

Àsùwàdà Principle and Inter-Ethnic Conflict in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the *àsùwàdà* principle as an indigenous social theory, which is based on *alàsùwàdà*, a body of doctrines according to which the creator of human beings and everything in nature, *dá* (created) individual human beings as *à-sù-wà* (beings who can only live successfully as part of a human group with a purpose). By establishing a teleological or purposeful unity and interconnectedness among all human beings, the *àsùwàdà* principle suggests that all human beings are created to be gregarious in nature and enjoy the best *iwà* (existence or character) when they *sù-wà* (live in group). This paper interrogates the *àsùwàdà* principle in relation to the problem of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. The paper concludes that if as human beings, we are *dá* (created) to be *àsùwà*, then, with the complementary ideas of *alájòbí*, *alájògbé*, and *ifògbóntáyéṣe*, ethnic pluralism should not necessarily lead to ethnic antagonism or conflict.

Keywords: *Àsùwàdà*, Ethnicity, Pluralism, *A`jòbí/A`jògbé*, Conflict.

Introduction

This paper examines the *Àsùwàdà* principle as an indigenous social theory, which is based on *alásùwàdà*, a body of doctrines, according to which the creator of human beings and everything in nature, *dá* (created) individual human beings as *à-sù-wà* (beings who can only live successfully as part of a human group with a purpose). By establishing a teleological or purposeful unity and interconnectedness among all human beings, *Asùwàdà* principle proffers that all human beings are created to be gregarious in nature and enjoy the best *ìwà* (existence or character) when they *sù-wà* (live in group). This paper will examine the *Àsùwàdà* principle in relation to the problem of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. The paper will conclude that if as human beings, we are *dà* (created) to be *àsùwà* (beings who can only successfully as part of a human group with a purpose), then, with the complementary ideas of *alá-ǵòbí*, *aláǵògbé*, and *ifògbòntááyése*, ethnic pluralism should not lead to ethnic antagonism or *conflict*.

Àsùwàdà Principle

The *Àsùwàdà* principle is a social theory, which Akiwọwọ developed from a Yoruba poetry, which he identifies as *àyáǵò alásùwàdà*, which is “usually recited...at a rite-of-consecration called *akintẹlú* performed when a new human settlement is to be founded” (Akiwowo 1990, 104). Akiwọwọ referred to *alásùwàdà* as “the author of all things” (1986, 348) in heaven and on earth. According to Akiwọwọ, “The source of all earthly forms of *ìwà-sùsù* (bunched of existence) is the divine being called *Ọlọfin Otete* (ruler of the palace of infinite spaciousness). He or she is addressed as *Alásùwàdà* (the author of all things)” (1990, 108). Makindé succinctly gave an analysis of Akiwọwọ’s concept of *àsùwàdà*,

Àsùwàdà’ is derived from *ìwà* (a state of being, existence, or character in a perpetual state of development; *sùwàdà*, to come together or co-exist for a common end or pupose) and *Asù-ìwà-dà* (literally meaning that which kneads or moulds *ìwà*, i.e. beings, states of existence or characters so that they can live together in harmony for a purpose or common end (1990, 121).¹

This complies with Akiwọwọ’s interpretation of *àsùwàdà* as “purposive clumping of diverse *ìwà*” (1986, 345). Simply put, *Àsùwàdà* refers to human beings as social, political and gregarious animals. They are beings who can

1 The issue of teleology or group purpose is well discussed and assessed in Lawuyi and Taiwo 1990, and Ademoyo (2009).

only realize their goods and life purposes and objectives when they live in groups with others. They are beings who cannot achieve their worldly goals atomistically as individuals in isolation from the society. Akiwọwọ calls this the sociality of man, where by sociality he means “the quality or fact of being able to live and grow in communities...the quality of being able to *sùwàdà* (come together for a common end; to co-exist)” (1983, 16). This account clearly “distinguishes between *àsùwà* (coexistence) and *àsùwàdà* (the fact of being together for a purpose)” (ibid, 16-17).

