



Issues of Cohesion, Nationality and Self-determination in the Arts and the Humanities

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Abstract

Studies on human society and culture, which includes such areas as philosophy, psychology, sociology, religion, history, language, etc. constitute the academic disciplines of Arts and Humanities. These mentioned academic areas are fundamental in the development of cohesion, nationality, and self-determination. Furthermore, knowledge and skills acquired from such areas will serve as a catalyst in the growth and development of a more productive society. Cohesion is achieved when there is unity. Unity exists where a variety of individuals from distinct cultural, ethnic, tribal, social and economic systems come together and live in harmony in a specific setting. In other words, national cohesion is a situation in which people of diverse cultural, religious, linguistic, political, social and economic systems are brought together to have a common goal. A united society is a self-determined one. A self-determined society usually possessed a certain degree of national consciousness to form their own state and choose their own government. This means the society has freedom and ability to make choices and manage their own affairs. Both cohesion and self-determination become possible when individuals in the society are organised under one legal jurisdiction, and belonging to a particular nation. Therefore, this paper aims to explore on the issues of cohesion, nationality, and self-determination in the arts and the humanities.

Keywords: cohesion, social cohesion, nationality, self-determination, trust, identity, cooperation

Introduction

Major human development problems, such as water problems, sanitation problems, health problems, etc. cannot be solved without understanding the human behaviour, human culture, human beliefs, and human history. The academic discipline of Arts and Humanities takes us to the very center of what it is like to be human. Scholars of Arts and Humanities try to understand what people feel, where they come from and how they understand their world. The scholars in the field work with the communities and employ multiple methodologies to tackle big problems that are human, cultural and intellectual problems, (Fitzmaurice, 2018).

Human communities are all embedded in social structures, living together harmoniously and happily. The secret glue that holds a society together is the attitude and behaviour that shape and influence social unity. The main idea behind cohesion in a society is that people, despite their varied individual traits, are part of overlapping groups with more complex interconnections. It describes the bonds, the rapport, the empathy and the understanding people have for each other which will help them work effectively as a team, (Johnson, 2022). Social cohesion is achieved through trust, cooperation for the common good and inclusive identity.

Cohesion, Nationality and Self-Determination: Background



Issues of Cohesion, Nationality, and Self-determination in the Arts and the Humanities

Issues of cohesion, nationality, and self-determination are complex and interconnected concepts that have been debated by scholars in the field of Arts and humanities such as political philosophers, sociologists (Durkheim, 2013; Putnam, 2000), and political scientists. Cohesion is seen as the bonds that hold a society together, which includes shared values, beliefs, and identity. Issues of cohesion arise when diverse groups within a society have conflicting interests, values, or identities, potentially leading to unrest, fragmentation, or even violence. Nationality concerns the relationship between a nation (a group of people with a shared identity, culture, and history) and a state (a political entity with defined borders and governance). Issues of identity arise when different national groups coexist within a state, leading to questions about representation, power, and resource distribution. While Self-determination is the principle which holds that, a nation or people have the right to determine their own political status, including independence, autonomy, or union with another state.

Societies will inevitably be confronted with several challenges, but the intersections of different groups and societal relationships based on shared identity, vibrant cooperation, and high levels of trust foster a strong feeling of togetherness as they work like a glue that holds the society together. The most important basis defining development goals as well as a relevant requirement for tackling the challenges that emerge from the development processes are the strong ties that glue the society together (Leininger et al., 2021) Social cohesion is the glue that holds society together. It makes communities and states more resilient in the face of crisis and facilitates change processes that benefit everyone (Aldrich, 2012; Townshend; Awosoga; Kulig; & Fan, 2012) in (Leininger et al. 2021).

There are different views on the conceptualisation of social cohesion, but there are three key attributes that are common to the concept as identified by Schiefer and van der Noll (2016). The three attributes are *trust*, *identity* and *cooperation*. According to (Leininger et al. 2021), “social cohesion refers to the vertical and horizontal relations among members of society and the state that hold society together. Social cohesion is characterised by a set of attitudes and behavioural manifestations that includes trust, an inclusive identity and cooperation for the common good” (Leininger et al., 3: 2021).

Social cohesion is increasingly recognised as an important condition for the resilience of societies and the well-being of their members. Conducting research in the field of social cohesion, which is very complex multifaceted phenomenon, will require the active collaboration of local researchers and universities. Researchers need to consider history and the ongoing debate in the different countries where social cohesion researches were conducted to understand the patterns of the glue that holds societies together. To gain such insights, it is first necessary to understand how different societies conceive social cohesion.

