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NIGERIA'S NATIONAL NARRATIVE IN THE LIGHT OF THE WITTGENSTEINIAN CONCEPT OF MEANING

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Abstract

Ludwig Wittgenstein had posited that the problem of philosophy is basically a problem of words – what one means when one says things and what exactly the words are meant to represent. Nigeria after more than six decades of sovereignty is still battling to define and create the meaning of her sovereign existence. The inability to engender a cognitive category that sincerely represents the actualization of the lofty dreams of the founding fathers of the country in the light of her rich endowments has remained the bane of Nigeria. A critical look at the many narratives – historical, religious, cultural, linguistic, socio-economic and political that come out of the country reveal not only a disconnect between the national objectives and the actual situation in context, but also an emptiness in language that can only be the function of meaninglessness in existence. Drawing from conceptual and contextual approaches, the paper concludes that there is need to change the national narrative of Nigeria in order to create some meaning for the country. Changing the national narrative demands reforms. These reforms include restructuring, reviewing the constitution, improving the education system, reviewing political orientations to make them more ideological and value-driven, improving the rule of law and protection of human rights, among others. One would posit here that it is by improving the quality of life in the country in line with her rich human, cultural and

material endowments and as such giving the people a meaningful existence that the national narrative would become meaningful. In this way, what is said will represent what the actual situation is and meaning would be found in context as Wittgenstein postulates.

Keywords: Progressive Narrative, Nigeria, Wittgenstein, Meaning, Nation-Building

Introduction

Nigeria is a typical example of the African continent, which political narrative fails to convey meaning relevant to social realities. Africa is undoubtedly one of the most naturally endowed continents in the world. Yet, it seems to generate only a socio-political and economic negative narrative. From one part of the continent to another, the stories do not tell of the admirable development, but only of poverty, disease, conflict, war, man-made and natural disasters, unemployment, corruption, mismanagement and abuse of resources and death. According to the 2020 World Happiness Index Report, African cities are the unhappiest cities in the world. The overarching narrative from Africa is that of a continent with vast human and natural resources, but impoverished by generations of external and internal exploitation, mismanagement and corruption by its leaders and rulers.

Nigeria embodies the situation in Africa. As a country, Nigeria is a group of many culturally rich peoples with different talents and potentials. Different parts of the country remain the largest sources of raw materials that drove the Industrial Revolution in Europe and today's world economy – cocoa and rubber in the West, palm oil and related products in the East, and groundnuts and other grains in the North. After discovering commercial quantities of oil, Nigeria is considered the fifth largest oil reserve in the world followed by Angola, yet this unfortunately has not added any value to developmental stride of the Nigerian state. Quite sadly, since political independence in 1960, it has been a story of hypocrisy, mismanagement, marginalization, corruption, poverty, hunger, misery, conflict, and destruction of life and property. Nigeria's current structure, constitution and leadership are just one source of negative coverage and narrative.

These narratives seem to bear no positively impactful meaning whatsoever because of the general feeling of existential meaninglessness that pervade the country. There are two aspects to this sense of meaninglessness in the Nigerian narrative: First, the country's human and

natural endowments have not resulted in a high quality of life for the people, but have led to the opposite result, namely, poverty and misery. Second, the sources of national narratives, including state structures, constitutions, and leadership language, do not convey the meaning of how the real situation should lead to national development and prosperity for the people, or how it is supposed to be achieved. In the prevailing narratives, there is little or no concern for meaning, logic, clarity, and truth. Instead, these narratives only succeed in conveying feelings of race, religious prejudice, nepotism, ethnicism, socio-political alienation, furtherance of individual and sectarian political interests. Therefore, there is a difference between what is said and what the concrete reality is.

Statement of the Problem

The question at the heart of this paper stems from Nigeria's historical, socio-political, religious and ethical narratives that create a semantic separation between what is said and what is actually happening. Consistent with Wittgenstein's contention that philosophers throughout history have asked the wrong questions, thereby obscuring the simplicity and meaning of language, and given that "ideas rule the world", efforts to change Nigeria's socio-political environment must begin with questions about how to liberate the Nigerian society from mostly ambiguous, illogical and untrue narratives.

The true narrative of Nigeria must come from a point of ideological depth and logical coherence. And to these, legitimate questions could be properly raised like; How has the deliberate violation of the legitimate meaning of words within the Nigerian state as socio-political entity contributed to the Nigerian quagmire? How can the Nigerian society build genuine moral values based on a narrative of truth and meaning? This eponymous question will raise other questions, such as: Is the Nigerian state built on such a structure, based on consent and mutual understanding, to ensure its continuity and unity? Is the current Nigerian constitution fair and just enough to preserve and promote the general welfare of all citizens across the country? Is the Nigerian political leadership today knowledgeable, efficient and objective enough to carry out its governance duties without prejudice and unwarranted injustice? With abundant human and natural resources, is Nigeria capable of developing and becoming a global economic power in the 21st century? How sustainable is Nigeria's current political and economic structure? As a nation, is Nigeria doomed to poverty and misery

because of a lack of adequate resource management and a lack of strong, knowledgeable and effective leadership? These and more are some of the questions to be analysed in this study.

Objective of the Study

It is the objective of this paper to investigate the disconnect between Nigeria as a naturally endowed country and the Nigeria of today that is the epicentre of poverty and suffering. The paper also examines the sources of Nigeria's national narrative – the state structure, constitution and leadership that emerged from the 1914 amalgamation – to see if they are sufficiently positioned to tap to its fullest the gifts the country is endowed with.