This clumping of diverse *ìwà* or bunched existence is not restricted to the humans. It is replicated among animals and plants. This is aptly captured in some lines of the poem such as:

56. *Àsùwà* is what the *oyin* are
57. *Àsùwà* is what the *àdò* bees are
58. The *ééran* leaves grow in *Àsùwà*
59. *Àsuwà* is what broomsticks form
60. It is in *Àsùwà* that the *ééran* leaves grow in the *aare*
61. *Àsùwà* is what *ẹlẹgírí* birds form
62. It is the coming together of a multitude of men
63. That we know as warfare
64. It is as *Àsùwà* that one encounters the grassland
65. It is as *Àsuwà* that locusts invade a farmland... (1990, 108)

For Akiwọwọ, these instances, among many others, “list forms and types of life forms or beings which continue in- being as a result of their conformity with the principle of *asuwa*” (1990, 109). Following the lines, one can see that the principle of *àsùwà* is not restricted to the human beings. It is extended to other forms of life such as “*oyin* (bumble bee), *àdò* (honey bee), the human hair, trees, grasses, ants, leaves, birds, locusts, and even man-made *àsùwà*, such as broomsticks, and corps of fighting men” (ibid.). This is why “In several *àsùwà* the termites colonize their mounds. In several *àsùwà* we encounter the *ekunkun* by the riverside. It is as *àsùwà* that we find the *làbẹlàbẹ* by the waterside” (ibid.).

In addition to the principle of bunched existence in the *àsùwàdà* principle is the idea of collective goodness. It is part of the *àsùwàdà* principle that collective good reigns (ibid, 110-111). This can be seen from some of the lines of the oral poetry such as:

108. On the day, he was to release
109. Existences on the Earth
110. One particle of dust became
111. A basketful measure of dust
112. A basketful measure of soil became the earthcrust

113. Dews pouring lightly, pouring lightly
 114. Were used to mould the earth
 115. Dews pouring heavily, pouring heavily
 116. Were used to mould the earth
 117. So that *ire-gbogbo* may multiply on it
 118. *Ire-gbogbo* took the shape of *àsùwà*

The principle emphasizes collective goodness, which can only be attained in the harmonious coexistence contained in *àsùwà*. This principle is stressing the point that there can only be goodness in society when a bunch of characters forms a bunched existence. They need goodness to regulate the differences in character. More than that, the principle emphasizes the point that it is in *àsùwà* (bunched existence) that goodness actually resides. Outside of this (*àsùwà*) there is no good.

Àìsùwà is the absence of *àsùwà*. It is clear from the *Àsùwàdà* oral poetry that at the beginning of creation, all earthly beings were created with the *Àsùwàdà* such that they can only realize the goodness of their beings in the harmonious coexistence as a group. *Àìsùwà* was not part of the original creation. “*Ire-gbogbo* is in the form of *asuwa*” (ibid, 111). *Ire-gbogbo* here means collective good. The line is simply saying that collective good is in the form of *àsùwà*. However, at a point in the history of existence on earth, *àìsùwà*, which means absence of bunched existence, was introduced into the natural order. According to the oral poetry, *àìsùwà* in form of “error, or moral offence... began when *Yankangi* strayed away from *ire-gbogbo*” (ibid.). Some lines of the poetry state the beginning of the disorderliness thus:

129. There is no luckless head in a companion of travelers
 130. For *ire-gbogbo* is in form of *àsùwà*
 131. *Yankangi* alone it was
 132. Who strayed for a moment from his companion
 133. Was said to have stolen *irú* to eat
 134. From Mother Olugamo’s tray in heaven

This straying away from companionship by *Yankangi* is regarded as self-alienation which negates the original *àsùwà* social order naturally planned for human existence. Thus, “According to the principle of *àsùwà*, there was no error at the emanations of earthly beings. Error, ‘sin’, or self-alienation, was introduced into the natural order when *Yankangi* inadvertently turned his back against his original community to be alone in order to enjoy alone the provision that was intended for the common good” (ibid, 112).

