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## **Citizenship and Peace Studies**

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## *Chapter 3*

### **NIGERIA AS A SOCIAL SYSTEM**

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#### **Introduction**

Nigeria is a geo-political sovereign entity on the West coast of Africa. With a population of about One Hundred and Sixty Seven Million (167m) people and over three hundred and fifty (350) ethnic nationalities, the country is at best very diverse and in need of unity. Put differently, it is made up of various peoples and cultures (Essoh and Oluwabamide, 2006). This paints a picturesque of a system made of many parts; but all elements contributing to the survival and up keep of the whole. This notion is best appreciated when emphasis is placed on the functionality of the various parts, as well as the issues of national cohesion, social organization and social control.

#### **3.2 Social System**

In the light of the above, the question is: "Is Nigeria a social system?". Any attempt at providing answers to the question calls for an appraisal of the concept of the social system. Thus, what is a social system? Talcott Parsons as inspired by knowledge of the biological sciences, explained the society as a social system. Notably, Ekong (2003) refers to society as a group of people living together in a definite geographical territory and sharing the same culture. This, Wilkins (1973) agrees. And Ekpenyong (2003), in concord, implies that societies are social systems because they have interrelated parts with each part having clearly defined functions. Moreover, Ekpenyong (2003) that the relations, interconnections and interdependence of the parts unite them into a coherent whole and accounts for the persistence of the social unit in question.

Generally, a system is any structured or patterned relationship between any number of elements, where this system forms a whole or unity. Examples of systems include: the human organism and the water system toilet. Marshall (1998) submits that the basic assumption here is that a system has an environment and therefore there is the requirement of boundary maintenance. There is also an inter-change between a system and its environment. Systems, therefore, will tend towards an equilibrium state or homeostasis. Thus, systems change by becoming more internally differentiated. The natural sciences have encouraged the development of this view. From the sociological point of view, Herbert Spencer is accredited with the early development of the idea of society as a social system. Influenced by such development, Talcott Parsons developed the theory of structural functionalism (Parsons, 1937). In his latter work, Parsons (1961) argues that the society as a social system is usually faced with two major problems, namely: the external problem of the production and allocation of scarce resources; and the internal problem of achieving social order or integration. This

reality informed Parsons' development of four sub-systems, which respond to the external and internal functional prerequisites of the system of actions, namely: adaptation (economy), goal-attainment (polity), integration (society community), and latency (socialization). This is submitted in the acronym A.G.I.L. A system, therefore, implies the interdependence of parts and boundary of some kind between it and the environment. Merton in Ritzer(2011), however, argues that the framework of functionality of the system requires that there be specification of the units for which a given social item is functional. It expressly allows for a given item to have diverse consequences, namely: functional, dysfunctional, and even nonfunctional consequences for individuals, sub-groups, groups, and for the more inclusive social structure and culture. The difference between the functional virtues and the dysfunctional virtues makes for the netfunction. Thus, when the netfunction is in the positive, the item continues to subsist; but when it is in the negative, there is no point for its continued survival.

According to Anderson and Carter (1989), social systems comprise knowledge about persons, groups of persons and the human and nonhuman environs that influence social behaviour and are influenced by persons. Olsen (1998) acknowledges that while social system is not a particular kind of social organization, it is an analytical model that can be applied to any instance of the process of social organization. It follows that a social system is a bounded set of interrelated actions that together constitute a single entity. Barckley (1999) sees it as a complex of elements or components directly or indirectly related in a causal network, such that each component is related to at least some others in a more or less stable way within a particular period of time.

In a free verse, Gintis (n.d.:23) expresses:

*“The social system consists of the structuring interaction of individuals. This structuring*

*takes the form of a concrete number of alternatives ordering the way the individual may relate to his (or her) social environment. These alternatives are called roles ...”*

Inherent in the above are the following: energy transfers between persons or groups of persons; organization (the grouping and arranging of parts to form the whole, to a putting into working order), evolution (which implies that social systems are always both changing and maintaining themselves at any given time – a case of homeostasis); structural characteristics including: boundary and linkage, hierarchy and autonomy, differentiation and specialization; as well as behavioural aspects which present those energy interchanges that are of shorter duration and faster tempo, including: social control and socialization, communication, and adaptation (Anderson and Carter, 1989).

