

# NIGERIAN CULTURE — AND — CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION



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## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### NATIONAL IDENTITY IN THE NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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#### **THE CONCEPT OF NATIONAL IDENTITY**

The discussion of the concept of national identity should perhaps begin with a clarification of the term 'identity'. By identity is meant absolute sameness or exact likeness. It is the quality of being alike or being of the same kind. The identity of a group proves the sameness of its members and differentiates it from other groups. Individuals in a society identify with certain groups at all levels in that society starting from the micro (family) level to the macro (national) level. Within the family, the family name, normally the surname of members, serves as a symbol by which its members are identified. Similarly, members of the same ethnic group have their identity expressed through similar cultural patterns. Members of a particular community, Local Government Area or even a State of origin share a common identity within each of these groups through belonging to each of them.

Individuals also identify with each other on a national level. At this level, people no longer see themselves as belonging to a particular family, community, ethnic group or a state of origin, but as belonging to a nation (Ahmed, et al., 1989). This is because the things the members share in common as members of the same country become more important than the things individual families, communities, ethnic groups and states of the federation share in common. Consequently, members identify with the aims and objectives of the nation. The national flag, the coat of arms, the national anthem and the national pledge amongst others are all symbols of identity for Nigerian citizens who live within or outside the country. These symbols prove that members of the Nigerian society belong together.

With this background explanation, we can then define national identity as that which relates to people of the same nation, showing the quality of being of the same kind or having a sense of absolute sameness and identifying with the aims and objectives of the nation. It is a situation in which the citizens of a nation have a sense of belonging to the nation and identifying with national goals and objectives. In such a situation, citizens will easily

support government policies and also willingly pay their tax. In other words, they have a feeling of allegiance to their nation, an active sense of identification with the nation.

It is not uncommon to find members of the same ethnic group or state of origin who meet themselves in other parts of the country relating as brothers even though they may come from different communities. Similarly, people who hail from the same country meeting themselves in other countries tend to relate as brothers for the simple fact that they share a common nationality.

Ethnic identity and ethnic consciousness tend to create inter-ethnic rivalry among the different ethnic groups in a society. Conversely, national identity and national consciousness tend to foster unity and enhance national integration. By national integration is meant the achievement of a cohesive society in which different cultural and social aggregates come together into a strong pre-eminent sense of national identity and the process of establishing a minimum value consensus for the purpose of maintaining a stable social order (Aliyu, 1975).

The need for national identity in the Nigerian society becomes imperative when we consider the fact that Nigeria has well over 250 different ethnic groups with different cultural patterns. For a nation with such complexity and cultural diversity to be united and properly integrated, the things her members share in common, rather than their differences, should be things to emphasize. It is in realization of the need for peaceful co-existence, national identity and solidarity, that the Directorate for Social Mobilization (MAMSER), under its political education programme, aimed at "educating and mobilizing Nigerians to identify with the Nigerian nation and to reject manipulations or acts which threaten the identity, integrity and solidarity of the nation" (Ashogbon, 1990:16).

### **NATIONAL SYMBOLS**

The term symbol has aptly been defined by Leslie White (1982) as "a thing, the value or meaning of which is bestowed upon it by those who use it". Here, he calls a symbol a "thing" because according to him, "a symbol may have any kind of physical form; it may have the form of a material object, a colour, a sound, an odour, a motion of an object, a taste".

Symbols convey meanings to their users. For example, in most societies of the world, black is the colour for mourning and the sign of the cross connotes the death of Christ to the Christian. The meanings of symbols are derived from, and determined by those who use them. Meaning is be-

stowed by human beings upon physical things or events which there upon become symbols (White, 1982: 31-33).

As a geographical entity, at least as clearly shown by the map of Nigeria, the country has a physical shape which differentiates her from other countries of the world. Besides, she has certain signs and objects which serve as symbols of identity by which she is distinguished as a free and independent nation and/or by which her members could be identified.

The national symbols to be discussed here include: the national flag, the coat of arms, the national anthem and the national pledge. Others are historical symbols, cultural symbols, official symbols as well as national heroes and heroines (Ahmed, et al., 1989). All these national symbols distinguish Nigeria from other countries of the world because they are distinct from those of other countries.