In November 2022, the German Institute of Development and Sustainability organised a workshop that brought together (co-)authors of seven country case studies in Africa, scholars of social cohesion in Asia as well as all relevant partners of the institution’s social cohesion project. The workshop aimed to contextualise the concept of social cohesion in selected African countries. Therefore, the question is how non-European societies conceptualize social cohesion.

The workshop discussed research results on the concept of social cohesion in many African countries and a comparison of them with the concept and measurement of social cohesion as outlined in Leininger et al. (2021). The objectives of the workshop are: to detect similarities and differences of the concept of social cohesion across African countries; to detect conceptual dimensions from African countries that deviates from the mainstream literature; to



subsequently provide fresh insights to serve as a starting point for further conceptual developments and empirical analyses of social cohesion in African contexts. Part of the activities of the workshop was the participants' discussion on the concept of social cohesion in different African context. The discussion revealed a lot of interesting perspectives as follows:

In Ghanaian society, according to (Torsu, 2021), social cohesion is seen as the strength of relationships within the community. Ghana is a multi-lingual, multi-religious, multi-political party and multi-sexual orientation country. Therefore, social cohesion is how all these dynamics cohere together to create a solid society. Social cohesion in Guinea means talking about how to struggle to put an end to the conflicts (Oumar, 2021). The conflict is basically on how people struggle to access state resources, mining resources, forestry resources, and so on. There is peace building paradigm brought by the international organisation, and supported by the state. There is also the local paradigm based on the societies. In South Africa Social Cohesion is pursued as a way of nation-building because of how history divides the society according to race, ethnicity, and language and also geographically (Khaile, 2021). The concept of Social Cohesion in Malawi is captured in the Idea of connecting and moving together and doing things together (Chunga, 2021). While in the Ivory Coast, elements of social cohesion are embedded in local practices such as resolving conflict, and inter-ethnic alliance. The modern concept of social cohesion which is recently taken up by the government, is an attempt to eliminate all forms of exclusion, to foster trust in people so that they can work collectively for a common good for the Ivorian society (Abugbilla, 2021)

Based on the foregoing dialogue, it is evident that in the African context, people unite around the concept of social cohesion in the sense that they cooperate with each other and that is a very strong feature in many African societies.

Cohesion, Nationality and Self-Determination in Nigeria: The Roles of Philosophy, Psychology and History

Within the Nigerian context, the Nigeria Social Cohesion Survey Report (NSCSP) (2019: 12) defines Social Cohesion in Nigerian society as the “willingness of Nigerians to cooperate with each other to survive and prosper”. This definition indicates that despite diverse culture, ethnicity, language, religion, economic system and political affiliations within the Nigerian society, there is still some level of inclusive identity, trust and cooperation for the common good both at the horizontal and the vertical levels.

The NSCSP report highlights that a lot needs to be done to achieve the desired level of social cohesion in Nigeria. Amongst its recommendations is that the Nigerian government, traditional and religious leaders, civil society organisations and Nigerian citizens should join hands to contribute to fostering social cohesion. This can be achieved through peace building initiatives and policies that promote trust and foster good governance; resolving local conflicts; creation of platforms for dialogue and monitoring peace building; and engaging with leaders and other stakeholders in dialogue for building a strong and prosperous Nigeria (NSCPR, 2019).

As an intellectual discipline concerned with reasoning, ethics, and human purpose, **philosophy** provides a moral and intellectual framework that promotes unity, ethical governance, and self-awareness in society. In Nigeria, philosophical thought contributes significantly to social cohesion, national consciousness, and self-determination by shaping citizens' moral values, critical thinking, and sense of belonging. Through African philosophical traditions such as communalism, humanism, and the ethics of interdependence, philosophy contributes to the understanding of national unity and collective progress.



Philosophy promotes social cohesion in Nigeria through the cultivation of moral values, empathy, and respect for others, providing a moral compass for right conduct and fairness. It develops the capacity for rational reflection and moral judgment that every society needs for stability and growth. In a diverse nation such as Nigeria, philosophy plays an important role in encouraging dialogue, tolerance, and ethical leadership (Oluwole, 2014). Philosophical inquiry provides a foundation for resolving conflicts, shaping governance, and inspiring citizens to pursue national unity and collective well-being.

