

The limits of virtue politics in an African context

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ABSTRACT

This paper situates Karl Popper's 'paradox of tolerance' as foundation within the context of interrogating multifaceted violent identity politics propagated in contemporary Nigeria. The paper argues that the 'active' virtue of tolerance which requires that subjects within the Nigerian polity engage each other in rationally-driven discourse on issues of dissent does not presume long-suffering or passive endurance of violence propagated by a side of the dissenting divide. It is thus pertinent that an appropriate intervention by the Nigerian state delineating the limits of tolerance in the face of perennial intolerance and the proliferation of violent identity politics is inevitable.

1 INTRODUCTION

The recurrence and proliferation of violent identity politics forces grave challenges on the imperative to negotiate sustainable development and social order in various parts of Nigeria, West Africa. Beyond the various antecedent occasions of violence, contemporary national polity presents with violent identity politics often structured around the quest for religious, economic and political hegemony. Indeed, these contemporary violent eruptions have maintained similar patterns with such earlier expressions of violence.

This paper seeks therefore to interrogate the pattern of recurrent violent identity politics from the point of view of virtue politics—a burgeoning approach which connects virtue theory directly with politics. Virtue politics promotes certain character disposition among political agents in view of the advancement of social order. In the quest for harmony in pluralistic and multicultural societies, the virtue of tolerance is recognised as being prominent along with the virtues of justice, integrity and solidarity. The virtue of tolerance specifically refers to the public and private disposition by which rational agents/subjects (state, individuals or groups) in plural societies are able to preserve the dignity of interlocutors with whom they share mutual dissent on particular issues. It is thus pertinent that an appropriate intervention by the Nigerian state delineating the limits of tolerance in the face of perennial intolerance and the proliferation of violent identity politics is inevitable as a means of safeguarding social order and the well-being of every citizen.

The authors of this paper begin with an original position that tolerance ranks *prima facie* as a virtue for the ordering of the *polis* and that dialogue functions always at the service of that

virtue whenever there are ideological differences between identities and or the state. Albeit the classical understanding of virtue as a consistent character disposition to do good, this paper shall proceed further by delineating appropriate instances whereby the virtue of tolerance can be punctuated by other interventions in the polity. To be sure, Karl Popper's paradox of tolerance would be adopted in arguing for contexts in which the exercise of the virtue of tolerance maybe put aside for other salutary societal interests. The same paradox would also be shown to be well nuanced albeit differently in the thoughts of Brian Barry regarding the conception of good life (i.e. an inclusive and equitable polity), which is earmarked by reasonable limitation of subjects' expression of autonomy in terms of self-determination over considerable national cohesion. It shall thus be argued that the suspension of the exercise of the virtue of tolerance in such instances is always to be informed by the need to respond appropriately to the challenge of violent identity politics which emerge as a result of identity groups rejecting the option of dialogue guided by reason. Furthermore, it would also be argued that such imposition of limits to the exercise of virtue confers a duty on the state to be proactive in response to violent identity politics in the Nigerian democratic polity.

The goal of this paper is advanced in the four segments of the paper's body. In the first place, preliminary clarifications would be made regarding the nature of virtues in general and their place in the political context. This would be immediately followed by a recognition of tolerance as a specific virtue among others relevant for the engagement of agents in political space. The paradox that is characteristic of tolerance in the *agora* is presented in the next segment in the form of a certain delineation of the limits of this virtue in context. Here, it would be argued that the 'moderation' of tolerance must always be based on an evaluation of potential harms to the society. In the final segment, the paradox of tolerance would be contextualised within the Nigeria polity with some reference to the thoughts of Brian Barry.

2 ON THE NATURE OF VIRTUE

The Greek word *areté* which Aristotle deploys in his reference to virtue as an excellent disposition of character in a variety of human interests and activities is foundational in the development of the Nicomachean ethics. The same word is quite functional and instructive in our exposition of the idea of virtue politics. The English derivation of the same word proceeds directly from the Latin *virtus*; and here it continues to bear that sense of *excellent* character disposition. In Isaac Ukpokolo's words, 'virtue as excellence in a field of human endeavour is skill appropriate to a specific faculty'. It is both 'the fulcrum of right human actions' and 'the capacity to make wise judgments of particulars and universals within specific social and existential realities' (Ukpokolo, 2017, p. 162).

It is important to recall the distinction by which Aristotle insists that the virtues far from being mere ends (*telos*) in themselves; are means by which humanity approximates itself to its goal or purpose. The virtues in this connection therefore function by providing ancillary support to human persons in the pursuit of their ultimate wellbeing. In stating that 'some ends are good in themselves, some are useful for greater ends...not all ends are final ends', (Aristotle, 1999) Aristotle regarded the virtues as proximate ends on account of their being emblematic of excellent character in human persons. The proximate status of the virtues is illustrated within the context of the goals to which the human spirit aspires, where the virtues are means to achieving humanity's final or ultimate goal.