By gaining the knowledge needed to improve the national narrative, Nigerians can begin to find ways to restructure and reform the Nigerian society. This process of restructuring and or reformation begins with deconstructing and unlearning all the misleading and false narratives of the past that have led to a serious loss of meaning for the nation and its people.

Significance of the Study

The importance of this research can be drawn from two perspectives – theoretical and practical. In theory, the study is significant because it draws on a deeper reading of Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. Language leads to positive or negative narratives. Negative narratives could discourage, divide or dampen the productive zest of the citizens thus leading to poverty and breakdown of the society. Understanding the dynamics of language through Wittgenstein will help us to use language positively to achieve results. This means that to change the national narrative, one has to change the use of which the tool of language is engaged.

From a practical point of view, this research is significant because it draws attention to the living conditions of poverty and misery in Nigeria, which contradict her enormous human and natural endowments. These underlying realities which are narratives in their own right are further clouded by negative narratives in various forms caused by unwarranted abuse of the rules of language as a fundamental tool of interpersonal encounter. From this perspective, the study calls for action to reform the Nigerian state and change the narrative.

Method of Study

This study is a qualitative research, using the methods of conceptual and contextual analyses. From the conceptual approach, the narrative of meaning is clarified and understood. From a contextual approach, the issue of negative narratives from Nigerian contexts is interrogated. The sources and reasons for these narratives are assessed in terms of changing the narrative in context.

An overall methodical approach is qualitative analysis in textual research. The study conducted a comprehensive examination of relevant materials through library searches, online resources, and related resources. All collected information are analysed and interpreted within the framework of Wittgenstein's theory of meaning and applied to changing narratives emerging from the research context. The views of other philosophers and scholars will be included in the analysis and appropriately cited where necessary.

Scope of the Study

The paper focuses on the critical appropriation of Wittgenstein's concept of meaning and its application in questioning Nigerian political narratives with a view to changing them. This study is not intended to cover all of Wittgenstein's ideas, nor to apply all available theories of meaning, nor to cover all issues facing the Nigerian state, although some of these issues will be included in the analysis appropriately. The study attempts to assess the problem posed by the meaninglessness of the socio-political narratives of the Nigerian state using analytical methods of the analytical tradition to which Wittgenstein belongs.

African Negative Narratives and Assumptions

Prominent African scholar Ngugi Wa Thiongo believes that with the advent of colonialism, Africa lost its cultural value and meaning. According to Wa Thiongo, there are some basic assumptions behind the critique of the meaning of African culture. The first is the assumption that a comprehensive understanding of the dynamics and dimensions of any society, including its cultural aspects, cannot be divorced from economic and political structures and dimensions. Thus, the quality and quantity of wealth in a community, and how it is organized from production to distribution, affect and will be affected by how power is organized and distributed. These in turn influence and are influenced by the social values embodied and

expressed in their culture. Therefore, wealth, power and the self-image of the community are inextricably interwoven.¹

The second assumption is the changing nature of society. Society is changing, and so is culture. Culture is not only the product of the development of this society, but also the treasure house of all the values developed and accumulated from different parts of the society throughout history. In this sense, culture is considered conservative because it unites society more firmly than business and politics, which change relatively quickly. Culture endows every society with a self-understanding by arranging itself within the economic and political spheres.²

The third assumption stems from the dearth of academic enterprise, development and resourcefulness, which Mary Stella Chika Okolo considers as gravely disastrous in the furtherance of meaningful strides in the establishment of any reading culture due to inept corruption and utter neglect in the academic engagement. She simply appeals to the moral socio-political fabric of the Nigerian state. Okolo begins her argument by proposing an undeniable link between philosophy and literature. This relationship, according to her, is nothing new. Philosophy and literature as theoretical disciplines concerned with raising social awareness, do similar thinking about the good society and what is good for humanity. A neglect of the establishment of this link, she insists prevents African literature from contributing to the spiritual and ideological liberation of the nation. She often discusses the work of Chinua Achebe and Ngugi Wa Thiongo, pioneer political thinkers with the intelligence and ability to transform nations with their ideas, but overlooked due to widespread corruption entrenched in African political roots. Emancipating this continent does require narratives from African thinkers that are authentic and original. She advocates for literature as a philosophy that provides a theoretical framework through the use of meaningful narratives in society.³ For example, they can lead readers to think critically about the types of leaders appropriate for a particular society and the level of citizenship that people exercise to protect their rights. Both philosophy and literature provide critical evaluations of existing and possible forms of political arrangements, beliefs and practices. In addition, they provide

¹ Ngugi Wa Thiongo, *Moving to the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms*, London: James Currey Pub., 1992, p. 11.

² Ngugi Wa Thiongo, *Ibid.*, p. 11.

³ M. S. C. Okolo, *The African Literature as Political Philosophy*, Dakar: CODESTRA Books, 2007, p. 23.

insights into political concepts and rationale for normative judgments about politics and society. They also create a sense of social change.⁴

