# The 'we versus them' divide in Nigeria: rethinking traditional epistemologies

Cyril-Mary Pius Olatunji[1]

Department of Philosophy, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Nigeria

*Ethnicity, religion and politics are undisputedly the root of major problems in many African states. Clear examples of this can be found in Nigeria. Some scholars have argued that politicians use ethnicity and religious differences in order to create unnecessary rivalries and to settle political scores and fuel ethnic and religious violence in Nigeria. Others are of the view that religious and ethnic differences are responsible for political instability in the country. While some scholars suggest that the country should be divided along ethnic or religious lines, others argue that the size and diversity of Nigeria would guarantee enhanced competitiveness for the nation. Without necessarily taking sides in any of these arguments, the author examines the epistemological foundations of sustained 'schism' in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Nigeria, we versus them divide, conflicts, traditional epistemology.

## Introduction

Ethnicity, religion and politics are undisputedly the root of major problems in many African states (Megalommatis, 2010; Dada, 2010:1-19). Clear examples of this can be found in Nigeria (Salawu, 2010:345-52; Degne, 2006:1-14). Perhaps more than most other African states, the Nigerian case is further complicated by other social class differentiations such as rich/poor, male/female, employed/unemployed, rulers/common people, young/old and numerous other indices. Scholars and practitioners in various fields who themselves are Nigerians, and even non-Nigerian sympathisers, have spoken and written about this problem, describing it as the problem of social schism and blatant lack of cooperation (Joseph, 1995:115-154).

The problem manifests itself in war, bloody violence, apathy, social schism, mutual distrust, and lack of social cooperation as identified by Diamond (1998:2-7). This paper is a reaction to some of the previous explanations of the problem as well as a personal reflection on it. I react in what follows to explanations given by scholars who have debated the reasons as to why Nigeria is in its present state of social and political crisis. Some scholars (e.g. Agunlana, 2006:255-63) are of the view that the problems are caused by politicians who employ schism as a scheme for 'divide and rule' in order to perpetuate their hold on political power, or by leadership failure (Achebe and Mekusi). Others like Diallo (2006:12-22) believe that they result from some external intrusions into the politics of Nigeria. What comes across in these two schools of thought is that none of them has identified any fault with Nigerian civil society (the ordinary Nigerian). Furthermore, the two groups of scholars see themselves as experts who must detach themselves from Nigeria and stay aloof in order to be able to examine the country from without.

While the suggestions of both groups are of importance in analysing Nigeria's political crisis, neither can be adequately analysed in a single paper. I am therefore going to touch more on the latter in my analysis of the epistemic foundation of Nigeria's predicament. Consequently, the intention is not to examine the situation of Nigeria or of Nigerians like an expert wishing to prescribe solutions to clients, or as a technician employed to fix a mechanical fault. Nor is it to empathise with Nigerians like a priest prescribing some acts of contrition to a devotee. Rather, the intention of this paper is to examine the situation I have found myself in as a Nigerian. It is to react to the sort of explanations provided thus far by scholars to the crisis of Nigeria within the context of postcolonial Africa.

This study is significant because it helps to reveal the black spots of previous explanations, and serves as a turning point in the manner in which scholars have portrayed the situation of Nigerians, and by extension, of Africans. As mentioned above, some scholars (Suberu, 1999:63, 66, 77-83; Agunlana, 2006:255-63) have argued that it is postcolonial politicians who have fuelled violence in Nigeria. It is argued that the politicians, in the process of their power struggle, use ethnicity and religious differences as a means to create unnecessary rivalries and settle political scores. Others contend that religious creeds, religious leaders and ethnic leaders are responsible for political instability in the country (Mantzikos, 2010:57-62). Some even blame the phenomenon on the modern state system which, according to the holders of this view, originates from the colonial balkanisation[2] of the geographical space of Nigeria by the erstwhile colonial masters who also introduced their various religious ideologies (Diallo, 2006:12-22; Busia, 1971:37). However, while some

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1. Cyril-Mary Pius Olatunji completed his Doctoral degree at the Department of Philosophy, University of Zululand, South Africa in 2011. He lectures at the Department of Philosophy in Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Nigeria. *cyrilbukkyp@yahoo.com*
2. Balkanization is used to mean the arbitrarily imposed artificial boundaries and state frontiers, which pull apart folks who had earlier lived as people of the same biological stock (Busia, 1971:37).

scholars suggest that the country be divided along ethnic or religious lines, others argue that the size and diversity of Nigeria would guarantee enhanced competitiveness for the nation (Joseph, 1995:115-4). In other words, scholars are divided between two groups of opinion: those who argue that the social schism in Nigeria is caused by colonial factors, and those who believe that postcolonial Nigerian leaders are the root of the problem (Oke, 2005:332-43).