Aristotle designates *eudaimonia*—happiness as the supreme good or the good life of the human person. In establishing happiness as the supreme end of the human person, he stated that the supreme good must be something final and self-sufficient; such that, it would be chosen by anyone in whatever condition (Irwin, 2007, p. 131). On the pre-eminence of *eudaimonia*, Aristotle speaks thus:

What then is the good of each? Surely that for whose sake everything else is done...Now such a thing is happiness, above all else, is held to be; for this we choose always for itself and never for the sake of something else (Aristotle, 1999)

Happiness is reckoned as the chief good which the human person seeks by the very fact that, the pursuit of other goods like wealth, health, peace, power or pleasure is only in response to the burning thirst for happiness which those who pursue those other goods suffer from. Happiness as the supreme good is attainable only through the ‘exercise of natural human faculties in accordance with virtue’ (Aristotle, 1999).

In the quest to approximate to the supreme good designated as happiness, the human person who as Aristotle says is essentially a political animal (*zoon politikon*) must relate with other members of the same species as by nature, his being is interconnected with those of others. Hence, the individual is only able to attain the ultimate goal of happiness when personal choices and actions take on meaning in the *polis*—the public space where the individual connects and participates with the ‘other’ and by extension, with the state. The import of this is that, although the virtues are cultivated and nurtured in individual citizens, they become operative in the *polis* where human actions take on meaning in the context of inter-subjective relations.

When viewed from some ‘Machiavellian’ vantage point or interpretation, it might seem that the idea of virtues in politics is superfluous or at best incongruent with the plural brute forms and contrary manifestations of agents and interests often found in political spaces. The reaction to the (in)appropriacy of the virtues in politics would depend on our vision of politics. If politics is conceived of only in the narrow terms of the acquisition and continuous maintenance of political power by any means whatsoever, then indeed, the virtues might be superfluous. If on the other hand politics is understood as a necessary, continuous, quotidian activity transcending the acquisition and maintenance of power to include the maximisation of inclusive human wellbeing as a means of negotiating the *summum bonum*, then the virtues are at the heart of human flourishing.

3 TOLERANCE IN THE CONTEXT OF VIRTUE POLITICS

Given the aforesaid about the nature of the virtues, we proceed here to consider the position of tolerance among the virtues functioning as it were as means to achieving humanities' ultimate goal in pluralistic societies. It should be noted that enumerating tolerance in the ranks of the virtues is fraught in the first place with the challenge of justifying its status as a moral virtue properly so-called. The imperative for this justification is derived from the scepticism abhorred in some quarters about the possibility of tolerance being recognised as a virtue. This reservation about toleration being a virtue is well nuanced in the words of Catriona McKinnon who stated among other things that:

Toleration is a matter of putting up with that which you oppose: the motto of the tolerant person is ‘live and let live’, even when what she lets live shocks, enrages,

frightens, or disgusts her. As such, toleration is a controversial value. The secular righteous on the left reject it as the pet indulgence of a pampered liberal elite whose self-interest it serves by providing them with convenient excuses for blocking any agitation aiming at real social change. The secular righteous on the right reject it as the corrupt policy of the morally spineless who lack the insight and strength of will to improve the moral character of society and their fellow citizens through zero tolerance. And the religious righteous treat arguments for toleration with suspicion in the face of the eternal damnation to be meted out to those who will inevitably stray from the path to salvation once other paths are made available to them through the practice of toleration (McKinnon, 2006, p. 3)

The reference to tolerance as a 'controversial value' hint at the popular perception that to tolerate is to give unwarranted indulgence. Such indulgence in itself could thus be considered as vicious. In the alternative, the character of excellence present in the idea of tolerance is better illustrated when we consider Anna Galeotti's justification for the need for tolerance as a virtue useful for ordering pluralistic society in the following citation:

If we assume that liberal society needs some political principle of toleration to guarantee civil co-existence in conditions of pluralism, the moral virtue of tolerance may have an important role in bridging private and public reasons for toleration. Tolerance can provide the individual with moral reasons not to act upon her personal convictions in order to fulfil the political requirements of neutrality and impartiality. The gap between public and private morality, between the citizen and the private individual, can thus be filled by the moral virtue of toleration (Galeotti, 2001, p. 274)

Tolerance as a virtue for politics—where politics refers to the aggregate of inter-subjective activities, specific actions and ideals proposed and implemented by agents who aim at organising the society in view of attaining common good, is according to Galeotti 'the disposition to refrain from exercising one's power of interference on others' disliked actions and behaviours which are considered important for both the tolerator and the tolerated'. (Galeotti, 2001, p. 24). The disposition to refrain from exercising one's power of interference on the disliked actions and behaviours of other agents is always driven by a higher principle; that is, the actions or behaviour that is tolerated must lie within the ambit of the harm principle.