One of Nigeria's foremost literary icons, Chinua Achebe, attempts to recreate the true narrative of Nigeria's socio-political quagmire in his book: *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*. The war between Nigeria and Biafra according to Achebe is one of the unfortunate realities of unwarranted domination and unmerited genocide that the Nigerian government visited on her innocent citizens and which has been denied by the government. Achebe's book exposes the ills of the war and its destructive effect not only on Nigeria's political cohesion but on political structures and institutions as a whole. Achebe began to trace Nigeria's political quagmire back to European colonial rule. He maintained that Britain got a vast territory in West Africa, which later became Nigeria, like a piece of chocolate cake at a birthday party. It is one of the most populous regions of the African continent, with more than 250 ethnic groups and different languages. The northern part of the country was home to several ancient kingdoms such as Kanem-Bornu, where Shehu Usman Dan Fodio and his jihadists were incorporated into the Muslim Fulani Empire. The middle belt of Nigeria was home to the splendid Kingdom of Nok and its world-famous terracotta sculptures. The Southern Protectorate was home to some of the most advanced civilizations in the region. In the West, the kingdoms of Oyo and Ife were once majestic, while in the Midwest, the unparalleled kingdom of Benin took artistic excellence to a new level. Crossing the Niger River to the east, the kingdoms of Calabar and Nri flourished with its republican endowment and adorned with many unique variations of administrative excellence. Achebe is of the view that if the Berlin Conference decided Nigeria's destiny, the amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates would inevitably complicate Nigeria's fate, because Animists, Muslims and Christians are all held together by a subtle, delicate, artificial and "highly inflammable" grid.⁵

According to Achebe, this union of different ancient kingdoms was at the root of Nigeria's problems due to the economic and administrative selfishness of the colonizers. This amalgamation (merger) was done without due respect and consideration of the various amalgamating units with their unique cultural differences, that cannot easily bond together for progressive development without the intermittent eruption of devastating tensions of lower and greater magnitude. The final damage according to him was caused in 1914 when Lord

⁴ M. S. C. Okolo, *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁵ A. Achebe, *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, New York: Penguin Press, 2012, p.13.

Frederick Lugard merged the northern and southern protectorates. This nefarious merger has united Nigeria at a level that promises no political and economic progress. Furthermore, the Nigerian Independence and Post-Independence period, which was supposed to see to the rise of the country, was a period of decline caused by the political divisions and selfishness of the political class. Unfortunately, the structure of the country is such that there is an inherent power struggle between the races, and of course, those in power want to stay in power.⁶

Achebe further insists that even in a limited area, the easiest and simplest way to keep going in the false deceptive amalgamated Nigeria is to resort to tribal sentiments, which are heavily exploited in the 1950s and 1960s and is still exploited today especially by the political class. The original idea of a united Nigeria was driven by leaders and intellectuals from the east. With all their flaws, they had the idea of building the country as one. The first to object to this unification was the Northerners led by Sarduana, followed by the Awolowo group that formed the Action Group. Achebe observed that the Sarduana's Northern People's Congress was supposed to be a national party, but it simply refused to change its name from Northern to the Nigerian People's Congress, even for a cosmetic political appearance. It simply refused to be seen as such right up to the end of the civilian regime.⁷ Indeed, so many political parties emerged after the war that were built not on national and patriotic principles, but on tribal and selfish political interests. These parties would further exacerbate existing fissures and frictions in an already divided country. In fact, according to Achebe, the post-war period saw a proliferation of political organization that were never rooted to the unification of the country. Nevertheless, with the formation of NCNC (National Council of Nigerian Citizens), in 1944 by Nnamdi Azikiwe, the hopes of uniting the nation was kindled. Azikiwe built on the lessons he had learned from his previous forays into politics, and managed to persuade several active members of the Nigerian youth movement to form an umbrella group of all major Nigerian organizations for the building of a united nation.⁸

In the book *The Wretched of the Earth*, the Martinique author Franz Fanon elucidates the power of historical narratives and the damage they do to social psychology. This was to confirm Achebe's already-existing claim that European colonialists had done enormous damage to the African psyche. Fanon asserts that narratives can become a means of violence due to the spiritual and theoretical oppression of one person by another. Violence narrative

⁶ C. Achebe, *There was a Country*, Ibid., p.59

⁷ C. Achebe, *There was a Country*, Ibid., p.59.

⁸ C. Achebe, *There was a Country*, Ibid., p.49.

can lead to loss of existential meaning and ontological schizophrenia.⁹ In his work, *Black Skin White Mask*, Fannon further explains the subtle and destructive process of achieving spiritual destruction by instilling an oppressive ‘narrative’ of inferiority in people living under oppressive regimes. Fannon explained that colonizers inflicted violence on the colonized by destroying their psychological, physical, cultural, and environmental constructs. This requires the violence of the colonized to restore their existential identity and meaning through retaliatory violence in the form of anti-colonial revolutionary struggles. He critiques the subtle and varied ways in which existential identities are thwarted by cultural and systematic narratives that favour their oppressors. He uses psychoanalysis to show the metamorphosis of language in society to achieve the sovereignty and authority desired by the oppressor. Through this means, language is negatively exploited as an instrument of subjugation in the hands of the oppressor.¹⁰

In Osei Owusu’s article, *Ignorance is Expensive: The Cost of Ignorance*, he analyses the role of corruption in destroying and paralyzing the economies of Africa and Nigeria. Although corruption is a global phenomenon, its effects, especially in Africa and Nigeria, are far-reaching and unimaginable. According to Owusu, corruption is a disease that cuts across nations, but Africa is the epicentre and sub-Saharan Africa is the sanctuary that breeds and nurtures it. Indeed, one witnesses the full effects of corruption and the consequences therefrom at the heart of the African state by the palpable reality of endemic poverty, high illiteracy rates, lack of better social services (such as health), poor jobs, lack of good drinking water, civic aspirations, ethnic tensions, insurgency and various coups in most African countries.¹¹

Owusu explores a well-known idea that corruption is a moral disorder, a threat to national development and a pervasive social disease that destroys the moral conscience and numbs people to the growing demands and challenges of creating a better Africa for all. He insists that corruption has destroyed Africa with poverty and poor governance in the name of personal gain, at the altar of social or democratic governance with transparency and moral power.¹² These further highlight other facts, which might be contributive in destabilizing and undermining Africa’s progress. These according to him include: poor large and extended families, girls-child education, and so many other factors along this line. What one could

⁹ F. Fannon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, New York: Grove Wine Field, 1963, p.86.