## We and the divide in Nigeria

In 1999, there was a motor accident in the neighbourhood of a certain village around Lokoja, an ancient Nigerian city at the confluence of the rivers Niger and Benue. As the people who went to rescue the accident victims were returning, one of them was asked in the pidgin English language, often referred to as 'broken', "Hao many iple mort for de moto accident" ("how many people died in the motor accident")? He replied: "Person no die, na only wan mala" ("no person died, only one Malam [Hausa] died"). Although the answer given by the witness of the accident may not have been a deliberate attempt to regard the Hausa or other ethnic citizens as non-human beings, it might have erupted from the realm of the subconscious, or from habit. It might have resulted from cultural arrogance, which makes people look down on others as inferior. In that case, the statement "no person except one Hausa man" represents a deep-rooted tribal hostility, ethnic arrogance, lack of social cooperation and possibility of violence. All these problems add up to up to the 'we and them divide', to use Mazrui's (1990:1-9) term.

Nigeria is a very complex country and these divides exist in very complex and multidimensional patterns. For instance, religion in Nigeria ranges from Christianity to Islam and traditional worship. All religious groups in question have sects and denominations. There are over a hundred distinct tribes and over three hundred competing languages (Library of Congress, 2008; Ekanola, 2006:279-93). Two of the three dominant religions (Christianity and Islam) were imported or originated from outside Nigeria. Many Nigerians practise foreign religions publicly and supplement them with the secret practice of traditional religions. In essence, the psychological orientation of Nigerians is formed and informed by both foreign and local elements.

In "*Cultural forces in World politics*", Mazrui (2005:1) identifies some forms of social schism. He talks about the east/west, north/south, developed/developing, Christian/Muslim, black/white, rich/poor divides in world politics. In "*The State of the Nation*", a publication of the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU, 2002:22-23), the dons identify similar polarities within Nigeria. To begin with, postcolonial Nigeria began its self-rule in the 1960s with a civil war referred to as the Biafra war. It was a war fuelled by rivalries and schisms between three main ethnic groups but that ended with strife between the Igbo and the rest of Nigeria. The membership and status of Nigeria in the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC) has been the source of conflicts for decades. Land disputes have seen to the death of hundreds of people every year (Odiegwu, 2010:11). Scholars have even wondered whether the oil resources are a curse to Nigeria (Lartey, 2010:8). There have perhaps been more military coups in Nigeria than in most countries within its fifty years of independence (more than seven to date) [Ehiabhi, 2006:92-103]. Ehiabhi explains how the civil war was succeeded by coup d'états, one of which resulted in some parts of northern Nigeria being expelled from the country for some hours.

Every year is greeted with violent clashes between religious groups, ethnic groups and political parties. In spite of ecumenical institutions such as the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN), the Christian community is no more united among themselves than between the Christians and the Moslems. Moslem fundamentalists and traditional Moslems look askance at one another. The national character policy and the presidential candidacy zoning systems attempted and insinuated at various quarters in the political arena in Nigeria (Nnodim, 2010) are all expressions of ethnic and tribal rivalries. It seems as though all local, state and national elections in Nigeria are accompanied by violence and bloody clashes (Briefing Paper, 2009). In Nigeria, inter-ethnic, inter-tribal, inter-community, inter-trade-union, and political violence have become recurrent events and a normal way of life (Lartey, 2010:8). Political thuggery, politically motivated killings (Rotimi, 2005:79-98) and kidnapping are expressions of lack of social cooperation. In recent times, the wave and incidence of terrorism, nicknamed 'boko haram' (Olukoya & Olowonro, 2011:4), is itself the peak of social weakness. The 'we versus them' social problem manifests itself in several ways other than bloody clashes between people. The gap between the rich and the poor, the elite and the masses, the literate and the illiterate, seems beyond bridging. In addition, the vandalising of government properties like petroleum pipelines (Fred, 2010), refineries (*Daily Trust*, 2010), and electricity (*World News Head Lines*, 2010), to name a few, are not only expressions of protest against the government, but also against the rich and the ruling class. They are all symptoms of the social demarcationist orientation that midwifes the 'we versus them' orientation. In Nigeria, soon after an election, the elected representatives move to the state and federal capitals, far beyond the reach of those who elected them.