The harm principle originally proposed in the context of a discourse on the liberty proper to human flourishing by J.S Mill stipulates a fundamental condition by which the state may interfere with the freedom that people have to live and be in a pluralistic society. The principle thus assumes in the first place, the essential freedom that people have. This freedom is ordinarily sacred as it were; yet it may be abridged by the coercive action of the state only for the purpose of forestalling harm to other agents in the polity (Mill, 1859). The harm principle therefore functions by checking the possibility of an arbitrary use of state coercion in a situation where the state positions itself as a behemoth usurping popular liberty. Given that the determination of what constitutes harm may be fraught with the burden of subjectivity, the application of the harm principle would therefore require thorough considerations. Be that as it may, in the context of violent identity politics wherein hate speech with the predilection to incite power matrixes that can culminate in the physical harm and the social oppression of people with alternative orientations, the duty of the state to protect by deploying the harm principle becomes more easily appreciable.

In a later work, Galeotti referred to toleration as ‘the social virtue and the political principle allowing for the peaceful coexistence of individuals and groups holding different views, practicing different ways of life, and having different characters within the same society’ (Galeotti, 2006, pp. 565–566). Among other factors, the dimension of this social virtue is determined by the conclusion that the differences which are tolerated are in themselves ‘morally objectionable’. Thus, they are marked off from mere indifference or a certain lack of interest by the tolerating agent. From the foregoing, tolerance ceases to be a means to building strong polities if in the first place it overruns the limits demarcated by the harm principle; that limit being the point whereby the action of an agent causes grave harm to other agents. At such extremes, tolerance metamorphoses into vicious indulgence (Galeotti, 2001). It is important to note in this regard that if placed within the Aristotelian ordering of the virtues, the virtue of tolerance would be that golden mean establishing the distinction between the extreme ends of indulgence on the one hand and intolerance typically characterised by crass prejudice, narrow-mindedness and the deployment of violence in the quest to advance positions held by individuals or groups.

The import of this is that when the virtue of tolerance is allowed, the one who exercises this virtue (an individual agent, a group or the state) ought to have gone through a reflective process of determining whether and by what means an appropriate action should be effected against the agent (an individual or an identity bloc) whose activities or behaviours are tolerated. Galeotti's justification also notes that beyond checking actions and behaviours against the harm principle in a bid to exercise tolerance, appeal should also be made to other higher principles which have their sources in moral theory; such as, ‘the love of peace, the value of diversity, respects for others' choices and all such salutary values by which less focus is beamed on the object or attitude of dislike in honour of values that promote common good’. (Galeotti, 2001, p. 275).

Balayan in the same vein as Galeotti notes that ‘to *tolerate* is to voluntarily abstain from struggling (or struggling in certain ways) against incorrect, harmful, immoral etc. beliefs, behaviour and practices of others (object of tolerance). As tolerance is a moral virtue, the agent must consciously abstain from this struggle for some moral reasons’ (Balayan, 2014, p. 338). The emphasis in the latter part of the notation that the agent must ‘consciously abstain from struggle for moral reasons’ serves to reiterate the point about the importance of conscious intentionality on the part of the agent who exercises tolerance against the actions of the other.

One last point to be made with regards to the nature of tolerance as a virtue for the instrumental ordering of the *polis* has to do with what is here referred to as the discursive character of the virtue itself. It is argued in this paper that the virtue of tolerance is not as one may be inclined to think a passive value or a tendency toward the promotion of simple pacifism or longsuffering. The active nature of tolerance as a virtue is always present in the context of the dialogue which ensues between dissenting human subjects in pluralistic, public spaces. To be tolerant in the context of dialogue is therefore to treat dissenting interlocutors with a certain dignity. This presupposes respecting the agents who represent particular positions and orientations in discourse while not acquiescing to the tenets and positions that they advance.

Dialogue according to Joseph Ratzinger ‘does not take place simply because people are talking. Mere talk is the deterioration of dialogue that occurs when there has been a failure to reach it. Dialogue first comes into being when there is not only speech but listening’.

(Ratzinger, 1995, pp. 32–33). The principle of *audi alteram partem*—listening to the other party in dialogue is further enunciated by Ratzinger in the following:

Moreover, such listening must be the medium of an encounter; this encounter is the condition for an inner contact which leads to mutual comprehension. Reciprocal understanding finally deepens and transforms the being of the interlocutors... To listen means to know and to acknowledge another and to allow him to step into the realm of one's own... It is readiness to assimilate his words, and therein his being into one's own reality... Thus, after the act of listening, I am another man, my own being is enriched and deepened because it is united with the being of the other and through it, with the being of the world (Ratzinger, 1995, pp. 32–33)

While tolerance as a virtue is an intrinsic value in itself, it is also extrinsic or instrumental in nature; when it serves as a means to achieving the other goal of harmony and social order. In its extrinsic nature, it advances the cause of social order by creating avenues for dialogue between mutually respecting agents in the public space. This virtue is therefore a *sine qua non* for the commencement of discourse along the many lines of differences often characteristic of liberal democratic spaces.

4 PARADOX OF TOLERANCE: DELINEATING THE LIMIT OF VIRTUE

The one question which this paper purports to react to in this section is: Could there be a limit to the practice of the virtue of tolerance? The necessity of raising this question is informed by the understanding of virtue as a consistent excellence of character in agents. Such an understanding presupposes that one must always act virtuously in every situation or context; or better still, an agent may not be said to be virtuous if s/he performs good acts only at convenient moments.