According to *Akìwọwọ*, “self-alienation, called *àìsùwà*, was the first prototype of error or sin, of what we regard in sociology as social deviation or social pathology...it is imperative for the common good that there be always

sociality among all elements in creation” (ibid, 112-113). This principle emphasizes the point that we can only find the substance of goodness in the community of creatures. This is because, “The whole earth is a macro-community in which human settlements of varied sizes and densities are micro-communities” (ibid, 112). The *àsùwàdà* principle, no doubt, stresses the importance of social harmony in human communities while, at the same time, stressing the evil consequences of one part of the community alienating itself from the others.

The Nigerian Multi-National State

Nigeria is a hotchpotch of different ethnic nationalities. It is clear that the people of Nigeria “are in different geo-political settings with their multifarious experiences about the world” (Salami 2004, 398). Nigeria is a nation that is composed of several ethnic nationalities. This “conglomeration of different ethnic nationalities” (ibid.) makes Nigeria an ethno-culturally pluralist nation-state, which “is fragmented into different ethnic, commune-cultural, or local loyalties as well as different corresponding socio-cultural allegiance and commitments” (ibid, 399).

The idea of ethnic pluralism expresses the fact that as social and gregarious animals, human beings belong to different groups which “are organized by some distinct sets of customs, techniques and traditions” (ibid.) that form the culture of a people. In this case, “members of the same ethnic group are said to share the same mother tongue, blood relationship, ancestral lineages, and geographical proximity, among others. Members of an ethnic group are born into the group and they necessarily belong to it (Maclean 1991, 325-326). For instance, “the cultural tie between the Hausa of Nigeria and Niger may be greater than contacts between Hausa of Nigeria and Jukun of Nigeria” (Udo 1980, 10). This factor of cultural ties is so strong that “Long after the establishment of British and German rule, many chiefs in the German-controlled areas of Adamawa continued to pay tribute and do homage to the Fulani Emir of Yola, the former ruler of Pre-colonial Adamawa” (ibid.). Ethnic pluralism can also be explained by the usual concentration of different ethnic groups on different and separate spatial locations. Given this fact, “the different ethnic groups are opened to different geographical locations, which sometimes carry with it the differences in weather and activities, of the different ethnic groups, which settle in different locations” (Salami 2004, 400).

The differences in the ways the different ethnic groups go about the business of their lives is greatly influenced by the differences in weather among them. This is explained by the fact that the group in the south are bound to have more water round the year, while the counterpart “in the North are

exposed to the dry North-East trade winds from the Sahara Desert which is for most of the year, hot dry” (ibid.). The differences in weather creates differences in the lives of the different ethnic groups that constitute the Nigerian nation-state. For example, “the long dry season when water and grazing for cattle is scarce has made it necessary for the Fulani cattlemen to adopt a nomadic mode of existence” (ibid.). The differences in lives and in the cultural milieu of the different ethnic nationalities have, in no small measure, influence the ways they go about meeting their material conditions of existence. This, in effect, provides different social and cultural ties, which separate the different ethnic nationalities from one another. The consequence of this is the problem of ethnic pluralism in which citizens emphasize their different ethnic nationalities and demonstrate their allegiances as well as loyalties to their ethno-cultural groups at the expense of the corporate identity of the Nigerian state (ibid, 400-401).

Ethnicity and the Nigerian Multinational State

Ethnicity is nothing but the fact of belonging to an ethnic group (Gbadesin 1981, 3-5). Ethnicity simply says that a nation is made of several ethnic nationalities. “It expresses the fact that Nigeria is made of such linguistic, cultural, or ethnic groups as Birom, Tiv, Igbo, Edo, Yorùbá Ijaw, Jukun, and Hausa among others” (Salami 2004, 401). The classification of people into an ethnic group is based on language sharing, blood relationship or ancestral linkages. For each ethnic group, there is a lineage traceable to a common ancestor. For instance, members of the Yoruba ethnic group will trace their ancestral lineage to Odùduwà. The ancestor is considered the progenitor of members of the ethnic group.²