There are places in Nigeria where the language spoken by females differs from the one spoken by the males. There are also townships with more than one king and language. In Ajowa Akoko, for instance, there are about five kings and five different languages. It should also be added that in many parts of Nigeria, football has become a source of hostility

rather than a source that unites people in many other parts of the world. In some parts of the country, fans of Manchester United cannot watch a match between Manchester United and Liverpool under the same roof, let alone on the same television screen.

It is tempting to conclude, as some scholars and opinion holders have done (Alli, 2011:1-4; Akowe, 2011:2), that Nigeria's political leaders are the root of the problem. It is equally tempting to accept that the problem is an effect of colonialism. It may even appear safer, at first sight, to argue that both corrupt leaders and the colonial enemy have caused the Nigerian crisis. These three alternatives, however, are merely simplistic approaches to the problem. On the one hand, they prevent further investigation into the possible root of the problem. On the other hand, since some of the scholars who have explained the problem appear to be unquestionable experts and custodians of knowledge on social issues, questioning their models of explanation may at first sight appear like an unscholarly speculation.

Over the years, scholars have employed these types of causal explanations, perhaps because these explanations project the image of the scholars as experts and give them the popular scientific label. Before explaining the black spots in these explanations of the Nigerian problem or making any suggestions on its dynamics, I shall explain the link between epistemological orientation and the tendency to behave in certain ways.

## Traditional epistemologies

The relationship between thought and action can be explained in two ways. Explaining how a person's thoughts affect society is often assumed to be a job for the psychologist (Henriques, 2004:1207-1221; Viney, 2004:1275-1278). Having to examine the basic beliefs and mental schemes that produce the thought contents and thinking patterns of an individual actor, on the other hand, is an investigation within the domain of epistemology (Fumerton, 2006:53, 75, 117). However, an investigation that uses both these fields (philosophical epistemology and psychology) could produce better results because the combination allows for a more holistic synergy.

The sharp demarcation made by scholars between the two realms is extremely arbitrary. For the most part, the two are about the same undivided person. Perhaps this demarcation results from the epistemological fashion of the day which sees the intellectual community thoroughly and arbitrarily chunked into independent units, making interdisciplinary research difficult in universities and research institutes, especially in African universities (Moabi, 2010). This paper does not intend to delve into the entire problem of interdisciplinary demarcation in the twenty-first century. However, it provides some insight and perhaps hindsight into part of the problem. It touches on how the intellectual habit of arbitrary demarcation between two points, objects, qualities, ideas, theoretical positions or concepts characteristic of academics and general society in contemporary times relates to the social situation in Nigeria. Recently, phenomenology has attempted to bridge the gap between philosophical epistemology and psychology. However, phenomenology, from its transcendental formulation from Edmund Husserl under the influence of Franz Brentano to its existentialist formulations by Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Albert Camus, is largely reductionist in approach (Omoregbe, 2003:29,81). While Husserl endorses a fleshless ontology in search of the essence of being, Merleau-Ponty rejects the 'inner man' of St Augustine (Omoregbe, 2003:29) and commits himself to the Aristotelian scholasticism of the incarnate being (Omoregbe, 2003:81-83). In essence, instead of reconciling the inner-outer demarcation initiated by medieval philosophers, Merleau-Ponty simply opts for a secular presentation of the 'incarnate being' adopted by Aquinas from Aristotelian scholasticism. Hence in addition to the split between the traditions of phenomenology, phenomenologists have further distanced phenomenology itself from its initial aim to reconcile epistemology (Lechte, 2008:25-58).

