

## THE CHALLENGE OF ETHNOCENTRISM IN NIGERIA AND THE YIN-YANG PRINCIPLE OF COMPLEMENTARITY

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### Abstract

*Arguably, ethnocentrism remains a bane to unity and development in Nigeria. Whereas some blame it on colonialism and bad governance, this paper, however, contends that ethnocentrism is a product of a negative mindset in most Nigerians, which must to be corrected for any better experience in social relations to hold. In view of this, the paper examines the negative mindset that undergirds the ethnocentric attitude in social relations in Nigeria. It explores the potential of the Taoist Yin-Yang philosophical principle of complementarity in view of re-orienting the mindset of Nigerians along the more positive lines of complementary mode of thought and existence. It concludes with the view that this principle has much to offer the Nigerian society at this critical time, as its ideals of complementary consciousness and mutual co-existence of things, are essential for effective management of our ethnic diversity. The paper adopts critical method of research.*

**Keywords:** Taoism, Yin-Yang principle, Ethnocentrism, Consciousness, Nigeria.

### Introduction

Arguably, the fabric of the Nigerian society is increasingly being ripped apart by the lethal force of ethnocentrism. This has largely manifested itself in the politics of ethnic domination, economic exclusion and ethno-religious crises that have engulfed the nation. Today, many Nigerians are strangers in their own country, without much rights, and privileges. Matthew Kukah laments that, “due to politics of ethnic domination, there has been a total loss of sense of belonging to the Nigerian state by Nigerians” (2003, p.41). Given this sad situation, the socio-cultural and political harmony and growth of the country has predictably remained elusive. In consequence, the country has been hemorrhaging from bitter ethnic rivalries, socio-political upheavals, ethnic agitations and threats of secession, economic imbalance, terrorism and banditry, and poverty.

Some thinkers, however, tend to blame the problem of ethnocentrism in Nigeria on colonialism and bad leadership (Nnoli, 1980, p.35). However, I consider such factor as mere external manifestations of a much deeper cause of ethnocentrism. Hence, attempts to address this challenge with such factors in view, has the likelihood of dealing with symptoms other than the root of the problem. For the problem to be effectively tackled, it must be addressed from its primary root cause. In view of this, this paper argues and justifies the position that, ethnocentrism is rooted in a negative mindset that is typically

absolutist and exclusivist. It further explores the potential in the Taoist *Yin Yan's* philosophy of complementarity, in view of re-orienting the mindset of Nigerians with the needed complementary modes of thought and existence, needed to attain of ethnic harmony and mutual co-existence in Nigeria.

### **Conceptual Clarification: Ethnocentrism**

The term ethnocentrism derives from two Greek words: "ethnos", meaning nation, and "kentron", meaning center (New World Encyclopedia). Literally the term means an emotional attitude that considers one's nation as the centre of the universe. According to Ludwig Gumplowicz "ethnocentrism is the reasons by virtue of which each group of people believed it had always occupied the highest point, not only among contemporaneous peoples and nations, but also in relation to all peoples of the historical past" (qtd. in Hofman, and Alexander Kovalev, 1989, p.84). defines ethnocentrism as, "the technical name for this view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it" (1978, p.13). In this line of thought, R. Buhlman, explains that "ethnocentrism absolutizes one's own culture, one's way of living with a strong sense of superiority and a corresponding dislike or misunderstanding of other groups" (1992, p.59).

From the foregoing definitions, it is obvious that ethnocentrism is any culturally biased judgment or attitude, rooted in the belief in one's ethnic culture's superiority, and contempt for others. It is an attitudinal error involving an exaggerated sense of self-importance or centrality of one's ethnic cultures or belief. It represents profound cognitive failure to understand the relativity of conceptual schemes, and, by extension, cultures, and beliefs of others on their own terms (Motyl, 2000, p.152). Ethnocentrism is often seen as "the main source of regional, inter-state and inter-ethnic conflicts in Africa, and it promotes struggles over resources through social exclusion and ethnic violence" (Fayemi, 2021, p.177). It is also at the heart of , stereotyping, discrimination, or xenophobia in the world. It has become a major challenge to the unity and development in Nigeria as Joseph Ebegbulem observes, "politics of ethnicity and regional domination is the major source of political crises in Nigeria" (1998, p.77).