Ethnicity expresses the fact of belonging to different ethnic groups. This suggests social and cultural pluralism. It explains the fact that in a nation, like Nigeria, where the concept is applicable, there are more than one ethnic group forming the nation. To have a state or nation, there are requirements such as an occupation of certain geographical location with specified boundaries by a sizeable population of human beings who are under the rule of some who have the authority to direct the affairs of the state. Such a community must also enjoy sovereignty or self-governance (Fishman 1972, 2). Establishing a nation or a state-community requires the coming together of people of different ethnic origins who have different ancestral linkages, languages and blood relationship under one administrative umbrella (Aristotle 1963). A positive link can be established between ethnicity and nationhood because there is hardly any nation that is ethnically monolithic. Since nations are formed

2 Wsevolod (1971) and Francis (1974).

from a conglomeration Fishman of different ethnic groups, it is plausible to claim that ethnicity is significant to nationhood. With this, we can treat ethnic groups as integral parts of the nation (Isaacs 1975).

In spite of the aforementioned positive link that may be established between nationhood and multiplicity of ethnic groups, some critics assume that multiplicity of ethnic groups may be inimical to the idea of nationhood by constituting a basis for inter-ethnic conflict. The point raised by the critics of multiplicity of ethnic groups is that in an ethnic pluralist state like Nigeria, “people show more allegiance to their ethnic groups than the nation as a whole. People find their primordial affinities and attachments as well as their ancestral linkages stronger than the political ties in nationhood” (Salam 2004, 401).

Inter-Ethnic Conflict and the Nigerian Polity

The Nigerian polity shows some examples of how ethnic pluralism has almost balkanized the Nigerian state. Nigeria as a nation has a heterogeneous ethnic heritage. The number of ethnic groups in Nigeria is estimated to be two hundred and fifty. Among this estimated number of ethnic groups, four occupy a position of prominence. The four prominent ethnic groups are “Yoruba in the West, Hausa and Fulani in the North, and Ibo in the South-East. These four are reckoned as constituting sixty percent of the population. The Hausa comprise the largest single group in the North followed by the Fulani. The Yoruba dominate Ògùn, Òndó, Ọ̀yó, Ọ̀sun, Lagos, and Èkìtì states. The Ibo dominate Anambra, Imo, Abia, Enugu, Cross River, and Bayelsa States.”³ Apart from these four dominant ethnic groups, there are some other minor ethnic groups such as “Kanuri in Bauchi and Borno states, the Edo in Delta and Edo states, the Ibibio in Cross River and Akwa Ibom states, the Ijaw in Rivers, Bayelsa, Edo, and Delta states, the Tiv in Benue and Plateau states, the Nupe in Niger, Kebbi, and Sokoto states, the Efik in the East, and so on” (Salam 2004, 402). This diversity in ethnic lineage, no doubt, constitutes bases for diversity in the politico-economic relation in Nigeria (ibid.).

The rise in the number of ethnic militia and warriors signifies one of the negative impacts of ethnic pluralism on the Nigerian political entity. In Nigeria, “the inter-ethnic agitation is no longer restricted to the major ethnic groups... In Nigeria today, inter-ethnic suspicion and conflict is diverting the attention of the citizens from the pursuance of the national goal and objective” (ibid, 403). In a multi-ethnic Nigeria, an Ibo from Eastern Nigeria or a Yoruba from the West will be reluctant “to settle down as a Nigerian in the North, which is the geographical and cultural region of the Hausa, Fulani, or

3 Ikime (1980), Ofonagoro (1978), Nnoli (1978), Fashina (1998).

the Kanuri” (ibid.). In the same vein, it is becoming difficult for the Hausa, Fulani, or the Kanuri to be assimilated to the way of life in the Eastern and Western Nigeria. Furthermore, a Nigerian from a different ethnic group can only get a temporary appointment, if at all, in some other parts of the country that belong to some other ethnic groups.

Ethnic pluralism and its attendant problem of diversity have made it difficult for citizens of Nigeria to move freely throughout Nigeria or reside freely in any part of Nigeria of their choice. For instance, “cases of discrimination in the provision of goods and services abound with citizens making complaints to governments whose hands seemed to be chained” (Gbadegesin 1991, 101). Besides the issue of discrimination, national programs are usually beclouded by mutual suspicions and cry of marginalization: “For example, when one ethnic group controls the political machinery of the state, other ethnic groups find it difficult not to feel marginalized” (Salami 2004, 403).