In the history of thought, epistemology is traditionally a search for knowledge. It begins with claims to knowledge against sceptical objections. It therefore centres around the argument that knowledge is possible and that one cannot claim to know unless one can say how he or she knows. That is, for instance, $p$ does not know that $s$ exists unless $p$ is able to tell in a manner beyond any doubt, how $p$ knows or may know.

Traditional epistemology therefore accommodates the sceptical objection. Given the provision for scepticism in traditional epistemology, there are two original groups within the history of traditional theoretical epistemology. There are those who claim that knowledge is possible and there are those who object to the possibility of knowledge, usually referred to as the sceptic school of thought. Each epistemological group is further subdivided into factions that depend heavily on the levels of their emphasis. Roughly, those who believe in the possibility of knowledge are subdivided into rationalists and empiricists, and the empiricist school is further divided into other units. Regarding the criteria for knowing, the non-sceptic group are distributed between the foundationalist, coherentist and contextualist theses.

There is yet another epistemological project that has to do with the question of where to locate knowledge (O'Hear, 2003:29-37; Fumerton, 2006:54-55), and scholars remain as divided as in other previous projects. The rationalists, for instance, believe that knowledge can be located within the realm of pure reason. Descartes, Malebranche and Spinoza

represent the rationalist school. Locke, Berkeley and Hume represent the empiricist school of thought, which believes that the best knowledge we can ever have is knowledge acquired through the senses (Bewaji, 2007 63:152-157).

Within the history of philosophy as an intellectual discipline, epistemology is presumably as old as human reasoning. Others would say that it dates back to the earliest Greek philosophers in the Western history of philosophy. Within the Western tradition, however, René Descartes represents a landmark in the history of epistemology. Descartes is popular for instituting dualism in relation to the body-spirit demarcation. He did this by demarcating between the solid and incorrigible foundation and the structure of knowledge built thereon. The root of the object-subject demarcation of the realist tradition is also traceable to Descartes.

Since Descartes, epistemology has taken a completely new turn. With the initiatives of other philosophers, particularly in the modern and postmodern era and tradition, philosophy has evolved into something markedly different (Habermas, 2005:109-129). Of note is the ascendance of the contextualist approach to thinking, thought and issues, often referred to as contextualism or socialised epistemology. Socialised epistemology came up as a reaction to Descartes' foundationalist approach to the justification of knowledge claims. This is because post-medieval scholarship went hand in hand with the growth of science when scholars were opened up to greater freedom of thought and action, not only because of the reduced power of the Church, but also because of the spread of social enlightenment which leaned towards the undermining of authoritarian leadership.

From the foregoing, the influence of epistemology on society is evident, as is the influence of an individual philosopher like Descartes on epistemology. The influence of the dominant epistemological fashions and traditions on society in general is often ignored in intellectual explanations of social behaviour. For example, suppose in a first-year undergraduate class a student says, "I know that the world is spherical because my geography teacher taught me so during an elementary class." A professor could take this statement to mean that the student knows at that stage that the world is spherical. If, on the other hand, the same person asks a third-year or postgraduate student the same question in an examination, he or she may not be willing to mention the schoolteacher in their answer. Ironically, another professor might overlook the different circumstances and take the answer to be true and correct in both cases. The difference, however, lies in the fact that the two professors conceive knowledge differently. The former sees knowledge as context dependent, while the latter sees it as universal and perhaps, incorrigible.

Thus what we hold to be true, and the extent to which we believe that things are exactly the way we see them, depends on our conception of truth and knowledge. The Cartesian dualist and perhaps polarist orientation has marked a turning point in epistemology. As noted earlier, this orientation marks the legitimization of the mind/body demarcation and consequently of the physical/mental, subject/object, subjectivity/objectivity dichotomy. The dichotomous (demarcationist) orientation (Dupré, 1993; Galison & Stump, 1996; Parsons, 2003; Popper, 1963) has been the hallmark of traditional academic philosophy since Descartes. Given the position of philosophy as the mother of all other intellectual fields, the dichotomist outlook of philosophical epistemology expects to influence the foundation and outlooks of all other disciplines, albeit in academics and the intellectual world in general.