To the question regarding whether the toleration of the intolerant is required as a feature of a just society, John Rawls weighs in with an intervention from a liberal, political point of view which places less emphasis on morality-laden values and rather adopts a practical approach that speaks directly to the organisation of the political society. By this pragmatic approach which is an extension of the convenient choices agents would make while under the ‘veil of ignorance’. (Rawls, 1999, p. 134). Rawls maintains a neutral stance regarding moral values; and instead opts for a scheme wherein political agents act to preserve societal harmony not inspired by the demands for virtuous living but for the sake of each individual agent's convenient and continuous survival in a pluralistic society. Tolerance would therefore be a virtue for practical survival in the pluralistic polis which ensures that salutary values such as justice and societal harmony are continuously preserved. While Rawls appreciates tolerance as a positive value for practical living, he nevertheless set the limit to the practice of this virtue by insisting that there must be a ‘more stringent condition...some considerable risks to our legitimate interests’ which would necessitate that the freedom of an intolerant sect should be restricted (Rawls, 1999, p. 192). Such ‘legitimate interests’ to which Rawls refers would border on security and the liberty of social institutions.

Jürgen Habermas also maintaining a similar position as Rawls worked out a system which seeks to support tolerance as a principle for the ordering of the society by insisting that tolerance in the public space is the product of *deliberation*—a certain negotiation in which citizens engage each other for the sole purpose of assuring each agent's wellbeing. This approach does not argue for tolerance in public as an intrinsic moral value nor as a duty

merely commanded by the state; but rather as a form of *modus vivendi* that individuals arrive at in view of the proximate and practical need to survive. Habermas is thus of the view that tolerance is 'a pragmatic policy' by which divergent culture identifiers or differences such as religious belief, are able to coexist in the context of pluralism charged with multiculturalism and the continuous quest for equality (Habermas, 2003, p. 1).

As tolerance in Habermas' thoughts is not open-ended, its dimensions and limits are determined according to Lasse Thomassen "through the rational self-legislation of the citizens, the political community engages in a process of critical self-reflection where the 'self'—the subject of the democratic community—is dispersed in intersubjective relations of deliberation" (Thomassen, 2006, p. 448). Habermas' notion of deliberative public discourse throws open challenges with regards to determining who the participating agents in a deliberative discourse on determining the scope of tolerance would be; as there is a tendency for a great disagreement between parties over the conditions of allowing tolerance. This challenge cannot be dismissed in the course of a deliberative discourse by merely having some 'specialist' predetermine the terms and conditions for tolerance. Adopting such means would amount to tacitly allowing for paternalism—an orientation which in itself is antithetical to the equality of agents which is supposed to be the overarching goal of tolerance (Thomassen, 2006, p. 448).

Andrew Fiala has stated that such pragmatic approaches drawn from political liberalism is typically caught up between pluralism and relativism in the bid to avoid metaphysical dogmatism and or political imperialism that are typical of comprehensive doctrines in pluralistic societies. The state in the context of such diversity would better perform its duties by not having to decide what moral, doctrinal or cultural attitude is appropriate for every agent in a pluralized society (Fiala 2020). The very idea of a state maintaining a neutral position in the context of polarising debates bordering on ideologies and identities is akin to a state losing its voice and potency. For, what or where then is the state if it loses its coercive powers and is thus unable to fulfil its role as the protector of life and property?

To the question concerning the possibility of a limit to the practice of the virtue of tolerance, Karl Popper proffers an answer in the affirmative in 'the paradox of tolerance' which appears as a footnote in his work *The Open Society and its Enemies*:

Less well known is the *paradox of tolerance*: Unlimited tolerance must lead to the disappearance of tolerance. If we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them.—In this formulation, I do not imply, for instance, that we should always suppress the utterance of intolerant philosophies; as long as we can counter them by rational argument and keep them in check by public opinion, suppression would certainly be unwise. But we should claim the right to suppress them if necessary even by force; for it may easily turn out that they are not prepared to meet us on the level of rational argument, but begin by denouncing all argument; they may forbid their followers to listen to rational argument, because it is deceptive, and teach them to answer arguments by the use of their fists or pistols. We should therefore claim, in the name of tolerance, the right not to tolerate the intolerant. (Popper, 1966, pp. 543–544)

It is important to note the very background against which Popper advances this distinctive paradox. Popper's idea about tolerance is presented in the context of his reflections on the

totalitarian orientation that is characteristic of Plato's political thoughts regarding Philosopher-Kings taking charge of the organisation of the polity. Having negated the purported importance of Plato's focus on the question of 'who should rule' the *polis*, Popper rather suggested that focus should rather be on answering the question on how the *polis*, often typically characterised by pluralism can be organised so that 'bad or incompetent rulers are prevented from doing so much damage'. The shift in focus is premised on Popper's consideration that it is more reasonable to advance human interest in a liberal democracy by developing viable institutions to which rulers who themselves may be susceptible to vice can be held accountable as any other citizen (Popper, 1966, pp. 125–126).