Ethnicity and Ethnicism

It may be interesting to ask whether ethnicity needs be inimical to nationhood or whether the fact of a nation having multiple ethnic groups should ordinarily lead to inter-ethnic conflict. Contrary to the apparent connection between multiple ethnicity and inter-ethnic conflict, as we have in Nigeria; “ethnicity does not portend negation to nationhood. Rather, ethnicity as a biological concept is neutral. It has no political or class bias” (ibid, 403; Gbadegesin 1991, 87). It has been observed that “the important fact about an ethnic group is the involuntary and irrevocable nature of its membership. An individual is ascriptively the child of his or her parents, and the fact cannot be changed, no matter how he or she may be dissatisfied with it” (Gbadegesin, 4). This excludes the element of choice in ethnicity. An ethnic group should be seen, primarily, as a biological group and should not be confused with a political group. It expresses a biological connection. “The upshot of this is that ethnicity does not express lack of national identity or call for inter-ethnic conflict (Salami 2004, 404). A nation can be made of different ethnic groups and still remain cohesive and maintain a common corporate interest not distracted by ethnic considerations. In this case, “ethnicity is just a neutral concept. It merely expresses a biological relationship among members or citizens of a nation... neither ethnic homogeneity nor ethnic heterogeneity is sufficient to produce national unity or diversity respectively” (ibid.).

Nevertheless, problem can arise between ethnicity and nationhood when ethnicity is politicized. In other words, “it is when citizens begin to manipulate their facts of belonging to different ethnic groups, for their political and economic ends, that we begin to lose a sense of national identity. This fact

of politicizing ethnicity is what is referred to as ‘ethnicism’” (ibid, 405; Gba-degesin, 87). According to this view, the origin of inter-ethnic conflict in a multi-ethnic society “is not the fact of belonging to different ethnic groups but something more hidden, such as economic needs, psychological attitudes or some internal patterns of the group structure...ethnic antagonism is created by the human beings in the community” (Gallo and Molina 1991, 62). The inter-ethnic conflict as we have it in Nigeria is a product of the use to which ethnicity is put. In this case, “ethnic elites manipulate and politicize ethnicity in their various struggles to partake in the sharing of the national cake. This politicization of ethnicity militates against national identity and harmony in an ethno-cultural pluralist Nigeria” (Salami 2004, 405). Based on this politicization, there are multiples of ethnic militias from as many as the number of ethnic groups existing in Nigeria. This has led to a devastating conflicts at various periods in the life of Nigeria. At present, there is the resounding secessionist outcry for a Biafran Republic from the Igbo ethnic group while the Hausa-Fulani ethnic groups are holding the North as an ethnic site that non-northerners cannot inhabit.

àsùwàdà Principle as a Panacea for Inter-ethnic Conflict

Although ethnicity does not in itself presuppose any form of separatist or secessionist preoccupation, yet, if it is over-politicized, it can lead to the disintegration of national unity and identity. This presupposes that ethnicity needs to be dealt with creatively. Ethnic pluralism can be turned into a positive force, what is required is mutual respect among the various ethnic groups. For Mclean, “the different ethnic groups should engage in cooperative, but competitive interaction for the positive development of the society” (1991, 333). In search of a creative way of dealing with the problem of ethnicism and the attendant problem of inter-ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, the *àsùwàdà* principle becomes handy. The problem before us is how to resolve the incompatibility between ethnic pluralism and national harmony. The fact of the multiethnic and multicultural nature of the Nigerian state and the attendant problem of interethnic conflict call for conscious efforts at fostering interethnic peace and harmony.

Àsùwàdà, *Alájobí*, and *Alájobé* are concepts which, if properly operationalized, can provide suggestions to move Nigeria out of the present ethnic conflict and disharmony. *Àsùwàdà Ènìyàn* already presupposes bunched existence and teleological co-existence. *Àsùwàdà* oral poetry already establishes the principle according to which humans and animals were created to manifest bunched existence or group existence as a result of having been created from the same dust and the need to meet the individual and collective goals as

a group in a gregarious existence. Unlike the Hobbesian account of the origin of man in an atomistic and individualistic state of nature, from which humans later escaped, because of the undesirable nasty and brutish nature of such a state to build a commonwealth; the *àsù-ìwà-dà* principle states that human beings and other animals were originally created to live together in group to achieve their individual and collective goals, and that *àì-sù-ìwà-dà*, which means self-alienation and separation or deviation from group existence, is an aberration that later came as an error on the part of human beings.