¹⁰ F. Fannon *Black Skin White Mask*, translated by Charles Lam Markman, London: Pluto Press, 1986, p.17

¹¹ S. O. Owusu, *Ignorance is Expensive: The Effect of Ignorance*, Bloomington: Author House, 2012, p.14.

¹² S. Owusu, *Ignorance is Expensive: The Effect of Ignorance*, *Ibid.*, p.18.

identify as “family explosion” appears to be the characteristic mark of African families, whereby children are daily added to the already poverty-stricken number of the family members. Many conservative thinkers still believe that having children determines social status. They do not realize that the world has changed and that education and a decent life are the most important things one can give to one’s children to ensure their future in the 21st century.¹³ He therefore calls for the proper, integral and comprehensive education. He sees education as the process of training and developing knowledge, skills, spirit and character. For him, education is the most powerful and effective engine for the development of a nation and a country, the most powerful weapon to eradicate poverty, child labour, and gender disparity, and the best means to achieve peace and stability in Africa. In this wise, education instils a sense of civic duty or responsibility. Thus, he insists that this is the only way to develop human capital for a better country and raise children for a better world.¹⁴

In his work *Rethinking Values in Africa for Collective Wellbeing*, B. Kuyini agrees with Achebe that African values and morals were lost through colonization. He simply insists that to rediscover African values, one must start with decolonization. This is a process he explains whereby the hinges and hooks of colonial mentality through consciously informed steps will be gradually shed off. Decolonization according to Kuyini, can never be ignored because it deals with that which touches the foundational constitution of individuals and the impressions they have gathered from definite influences on them, born by interaction with the colonial masters, which in the decolonizing process must be fundamentally changed. It transforms spectators overwhelmed by their smallness into privileged actors by confronting them with the hard facts of the unfolding of historical events. It brings a natural rhythm into existence, which could have been introduced by entirely new players, and with it a new language and a new humanity. He argues further that decolonization is the real creation of the new man. But the legitimacy of this creation is not due to supernatural forces. The colonized “thing” becomes human in the process of its self-liberation.¹⁵

These negative narratives from Africa, especially Nigeria create a culture and an existential worldview of futility and despair. This could explain why there is a discrepancy between the narratives and what is actually happening in the country, fuelling calls for restructuring or even secession. This paper attempts to dissect and analyse the epistemological and existential challenges of the Nigerian society, and the narratives that have arisen from and around these

¹³ S. O. Owusu, *Ignorance is Expensive: The Effect of Ignorance*, Ibid., p.29.

¹⁴ S. O. Owusu, Ibid., p.58.

¹⁵ B. Kuyini, *Rethinking Values in Africa*, USA: CreateSpace, 2013, p.22.

challenges. But before this, a look at the drama of the 1914 amalgamation which is a unique narrative in its own case is considered here to be important.

The 1914 Amalgamation and the Matters Arising

Before the British colonialists came to the region and country now known as Nigeria, it consisted of different forms of ethnicities, defined by distinctive cultures, religions and political structures. These ethnic groups were brought together to facilitate political and economic exploitation. This gave rise to the protectorates of southern and northern Nigeria. These protectorates were characteristically very different in culture, politics, religion, and lifestyle that compelled even British colonialists to administer them differently.

In 1914, Lord Frederick Lugard finally amalgamated the southern and northern protectorates into one country with the name Nigeria arbitrarily, simply because of their geographic proximity and colonial convenience without considering the naturally negative impacts of the amalgamation on these diverse kingdoms and chiefdoms. Max Silhoun, in his book *What Britain Did to Nigeria*, argued that the merger was an attempt by the British to defend their interests in Nigeria.¹⁶ In his own words, “Nigeria’s existence is little more than the outcome of balancing the colonial accounting books.”¹⁷ Although Lugard is considered to be the architect of Nigeria’s amalgamation, the process began long before he became the High Commissioner of Northern Nigeria or the Governor-General of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914¹⁸, which is basically unfortunate, since according to Sir George Goldie, the two protectorates are as far apart in government, customs, and general ideas of life, both in the terrestrial and celestial beliefs, and in the now and in the hereafter, as England is from China.¹⁹

Teniola’s ideas are not dissimilar to the contributions that Chinua Achebe has already made. In fact, he drew his current concerns from the events of the Berlin Conference, when Africa was balkanized among some world powers, and the part later known as Nigeria became the booty of Britain. Achebe maintains that these affairs, and indeed the lives of the entire peoples in this continent, have had no serious consequences for the “Balkanists”. For them, the most

¹⁶ The priority of the colonial officials was to minimize the financial burden on British taxpayers, cut red tape or an unwarranted bureaucratic engagement and increase the revenue yield. In this regard, from a British perspective, it was a success. Nigeria was just one page in the colonial accounting books. (Cf. E. Teniola, “The British, Nigeria and the Mistake of 1914”, *Premium Times*, July 3, 2021.

¹⁷ E. Teniola, „The British, Nigeria and The Mistake of 1914”, *Premium Times*, July 3, 2021.

¹⁸ E. Teniola, *Ibid*.