### **Ethnocentrism and the Nigerian Experience**

Ethnocentrism has remained a festering sore manifesting its devastating impact on Nigeria's socio-political and economic development. It shows up basically in the politics of ethnic domination of the minorities by the majority ethnic groups, ethnic tensions and mutual suspicion among the country's diverse ethnic nationalities, economic and political marginalization. Historically, the geographical area known as Nigeria was created by the British colonial administration with the 1914 amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates. In that process, the over 250 ethnic nationalities, who hitherto, lived separately and independently of one another, were brought together to form the country for the administrative convenience of the colonial masters. Among the major ethnic groups in Nigeria are Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo; while the minority ethnic groups include Ibibio, Efik, Igala, Tiv, Jukun, Urhobo, Ijaw, etc. Some scholars consider this amalgamation factor as responsible for ethnocentrism in Nigeria because, "it which took

place without the involvement and consent of the ethnic nationalities” (Nnoli, 1980, p.35); and more so, because, “the colonial politics and economic policies tended to benefit the elites of dominant groups at the expense of less influential ethnic minority” (Fayemi, 2021, p.180).

However, in 1939 when Sir Bernard Bourdillon introduced federalism in Nigeria, he divided the country into provinces and regional councils along the three major ethnic groups in the country. On the basis of this political arrangement, which was later solidified in the 1950s, legislative assemblies were set up at the regional and federal levels (Udoidem, 2000, p.24). For Ogu and Anthony (2022, p.22), “this division of the country along ethnic lines produced regional tensions, suspicion and rivalry among the three major ethnic groups: the Hausa-Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the West, and the Igbo in the East”. It is also argued that with this arrangement, “ethnic-based party politics emerged in Nigeria, and the minority groups rebelled and Nigerians started fighting for ethnic dominance as they marched towards Independence” (Osaghae, 2002, p.58).

The largest ethnic groups in each region – the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo in the Northern, Western and Eastern regions respectively – came to dominate their respective regions as well as contested for power at the federal level. Within each region, ethnic minorities often opposed the political domination of the larger groups, and as a result, they felt increasingly alienated from the political process. Thus, the struggle for political independence was *ab initio* reduced to the quest for ethnic dominance; and ever since, the post-colonial Nigerian society has largely been defined by ethnic politics, religious factionalism and the struggles by the minority groups for political and economic inclusion, representation and self-determination against the domination and exclusion by the majority ethnic groups.

This ethnic tension and distrust in the country, were projected in the emergence and formation of political parties along ethnic and regional lines, which fought bitterly over the control of the nation's resources during the first Republic. The North led by Sir Ahmadu Bello, formed the Northern People's Congress (NPC); the East led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, formed the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons (NCNC), later transformed into National Council of Nigerian Citizens (when Southern Cameroon left Nigeria in August 1944); and the Yoruba led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, formed the Action Group (AG). Falola and Matthew assert that “those parties that had control over the assemblies were able to distribute government resources among themselves, supporters, their regions and ethnic groups, and equally were able to deny these resources to their opponents” (2008, p.165).

The politics of ethnic domination and ethnic conflicts was at play in 1951, during the Regional Premiership elections, when Awolowo used the ethnic maneuver to out-stage Nnamdi Azikiwe in his bid for the Premiership of the Western Region (Udoidem, 2000, p.25). Wole Soyinka says that, “Obafemi Awolowo 'stole' the government from him (Azikiwe) in a broad daylight” (1960, p.63). Azikiwe, returned to the East, where he compounded the problem by causing the overthrow of then Premier of the Eastern