To achieve this bunched existence of different ethnic groups in the attainment of nationhood in a multinational state, *alájòbí* and *alájògbé* are handy. Going by Akiwòwò's discussion of *àsùwàdà* in conjunction with his discussion of the twin concepts of *àjòbí* and *àjògbé*, the multinational and multicultural nature of the Nigerian state can be explained and understood. While the concept of *àjòbí* may express the fact of belonging to a family and an ethnic group in which people share the same blood, language and ancestral lineage, *àjògbé* expresses the fact of ethnicity in which various such groups co-exist in a community.⁵¹ Corresponding to these concepts are also *alájòbí* and *alájògbé*. These two important concepts and notions capture the condition of several families or ethnic groups sharing the same geographical and political space.

The question is whether the possibility of co-existence guarantees harmonious co-existence among different families and or ethnic groups or ethnic nationalities. One good thing in this case is that human beings were originally created to live a bunched existence. The self-alienation, which constitutes the original sin here, is wrong and simply needs to be put back to normal. Prima facie, it seems as easy as to simply use moral education to let people of different ethnic nationalities realize the originally bunched nature of our existence and the abberative nature of self-alienation or inter-ethnic conflict. The moral education will involve the emphases on how to restore the original mutual trust and confidence that the self-alienation has taken away from the various groups of *alájòbí*, which join to form the Nigerian *alájògbé*.

The assumption underlying this proposal is that if human beings know what is right they will do what is right. In other words, once everyone knows that originally we were meant to co-exist for the general goal of the multinational state, everyone will work towards the harmonious mutual coexistence rather than fanning the ember of interethnic disaffections. Much as the method of moral education promises some level of efficacy in bringing harmony back to the present state of anomy, the problem is that it is not usually the case that human beings cannot knowingly do that which is wrong. In other words, a person may know that an action is wrong and still go ahead to do it or cause it to happen.

This raises the question of the problem of the will. This is a case in which, in spite of the knowledge of the distinction between right and wrong, one's will is not strong enough to resist doing the wrong. This is to argue that mere moral education about the *àsùwàdà* may not be sufficient to guarantee harmony in a fractious relationship. However, the question can be raised that if by nature we are to necessarily live in a bunched existence, why do we find ourselves in this disharmonious corporate entity called Nigeria. The answer may be that as long as there is possibility of self-alienation, the bunched-existence is not built on necessity but on capability. If we go by this, we will be saying that *àsùwàdà* created human beings with the capacity to *su-wa*, or have bunched existence; it did not create them to necessarily have a bunched existence. This necessity-capability distinction may weaken the prospects of the *àsùwàdà* principle serving as a panacea to inter-ethnic conflicts. Again, there is the collective goal of all the *alá jògbé*, and by extension the collective goal of the nation that fosters the overall goal of the aggregate of co-existing *alá jòbí*. In other words, even if the necessity of bunched existence is watered down to mere capability for bunched existence, there remains the need for bunched existence for the attainment of the national goal. In a situation in which, as explained in the *àsùwàdà* principle, individual goals are only achievable through the collective goal, there is the duty to harmonize the interests of the different ethnic groups making up the Nigerian state.

Attempts should be made to clarify that the kind of collective goal that the *àsùwàdà* principle emphasizes is not the type that suggests totalitarianism. The collective goal, engendered by the idea of bunched existence in the *àsùwàdà* principle, recognizes the individuality. However, it holds that the specific, private and personal content of the individuality are connected to those of others in the larger community (Ademoyo 2009, 26). In other words, the good of the individual is connected to the good of the community; the individual ethnic groups need the co-existence or the togetherness in the nation-state to achieve their individual goals.