The methodological principle initiated by the object/subject demarcation is that of causal explanation (Outhwaite, 1917:5-7). The principle in question finds its way into the methodology of mainstream social sciences through the rise of empiricism in the seventeenth century and the dominance of realism, especially in political science, sociology and international relations in the twenty-first century (Outhwaite, 1917:6-10). This explains why it is sometimes referred to as causal realism, because the problem of perception is the problem of empiricism and the demarcation supports the realist thesis of the empiricists (Chisholm, 1972:2). Realism in general is the belief that the physical existent object is real, but can only be known through the mental image. That is, we cannot have direct contact with the physical world.

In the natural sciences, the dualist stance forms the very foundation of Newtonian physics where objects are subdivided into smaller units and where the action in one is seen as a reaction to the force from another. In politics and political science, it forms the basis for representative democracy and gives rise to the sharp demarcation between rulers and the ordinary citizen. The dichotomist (demarcationist) epistemology thus gives rise not only to the proliferation of academic disciplines and fields of study since the beginning of the 20th century, but also to the proliferation of schools of thought and the general epistemological crisis of the 21st century.

By implication, the social orientation offered by the epistemological traditions of the Western world is dualist, pluralist and dichotomist. Perhaps this partly explains why some scholars of African studies have accused colonialism of importing ideologies that support excessive individualism, discord and chaos into Africa (Wiredu, 2000:186-204; 1992:59-70). However, their position could be completely true *only if* it is found that precolonial Africa was innocent of any such dichotomist principle. Thus it becomes necessary to make an epistemological enquiry into the traditional epistemic scheme of the precolonial African system.

There is no point in trying to oppose the view of scholars who argue that the worldview of many African cultures is monistic (Bamikole, 2004:97-111). That is, it promotes a unified or a mono-dimensional worldview or that it opposes diversity and perhaps, freedom of thought. They may be correct, but only to a certain extent. Within the lofty appearance of monism, however, there lies a subtle picture of dualism and pluralism. The underlying principles of African cultural systems have provided a world view with no less a dichotomist orientation than that of Cartesian dualism.

To begin with, a good number of scholars agree that the African worldview is communitarian (Wiredu, 2008:332-39; Gbadegesin, 2000:149-68; Wiredu, 2000:374-82; Sogolo, 2000:177-85; Koenane, 2010; Onyiam-Osigwe, 2005). Nyerere (1995) paints a classic picture of communitarianism in his description of African polity. According to his description, elders converge under the shade of a big tree and discuss an issue until they reach an agreement. Given the constraints of the transport system available in precolonial Africa when the 'under the tree' system was popular, and given the fact that agreement by consensus could be a very difficult task without some sort of manipulation (Wiredu, 2000:374-82), one would expect that such a provision would only work for a small community. It also suggests that African communitarianism was an intra-community arrangement. The implication is that the sort of communitarian system practised in Africa did not regulate the relationship among African communities. In fact, when each community was united against the other, the result was war. If the scholars of indigenous African social and political systems are correct regarding African precolonial communitarianism, then the system was not as good as they have portrayed it. It would imply that either there was a socio-political landscape in Africa that was different and superior to the theoretical insinuation of these scholars, or that the scholars were correct and African communitarianism meant inter-community conflicts.

The underlying polarity in the intra-community communitarianism does not necessarily imply that there were originally no inter-community relationships in Africa. Perhaps originally, in the three leading ethnic groups (Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani and Igbo), as in many African societies, there were two kinds of political arrangements. One was an age-based hierarchical system, while the other was monarchical (Salami, 2006:67-78). For example, the generally held view is that the monarchical system has been in the Hausa communities from time immemorial. There can be no argument until the origins of the monarchical leadership among the Hausa are investigated and it is proven otherwise. Among the Yoruba however, the monarchical system came later with the arrival of Oduduwa, who only united people to establish the Yoruba kingdom. Among the Igbo, expressions such as "Igbo enwe eze" ("the Igbo have no king") and "Onye obula bu eze nebu ya" (everyone is a king in his compound) suggest that kingship was a later development, and that each community was an independent state or nation (Nwala, 1985:163-74). The other system, especially among the Igbo and the Yoruba and perhaps in some Hausa/Fulani communities, appears to be be more original and behaves as a family-centred nation-state organised in a hierarchy based on age (Nwala, 1985:167). In this latter system, the oldest man in the community is automatically the head. Fortunately both systems, although widely different, are democratic in their own right because at least they were able to ensure social cooperation and individual freedom, which are the more important elements of democracy. There are indications, however, that the monarchical system came as a result of the corruption of what is described as the traditional republican system of rulership.