It is the duty of every Nigerian citizen to abide by the Constitution (an official symbol) and also respect the national flag, the national anthem as well as the national pledge. Section 24 of the second chapter of the 1989 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (FGN, 1989:22) clearly states as follows:

It shall be the duty of every citizen to abide by this Constitution, respect its ideals and its institutions, the National Flag, the National Anthem, the National Pledge, and legitimate and properly constituted authorities.

### **The National Flag**

The Nigerian national flag which was designed by Mr. Taiwo Akinwunmi in 1959 was first unfolded on October 1, 1960, when Nigeria gained her independence from British Colonial rule. The flag is divided vertically into three equal parts of green, white and green colours. The central part is white in colour and it symbolizes peace and unity, both of which are essential ingredients for national growth and stability. The two outer parts which are green in colour symbolize the green farmlands and forests from which the nation's vast agricultural wealth is derived.

### **The Coat of Arms**

A Coat of Arms is usually referred to as Armorial Bearings. Nigeria's Coat of arms is a symbol used to represent the unity, authority and power

of the country. It has an eagle which is mounted on a black shield. This shield is trisected by two silver wavy bands, 'Y'-shaped. It also has two white chargers or horses which support the black shield on either sides. At the base of the shield is a wreath of *coctus spectabilis* flower, cast in the national colours of white and green (see Fig.2).

The eagle represents the strength of the nation while the two white chargers or horses symbolize her dignity and pride. The black shield stands for the fertile soil for agriculture, and the 'Y'-shaped silver wavy bands denote rivers Niger and Benue as well as their junction and confluence, the

Fig.2: Nigeria's Coat of Arms



main waterways flowing through parts of the country. The *coctus spectabilis* is a colourful flower which grows in most parts of the country and it represents the beauty of Nigeria. The nation's motto: "Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress" is written on the base of the shield (Badmos, et al., 1986).

### **The National Anthem**

Prior to October 1, 1960, when Nigeria gained her political independence, the British national anthem was normally used at festivals and official ceremonies. The contents of that anthem were such that it prayed for the safety and protection of the British Queen who was also the original head of the Nigerian government. In 1960, a British woman wrote another national anthem for Nigeria's independence. It reads as follows:

*Nigeria we hail thee  
Our own dear native land  
Though tribe and tongue may differ  
In brotherhood we stand  
Nigerians all are proud to serve  
Our sovereign motherland*

*Our flag shall be a symbol  
That truth and justice reign  
In peace or battle honoured  
And this we count as gain  
To hand unto our children  
A banner without stain.*

*O God of all creation  
Grant this our one request  
Help us to build a nation  
Where no man is oppressed  
And so with peace and plenty  
Nigeria may be blessed.*

This anthem was the one used until 1977 when it was decided that a new Nigerian national anthem be written by a Nigerian (Ahmed, et al, 1989). This new national anthem has been in use since 1978. Its lyrics are as follows:

*Arise O compatriots, Nigeria's call obey  
To serve our fatherland  
With love and strength and faith  
The labours of our heroes past  
Shall never be in vain  
To serve with heart and might  
One nation bound in freedom, peace and Unity.*

*O God of Creation, direct our noble cause  
Guide our leaders right  
Help our youth the truth to know  
In love and honesty to grow  
And living just and true  
Great lofty heights attain  
To build a nation where peace and justice shall reign.*

The first stanza of the anthem is a call to fellow Nigerians to arise and serve the nation. The second stanza is a prayer to God for direction and guidance. The anthem is meant to inculcate in all Nigerians, the spirit of service, love, freedom, peace, unity and justice as well as the spirit of nation-building. The anthem is usually rendered whenever the Head of States or

President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria or a State Governor has an official ceremony to perform. Every Nigerian is expected to stop every movement and stand at an attention any time the national anthem is on, as a mark of respect. Radio and Television stations usually play the anthem at the commencement and close of each day's programme.