In restating the central political question to read 'who should rule?', Popper avoids the plights which a pragmatic approach which has great tendencies for relativism might generate. The question of how the polis ought to be organised is a question bordering on the requisite values necessary for the ordering of the society.

The paradox of tolerance as cited above was Popper's attempt at depicting and responding to some of the challenges of the liberal democratic polity in terms of the absurdities that this form of governing the society generates. Related to the paradox of tolerance is the paradox of freedom—'the argument that freedom in the sense of absence of any restraining control must lead to very great restraint, since it makes the bully free to enslave the meek'. Both are (undesirable) inconsistencies which the ideal of liberal democracy often bring about.

The paradox of tolerance as explicated by Popper presents a 'process approach' to pluralism in public affairs; especially when issues have to do with reacting to the actions of intolerant subjects or agents who advance their positions by the use of violence. Hence, emphasis is laid first on the deployment of rational arguments as a means of maintaining dialogue with dissenting subjects. Such first process assumes that subjects at the other spectrum are open to dialogue as a means of settling differences. But as it does often occur in reality that dissenting subjects or identity group may become suspicious of rational arguments and may rather prefer to proceed by deploying their 'fists and pistols' as a means to promote and proliferate contentious positions, the imperative to dialogue at such moments reaches a *cul-de-sac*. At such impasse, Popper finds it appropriate that a right to suppress the intolerant (even if the use of force is required) subsists. It is important to state here that the right to suppress even with the use of force is at the service of tolerance; hence, Popper's expression that 'if we extend unlimited tolerance even to those who are intolerant, if we are not prepared to defend a tolerant society against the onslaught of the intolerant, then the tolerant will be destroyed, and tolerance with them'. (Popper, 1966, p. 543).

In more recent times, Balayan has responded in the fashion of Karl Popper to the question bordering on whether tolerance requires 'tolerating the intolerant'. Balayan in response notes *inter alia* that 'there obviously are actions such that it is morally justified to use force for eliminating or punishing, in other words there are rightfully punishable actions'. Appropriate illustration is drawn in that connection from the 'conditional' necessity of forcefully ending human enslavement. Other instances where tolerance includes punishment by means of force would be instances of child torture, unjustified violence, limitation of liberty, etc. (Balayan, 2014, p. 348). Non-tolerance, the refusal to bear the excesses of intolerant persons or identity is thus the typical and appropriate moral response to immoral acts which constitute affronts to human lives and dignity in the persons of other agents in an inter-subjective public space.

The right and practice of limiting the practice of the virtue of tolerance, that is, the denial of tolerance to the intolerant can be invariably said to be an exercise in virtue itself; albeit in the form of a ‘negative’ duty based on an evaluation of the harm that the intolerant non-state agent (individual or identity groups) causes to other agents and to the *polis* at large. The non-tolerance of the intolerant is here recognised as a service to the cause of the virtue of tolerance based on a reasoned, non-arbitrary approach to weighing outcomes of human acts in view of promoting the well-being of each and all.

5 THE PARADOX IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN CONTEXT

Karl Popper's paradox of tolerance comes alive in the history of Nigeria. More specifically, the paradox speaks in quite exact terms to the peculiarities of contemporary Nigerian socio-political space; especially with regards to the trends of ongoing violent identity politics proliferated across the nation.

The history of Nigeria spanning the period before and after national independence is replete with various instances of violent identity struggles organised for the most part to fit the structures of politics—the quest for the hegemony of political power, economic interests—agitations for distribution and redistribution of economic resources, and religion—plural comprehensive doctrines advanced by religious groups regarding matters of faith and the unorthodox tendency by which persons or groups seek to proselytise or impose particular religious beliefs on an otherwise heterogeneous people. It is important to note that the tripod made up of political, economic and religious interests upon which identity politics in Nigeria are often grounded is further sustained by the fact of cultural heterogeneity or what can be referred to as the multicultural form of the Nigeria nation. Hence, the equivocations that come because of plural cultural groups existing within a space as a product of colonial amalgamation never ceases to increase the tempo of negative identity politics in Nigeria.

Particular instances of negative identity politics that have culminated in watershed moments in the history of Nigeria includes the post-independence 1966 massacre which took place in northern Nigeria and its attendant reprisal violent attacks in the then eastern Nigeria, the Nigerian civil war which spanned 1967–1970, the *Maitatsine* uprising which happened in the 1980s, the Kano riot of 1982, the incessant violence in Kafanchan and Zangon-Kataf in 1987 and 1992, respectively, the Ogoni struggle against the military junta, among others (Adesoji, 2011; Ibrahim, 1989; Kukah, 2011; Suberu, 2003).

From the few but prominent instances of struggle cited here, we find the notation by Osaghae and Suberu that ‘Nigeria presents a complex of individual as well as crisscrossing and recursive identities of which the ethnic, religious, regional and sub-ethnic (communal) are the most salient and the main bases for violent conflicts the country’ to be an apt description of the shape of violent identity politics in Nigeria (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005, p. 7).