Region, Professor Eyo Ita, a politician from the Efik minority ethnic group and leader of the NCNC government in the Eastern Region. He eventually expelled Eyo Ita from the NCNC. This was considered an affront on the minority tribes of the Southern part of the country. Eyo Ita, however, left the party and formed the National Independence Party, “which became the embryo movement for the minorities of the Eastern Region, challenging Igbo domination of the region and demanding regional status for the homelands of these ethnic minorities” (Lloyd, 1968, p.288). These early acts of ethnic politics, were to serve as reference points to subsequent political activities in Nigeria, and their domino reactions have since turned Nigeria into “a perpetual ethnic memory syndrome, infected with insidious orgy of betrayal and revenge” (Udoidem, 2000, p.25). Furthermore, the Parliamentary elections held in the country in 1959, resulted in victory for the NPC, which won 134 of the 312 seats. The NPC, however, formed a coalition government with the NCNC that governed at the federal level, but which eventually became dominated by the NPC, and which under the leadership of federal Prime Minister Balewa, undertook many measures specifically to improve the condition of the Northern Region and northerners within the federation (Falola and Matthew, 2008, p.166). The NPC-led government regularly handed out appointments and promotions to northerners at the expense of more qualified southerners in an effort to bring about greater parity between the regions in the public service sector. According to Falola and Matthew, “from 1958 a quota system had determined admissions to the military: 50 percent of military recruits were to come from the Northern Region and 25 percent each from the Eastern and Western Regions” (2008, p.166). Policies such as these were believed to have infuriated southerners, who saw their hard-won skills disregarded by a federal system that increasingly seemed to value ethnicity over merit.

The domineering ethnic competitions and regional tensions heightened during the 1960s, and led to the overthrow of the civilian democratic regimes by several military officers from 1966. This was the first Military Intervention in politics, which unfortunately worsen the situation, because “this time, ethnicity had become militarized” (Ekanem, 2003, p.82). The military had the northern hegemony in place with the greater percentage of officers being from the Northern extraction in comparison to other regions in the Country (Gutteridge, 1969, p.22). All these led to the gruesome ethnic-driven Civil War from 1967 to 1970, when the Eastern Region attempted to secede from the Federation and establish the sovereign state of Biafra.

The Second Republic which resumed in 1979, was even more heavily characterized by this syndrome of ethno-regional politics and struggle for ethnic domination. The Northern People's Congress, which transformed into National Party of Nigeria (NPN), had basically northern founders, who largely sought and represented the interest of the dominant Hausa/Fulani in the North. The newly formed Unity Party of Nigeria by Chief Awolowo, which replaced the Action Group in the West, sustained the ideals of the Action Group to secure the interest of the dominant Yoruba in the West. In the East, the new party, Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), which replaced the NCNC, was founded by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and his loyalists, to secure the interest of the Igbos. The spirit of ethnocentrism

that these new parties re-awakened at various levels across the country, led to the collapse of the Second Republic with another era of military intervention in politics.

The annulment of the 1993 election won by a southerner, Chief MKO Abiola, was also considered to be due the politics of ethnic hegemony (Ekanem, 2003, p.81). In the Fourth Republic which witnessed the return to civil rule in 1999, the incidence of ethnic-oriented politics manifested in the activities of the Action Congress (ACN), dominated mostly by the Yorubas of the Southwest; all Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), dominated mostly by the Igbos in the Southeast; the Congress for Positive Change (CPC), dominated mostly by the Hausa-Fulani of Northern Nigeria. The People's Democratic Party (PDP), also largely under the Northern hegemony. The current ninth Republic and All Progressive Congress (APC) – led government under President Muhammadu Buhari, which took office since 2015, is also, arguably under the Hausa/Fulani Northern hegemony, as strategic appointments in politics and security agencies are largely skewed in favour of people of this ethnic group. This has heightened ethnic suspicion and tension in the land, animating the current agitations for ethnic self-determination among the Igbos in the East and Yorubas in the West, as well as the demand for a Southern President in the upcoming 2023 general elections. The politics of ethnic domination and the struggle against economic exclusion is also responsible for the minority rights agitations of the people in the Niger Delta (Fayemi, 2021, p.181). Like other minority groups, the oil minorities of the Niger Delta have historically felt shortchanged by the revenue allocation model of the federal structure, which has left their communities exploited and underdeveloped, even as they bear the burdens of environmental degradations due to oil production (Fayemi, 2021, p.181). Sequel to this, many armed militancy groups have emerged in the Niger Delta Region.