### **The National Pledge**

Every Nigerian is expected to memorize and master the national pledge. It is normally recited in schools, and colleges, on Radio and Television at the commencement and close of each day's programme as well as on important occasions. It reads thus:

*I pledge to Nigeria, my country  
to be faithful, loyal and honest  
To serve Nigeria with all my strength  
To defend her unity  
And uphold, her honour and glory  
So help me God.*

The national pledge is a solemn promise that every Nigerian is expected to make to the nation. The last line of the pledge is a prayer to God for help in order to be able to fulfil the promise. The pledge is meant to inculcate in all Nigerians, the norms of the nation and the national ethic including faithfulness, loyalty, service, unity and honour.

### **Historical Symbols**

Historical symbols are those which are used to mark important events that occurred in the history of a nation. Such historical symbols abound in many Nigerian towns and cities. For instance, there is the statue of the Unknown Soldiers and the Soldier of Peace in Tafawa Balewa Square in Lagos. These were men who laid down their lives in the service of the nation. Also, there are Emotan statue in Benin City and Tinubu Square, Sam Okwaraji in the National Stadium in Lagos, General Murtala Mohammed in a number of Nigerian cities, and similar other statues of people who dedicated their lives to the service of the nation. The Opa Oranyan (Oranyan's Staff) at Ile-Ife and the Tinubu Fountain in the centre of Lagos are other examples (Ahmed, et al., 1989).

The rationale behind these historical symbols is to immortalize the names of important people or heroes who played significant roles in the

history of Nigeria, and whose attributes are worthy of emulation. They are also to remind us of the memorable events which occurred in the country's history.

### **Cultural Symbols**

Traditionally, different cultural groups have their cultural symbols by which they are identified. These range from hair-styles to facial and body marks. The style of hair-do common among Yoruba women (weaving with fingers) differs from that common among Isoko women (plaiting with thread). Similarly, facial markings common among Ibadan people of Yoruba are different from those found among the Fulani. While a typical Fulani person may have a few short markings on each cheek near his mouth, the typical Ibadan Yoruba person would normally have several long markings called *Gombo* covering a substantial part of his face. This practice was necessary and acceptable in the days of inter-tribal wars and slave trade because the marks served the purpose of identification.

Body marks which could either be temporary or permanent have also been used by many traditional cultural groups in Nigeria. While the temporary marks are merely a form of body decoration made with a special type of ink, the permanent marks which are usually made with the use of a needle, a razor blade or a sharp knife are done when a person is still young. By such body marks, a person's ethnic group can be identified since such body markings vary from one ethnic group to another. However, facial or bodymarks in the Nigerian society are gradually fading away with the new generations of Nigerians.

### **Official Symbols**

The Nigerian Passport and the Nigerian Constitution are two official symbols in Nigeria. The Nigerian passport is a document issued by the Federal Government to Nigerian citizens. Citizens of any country who wish to travel to other countries must possess and carry their national passport with which one can easily identify them and also prove their nationality. Each Nigerian passport normally contains the name of the bearer as well as his/her other personal characteristics such as sex, occupation, place and date of birth, height, colour of eyes, colour of hair and of course his/her photograph for identification.

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, like the Constitution of any organization sets the laws, rules and regulations which should guide every Nigerian citizen as well as the fundamental principles by which the country is established and governed. It is the duty of every Nigerian



citizen to abide by the constitution and also to respect its ideals and its institutions.

### **National Heroes and Heroines**

At various times in the history of Nigeria, a number of people have immensely contributed to the success of the nation in diverse ways. While some have fought for freedom from colonial and imperialist domination, others lost their lives in the process of fighting for the unity and strength of the nation. Some dedicated their lives to teaching and serving the Nigerian people while some others preserved the dignity and pride of the Nigerian people at the time of crisis. All such people may be considered as heroes and heroines. The list is inexhaustible. Only a few of such heroes and heroines shall be mentioned here. They include: Mohammed Al-Kanemi; Usman dan Fodio; Emotan of Benin; Moremi of Ife; Queen Amina of Zaria; Madam Tinubu; Samuel Ajayi Crowther; Herbert Macaulay; Alvan Ikoku; Alhaji (Sir) Abubakar Tafawa Balewa; Sir Ahmadu Bello; Chief Obafemi Awolowo; Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe; and General Murtala Mohammed.