In recent times, the brand of violent identity politics propagated by agents domiciled in northern Nigeria, such as *Boko Haram* (and other sister groups with similar interest/orientation) and herders has become a major cause of social disintegration in the Nigerian polity. While *Boko Haram* agitates albeit using violent means for the institution of Islamic theocracy and the banishment of the appurtenances of western education or civilization in Nigeria, the herders who rear cattle in the nomadic style on the other hand have incessantly struggled with farmers across Nigeria over a putative right (claimed by herders) to have their animals graze freely on farmlands owned by local farmers. Violent tension and

massacre by both parties often result from the wanton destruction of various farmlands and farm produce by the activities of these herders.

It is argued here that insofar as the theocratic interests of *Boko Haram* for the entire Nigerian entity and the putative rights which herders claim against farmers across Nigeria are not ordinarily justifiable under the constitution of Nigeria, the violent activities of both groups are several instances of radical intolerance. This charge of radical intolerance is further supported by the fact that while arrangements have often been made at deploying dialogue as a means of resolving the impasse between these identity groups and the nation at large, these identity groups are to use Popper's words, 'rather not prepared to meet the nation on the level of rational argument' (Popper, 1966, p. 544). Hence, they deplore rational arguments while they maintain a preference to respond to arguments by the use of fists and pistols.

Intolerant actions proliferated in the public space by both groups who either intend to impose their religious orientation on a rather pluralistic nation or by those who must forcefully drive their animals through farmlands owned by local farmers are vices to which the Nigerian state as the entity bearing certain rights and duties on behalf of the people should respond appropriately.

Following in the thoughts of Popper on this weighty concern that radical intolerance is, the active nature of the virtue of tolerance requires that at the exhaustion of rational dialogue and the continued perfidy of violent, radically intolerant groups, the Nigerian state has the duty to deploy the state's instruments coercive powers as appropriate. In such instances, the exercise of coercive powers which must be appropriate and proportional aims always at ensuring the protection of the liberties of the people. Indeed, while liberal democracy celebrates a variety of freedoms that people have to live and be, the duty of the state to protect this liberty always extends to ensuring that the dimensions of overlapping consensus on comprehensive doctrines bordering on religion and morality are secured beyond the reach of extremist views that are forceful enough to break social cohesion. It is important therefore that radical intolerance must be suppressed by the state. The state's exercise of its coercive faculty in a liberal democracy must always be hinged on the rule of law. This necessitates that such coercion could be effected either as proximate, pre-emptive measures in the form of the use of modern technology for intelligence gathering and surveillance. This approach can help to forestall actual perpetration of terror acts in proactive ways, thus keeping with a proportional use of coercive powers while at the same time, ensuring the protection of lives and properties. Other approaches to the state exercise of coercive powers in counter-terror contexts would include suitable interdiction of hate or incendiary rhetoric and violent aggressions, lawful arrests of erring agents, court prosecutions and the timely dispensation of reasonable judicial rulings as appropriate.

To be sure, value pluralism can be well considered as quite resourceful for multicultural and pluralistic liberal democracy. The all-important role of dialogue in such pluralistic societies can also not be underestimated especially as it gives room for a free exchange of views and perspectives to life, albeit these views and perspectives disagreeing with each other. Nevertheless, it is important to consider that dialogue in the pluralistic public space should not be without its rubrics. The line must always be drawn at the point where identity group deploys fists and pistols as instruments of social engagement. At such points, there cannot be dialogue ad infinitum; as a party in what is supposed to be a civil engagement has taken on the gauntlet in view of negotiating some pyrrhic victory in discourse. As such, while it seems that the idea of the Nigerian state suppressing agents and their views would ordinarily seem

incongruous with the idea of tolerance enumerated as a virtue for pluralistic relations in multicultural society, it is important to note that such due suppressive acts simply illustrate 'the paradox of tolerance' again; where this paradox consists in the delineation of specific limits to the exercise of the virtue of tolerance in the context of curbing the excesses of agents in the polity who insist by overreaching approaches threaten physical and overall wellbeing of the society at large.

In this vein, we refer here to the due suppression of violent identity politics by the state as 'moderate intolerance'. To speak of moderate intolerance as a virtue in this context is to maintain that the intolerance deployed by the state to curb the excesses of radically intolerant identity group violently engaging other citizens and the nation at large serves the purpose of preserving the actual end of virtues which is common human flourishing. Moderate intolerance as an expression of virtue is named as such because it becomes necessary only at the exhaustion of opportunities for rational dialogue and the calming possibilities that such dialogues can offer. It is reactive and preventive when it is obvious that radically intolerant groups such as *Boko Haram* deploy violent means, thus causing the destruction of lives, properties and further fracturing of societal cohesion. Just as courage can be said to be a virtue found in between the two vicious extremes of foolhardiness and cowardice, so also is moderate intolerance exercised by the state is here understood as functioning as an active expression of virtue locatable in between violent, radical intolerance and pacifism in the face of wanton destruction of the *polis*.