In the light of the above, Akpan (2005), relying on the sociological perspective posits that human society must have the following characteristics: locality, organization, durability, and self identification. But as discussed by Anderson and Carter (1989), the characteristics are under energy, organization, evolution, structural characteristics, and behavioural realities. With emphasis on functionalism, national cohesion, social organization and social control, this work appraises Nigeria as a social system in the context of the positions of Akpan (2005) and Anderson and Carter (1989). These are discussed as follows:

#### **i. Structural Characteristics**

These include locality and boundaries, hierarchy and autonomy as well as differentiation and specialization. Arguably, therefore, every social system requires that its members share a common environment, locality, boundary or geographical territory. This, Akpan (2005) argues, encourages interaction that binds the

groups that stay in the area together. Boundary is the location where the intensity of energy interchange is greater on one side of a certain point than it is on the other, or greater among certain units than among others. Noting that boundaries do not necessarily mean barriers, every social system necessarily has a readily discernable boundary and yet be very open to transfers of energy and functional interaction across its boundary.

Nigeria has linguistic, cultural, geographic, religious, constitutional, etc. boundaries. For instance, the geographic boundary of Nigeria is put at 910,770 Km. Sq. To the North, Nigeria is bounded by Niger Republic; North – East by Chad; East by the Camerouns; West by the Benin Republic; and South by the Atlantic Ocean. With a large territorial unit, Akpan (2005) opines that the Nigerian experience has created doubts as to the development of the sense of society. This is evident in the ethno-religious realities that culminate into divisive calls on Nigeria.

## ii. **Organization**

Discussing the cybernetic concept of organization, Monane (1997) asserts that organization pertains to interrelatedness and the degree of impact of a component's action upon the action of other components within the system. Inherent in this is the reality of social division of labour which points to how the needs of the society, could be met. The quality of organization could be, simple or complex, low or high. From the family, through, the lineage, community, village, to the national settings, members of the society are seen to be involved in a web of interrelationships.

Hierarchical and autonomous attributes as well as differentiation and specialization are also played out in the organizational realities of a society. Of course, parts of the society are related to each other in various ways. One of such ways is the vertical or hierarchical dimension where parts are ranked in the

order which energy is distributed. In which case, some parts control others in the power equation. This also comes in the form of authority where some parts serve as sources of sanction and approval; and in form of a required sequence or an order in which development must occur (Maslow, 1968). Inherent in this is autonomy to self - determination. Another perspective of organization is in differentiation and specialization. While differentiation refers to “dividing the functions”, specialization suggests that a part only does a function, and that no other part of the whole performs the same function.

A cursory appraisal of Nigeria would reveal that even in natural endowments, the country is organized along various lines. While the Niger Delta region is rich in crude oil and natural gas, the North West is densely populated which makes it determinative of the polity. The South West has much intellectual power. The North East and Central (Middle Belt) is blessed with fertile land – hence, it proves the food basket of the country. And the South East is given to commercialism.

Also, religious and ethnic colourations are frontal in Nigeria. As a result, they play pivotal roles in the shaping of the organization structure of the Nigerian nation. The activities of the Arewa Consultative Forum, Afenifere Group, Ohaneze Ndi Igbo, Ibibio Elders Forum, Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSSOP), O'dua People Congress (OPC), and the Boko Haram Fundamentalists, etc. speak volumes here.

## iii. **Evolution and Durability**

Within the context of social system, it could be said that change and maintenance are not diametrically opposed in reality. Systems, thus, never exist in a state of complete change or complete

maintenance of status quo. Therefore, systems are always both changing and maintaining themselves at any given time. Put differently, the relative permanence in the organization of interaction is a prerequisite for every society (social system).