Several efforts have been made by Nigerians to immortalize the names of these great heroes and heroines. Examples abound of important places, buildings, schools etc., which have been named after these great Nigerians. Such include: The Murtala Mohammed International Airport, Lagos; Tafawa Balewa Square, Lagos; Tinubu Square, Lagos; Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria; Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife; Amina Hall in the University of Lagos; and finally, Zik, Bello, Balewa and Kuti Halls - all in the University of Ibadan, to mention but a few.

Many of the national symbols discussed above are normally used by Nigerian representatives abroad and at important international meetings. National symbols are meant to serve identification purposes and to infuse in all Nigerians, a sense of belonging to the nation. They are also meant to unite the many diverse ethnic and cultural groups in order to ensure national integration and harmonious living, peace and progress.

## **PEOPLE AND CULTURES OF NIGERIA**

### ***The Concept of Culture***

The term 'culture' has been variously defined by different scholars in the fields of anthropology, sociology, the humanities, biology and some aspects of medical sciences. Three of such definitions which have been given in anthropological and sociological literature shall be considered

here. Tylor (1891:1) defines culture as "that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and all other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of Society". To Ralph Linton (1980:3), "the culture of a society is the way of life of its members; the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation."

Yet a more recent and more comprehensive definition has been given by Andah (1982:4-5). To him,

Culture embraces all the material and non-material expression of a people as well as the processes with which these expressions are communicated. It has to do with all the social, ethical, intellectual, scientific, artistic and technological expressions and processes of a people usually ethnically and/or nationally or supranationally related, and usually living in a geographically contiguous area; what they pass on to their successors and how these are passed on.

This definition is particularly relevant to our discussion on the people and cultures of Nigeria because it notes that the people who share a culture are "usually ethnically and/or nationally ... related". This will become clearer in the latter part of this chapter.

From the definitions of culture given above, certain characteristics or features of culture are noticeable. Culture as the distinctive generality or totality of a people's way of life is historically created and it is shared by all members of a society. It is not genetically transmitted but learnt and transmitted through socialization process. It is universal, variable and dynamic.

There are two broad aspects of culture, namely: material culture and non-material culture. Material culture refers to such material things as the arts, craft, artifacts, tools as well as the technology of a society. Thus the material aspect of culture involves the products of man's ingenuity and industry in his attempt to exploit his environment for survival.

Non-material culture refers to the norms, values, beliefs or religion, ideas and philosophy, music and dance, drama, festivals, ceremonies, folklore etc. It is the non-physical aspect of culture which is learnt through socialization process. However, both material and non-material aspects of culture influence each other and the line of demarcation between the two is

not as clear-cut in practical terms as this theoretical presentation suggests.

Although such cultural elements as norms, values and beliefs vary from society to society, certain ways of life are common to all societies. These ways of life are called cultural universals. Examples are forms of marriage, cooking, incest taboo, systems of social stratification, language and such social institutions as the family, religion, education and systems of government. There are, however, variations in the forms these ways of life take from society to society.

A profound emotional reaction can be experienced by a person living in a different society, the culture of which he is not familiar. This is referred to as culture shock. An outstanding feature of culture shock is the inability of the person involved to make any sense out of the behaviour of others or inability to predict what they would say or do.

A society as a group is made up of two or more sub-groups. Each of such sub-groups acquires behaviour pattern peculiar to it. This peculiar pattern is known as *sub-culture*. Thus, there are class, youth, family, deviant sub-cultures etc. in a society.

*Ethnocentrism* is the tendency to judge other cultures by the standard of one's culture. An ethnocentric person feels that his own culture is not only the best but also superior to others' cultures. He therefore tries to impose his cultural ideas on others.

### **Nigerian People and Cultures**

The Nigerian society is characterized by a heterogeneity of cultures and diverse ethnic groups. Ethnographers have estimated that there are between 250 and 400 different ethnic groups in Nigeria. Some of these ethnic groups and the States of the Federation where they are located are listed below.