Taciturn states' non-responsiveness, characterised by a decision not to intervene in ethno-religious dissents or choosing to intervene only when it serves some vague convenience is quite typical of a neglecting approach to sensitive matters of state. Neglect from the states' quarter runs counter to the ultimate mandate of the nation-state, in terms of seeking the highest good of the citizenry (protection, safety and survival). Such benign neglect approach enhances the perpetuation of intolerance that ought to be negated by the non-tolerant exercise of the state's invincible use of force. In the Nigerian context, the *Odi* saga of the Niger Delta in 1999, following the 'supposed' intention of the state to nip in the bud the impending threat to the nation's militia surveillance over oil-resources agitation (Aghalino, 2009) aptly conveys an instance of active exercise of state's coercive force; albeit the criticism that has come on account of such usage of state coercion.

Apparently, endorsing the strategic use of force only becomes imperative after un-successive initiations of rational dialogue with dissenting groups. Otherwise, this culminates in issues of injustice, consequent upon the undue use of state power/force for territorial subjugation and human rights' violation of freedom as well as the silencing of right to demand for lingering reparation of environmental and socio-economic degradation as in the Niger Delta. The tendency not to pay sensitive attention to the complications surrounding due and undue state exercise of force amounts to ambivalent tension that may emerge between intolerance and non-tolerance. This is to speak of the ambiguities that may arise from misdirected exercise of state's coercion as a check of perceived intolerance; especially when it is an exercise that is subjected mainly to the state's interest rather than the ultimate mandate of citizenry happiness or good.

In other words, state coercion needs to be considerably deployed without any element of state tyranny, toward the end of subduing intolerant identities, etched by violence. In this direction, the state becomes properly recognised as functional and responsive when it is able to exercise its duties as the entity which holds the totality of coercive powers on behalf of citizens. The

state as the institution bearing *de jure* and exclusive monopoly of the use of force should act in the context of banishing intolerant act defensively on behalf of the citizenry. The deployment of force in the attempt to quell negative identity politics characterised by violence presupposes the exhaustion of other placid means of facilitating interventions.

The use of force by the state is *ipso facto* justified against any movement preaching intolerance. It places such movement outside the law as an incitement of intolerance, hence criminal in its various manifested modes (kidnapping, murder, genocide, ethno-religious clash, forceful possession of farmlands and so on) as it takes shape in the Nigerian polity and socio-political space.

Further allusion to Brian Barry's conception of the good life proffers corroborative hint on the essential significance of the state's repel of intolerance, even in terms of indiscriminate expression of autonomous self-determination that amount to undue threat of national cohesion. Barry's stance (Barry, 1973, 1991) is a derivative criticism of J.S Mill's conception of good life as contained in 'On Liberty' as well as John Rawls' notion of social justice. Basically, Barry raises critical caution about the unchecked nature of an individual or group's conception of good life as the expression of autonomy in whatever possible way, which may implicate an override of the expression of others' (beyond the individual or group) conception of good life. Barry suggests that a veritable way to mitigate the possibility of such override that could spur clash of conceptions or identities is to make room for an overlapping conception of good life. In plain terms, good life implies a sort of inclusive and balanced polity, which is accommodating enough for individual aspirations or identities to coexist. This means that individual or group's notion of good life should be advanced in such a way that it is tolerably considerate about the viable extent of others' conception of good life. Again, the expediency of rational deliberation among all subjects of dissent or interest within a polity as hinted previously is reinforced by the inevitable reality of the overlapping conception of good life.

This sort of preceding outlook foregrounds the idea of inquiring into the applicable limit of tolerance of the expression of good life as the notion of good life, as impressed by Barry, involves the expression of autonomy or liberty. In other words, in Barry's opinion, freedom to express good life can hardly be granted as indiscriminately unrestrained. In this connection, Barry devolves the obligation to reinforce the conception/expression of good life to a tolerable limit of co-existence among subjects to the state, especially in matters of justice. This needs to be so in order to mitigate the challenge of inequality, indulgence or preferential treatment of a group or sect over those at the margins (politically, economically or ethnically). Such strategy suggested by Barry within the Nigerian parlance would translate to the expedient pursuit of fostering 'justice as impartiality,' to use the coinage of Barry (1995), which is derived from his contestation of Rawls' standpoint about 'justice as mutual advantage' (Barry, 2001, 2005).

The virtue of impartiality of justice hence becomes an intrinsic nature of state-enhanced tolerance for ensuring the appropriation of resource allocation to concerned quarters, subject to equitable environmental consideration as in the instance of the Niger Delta oil creek areas. This also extends to the actualization of political inclusion or nationalistic determination above self-determination that would obliterate the frequent clamour and grievances for political representation in core governmental positions, advanced by the Biafra-IPOB fronts in South East Nigeria. Gradual waning of ethno-religious identities that often lead to violent conflict (common in North Eastern to South Western Nigeria) which renders the realisation

of nationhood in Nigeria questionable would also be optimistically achieved through such impartiality of justice.