¹⁹ Cf. E. Teniola, *Ibid*.

important thing is the so-called economic benefits of the sector. What the colonialists did in their respective locations of operations further deteriorated the standard of life in Africa, and so Britain got the territory of West Africa, which later became Nigeria, like a chocolate cake at a birthday party.²⁰

Achebe further notes that Africa's postcolonial tendencies are the result of people's losing their habits of self-governance. At the beginning of independence, the new systems imposed on the people by the "colonial masters"²¹ were also difficult to function. This is because, the colonial masters have had a long but uneven struggle to understand what is happening in Africa.²² A meaningful solution will require the goodwill and joint efforts of all who bear the "historical burden" of Africa.²³ Achebe's writing supports the idea that while this official political narrative of Nigerian society may seem credible, espoused around the world, and taught in schools and the media, nothing can be further from the truth. First of all, the British interfered in Nigerian politics and has continued to do so time and time again, so the concept of "independence" from the United Kingdom does not hold. Second, the general understanding of "democracy" has never been seen or practiced in Nigeria since 1999, but even more so now. Freedom of speech and human rights do not exist. The first hallmark and standard measure of a democratic society is the ability to hold free and fair elections, which in turn will lead to the building of consensus government. Unfortunately, no government in Nigeria has been elected in free and fair elections since 1999. And even before this time, Achebe entertains the opinion that the first election ever conducted in Nigeria by the Britain was equally rigged. Sadly, the only recognized free and fair elections in Nigerian political history on June 12, 1993 were cancelled by the Babangida government, which he has personally acknowledged in the recent publication of his book in the February of 2025²⁴. Every election in Nigeria has been overshadowed by ethnic wars, sectarian strife, factional conflict and violence, manipulation, ballot box theft and political assassinations. Indeed Nigerian's national narratives can best be understood when considered along the trajectory of the different narratives emanating from the socio-political narrative of Nigeria like, historical

²⁰ C. Achebe, *There was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra*, New York: Penguin Press, 2012, p.13. Analyzing Nigeria's amalgamation a century later, Obi-Ani et al. opined that a hundred years after, the foundations of the alliance are still in question. It goes without saying that the structure is weak. The architects of nation-building have been thrown out. The crooks have taken over the empire. No modern nation-state can survive on injustice. It is this systemic decay, despair, and injustice that has spawned rebellion, belligerence, and racial chauvinism across the country. Cf. N. Obi-Ani & Mathew Isiani, "The Mistake of 1914: 100 Years Later", *Nsukka: Journal of the Humanities*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2026, 1.

²¹ Achebe, *There was a Country*, *Ibid.*, p.14.

²² Achebe, *Ibid.*

²³ Achebe, *Ibid.*

²⁴ Cf. Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida, *In Journey of Service, Nigeria*, Book Craft, 2025.

narrative, socio-political narrative, religious narrative, ethical narratives economic narratives, intellectual narrative etc.

Narrative Emanations from the Nigerian Negative Narratives

Given that many of the terms, concepts and ideologies used in Nigerian society are meaningless in their own right, creating an existential alienation between the society and its members. This takes one back to the very assertion of Wittgenstein, that the meaning of a word is found in its use. Thus stressing the fact that meaning of words are found within the community of language users. Since every language, such as in a game assumes some very basic rules that the participants of the game must learn and obey. Therefore, any tendency to adopt a different paradigm of operation strange to the language community becomes by its very constitution an abuse and an unfortunate occurrence. In Nigeria, words and concepts are used in ways that defile and obscure ideas rather than convey them. It is my intention here to examine these various narratives that emanate from Nigeria at least in very brief manner, consider models for their existence and then make projections about their likely futures. In doing this, a rediscovering of the meaning of ideas and concepts will be enabled towards the creation of a better narrative for a better Nigeria.

1. Historical Narrative

As has already been demonstrated, the presence of the European and other world powers on the African continent unleashed untold harm on the continent and so a credible demonstration of honesty and sincerity in future interactions and engagement, can only be reasonable through a convincing acknowledgement of their tacit connivance and direct engagement in the destruction of the African states and a determined resolve to withdraw further interruptions in the African states. The worst corruption and human rights abuses in Nigeria's history remains the erroneous amalgamation of southern and northern Nigeria into one nation which has continued to militate against any possible progress of the Nigerian state in all forms and shapes.

This erroneous invention has been reinforced by an unjust and unbalanced system of government inherited from Britain, which has given those in power in the north of the country an underserved advantage, while disadvantaging those in the south, especially the south-

easterners. This remains the basis for all economic, religious and political issues in the Nigerian state. And even as this corrupt weak structure that was designed by the British was managed by the people, the Abdulsalami Abubakar Constitution of 1999 was surreptitiously introduced into the geopolitical terrain²⁵ and implicitly launched a brutal offensive against the entire geopolitical structure, exacerbating already existing problems. The number of people who have died due to the inability of this false contraption to be advanced and further progressed has exceeded the number of deaths in the slave trade and in the colonial times. Here, one immediately remembers all the victims of the Nigerian-Biafran war (1967-1970), all the victims of the various unrests in Nigeria, the victims of the Boko Haram terrorists and the incessant deaths daily witnessed in the Nigerian state.

Very sadly, one may be right to assume that the entire global socio-political system, and that of Nigeria, is built around a series of linguistic contradictions and sheer hypocrisy. Consequently, Wittgenstein argues, that much of the confusion in society and in the intellectual world stems from confusion in language. It is proper to note, that it is with the tool of language that narratives are formed. And this dynamism that language embodies can either generate a new narrative meaning or an obfuscation of an already existing meaning or simply a total destruction of an existing narrative or even a rewriting of an already existing narrative which ought to be the proper thing at this moment in the Nigerian state.