Ethnocentrism also plays out in the high degree of religious intolerance and violence between the Muslims and Christians in the country. The ethno-religious crisis between the two has almost split the nation into smithereens, leaving wanton destruction of lives and property at its wake. It started in Kano with the Maitatsine riot in the 1980s, when some Muslim fanatics declared war against Christians, whom they regarded as “war against infidels” (Etuk, 2011, p.37). The riot that ensued from this act created a nationwide hysteria, which eventually claimed over 4,177 lives. This set the template for the many other the ethno-religious violence and conflicts between followers of the two religions that have since engulfed the country. The situation is further compounded today by the emergence of the Islamic terror group, Boko Haram and its splinter group, ISAWP (Islamic West African Province) in the North Eastern part of the country, who in their primarily quest for the Islamization of the country since have abducted, raped and killed thousands of Nigerians since 2007.

For instance, on February, 2018, Leah Sharibu, a 14-year-old Christian student of the Government Girls Science and Technical School in Dapchi, Yobe State, was abducted along with 109 other girls by the splinter group of the Boko Haram, ISWAP. While other 104 girls were later released (apart from the five of whom were reportedly killed in the

abduction), Leah was held back because she refused to abandon her faith in Jesus Christ and convert to Islam as her abductors wanted. Till date she is still in the captivity of her abductors. Also in May 12, 2022, Nigerians woke up to the shocking news of the gruesome murder of a young Christian student, Deborah Samuel in Sokoto. Deborah, a student of the Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto, was stoned, flogged and burnt to death by her Muslim classmates, who claimed she had blasphemed against the Prophet Mohammed for attributing her success in her examinations to Jesus Christ in the class online group chat. Little is done by the government of the day to arrest and prosecute her murderers.

Another area of significant area where the challenge of ethnocentrism is currently facing Nigerian politics is the recent attempts by the government of the day to allow the Hausa/Fulani own cattle settlements in every part of the country including lands that belong to other ethnic nationalities. The Rural Grazing Area (RUGA) settlements planned for implementation under the Buhari-led administration presumably aimed at resolving the recurring conflict between farmers and nomadic herders, has been one of the most recent major controversies of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. Most ethnic groups have expressed gross repugnance towards this scheme and risen against it. However, reports show that the Federal Government is insisting on making the scheme a success though another plan called National Livestock Transformation Plan. This scheme is seen by critics as “a calculated attempt to ensure the dominance of the Fulani ethnic group by spreading their reach across all parts of the country as thus gradually establishing political strongholds” (Fayemi, 2021, p.183).

### **The Root of Ethnocentrism**

Clearly, for some thinkers, ethnocentrism is caused by such factors as colonialism and bad leadership in the country. For instance, Nnoli contends that “ethnocentrism and tribalism are the legacies of British colonialism” (1980, p.32). In Fayemi's view, “the post-colonial expressions of marginalization and domination of minority ethnic, religious and cultural groups are often a continuation of the ethnic, class and caste hierarchies established under colonial rule” (2021, p.180). However, it is my view that these factors or quality of social relations are themselves deficiency conditions and external manifestations of a more deep-rooted or ultimate cause of ethnocentrism. What then is the root of ethnocentrism? In answering this question, it is good to reference the fact that, social relation is nothing but an external expression of the internal state of man. That is, our thought pattern basically determines the nature of our social relations. James Allen says that “...as the plant springs from, and could not be without the seed, so every act of man springs from the hidden seed of thought, and could not have appeared without them” (1992, p.145). Innocent Asouzu captures this point more succinctly when he states that, “the way we relate to the world and the people around us depends on the way we conceptualize reality. The way we conceptualize the human person, for example, determines the way we relate to other human beings” (2007, p.333). Etim and Adekunle also affirm that, “the mind actively provides the platform for social relations as what we think we know determines what we think we should do” (2016, p.59).