In all, achieving a mitigation of violent identity politics via what has been described as moderate intolerance at the service of virtue might rely heavily on a re-evaluation of the security architecture of Nigeria as a nation. This is very important in the context of counter-terrorism and the need to curb violent identity politics at various levels. More specifically, a federal structure of governance in which coercive power of state and the control of it are fully centralised may prove ineffective; especially as social security, intelligence gathering and action against possible harm is more easily accomplished at the proximate levels of societal organisation. The point here is to say that there should be further allowance for collaborative subsidiarity (between the Federal government and state governments) regarding the organisation of national security structures in view of promoting a more inclusive approach to safeguarding societal well-being.

6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

What we have done in this paper is to contextualise Karl Popper's 'paradox of tolerance' within the context of virtues in politics; with contemporary Nigerian political terrain often charged with tense and violent identity politics as a specific case in sight. The first part of this paper therefore was the presentation of preliminary clarifications concerning the general nature of virtues and their relevance in the life of the *zoon politikon*. There it was noted that the common good of the human person is the grounding force for the exercise of virtues in the political space. The second part of the paper saw to the establishment of the importance of tolerance as a virtue relevant for relations between state and non-state agents within specific political spaces. The paradox that is constitutive of tolerance in plural, democratic states where human interests vary as such was presented in the next segment; with the harm principle functioning as a means of determining when tolerance may be abridged or moderated. Indeed, such moderation of tolerance is always a necessary, albeit a 'negative' expression of the virtue of tolerance itself. The paradox of tolerance is specifically placed in the Nigerian political arena in the final part of this work where the duty of the state to act to defend the freedom of the nation against the extreme and unfettered expressions of freedom by groups who decline dialogue in favour of violence.

In deploying, Karl Popper's 'paradox of tolerance' within the context of interrogating multifaceted violent identity politics propagated by agents from contemporary northern Nigeria and extending down south, this paper also finds the ideas of Brian Barry instructive for the purpose of arguing that the virtue of tolerance which is *active* in itself, that is, requires that subjects within the Nigerian polity engage each other in rationally-driven discourse on issues of dissent does not presume long-suffering or passive endurance of violence propagated by a side of the dissenting divide. It is thus pertinent that an appropriate intervention by the Nigerian state delineating the limits of tolerance in the face of perennial intolerance and the proliferation of violent identity politics is inevitable. The state's non-tolerance of violent agents which may often require the use of force against such violent agents is always a service inspired by rational reflections which necessitate that violence must be quelled by other means when dialogue hits a rock. This approach certainly takes on a consequentialist-utilitarian ethic which aims to increase happiness for the greater number of people by suppressing recalcitrant voices and agencies.

Indeed, the paradox of tolerance itself as applied in this work subsists with the original and prima facie understanding of virtue as a constant disposition to behave in a consistent and positive way that position the relationship between oneself and the other in safe haven from harms' way. Within a nation-state, it translates that mitigating intolerance is absorbed in restraining the tendency of indulgence that could yield harms or privation of common good that traverse the plurality of socio-political interest of many ethnic and religious sects. In cases where such is not guaranteed, the exercise of state (*de jure*) force/coercion should be engendered rather than tacit 'conspiracy' of inactive state force and pacifist strategies of inconsiderate policies that does not mitigate the perpetuation of violent intolerance that claims several lives, property, and lead to incessant internal displacement, as implied in the context of Nigeria.

Hence, the study considers Popper's paradox of tolerance and Barry's conception of the good life nurtured by an understanding that freedom must be circumscribed within some form of restraint as viable readings into the means of delineating the limit of the exercise of virtue specifically in the context of Nigerian democracy in such a way as to revitalise the Aristotelian vision of always ensuring to reach for the mean, a situation where no one is left worse off either in the person of the tolerator or the tolerated.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

For this work, the authors declare no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Availability of data	Template for data availability statement
Data openly available in a public repository that issues datasets with DOIs	<p>The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in [repository name e.g "figshare"] at http://doi.org/[doi], reference number [reference number].</p> <p>Jstor at doi:10.2979/africatoday.57.4.99</p> <p>Taylor and Francis Online at doi:10.1080/0972639X.2009.11886595</p> <p>Springer Link at doi:10.1023/A:1012217012310</p> <p>Oxford Academic at doi:10.1093/icon/1.1.2</p> <p>ScienceOpen.com at doi:10.1080/03056248908703826</p> <p>Sage Journals at doi:10.1177/0090591706288234</p> <p>Springer Link at https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-40796-8_11</p>
Data openly available in a public repository that does not issue DOIs	The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in [repository name] at [URL], reference number [reference number].

	Academia.edu at https://www.academia.edu/11623971/Moral_Grounds_and_Limits_of_Tolerance
Data derived from public domain resources	The data that support the findings of this study are available in [repository name] at [URL/DOI], reference number [reference number]. These data were derived from the following resources available in the public domain: <i>Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy</i> at https://iep.utm.edu/tolerati/ Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity at https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/57a08c9840f0b652dd00141e/wp6.pdf

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