In this regard, Achebe quoting an Igbo proverb tells us that “a man who does not know where the rain began to beat him cannot know where he dried his body”. The rains that fell on Africa began four or five hundred years ago, from the “discovery” of Africa by Europe, through the transatlantic slave trade, to the Berlin Conference of 1885. One might even journey a little

²⁵ A cursory look at the current Nigerian constitution as the supreme legal document reveals a document of injustice and imbalance in the country. It is used to disenfranchise some regions of the Nigerian polity and perpetuate imbalances. It must be noted that this constitution was bequeathed to the country by the military regime of Abdulsalami Abubakar. It was hastily set up by the military junta to hand over power to a democratically elected government. The preamble of the current Nigerian constitution gives the image of a consensus document among Nigerian citizens, which in fact never was, as citizens were never consulted when the document was drafted. In short, this document was written at the instigation of the dictatorial military government of Abdulsalami Abubakar and imposed on the people. The Constitution deceptively begins with the words: “We the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, having firmly and solemnly resolved to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation under God, dedicated to the promotion of inter-African solidarity, world peace,, international cooperation and understanding and to provide for a constitution for the purpose of promoting the good government and welfare of all persons in our country, on the principles of freedom, equality and justice, and for the purpose of consolidating the unity of our people do hereby make, enact and give ourselves the following constitution.” (Cf. Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999 Constitution: Laws of the Federation, Abuja, 1999). Sadly, the first sentence, “We the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria”, is false and completely misleading, because the views of the people were never consulted when the constitution was drafted. Indeed, the words, concepts, ideas and principles of the Constitution have been rendered meaningless by the actions and speeches of the people who uphold them; Nigerian politicians and the Judiciary.

farther by tracing the activities in Africa centuries before Atlantic slave trade, of the Mediterranean slave trade and the Islamic deluge that took over North Africa and some part of sub-Saharan Africa. Nevertheless, that contentious meeting of the world's major European powers in Berlin gave rise to what we see today happen in Nigeria. The great historic scramble and partition of Africa happened in this ignominious conference that unfortunately inaugurated the balkanization of an entire continent. Thus, Africa was divided like a piece of meat on the table of the European powers without any emotional remorse at all. And with this, new borders were created, and Africa's ancient societies were forcibly violated, consequently, leading to a tension-prone modern states. It happened without African presence or representation, to say the least, and Africa cannot allow this unfavourable structure to perdure after many years of unproductive experimentation. To therefore continue to keep Africa the way it is under any guise or pretence is simply to assist in the continuous rape and destruction of Africa. Nothing good can come from the existing structure. And the more it is maintained, the more Africa is impoverished, dehumanized and destroyed.

2. Socio-political Narrative

The report of the International Committee on Nigeria (ICON) since the year 2000 states that in Nigeria today, the breakdown of the rule of law, the escalation of violence, atrocities against targeted religious groups and innocent civilians, and the apparent impunity of perpetrators have helped turn the country into a largely failed state and a regional hub for terrorism and religious persecution. According to this report, Christians and Vulnerable groups of Non-Muslim Minorities have incessantly become victims. Conflicts and violations of fundamental freedoms in Nigerian currently threaten the security of minorities and other vulnerable religious and ethnic communities, a country that has been on edge or could be added to a list of countries with extreme social hostility in the first place and on all corners a good picture of religious intolerance. The report further delineates the ripples arising from the unfortunate situation by noting that the resource-rich Nigeria has the largest population (estimated at 200 million) and economy in Africa, but is characterized by vast disparities, because the majority of the country's wealth and resources are controlled by a few, and the vast majority of the country is poor and insecure. The country's complex social structure makes the goal of socio-political cohesion more difficult. The report further notes that the civilians in Nigeria face a range of dire threats to their security and fundamental human rights, including targeted killings, kidnappings and killings based on political, ethno-religious

identity or crime; arbitrary detention, torture and inhumane incarceration; denial of fair and public trials, restrictions on freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, censorship and restrictions on press freedom; administrative rascality, financial recklessness and corruption of various kinds, restrictions on outside investigators; lack of due process and a fair justice system which have become the identical mark of the Nigerian state.²⁶

The Nigerian political narrative presented by the International Committee on Nigerian reveals the fundamental meaninglessness of the political concepts and narratives used in the Nigerian political climate. It is therefore crucial that the political narrative in Nigeria today pays attention to the misuse and abuse of political concepts such as “independence, democracy, federalism, president, senate, legislature, judiciary, police, etc.” and try to understand what these terms mean and the concepts that are used. Societies around the world are not just built on vague and offensive words and concepts, but on systems that work for them. These systems are then expressed as ideas and concepts, not just as fake decorations, but as real expressions of effective governmental principles. To bring meaning to Nigeria’s political narrative, there needs to be a great deal of justice, cooperation, transparency, goodwill and sincerity from the Nigerian political class and governed citizens. This has been expressed in different concepts by different people. Whether it is restructuring, separation, decentralization, devolution of powers or complete separation of the combining regions in the country, the fundamental problems of corruption, greed and malice that characterize Nigerian politics must be addressed.