Based on this fact, a critical assessment of the definition of ethnocentrism, which is, “absolutizing one's own culture, with a strong sense of superiority and a corresponding dislike or misunderstanding of other cultures” (Gotan, 2006, p.58), yields that truth that, it is an attitudinal behaviour that is ultimately rooted in a negative mindset that is typically absolutist and exclusivist in nature. Such a mindset, elevates or exaggerates the sense importance and primacy of the individual or his group in the universe of beings, and so, seeks absolute attention and privileges above others, while it also denigrating other beings to the status of mere accidental and dispensable existence. Within such a mindset or consciousness, what appears as contraries or different to the individual and his ethnic culture, is seen as a contradiction, and an irreconcilable opposite that cannot cohabit, but must be manipulated, suppressed or eliminated by all means. Such a consciousness manifests itself in social relation in the form of ethnocentrism, as is the case in Nigeria.

### **From Ethnicity to Ethnocentrism**

Naturally, every human being has that ambivalent mental tendency or consciousness to secure his interest first or to identify with his or her ethnic group. This is occasioned by the challenges of primitive instinct of self-preservation, which we share with other lower creatures. This natural tendency is called ethnicity; and it is good, positive and intrinsic in every human being. Asouzu considers ethnicity as a fundamental characteristic of the human nature. For him, “the tendency to ethnic cleavage has a dimension that is natural to human nature but which can easily be misappropriated and manipulated (2013, p.64). For Anselm Etokakpan “ethnicity is never a negative concept... Ethnicity evokes a unity of persons, language, tribal marks, cultures, customs, religion and even a particular way of responding to natural demands” (2006, p.88-89).

However, as Azousu indicates above, ethnicity can easily be abused and manipulated in such a way that it leads to negation of the interest and identity of other people. When this happens, it becomes ethnocentrism. Cletus Gotan captures it this way, “while ethnicity, as a concept per se, is not negative, it can easily be abused and allowed to degenerate into ethnocentrism” (2006, p.58). In other words, while not being a negative factor per se, ethnicity has an inherently ambivalent dimension, whereby while serving it may serve a good purpose in the society, it can also be dangerously abused as an instrument of oppression and suppression of others, as it is unfortunately the case in Nigeria. In the face of such ambivalence, authentic existence entails the capacity the capacity to equilibrate this ambivalence and tension in a way that ensures mutual co-existence with all members and the society as a whole. Those who exhibit the ethnocentric tendency are those who simply fail to manage this ambivalence well. They are those who rather recourse to extreme and polarizing measures of always interpreting situations only to their own advantage and ignoring outrightly the interest of other stakeholders in the system. Such mindset becomes absolutist by assuming that one's own ethnic worldview or interest is superior to, or more correct or normal than all others, and constitutes the only frame of reference from which all other cultures, practices, behaviours, beliefs, and people, practices can be understood and judged, as is the case in Nigeria.

Such mindset also becomes exclusivist because it sees other ethnic worldviews, interests, culture or as contradictories with which it can never coexist or be reconciled. Within such a mind-frame, human existence is perceived as a ceaseless struggle between irreconcilable opposites, especially when contest for scarce resources is involved. One with such negative mindset is likely to elevate anything that helps one uphold an edge over others (e.g., population, geographical location, gender, race, tribe, etc.) to essential categories and seek absolute attention and privileges above others. In the same measure, one is likely to denigrate other people that stand on one's way to mere accidental dispensable categories. Any social relation or political structure that driven people of such mindset, is bound to be domineering and oppressive of others, polarizing, and seeking of parochial interest at the expense of others. Such negative mindset is the root cause of all ethnocentric behaviours in our country.