Ethnic Group	States where located
Hausa	Sokoto, Kebbi, Kano, Jigawa Kaduna, Katsina, Bauchi.
Yoruba	Ogun, Lagos, Oyo, Osun, Ondo, Edo, Kwara, Kogi.
Igbo	Anambra, Enugu, Imo, Abia, Delta.
Fulani	Kano, Jigawa, Sokoto, Kebbi, Bauchi, Adamawa.

Ethnic Group	State where located
Kanuri	Yobe, Borno.
Ibibio	Akwa Ibom
Tiv	Plateau, Benue
Ijaw	Delta, Rivers
Edo	Edo
Nupe	Niger
Urhobo, Isoko, Itsekiri	Delta Delta Delta
Igala, Idoma	Benue Benue
Igbira	Kogi
Biom, Angas	Plateau Plateau
Ekoi	Cross River
Chamba	Taraba
Mumuye	Adamawa
Ogoni	Rivers
Efik	Cross River

\* The ethnic groups listed here are just some of the major ones. Of these, Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo are the mainly dominant ones constituting about

58 percent of the entire population of Nigeria (NPB, 1984). These different ethnic groups have different cultures with which their members identify. This cultural diversity sometimes generates ethnocentric tendencies. Indeed, ethnocentric feelings are prevalent in Nigeria, a condition that sometimes engenders strife which may degenerate into general societal disintegration (Oyeneye and Shoremi, 1985:5).

Some selected aspects of the cultures of the different groups in Nigeria will now be considered. For the non-material aspect, we will consider music and dance, festivals as well as marriage ceremonies. For the material aspect of culture, we will consider the art and craft found among the Nigerian cultural groups.

### **Music and Dance**

Traditional music and dance are important and prominent features in the culture of the Nigerian people. Different ethnic groups have different types of traditional music and dance. The Igbo people, for example, are noted for *Nkpogidi* and *Atilogwu*. Among the Yoruba people, *Apala*, *Juju* and *Sakara* are popular traditional music. *Gogo* is popular among the Hausa while *Onyonkpo* is performed by the Idoma people of Benue State.

Different types of traditional musical instruments are also used for different types of music at different occasions among the different cultural groups. The Igbo people often use *Ekpili*, *Uyolo*, *Ekwe*, *Ogene*, *Okpokolo*, *Igba* and flute. Hausa and Fulani people play such drums as *Kalangu*, *Tambura*, *Shantu* and *Sambam*; while the Yoruba are noted for *Gangan* (talking drum), *Sekere* and *Igbin*. *Ganga* is often used during ceremonies among the Nupe and Hausa farming communities (Ahmed, et al., 1989). *Goge*, a musical instrument which originated from Arabia, is popular among the cultural groups in Northern Nigeria (Echezona, 1978:227).

### **Festivals**

Festivals in the Nigerian society are many and they vary according to the different cultural groups. Among the Hausa people in Sokoto and Kebbi States, there is the popular annual *Argungu* fishing festival which involves competition between many fishermen. Some of the festivals among the Yoruba include: *Agemo*, *Oro*, *Eyo* and *Egungun*. *Pattegi regatta* is a very popular and important festival celebrated among the Nupe people and it involves the display of the use of boats and canoes on the river. The aim of this festival is to enhance peace and unity among the Nupe people. Edo

people have the *Ugie-erhoba* festival, the Igbo have *Offala* festival and the *Odu* festival is found among the Ijaw of Delta and Rivers States.

### **Marriage Ceremonies**

Marriage ceremonies in the Nigerian society, as discussed in chapter two, vary considerably from one ethnic group to another. In many cases, traditional marriage ceremonies are combined with modern day marriage ceremonies contracted in the Court, Church or Mosque. In other cases, it is only the indigenous traditional marriage that is done and it is this latter type that is of interest to us here.

Traditional marriage in Yoruba begins with the selection of a mate by a father for his son using a middle-man who helps to make the proposal. Discrete investigations by either families involved are conducted. After consent to the proposal is given, bride price is paid and the marriage is contracted. However, before the girl is finally handed over, some fees must be paid by the bridegrooms delegation. These include: door-opening fee, children's fee, wives' fee and load-carrying fee. The new wife's feet must be cleansed before entering her husband's home (Oyeneye, 1985:139-162).