As people consistently interact in particular forms, such forms become crystallized over time into a patterned behaviour and are institutionalized. This speaks for durability. A causal flip through history of Nigeria reveals that arguably Nigeria was naturally conjectured. However, with a difference in development strides, the earliest of our history dates back to the Old Oyo Empire, the Benin Kingdom, the Kanem – Bornu Empire, the Nemba and other segmented city states in the South – South region, the emirate system which was instituted as a post 1804 – 1808 Sokoto Jihad led by Othman Dan Fodiyo, and several other political creations. The advent of the Europeans led to the ceding and annexation of Lagos in 1851, and in 1861 carved a niche out as the very foundation of Nigeria as a country. As an aftermath of the 1884/1885 Berlin Conferences organized by the German leader Otto Von Bismark, this area known as Nigeria was pasted to the British Government. Captioned the scramble and partition of African states, many nations were balkanized and coerced to stay together and become Nigeria. From the proclamation of Lagos as a Colony, and the creation of the protectorates of the Northern and Southern Nigeria and the subsequent amalgamation of the two protectorates in 1914 under the leadership of Sir George Dashwood Tubman Goldie and 1909, through the constitutional developments; to the achievement of political independence on October 1, 1960; the series of threats of disintegration – chief of which was a thirty-month old civil war (1967 - 1970), Nigeria has soldiered on as a country.

It should be noted that from the amalgamation of the two protectorates in 1914, through the creation of three (3) regions in 1946; four (4) regions in 1963; twelve (12) states in 1967; nineteen

(19) states in 1976; twenty – one (21) states in 1987; thirty (30) states in 1992; and thirty – six (36) states in 1996; as well as the losing of the Bakkassi Peninsula to the Cameroons in 2006; there has been minor distortions on the political map of Nigeria. Yet, the country has remained one and indivisible.

Akpan (2005), however, notes that Nigeria lacks a sense of durability due to multicultural beliefs which lead to multicultural policies, and the retardation of traditions through the inversion of foreign immigrants and cultural diffusion. The way out of the problem is proper socialization. It could be said that two tendencies of the concept and reality of homeostasis are, therefore, observable, namely: morphostasis (or structure - maintaining); and morphogenesis (structure - changing). In the circumstance, Nigeria enjoys a relative degree of homeostasis.

#### iv. **Self - Identity**

Self - identity is another prerequisite of any social system. This is incumbent on a society's uniqueness as traceable to a common heritage. This would best be appreciated in the global context. The historical sketch on Nigeria in (iii) above is considered significant. In addition, national insignia such as the National Flag (Green-White-Green), the Coat of Arms, the National Anthem, etc. are all ingredients for self identity. For instance, the musical tune: **s : d : s : d : m : s :-:- m : f : m : r : r : d :-:-** may not mean anything special to non-Nigerians. But it translates to the tune of the first two lines of Nigeria's National Anthem.

However, a critical appraisal reveals that Nigeria has had a rather slow reaction to the challenges of developing a Nigerian National Identity. This is predicated on policy summersaults that bedevils the nation and the existence of many distinct societies and ethnic nationalities within the Nigerian State. In the case of policy

summersaults, it is on record that the first National Anthem that was evolved at independence in 1960 was scripted thus:

*“Nigeria, we hail thee:  
Our own dear native land.  
Though tribes and tongues may differ,  
In brotherhood we stand;  
Nigerians all are proud to serve,  
Our sovereign motherland.*

Regrettably, with beautiful and nationhood-evoking and inspiring two other verses, and very emotions-building tune, it was changed to:

*Arise, O compatriots!  
Nigeria’s call obey;  
To serve our fatherland;  
With love and strength and faith.  
The labour of our heroes’ past  
Shall never be in vain.  
To serve with heart and might,  
One nation bound in freedom  
Peace and unity*

Also, with a duty-inspiring and God-depending second stanza which Nigerians rarely give a thought to, the present national anthem seems to lack the virtues of nationhood. Policy summersaults coupled with strong tendencies for sectionalism have combined with lack of identified common foes to thwart efforts at building nationalism.

To stem the tide, policies should be well thought after before their declaration. Once declared, they should be implemented with serious consistency. Also, to build stronger bond of nationalism, sectionalism should be consciously played down by identifying gray areas and declaring affirmative action. And finally, common foes should be consistently identified and tackled. This could come in

the areas of international sports, sub-regional and continental roles, as well as investment in international diplomacy. There is also need for re-orientation and socialization.