### **Taoist Philosophy and the Yin-Yang Principle**

Taoist philosophy refers to the various doctrines of the Indian philosophical school of Taoism, which ultimately, emphasizes living in harmony with the *Tào* (*Dào*: 'Way') – a cosmic force believed to flow through all things, binds and releases them (Mark, 1). Taoism is often traced to the mythical philosopher, Lao Tzu (c. 500 BCE). According to the historian Sima Qian (145-86 BCE), Lao-Tzu, was a natural philosopher, who believed in the harmony of all things and that people could live easily together if they only considered each other's feelings in their actions and recognized that their self-interest was not always in the interest of others (qtd. in Mark, 2005, p.2). Accordingly, Lao-Tzu grew impatient with people and with the corruption he saw in government in China of his day, which caused the people so much pain and misery. He was so frustrated by his inability to change people's behaviour that he decided to go into exile.

However, as he was leaving China through the western pass, the gatekeeper Yin Hsi stopped him because he recognized him as a philosopher. Yin Hsi asked Lao-Tzu to write a book for him before he left civilization forever and Lao-Tzu agreed. He sat down on a rock beside the gatekeeper and wrote the *Tao-Te-Ching* (The Book of the Way). When he felt he had finished writing, he handed the book to Yin Hsi, and walked through the western pass to vanish into the mist beyond. Yin Hsi then had the *Tao-Te-Ching* copied and distributed. The *Tao-Te-Ching*, a book of poetry and wise sayings, presents the simple way of following the *Tao* and living life at peace with one's self, others, and the world of changes. There are no "bad people" according to Taoist philosophy, only people who behave badly. Given the proper education and guidance toward understanding how the universe works, anyone could be a "good person" living in harmony with the earth and with others. Hence, the Taoist philosophy, generally emphasizes *wu wei* (action without intention), naturalness, simplicity, spontaneity and the "Three Treasures": compassion, frugality and humility and the *Yin-Yang* Principle of thought. The principles of Taoism have impacted Chinese culture greatly in the course of the centuries. Today, Taoism is one of the five religious and philosophical doctrines officially recognized by the People's Republic of China (PRC).

### **Taoist *Yin-Yang* Principle of Complementarity**

One of the major philosophical principles of Taoism is the *Yin* and *Yang* principle of thought, which reflects the belief in the complementarity or balancing forces and matching pairs, such as light and dark, hot and cold, action and inaction – believed to work together for a universal whole. The *Yin-Yang* thought emerges from the Taoist cosmological speculations about the origin of the universe. Accordingly, the universe came to be as a result of the interactions between the two primordial opposing forces of *Yin* (non-being) and *Yang* (being). Since things are experienced as constantly changing, that is, as processes of coming into being and passing out of being, they must have both *Yang* (being), and *Yin* (lack of being or non-being). The world of changing things that constitutes nature can, therefore, exist only when there are both *Yin* and *Yang* or *Yang* and *Yin*. Without *Yang* nothing can come into existence; and without the *Yin* nothing can pass out of existence (Koller, 2007, p.207).

Thus, with this principle, Taoists maintain a strong belief that, “everything in the universe is connected and that nothing makes sense by itself” (Koller, 2007, p.207). By the doctrine of this principle, nature favours unity of opposites, and life is supposed to reflect a balance created by such oppositional forces – as symbolized in the *Yin* and the *Yang*. The *Yin-Yang* is thus, a symbol of complementary opposites that creates a balance in nature – dark/light, passive/aggressive, female/male – everything except good and evil, life and death, because nature does not recognize anything as good or evil and nature does not recognize a difference between life and non-life. With this principle, Taoism believes that all is in harmony in nature, and all humans are encouraged to accept and live that kind of harmony as well in their social relations.