In traditional Igbo marriage, a diviner is sought at the initial stage to know whether the marriage will be successful. Discrete investigations into the history of both families are also conducted. Once satisfied, consent is given to the proposal but the girl's character must be tested in the groom's home. If she passes the test, her body is decorated, symbolizing her success in character test. Payment of bride-price involves a lot of haggling. A lot of feasting is done during the marriage ceremony.

Among the Tiv, the daughter of one family is exchanged in marriage for the daughter of another family; while Hausa girls are given in marriage at between the ages of twelve and fourteen. A Fulani young man about to marry must participate in public flogging called *Sharo*. His prospective wife is expected to be present at this occasion during which the young man is thoroughly flogged. He must not show any sign of pain or distress even if wounded in the process. He should rather be cheerful and be in high spirit. This would prove that he is courageous and could endure the rigours of married life (Oyeneye, 1985:156).

### Art and Craft

The different groups in Nigeria have rich works of art and craft for which they are famous throughout the world. The Edo people are noted for their bronze works. They cast human heads in bronze. The 'Ife bronze' is popular all over the world. The terracotta heads from the Nok culture found in Ife and among the Birum people of Plateau State is also famous all over the world. There are also the works of art and craft of the Ikom and Onon people of Cross River and Owo people of Ondo State in many museums in Nigeria.

Bida people are a noted for brass work; Hausa and Oyo people, for carved calabashes; Akwa, for their iron works; and the cultural groups in Northern Nigeria, for leather works such as bags, purses, slippers and shoes. Also, the Okwa-nkas are reputed for sculpture; Igbo for Abada-ba cloth made of raffia material; Ede people in Oyo State, Imo and Oke-Eri in Ijebu as well as Okigwe people are known for pottery. Others are the cane chairs, baskets and tools made by the people of Delta, Imo, Akwa-Ibom and Cross River States. The Yoruba of Abeokuta and Ibadan are noted for their indigo-dyed cloth (adire) which is of high aesthetic value.

Decorative arts including paintings, drawings and some aspects of sculpturing, body decorations such as tattoos, facial (tribal) marks and hairstyles all vary from one ethnic group to another in Nigeria. Among the Yoruba, women weave their hair with fingers. They also use antimony (*tiro*) to mark their eyes. *Biije*, a black vegetable is also used to stain the lower eyelid. Hausa women decorate their body with pounded fruits of Atiki plant mixed with palm oil and sandal wood. Fulani women perforate their nose and wear earrings on them. They also have numerous large perforations on their ears in which they wear several large circular ear rings.

### CONCLUSION

In such a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse society as Nigeria, the need for integration cannot be over-emphasized. Many aspects of the different cultural practices could be integrated in order to minimize ethnocentric feelings among ethnic groups and the concomitant strife and rivalry between them.

The different groups in Nigeria can be integrated through working together, sharing and exchanging ideas and forgetting the conflicts they had

with other groups in the past. Irrespective of whatever groups we may belong, we should take cognizance of the fact that we all belong to the same nation. The establishment of Unity Schools in certain areas of the country which create a forum whereby children from all over the country can meet and learn together are avenues through which they could get to know about people from other parts of the country. The existence of such schools should be allowed to continue and also possibly establish new ones.

The establishment of the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) also affords our highly educated youth the opportunity of serving the nation in States other than their own. This way, they get to know about other peoples' culture and possibly marry from other ethnic groups. Inter-ethnic marriage will help unite the different groups. Our young people should therefore be encouraged to select their marriage mate from other ethnic groups within the Nigerian society.

Sports such as athletics, boxing, table tennis and football, particularly, also play significant roles in National identity and unity. Ethnic and religious differences are normally forgotten whenever a Nigerian national team such as the Green Eagles, Flying Eagles and Golden Eaglets have to meet with teams from other countries. In such occasions, Nigerians normally see themselves as one and normally seek to defeat the opponent group.

Finally, the Nigerian government should provide among others, adequate reward for services rendered to the nation, social security, full employment and free education. Any Nigerian citizen should be allowed to live and work in any part of the country without discrimination. All these will increase the loyalty of the citizens to the nation.

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