According to the International Committee on Nigeria, the situation in Nigeria is dire. The future of this country hangs on the edge of a precipice. Geopolitical and bloc tensions have risen to the point where any random event could trigger a major disaster. Nigerians are more skeptical than ever. The drums of war can be heard in the villages, towns and homesteads. The committee entertains the fear that there is a sense that the Nigerian government is complicit in the pervasive insecurity across the country. This according to them is grounded on the fact that the Nigerian government has not been transparent with its citizens. It has failed to hold regular briefings and opportunities to answer questions from the media and much more woefully in updating the citizens about the crisis and the efforts made to tame the

²⁶ International Committee on Nigeria, *Nigeria’s Silent Slaughter; Genocide in Nigeria and the Implications for the International Community*, 14. The International Committee on Nigeria (ICON) is a consortium of Nigerians and other Nationalities who have combined efforts to promote religious freedom, human dignity, right to live, and are committed to the protection of the vulnerable against ethnic and religious persecution. The International Committee on Nigeria aims to create a community where the rule of law guides every facet of societal interactions in Nigeria.

situation.²⁷ The recklessness of the administrative organs of the Nigerian state has undoubtedly exposed the nation to horrible challenges such as terrorism, corruption, religious crisis, economic difficulties, epidemics, unemployment, lack of proper education, religious fundamentalism, poverty and natural disasters such as floods, oil pollution and erosion, ethnic conflict, human rights violations and many other issues have led to a massive exodus of Nigerian human²⁸ and natural resources²⁹ from the country to the rest of the world.

From all existential and pragmatic perspectives, democratic principles are yet to be demonstrably practiced in the African continent as it is done in the West, and until that is done, Africa will continue to be a reference point of negative narratives. Is it not sad for instance to note that the West believes in and practices democracy that embraces all its citizens, while continuing to undermine the principles of democracy in African countries. One wonders for instance how France and Britain can explain the differences in European industrialization and their continued illegal extraction of mineral resources from their “former” colonies. What explains the popular notion of corruption in many African presidents and states, whose corrupt practices are aided by countries like Switzerland, helping them salvage their spoils, and many other European nations, who continually allow and indirectly support their corrupt engagements? I do not intend here to exonerate the African leaders for

²⁷ International Committee on Nigeria, *Nigeria's Silent Slaughter; Genocide in Nigeria and the Implications for the International Community*, p.23.

²⁸ Faruk, Abubakar, Re: On Mass Exodus of Nigerian Nurses,” Nigerian Tribune, Oct. 22, 2021 https://www.bing.com/search?q=Re-On+Mass+Exodus+of+Nigerian+Nurses%2C+Nigerian+Tribune&cvid=520ab2b3d86e4c8e8ce843f25e340f85&gs_lcrp=EgZjaHJvbWUyBggAEEUYOdIBCTIwMDk2ajBqOagCBbACAQ&FORM=ANAB01&PC=U531 accessed on 16-09-2024.

²⁹ Nigerian crude oil, the country’s most important natural resource, is more of a curse than a blessing for the oil-producing region and the country as a whole. Crude oil is mined in Nigeria, then refined in other parts of the world, and sold back to Nigeria at very high prices. How this blatant slavery and modern colonialism survived into the 21st century remains one of the greatest existential mysteries. This shows that behind the global superpower’s call for human rights and poverty eradication is a reluctance to cede the economic stronghold of a world power to poorer countries. The Niger Delta which is the predominant oil-producing region of Nigeria has been marred by years of oil spillage, oil bunkering, violent militant agitation, environmental poisoning, massive corruption, and economic underdevelopment. Many communities in Niger Delta are still lacking in basic social amenities like electricity, good roads, basic health care, good education, recreational amenities, good drinking water, and good housing. According to the United States Institute of Peace in their special report articulated by Judith Burdin Asuni with the title “Blood Oil in the Niger Delta” the trade in stolen connivance poses an immense challenge to the Nigerian state, harming its economy and fuelling a long-running insurgency in the Niger Delta. It also undermines security in the Gulf of Guinea and adds to instability on world energy markets. According to Premium Times Daily dated July 6, 2021, Nigeria has recorded 4,919 oil spills in 6 years, and 5 trillion barrels of oil stolen as confirmed by the Minister of Environment, Mohammad Abubakar. Earlier in the 2021, an Appeal Court in the Hague ordered the Shell Oil Company to pay damages in millions of dollars to a group of lawyers from Southern Nigeria who launched a complaint against Shell, because of the oil spillage from Shell mining activities which destroyed their livelihoods. During a pre-COP conference held in October 2021 at Edinburgh, a young girl publicly confronted Shell CEO and characterized him as “one of the most evil people in the world”. She accused the Shell company and Siccar Point Energy as being responsible for a lot of sufferings and death all over the world, including the killing of unarmed protesters in Nigeria. (Cf. Euro news Oct. 21, 2021)

their irresponsibility, since they have, by their actions, whether tacitly or implicitly transformed themselves into veritable instruments of negative narratives of subjugation and exploitation by the developed nations.

The Pandora Papers are the latest in a series of documents leaked by journalists around the world accusing world leaders, billionaires, celebrities and corporate chief executives of the pervasiveness of corruption and Western complicity. Pandora and Panama Papers revealed documents, images, emails and spreadsheets from various financial services and firms in countries including Panama, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates.³⁰ Some of these companies used for money laundering are based in various locations in London and other European states. This underscores the fact that African political leaders, who steal public funds, will always need the support of Western companies to launder money. One of the most effective ways to combat corruption among African political elites is to conduct a thorough search of all property, businesses and cash belonging to those who hold political office in Africa resident outside the shores of Africa and determine their legitimacy and liceity and in the case of any indictment, gradually return these loots to their legitimate destination.