The *Yin-Yang* principle of thought reveals the ontological grounds for the unity of our beings as well as the complementary nature of our existence as human beings in the universe. It recognizes the truth about the interconnectedness amongst people not only of the same ethnic origin, colour race, but amongst everyone who is regarded as a person. It provides us with the ontological basis for unity in diversity in any existential manifestation. It shows that we are all connected, irrespective of our existential diversities; and that we need the other person or people from the other ethnic group to complement us for the perfection of our being and expectations at any level of existence in the society. It shows that we can unite and cohabit with people of diverse ethnic nationalities, without producing a contradiction, because nature requires so for a balance and harmony of systems. Thus, rather than exclusivism, this principle shows that complementarity is the language of nature; and that all ethnocentric tendencies and contrivances about the superiority of one ethnic culture to others in the society, is nothing but an ideological aberration and psychological deception, which amounts to self-destruction.

### **Implications for Managing Ethnic Diversity in Nigeria.**

Peace, ethnic harmony and development in our country will not descend on the wings of inevitability, but through a change of mind and hard work. Hence, for this country to make

progress forward in these regards, there is a strong need for Nigerians to commit themselves the ideals of complementarity thought and of existence as expressed in the *Yin-Yang* philosophical principle. Nigerians in their various categories need to appreciate that we are essentially one, irrespective of our ethnic and cultural diversities; and that by nature, we have a shared web of complementary existence. Hence, the essence of our ethnic diversity is not to seek to dominate or manipulate the other, but to be open to each other and to be permeated by fruitful, spontaneous contributions and exchange from within and without, so that we can gain mutual support and enrichment needed for our wholeness and perfection; for we can unite without war or bitter rivalries and violence. Since life, as the principle reveals, requires diversity of beings for harmony and balance, we need to acknowledge our limitations, that no one person or ethnic group can realize itself without the “other”. Our ethnic diversity, is therefore, not to be understood as tragedy or as irreconcilable and disjunctive negation to our being, but as conjunctive contraries or opportunities for our mutual complementation and enrichments. This calls for the rejection of the absolutist and exclusive mindset, which undergirds all sorts of ethnocentric behaviours in our society. For this same reason, authentic existence must be seen a matter of relating virtuously and positively with others. It is to be judged in our capability to identify with people of other ethnic groups and exhibit solidarity with them in their *otherness*. Our social and political lives ought, therefore, to be defined by mutual respect for human dignity in others, solidarity in actions, whereby we think of ourselves as members of the same group or nation, and who care for each other's quality of life through actions that promote justice, equity and fairness. In the light of this complementary existence, we have a duty to respect the rights and secure the well-being of others, even as we seek our own rights and well-being.

Irrespective of the historical accident that brought us together as a Country, and the dark experiences of our burdened past, we must be forward-looking, having also the confidence in our capacity to emancipate ourselves from all sorts of negative and polarizing mindsets or consciousness. Without such mental re-orientation, we will continue in the ideological tussle where we polarize each other as the offenders and the offended, and continue to seek to dominate others or to revenge, while imagining that we are immune to the flaws we target for criticism in others. This type of mental emancipation is needed to heal the wounds inflicted on our consciousness due to past mistakes and to supersede the phenomenon of ethnic domination and rivalries, which “have become the staple of Nigerian's political history” (Udoidem, 2000, p.29). Those in political power need to run an 'open society' in which the interests of every citizen, irrespective of ethno-cultural background are given equal consideration, a society which merit, achievement and credentials, rather than cultural or ethnic background, are considered the basis for official engagements. A fair chance in the fundamental structure of the nation's socio-political life must therefore, be created for all to participate in both the productive and distributive justice. As the *Yin-Yang* principle shows, no society can lend its support to any action on the contrary, without undermining its unity, stability and progress.

## Conclusion

Ethnocentrism, has undoubtedly complicated the task of nationhood in Nigeria. Today, there is a near total loss of sense of unity in the country. The urgent need to halt this dangerous slide has more than ever, become an essential imperative today. In view of this demand, this paper, proposes and recommends the Taoist *Yin-Yang* principle of complementarity for the re-orientation of the mindset of Nigerians along the lines of complementary mode of thought and existence. Given the salience of this philosophy in guaranteeing this needed complementary consciousness and relational existence, the accommodation of its normative ideals in Nigeria at time crucial time, is necessary to address the challenge of ethnocentrism in the country.

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