As Gbadegesin (1991) notes, philosophy helps individuals understand their duties not only to themselves but also to the community. It provides the moral and intellectual grounding necessary for sense of nationality, cohesion, and self-determination in Nigeria. By encouraging critical reasoning, ethical reflection, and the pursuit of justice, philosophy nurtures both individual and collective growth. Through philosophy, Nigerians can cultivate the tolerance and empathy necessary for peaceful coexistence. It helps define and strengthen the sense of national identity and patriotism in Nigeria by providing ethical frameworks and shared ideals; it promotes social cohesion in Nigeria through the cultivation of moral values, empathy, and respect for others, and it promotes self-determination by empowering individuals and communities to question injustice and pursue freedom.

Similarly, psychology, as the study of behaviour and mental processes, provides valuable insights into human interaction and the factors that promote understanding, peace, and cooperation. In Nigeria, the application of psychological principles has been vital in strengthening national identity, enhancing social cohesion, and encouraging individual and collective self-determination. A cohesive and united society relies on the capacity of individuals to understand one another, make autonomous choices, and work collectively toward common goals. By applying psychological theories and practices, societies can strengthen emotional bonds, reduce conflicts, and promote inclusive development (Myers, 2014).

Social psychology explains how stereotypes, prejudice, and group identities develop. Understanding these processes helps in designing programmes that reduce discrimination and intergroup hostility (Myers, 2014). Nigerian psychologists have contributed to peace education and intergroup dialogue programmes aimed at fostering mutual respect and empathy among ethnic groups. For example, after episodes of ethnic tension, community psychologists in the regions (such as Plateau and Kaduna States) usually conduct peace workshops emphasising forgiveness, emotional regulation, and cross-cultural communication.

Another instance is where counseling and community psychologists collaborate to work on interpersonal understanding and collective healing after communal conflicts. This has been seen in trauma recovery programmes for internally displaced persons (IDPs) in the North-East, where psychologists help rebuild trust among victims of insurgency. There were also positive psychology interventions such as resilience training and community mental health programmes aim to help improve citizens' well-being, fostering optimism and cooperation. Psychological counseling and education further empower people to make informed choices, build confidence, and develop the resilience necessary to navigate life's challenges. Such empowerment strengthens the collective agency of society.

Psychological research on group behaviour and interpersonal relations reveals how trust, cooperation, and shared identity contribute to stable societies. Kurt Lewin's (1947) studies on group dynamics demonstrate that cooperative interaction and participatory leadership foster unity and productivity. Moreover, peace and trauma psychology are instrumental in post-conflict societies. Therapeutic and reconciliation programmes based on psychological



principles help individuals and communities heal from collective trauma, rebuild trust, and strengthen social networks, make autonomous decisions, and pursue meaningful goals.

Psychology fosters self-determination by promoting personal growth, self-awareness, and intrinsic motivation. Humanistic psychologists such as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers emphasised that individuals are inherently motivated to reach their full potential through self-actualisation (Maslow, 1943). These theories highlight the importance of autonomy, self-esteem, and fulfilment in creating psychologically healthy individuals who can contribute positively to their communities.

Similarly, Deci and Ryan's Self-Determination Theory (1985) identify autonomy, competence, and relatedness as core psychological needs that drive motivation and well-being. When these needs are met, individuals experience a sense of ownership over their actions, leading to greater civic engagement, responsibility, and productivity.

Psychology's contribution to society extends beyond individual well-being to encompass collective harmony and national development. By promoting understanding, autonomy, and cooperation, psychology nurtures the mental and emotional foundations upon which unity, self-determination, and social cohesion are built. A society that integrates psychological principles into its institutions, education, and governance is more likely to achieve lasting peace, productivity, and inclusiveness.

The study of history promotes nationality, social cohesion, and self-determination in Nigeria. History, as the record of past experiences, helps citizens understand their shared identity, appreciate diversity, and learn from past struggles. Through historical education, Nigerians gain a deeper awareness of their heritage, national heroes, and the importance of unity in development. As Falola (2009) notes, understanding the nation's history enables Nigerians to appreciate diversity, promote peaceful coexistence, and strengthen their commitment to nation-building.