Whether this view is correct or not, most Nigerian communities of today, including some of the Igbo communities who had earlier taken pride in the fact that they had no kings, now practise the monarchical system, conceivably in order to attract some recognition and benefits from the federal and state governments (Nwala, 1985:163-75). The monarch by nature (whether democratic or otherwise) would want to ensure that his kingdom was protected against external invasion. The kingdom would also become predatory over surrounding smaller kingdoms and communities. Power tussles between the vassal states and the kingdom, between the king and the chiefs or even among the chiefs were not uncommon (Wiredu, 2000:374-82). This in itself is a practically dichotomous (demarcationist) system.

There is also a saying among the Yoruba, "t'ibi t'ire la da'le aiye", loosely translated as "there is both good and evil in the universe and they are both from the author of the universe". The good/evil, good/bad, divine/human, creator/creation, cause/effect dualities are all implied in this statement. The statement originates from the ancient precolonial 'Ifa' literary corpus (Yoruba oral tradition) and is attributed to 'Orunmila' as often used for divination (Oke, 2007:1-19; Akinnawonu, 2004:59-66). In traditional medicine, healers often consult the oracles to verify the cause of an ailment (Makinde, 1998). This is common practice in all the major and minor cultural groups in Nigeria. In the Yoruba setting, the diviner usually attributes the source of an ailment to 'Olodumare' (the Creator), 'Aje' (witches),[3] 'Ori' (literally translated

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3. Though 'Aje' does not translate exactly as 'witch' in the English language, there seems to be no exact translation for the concept in the Western tradition. The same goes for other concepts such as 'Esu', often translated as the devil, and 'Olodumare', which is translated as God.

as the inner-head) or to 'enemies' within or outside of the family of the sick person (Makinde, 1985:53-69 and Lawal, 1985:91-103).

Given the fact therefore that polarism and pluralism are found in both the Western and the African conceptual systems that make up Nigerian society, and consequently the Nigerian person, is it justifiable to say that some leaders have caused Nigerians to always demarcate or distinguish between one tribe and the other? On the contrary, is it not more appropriate to think that the leaders themselves are able to see these differences because they are also members of the 'demarcative' or 'dichotomist' society?

## Traditional epistemologies on Nigerians and in previous explanations

As noted earlier, scholars are divided on the issue of social schism in Nigeria. Some scholars have argued that it is a result of the colonial past that Nigerians have a deep-rooted hatred for one another along various socio-economic and cultural lines. Others blame postcolonial political, tribal or ethnic leaders for the problem (Kasfir, 1987:54-60). Academics and other experts in the field of social studies only add to the confusion. The scholars stand aloof, offering ready-made solutions to problems like conventional priests. Many of the experts in question are Africans and Nigerians, which ironically does not motivate them to think of themselves as part of the problems they are solving. They passionately demarcate between themselves (the supposed 'reservoirs of knowledge') and the rest of Nigerian society (the supposed public 'ignoramus'). This demarcationist inclination explains why some scholars and leaders (Joseph, 1995:115-117) have prescribed the division of Nigeria along ethnic or religious lines. These opinions have stemmed from a shallow understanding of the people and their problems, and have further entrenched the delusion among the people that their problems are merely the effect of insurmountable causes and circumstances, such that unless the present Nigeria ceases to exist, the problem will remain insoluble.