3. Intellectual Narrative

Nigeria's intellectuals are supposed to be the source of high hopes for Nigeria's future. This assumption is grounded on the fact that they ought to remain the moral conscience and societal gadflies. Even in a decadent society, it is the intellectuals who uncover the decadence and project possible solutions to the social quagmire. History abounds with intellectuals such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Plato, Aristotle, Niccolo Machiavelli, Albert Einstein, Boris Pasternak, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Chinua Achebe, Ngugi Wa Thiongo, Richard Wright, etc., who transformed their societies from darkness and ignorance to an age of knowledge and awareness. They are indeed great academics of wisdom and have beamed their intellectual light on topics such as politics, religion, economics, science, personal development, relationships, ethics, and more. They were the great critiques of apartheid, colonialism, slavery, the Holocaust, and racism, and have contributed immensely on some existential issues like depression, loneliness, and other facticities of life. They have indeed flourished through other periods of world history.

³⁰ International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, *Offshore Havens and Hidden Riches of World Leaders and Billionaires Exposed in Unprecedented Leak*, 3rd October, 2021.

However, due to the corruption in the country, the Nigerian education system is severely damaged by the presence of tutors who are more interested in money than knowledge. The fact that the leaders of the nation are not paying attention to educational infrastructure has led to the degradation and decay of the nation's school system. Poor and pitiable welfare package have become the defining characteristics of both tutors and students in state educational institutions. The whole system is rigged and looks very suspicious and very sad. As a matter of fact, a solid and good education is the key to the development of any society, and it is only through education that a resetting of all other narratives in Nigeria can take place.

4. Cultural Narratives

Humans are both creators and products of culture. With more than 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria, one cannot help but wonder how these cultural narratives contribute positively to the development of the Nigerian nation. The beauty and the wealth of the Nigerian cultural system have not been fully explored and appreciated due to the lack of a cultural narrative that promotes Nigerian culture. Nigerian society remains mired in language and physical cross-cultural conflict, making it difficult to properly appreciate each other. The root cause of this cultural conflict is the ruling class, which has ignited the flames of ethnic and cultural conflict consciously exploited as a shield for evading being held accountable for their ineffective leadership. Too often, politicians are quick to resort to cultural sensitivities about their sinister plans and the unfortunate execution of their corrupt activities, knowing all too well the subtle and sensitive nature of cultural tendencies within the Nigerian state. In this creation, the populace is quickly and dangerously divided along cultural ties, and then camping and fighting each other along these line and sadly vindicating the same politicians who marginalize them. This consequently provides a convenient escape route for politicians from being held accountable for their corrupt practices.

Nigerian cultural narratives need to focus on the key values of shared development, acceptance, love and progress. Every culture should look inward to find positive values within that culture. Values such as tolerance, hospitality, love, respect, appreciation of human life, and economic progress. Each culture should as a matter of fact promote its positive values. Unfortunately, the Nigerian political class, in its typically brazen and irresponsible system also uses guardians of cultural values to dominate, ignore, subdue, instil and propagate evil in

the society. Along with the intelligentsia, culture bearers should endeavour to liberate their culture from negative narratives.

Conclusion

This work has studied Nigeria's narratives in the light of Ludwig Wittgenstein's concept of meaning. Wittgenstein, an Austrian philosopher, in developing his philosophical framework, emphasized the importance of language and meaning in understanding reality. According to him, the meaning of words are discoverable in their usage and within the specific social and cultural contexts of their linguistic formulations and use. Nigeria, as a nation, has been plagued by numerous negative narratives that have shaped the country's identity and reputation. Nigeria is often perceived as a corrupt nation, with widespread graft and embezzlement. Despite being Africa's largest economy, Nigeria is home to some of the poorest people in the world. The country has struggled with various security challenges, including Boko Haram insurgency and kidnapping. Nigeria has experienced recurring ethnic and religious conflicts, which have led to loss of lives and property. These have not only shaped Nigeria's identity and reputation, but also the language with which she is described and the meanings attributed to her presence and existence.

Applying Wittgenstein's Concept of Meaning, Nigeria's negative narratives can be seen as a product of playing games with language in contradistinction to the rule-based formation of language game postulation which are shaped by the social and cultural contexts in which they are used. The negative narratives surrounding Nigeria can be seen as having a "family resemblance" to one another, in that they share common characteristics and themes, such as corruption and poverty, at least to the extent that they are governed by outright manipulation and warped intention to deceive for pure selfish reasons devoid of the sense of the community. The negative narratives that have formed the conspicuous mark of the Nigerian identity are easily seen in various forms and shapes like in the international media, diplomatic circles, and local communities thanks to the manipulative actions of her political gladiators. Wittgenstein's discourse on private language insists that language is inherently public and shared and so is community oriented. Therefore, Nigeria's negative narratives can be seen as a product of a conscious departure from the fundamental functions of linguistic formulations for the enhancement of the common good. Given that these negative narratives were created by

humans, it is simply logical to assume that the possibility of recreated positive narratives is both feasible and achievable.

By applying Wittgenstein's concept of meaning to Nigeria's negative narratives, it can be argued that the negative narratives are not inherent to Nigeria but are instead constructed through specific manipulative endeavours of playing games with language with the tacit conscious refusal to abide by the rules of linguistic communitarian engagement that the Wittgensteinian language game portends. It is therefore proper to insist that a more nuanced honest understanding of Nigeria's complexities that is not ignorant of the challenges therefrom will certainly inaugurate tremendous successes in all aspects of living, that will certainly offer a positive change in narrative. In doing this, enduring solutions will be developed that take into account the specific contexts that have informed the Nigeria's negative narratives, and will thus promote alternative narratives that will highlight Nigeria's successes and challenges.

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