In spite of the self-alienation that came as the first sin that diverted some component parts of the nation from the original collective goal of the nation, which is embedded in a bunched existence, the fact remains that the society needs a bunched existence for its perpetuity. Here arises the 'is/ought' question. Going by the *àsùwàdà* principle, the various ethnic constituents of the Nigerian multinational state ought to be in harmonious bunched existence, but, in reality the Nigerian nation-state is now in total disharmony. There is the IPOB/MASSOB in the South-East agitating for a Biafran nation, the Arewa Youth with its threatening presence in the North, the various Niger delta militant groups fighting for resource control, among others. The possibility of the problem of "is/ought" distinction and the way out of it is already

embedded in the *àsùwàdà* principle, which takes the collective goal of the collective as self-perpetuity and includes the idea of societal self-reinvention. The idea of societal reinvention presupposes the possibility of a break in the chain of bunched existence, which may be a temporary death of the *Àsùwàdà* spirit. The difference between the societies that cannot continue to perpetuate themselves and those that can will reside in their ability to reinvent themselves (ibid, 27).

Given the current comatose state of the *àsùwàdà* spirit in the Nigerian multi-national state, the question is the way out. This brings to bear the idea of *ifogbòntáyése*, which, for Akiwọwọ, means “using wisdom to remake the world” (1983, 4), and for Makinde, means “the conscious employment of human knowledge, reason and wisdom for the understanding and improvement of the world” (1990, 129-130). With *ifogbòntáyése* as a concept that is part of the *Àsùwàdà* principle, there is the opportunity for human beings to creatively employ deep intellectual thought to examine the why and how of the deviation that is engendered by self-alienation. *Ifogbòntáyése* becomes a tool for the “development and improvement of society and the general condition of humanity” (ibid, 131).

The way forward is to use wisdom and deep thought to reinvent the nation from the present *àìsùwà* back to its original state of *àsùwà*. Critical and rational thought will enable ease of studying and appraising how and why citizens resorted to self-alienation and thereby deviated from the original norm of bunched existence. This reappraisal will show the problem experienced by the members that prompted them to self-alienation, and help to fashion out explanations to resolve the problems. With *ifogbòntáyése*, it will be clear that Nigeria is a federalist state in which the different *alájobí* and *alájobi* constitute different federating units. If the different federating units are in disarray, disharmony, and self-alienated, the thought should be about the root cause of the disaffection. The discovery of the factors and causes of the disaffections will constitute a basis for resolving the disharmony. The basic feeling among the various ethnic groups, which are combinations of different *alájobí* and *alájogbé*, is that of distrust and marginalization, which result from social injustices. The question now is how to restore trust and harmony to enable bunched existence and realization of the collective will or goal of the Nigerian state.

One prominent *wisdom* (*ogbón*) in the attempt to *reinvent the society* (*tún ayé ẹ*) is to think of how to restore mutual respect and remove all those factors that brought mutual suspicions among the federating units. One of such reasons may be the idea of genuine federalism and devolution of power. This will be contrary to the present arrangement in which power is over concentrated at the top at the expense of the federating units. The present

arrangement raises inter-ethnic suspicions, especially when the federal power is seen to reside more in one part of the country than the others. The use of reason and wisdom is required in removing this lopsidedness in the arrangement of power and the attendant unjust distribution of wealth. Depending on how correctly we allow the use of reason and wisdom to appraise and tackle these causes of disaffection, we are at the verge of restructuring or reinventing the Nigerian society to attain the harmony and mutual trust required for a bunched existence which was the way we as people were originally created to live and exist.

Conclusion

This paper examines the *àsùwàdà* principle as an indigenous social theory based on a body of doctrines according to which human beings as well as all other creatures, are created such that they require bunched existence in order to achieve both their individual and collective goals. The paper discusses this *àsùwàdà* principle in relation to the problem of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. It finds out that, in spite of the fact that human beings were *àsùwàdà* by nature, there came a point in the history of humans when *àìsùwà* or deviation crept in through human's urge for self-alienation. Nevertheless, the paper concludes that despite the evil of self-alienation and its attendant problem of inter-ethnic conflict, a peaceful Nigerian state can still be reinvented with the aid of concepts such as *alá jòbí*, *alá jògbé*, and *ì fògbòntáyèṣe*.

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