Having linked the behaviour in Nigerian society to the two epistemological orientations (the colonial and the postcolonial), usually assumed to be opposed to each other, it is tempting to conclude that either or both of these epistemological influences have caused the social schism we find in Nigeria. Such a conclusion would be premature. This notion requires further clarification. If Nigeria had never been colonised, would that mean that the problem of social schism and tribal rivalries would not have existed? A country where the problem is as critical as in Nigeria is Ethiopia, but Ethiopia was hardly ever colonised. How then has a combination of colonial and postcolonial factors produced the problem? I do not think that the blame lies solely on the shoulders of this factors, because other places within and outside Africa have inherited similar traditions, but mutual distrust and schism in those places are not as deep, and do not always manifest in terrorism, wars and violent conflicts as is common in Nigeria. Examples are India, South Africa, Botswana and Egypt. In these places, the collective efforts and pressure of the civil societies are felt more positively.

A society's behaviour may be influenced by the dominant epistemological fashions because every society is a combination of individuals. The quality and quantity of individuals and their interaction and relationships determine the nature, problems and characteristics of a society. Nigerian society is no exception. An influence on an individual is indirectly an influence on the society to which the individual belongs.

The influence of Western epistemology on Nigerian society is brought about through formal education in different fashions and degrees (Bewaji, 2007:383-403). Nigeria, like many African states, is a place where being educated is almost synonymous with being literate and schooled in Western systems and languages. The Nigerian society of today has inherited the polarist epistemologies of traditional Western philosophy through other avenues like religion, the legal system, the economic system, technology (Olatunji, 2006:73-78), medicine and political formats (Mosley, 2009). The learner/teacher, divine/human, representative/people and natural/artificial divides are examples of polarism.

However, the mistakes of previous explanations of the Nigerian problem lie not only in their dichotomist (demarcationist) approach, but fundamentally in mistaking influence for cause. The influence of colonialism and its underlying epistemological tradition on the Nigerian people is not in any doubt. Colonialism has become part of their history, which they cannot now undo. The influence of the pre-contact cultures of the Nigerian ethnic and tribal groups and their underlying epistemological orientations are also not in question, because it forms part of the social gene[4] that is passed from generation to generation, albeit unnoticed. The possibility of conflict between the two rival epistemologies in one person and in one society is therefore undeniable. However, all these are half truths, because possibilities are mere possibilities; they are not necessarily actualities. They are sometimes contingent upon other more intimate factors. The other side of the story is that every society has had to combat influxes of rival epistemological orientations in every generation. It hinges on the problem of identity. Even the Europeans who colonised Africa have had to battle with this

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4.  Social gene means transmitted patterns of behaviour common to a certain people, but which has more to do with the people's socio-psychological experiences than with their biological make up (Fanon, 1993).

problem. After all, in the process of colonisation, the oppressor becomes the oppressed and the oppressed becomes the oppressor, and both of these groups lose their identity (Freire, 2006:40-73).

Given the above, the problem of social schism in Nigeria is not caused by colonialism, postcolonial African leaders or allegedly conflicting epistemologies because one of the attributes of a cause is that it is always succeeded by an effect (Faure, 2009:77-108. Maxwell, 2004, 3-11). That is whatever the cause, there must be an effect. It also means that people are effects of causes, and consequently have no contribution to the trajectory of their own history. Like a Trojan horse that carries within itself death and decay, the causal explanation seems like an exoneration of the people from being blamed for being responsible for a problem, but carries within itself fatalism and the death of civil society. The argument is that because people are not responsible for the problem because there was nothing they could do to avoid it, there is consequently nothing they can do to stop or survive it on their own.

In the case of Nigeria, this means that the people are at the mercy of their leaders or colonial agents for change to happen. It also means that Nigerians can go to sleep while depending on the benevolence of the causal agents for their fate in life. Although this paper is not so much about cause and effect, nevertheless an average Nigerian feels that he has some duties, obligations and contributions to the trajectory of the personal and national history. Hence, the causal explanations are derogatory to the Nigerian personality and misleading the Nigerian people, particularly the civil society on whose shoulders rest the hope of the nation in this milieu and beyond.

The problems therefore exist, not because of challenges such as corrupt leaders, colonialism or the more intimate factor of two distinct epistemological orientations. An explanation that detaches people from a problem simply detaches the people from the solution as well. If colonialism - the postcolonial leaders of the influx of epistemological strands - are responsible for the problems, it would mean that even if Nigerians try to find solutions, the incorrigible causal forces could still thwart their efforts by doing as they had done before.