History promotes nationality by fostering a shared sense of belonging among citizens. It reminds Nigerians of their common origins, experiences, and struggles, particularly the colonial encounter and the fight for independence. These shared historical milestones unite people across ethnic and regional lines under the identity of being Nigerian (Osaghae, 1998). Historical education also builds civic pride and patriotism. By studying the achievements of nationalist leaders like Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, and Ahmadu Bello, young Nigerians develop a deeper understanding of national ideals and collective identity (Afigbo, 2005). In this sense, history functions as a tool for shaping loyalty to the nation and strengthening Nigeria's shared identity.

History contributes to social cohesion by promoting understanding and tolerance among Nigeria's diverse ethnic and religious groups. When citizens are exposed to the narratives of mutual coexistence and inter-group cooperation in pre-colonial and post-colonial Nigeria, it challenges stereotypes and prejudices that fuel division (Falola & Heaton, 2008). Furthermore, the study of history provides insight into the causes and consequences of past conflicts—such as the Nigerian Civil War—offering valuable lessons for reconciliation and peacebuilding (Osaghae, 2002). Historical awareness thus becomes a tool for fostering empathy, national healing, and the shared pursuit of a peaceful and just society.

History also promotes self-determination by empowering citizens with knowledge of their heritage and rights. Awareness of the struggles for independence instils a sense of ownership and responsibility. As Oloruntimehin (2015) explains, historical consciousness allows citizens



to see themselves as active participants in shaping the nation's development rather than passive observers. The histories of resistance, reform, and self-governance inspire new generations to advocate for justice, good governance, and national progress. By connecting present challenges to past victories, history nurtures resilience, confidence, and a collective drive toward self-reliance.

History serves as a bridge between Nigeria's past and its future. It strengthens nationality by uniting citizens around shared experiences, promotes cohesion through mutual understanding, and encourages self-determination by empowering people with knowledge and pride in their heritage. Therefore, the integration of historical education into Nigeria's academic institutions remains vital for sustaining national unity and purposeful development.

Social cohesion, National language and the 4th Industrial Revolution

The English language which is part of the Arts and Humanities has significantly contributed to fostering cohesion, nationality and self-determination in Nigeria. The English language is the official language in Nigeria. Nigeria is a country with many diverse ethnic groups and cultures with different dialects and languages. Therefore, the English language is used as a common means of wider communication in Nigeria. It has eliminated language communication barriers throughout the country by making communication possible for people from different ethnic groups.

Furthermore, the English language has become a suitable medium of communication in multilingual meetings, conferences, seminars, workshops, religious services, and other social gatherings. It is the language of instruction in all educational institutions from primary four up to the tertiary level. The English language is the official language used in leadership and administration. in Nigeria. It is used for national and international communication. It is the language used for commerce, trade and other manufacturing activities. It facilitates entrepreneurial activities by providing global support through collaboration. It expands career opportunities and aids in networking with international colleagues. Thus, the English language has united the Nigerian citizens by serving as a means of promoting nationality and self-determination.

The New and advanced technologies introduced by the 4th Industrial Revolution (4IR) have greatly contributed in building a united and cohesive society. Social media platforms such as face book, WhatsApp, twitter and the likes have greatly strengthened social solidarity and community cohesion by increasing access to information, promoting open dialogue and facilitating collaboration in social movements. However, unwise use of social media can exacerbate social polarisation, conflict, and division.

In the area of teaching and learning English language, the 4IR promoted technology and human capacities in an unprecedented way. It has transformed language pedagogy through the use of internet and other digital tools into a more interactive and collaborative engagement. With modern technology, students can learn at their own pace and create their own schedule. Students have access to numerous online dictionaries, worksheets and exercises, podcasts, articles and e-books. Some of the English language learning tools include: Khan Academy, Microsoft OneNote, Simple English Wikipedia, Google Translate among others. The digital and advanced technologies in 4IR have become essential tools for social as well as educational development

Conclusion



The disciplines of Arts and Humanities have contributed immensely in building and fostering social cohesion in Nigeria through conducting social cohesion researches, application of psychological principles, philosophical thoughts, history and through the promotion of the English language as the official language as well as the language of wider communication. The two concepts: nationality and self-determination are all inclusive in the concept of social cohesion, the three elements of inclusive identity, trust, and cooperation for the common good are all relevant to the two concepts as well. A society in which people identify with each other at the individual and general levels; trust each other at the individual and general levels and also cooperate for the common good at the individual and general levels is the society that will form a nation and thereby achieve full self-determination.

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