### **3.3 Nigeria and National Cohesion**

With its fair share of social upheavals such as the pre – independence nationalist struggles, the post – election riots in the Western part of Nigeria in the early 1960s, the civil war between 1967 and 1970; many years of military interruption in governance, the *Maitatsine* Islamic fundamentalists, the riots/protests against obnoxious economic policies of government, the post-June 12, 1993 Presidential election riots, the Niger Delta militancy, and the current *Boko Haram* problem, Nigeria could be said to have experienced serious challenges of national cohesion.

The grotesque situation has led many to brand Nigeria as “where nothing works”. This rather ugly situation is made worse when one considers the diverse nature of country. The peoples of Nigeria lack the requisite character to give the society cohesiveness (Akpan, 2000). Loyalties are more to the sections than the nation. Little wonder Barclay (1996) would imply that Nigeria does not seem to have the unifying loyalties and the consciousness of nationality that other countries must have already taken for granted. Nigeria must therefore look inward to reinvent itself. In sum, placing Nigeria in juxtaposition with the four functional prerequisites advanced by Parsons (1961), namely: adaptation, goal attainment, integration, and pattern maintenance, it behoves on the leadership to mobilize the followership to galvanize a new Nigeria of unquestionable national and social cohesion. By leadership, one should see a position, structure, system, process, and a function which motivates the people to reach a sense of achievement and attainment of higher level of civilizations and development. By, extension, very conscious and detailed efforts at

improving the quality of all human lives of those in the country should be put in place.

### **3.4 Social Organization and Social Control**

Ekpenyong (2003) opines that social organization is brought to bear as social actors interact in a recurrent and patterned relationship. Such relationships are predicated on cultural ideas. The workability or organization presents a picture of a system. As a system, organization has a set of attributes which border on complexity and formality with a view to securing survival. It has parts which are as interrelated as are interdependent.

For societal organization to stay afloat, populations must be maintained in quantity and quality. Socialization and communication, stability of the system and proper coordination and regulation of activities, protection from external threats and stresses, control of behaviour, ability to manage and resolve conflicts, and procedure for change and ability to adapt to change all constitute an amalgam of basic survival requirements. This, Nigeria is grappling with through legislations, dialogues, policy formulations and executions. For instance, the Niger Delta militancy problem threatened the peace of the nation and the Federal Government of Nigeria beyond the unproductive option of matching force with force (the military option), opted for the amnesty programme which paid off. But government should be more proactive than reactionary.

One good approach to ensuring social organization is by investing on **social control**. It is unfortunate that the present day Nigeria seems to have domiciled the responsibility for social control on only the formal social control agencies. Little wonder the budget of 2012 has credited over Nine Hundred and Two Billion Naira (₦902b) to security. The issue here is not the amount of money spent, but on the ability of the agencies to successfully and

effectively carry out their constitutional responsibilities. It is on record that the formal crime fighting (control) bodies are grossly inadequate both in qualitative and quantitative terms. To this end, Brown (2005) recommends concerted efforts from all and sundry, and a synergy of such efforts at the instance of community policing. Social control, therefore, should be seen from a holistic point of view (not just from the militarized point). Invariably, unemployment, food insecurity (in terms of availability and accessibility), illiteracy, and irresponsible leadership should be very sincerely tackled if social control is to be realized. This will also enhance proper social organization.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

This work aimed at justifying the argument that Nigeria is a social system. It notes that Nigeria is multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, and therefore made of many peoples and cultures. Yet in its present conjecture, she was born at an opportune time. Courtesy of the colonial realities, Nigeria emerged as the largest black nation on earth and is bedeviled with several social cohesion, organization, and control challenges. The functionality of the institutions leaves much to be desired. This paper blames Nigeria's fragile state on its colonial history, strong preference of sectionalism to nationalism, policy summersaults which characterize the various regimes, lack of quality leadership, and lack of identified common enemy. To help stem the tide and enhance a cohesive Nigeria, the paper recommends: leadership commitment, re-orientation and socialization, well thought after policies and consistency of problem policies, among others.

From the foregoing, Nigeria would have been seen as a social system. However, its functional level has much room for improvement. All the parts must be made to function positively for the survival of the whole system.

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