What has been missing in these previous explanations is that no one seems to talk about the inability of Nigerians to effectively reject the influence of some epistemological strands or to effectively harmonise the various strands. First, the Nigerian society has not been able to realise that the two epistemological traditions are not as opposed as they might think. However, people cannot be motivated equally by opposing factors at the same time; the Nigerian person assumes that he or she has to suppress one of the two allegedly opposing epistemological traditions whenever a choice of action is to be made. Hence, knowingly or unknowingly, the Nigerian person allows himself or herself to be divided and perpetually switching between two imaginary worlds (de la Ceuz-Guzman, 1994: 75-88). On the other hand, his/her inability to reconcile himself/herself with his/her own world, conditions the Nigerian person to seeing conflict and differences in the world - between unity and diversity, monism and plurality, ultimate truth and divergence, the individual and society, colonial and traditional, white and black, good and bad, and me and others.

The co-switching itself is not the main predicament. The core crisis is the underlying assumption that one implies the negation of the other. That is, if the white is true and good, then the black must necessarily be false and bad. This unusual mental scheme prevents the Nigerian person from being able to look beyond the seeming differences and diversities to see unity. The Nigerian individual is consequently alienated from the real self. He sees many trees, but cannot see the forest. He focuses on the drops of water while the sea evades 'his' sight. For example, phenomenology as a philosophical tradition was imported to the Nigeria educational system as a new system of foreign origin, when in fact a system more coherent than and superior to the alleged phenomenology attributed to the Western tradition could have naturally developed from him. This mental attitude manifests itself in various other practical ways. This explains why Nigerians would import things that the country has in abundance.

A society, however, is a combination of individuals. The quality and personality type of individuals determine so many characteristics of a society. Given the situation of Nigerian society where there is an unmitigated but unharmonised adoption of plural, allegedly conflicting conceptual schemes and world views, the effect of these internalised conflicts cannot go unnoticed. It may not be strange, therefore, to find that people may be different in public from what they are in private. It may also not be strange to find that people switch between their traditional beliefs and Christianity or Islam. This is because the Nigerian individual assumes that the two are necessarily opposed stances, and that one implies the negation of the other. However since the choice of one mental scheme has to be made in every public situation, the Nigerian person feels compelled to choose the behaviour and mental scheme that has a wider acceptance for public situations, while the other has to be condemned to secrecy. Consequently, Nigerians find themselves making conflicting and naive choices while fluctuating and oscillating between conceivably incompatible mental schemes in public and in private situations. Many people become inconsistent, and the great country consequently becomes a sign of negative contradiction and deception, even to itself.

**Conclusion**

The discourse has offered a reflection on the social schisms that exist in Nigeria. The paper acknowledges the fact that some scholars have tried to find the causes of the schisms manifesting in the form of anti-government antagonism, inter-tribal conflicts and bloody riots, among others, in Nigeria. Without taking sides with any of the rival explanations, this paper has examined some crucial features of the social woes of Nigeria, explaining some germane epistemological factors often ignored by scholars in their explanations of Nigerian social situations. Specifically, scholars have misled the Nigerian person to think that he or she is not responsible for his or her condition and therefore cannot proffer any reliable solution. The scholars' explanations could further entrench ignorance ifnaievely taken as infallible truths. Expectedly, the ignorance in question is a culpable one, and so it could be surmounted. This paper explains the conditions under which the factors previously identified by scholars are able to produce social schism in a society, and specifically in Nigeria, i.e. if and only if Nigerians are truly like objects that are incapable of making choices, review their choices, review and change renew their live situations. It should be noted that even the proposals to further split Nigeria could be a futile exercise if the underlying conditions are not properly addressed.

Aspects such as the implications of schism on the performance of civil society in Nigeria on war against corruption, environmental degradation, and education have not been discussed in much detail and rigour in this paper. Although these aspects are relevant to the discussion, especially with the wave of political revolutions that are imminent in other parts of the world, they are better discussed in further detail in separate papers.

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