

## STEREOTYPED-SOCIALIZATION AND INTER-GROUP RELATIONS: A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE

**Richard Mutura Bariu**

*School of Education & Social Sciences  
Karatina University  
Karatina, Kenya*

### **ABSTRACT**

*In this paper we present evidence from scripture using insights from social psychological models that will help examine the link between socialization, stereotyping and inter-ethnic group relations. We argue that each community is socialized in ways that strengthen social identification among its members. We further argue that ethnicity is socially constructed with boundaries that are permeable and in continuous flux. Group socializations even from extant past are oriented on the basis of 'Us' and 'Them'. Stories, riddles, parables and proverbs are told so as to transform the social world of the members to reflect their values, norms and beliefs. By doing this they create a shared collective memory. The 'Us' and 'They' socialization is therefore part of biblical orientation among communities and has definitively defined the inter-group relations. We will look at the role of stereotypes in shared memories of other groups. We posit that each group has a way of defining itself that is, more often than not, in relation to the other groups. We will look at inter-group orientations in the Old Testament during different historical periods in general and in particular, we will look at some of the food laws in the Old Testament as a way of rethinking their function in inter-group relations. We will also look at socialization and inter-group relations redefined in the New Testament teachings. In sum, we argue that the relations between ethnic groups are critically dependent on the socialization that shaped the social identities of each community and particularly on the meaning ascribed to the events in relationship to social identities. As a conclusion, we will briefly look at the role of socialization and stereotyping in defining our contemporary inter-ethnic group relations.*

*Key Words: Socialisation, stereotype(s) inter-ethnic group relations, 'us-them' otherness, social identities.*

### **Introduction**

Two extreme positions about ethnicity are found within the pages of the Christian Bible. Mark Brett remarks that these are well known. "First 'the

radicalized' marriage policies of Ezra/Nehemiah, and second, Paul's vision in Gal. 3.28-29 that within the social space defined by Jesus Christ 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, male or female, slave or free'; Christ has erased the categories of ethnic group, gender and class" (Brett 1996:11). Such extremes are as a result of socialization during those different periods in the bible. During the time of Ezra/ Nehemiah, inter-group relations were more defined by the competing nature of the ethnic group to take control over the other. Stories about the other ethnic group were often negative; suspicion was rife over the influence ethnic mixing would bring to the entire community. By the time Paul was writing to the Galatians, the social world had changed especially because of the teaching of Christ that united all communities under one deity and with both the Jews and the Gentiles experiencing similar manifestations of the Holy Spirit. The two extremes mark a trajectory of relations from the Old Testament to the New Testament.

Related to the two extremes is the debate in social scientific theory between 'primordialist' and an 'instrumentalist' approach to ethnicity associated with Clifford Geertz and Fredrick Barth respectively. These two approaches deal with 'nature vs. culture' as orientations that shape ones ethnicity (Brett 1996:12-13). Primordialism is the view that ethnicity is determined by nature and we can do nothing about it while instrumentalism, is the view that ethnicity depends on cultural orientations and can be mobilized. In this regard, Nehemiah's argument on marriage is primordial; though to some extent it is instrumental since he is mobilizing the Judeans on the way to act while Paul's argument is outrightly instrumentalist in approach, with the primordialism as a starting point. Nehemiah's categorization of Judeans and non-Judeans and Paul's Judeans (Gal. 2:13-15; 3:28) and the Hellenes (Gal. 2:3; 3:28) serve as the entry point to social scientific theory of ethnicity which we discuss within the field of social psychology and social anthropology, fronted by Tajfel, 1979; Cohen 1978; Eriksen 1993; Hutchinson and Smith 1996; Jenkins 1997.

Although these group relations are determined by several factors it is noteworthy that they are primarily dependent on context and shared borders. Ethnic borders are in continuous flux as people categorize themselves into 'us' and 'them'. This paper is assessing the impact of socialization and stereotypes on the nature of ethnic group relations in the bible. The main research question we are seeking to answer is: what would it take for an ethnic group(s) to establish a positively treasured



uniqueness from other ethnic groups that provide its members with a constructive social identity about self and others that lead to friendly inter-group relations?

In accomplishing this task, I analyze the basic socialization processes of group members evident in the Bible so as to find out the effect of socialization on inter-group relations. I will conclude by applying the findings to the real-life issue of ethnicity in the contemporary world. We have defined the term ethnicity, ethnic groups and social boundaries before establishing our theory.

## 1. Ethnicity

The term ethnicity is a broad concept best defined by singling out its core elements. Firstly, ethnicity is a social relationship of differentiating people into social groups of 'us' and 'them'. It involves the 'aspects of gain and loss in interaction and ...aspects of meaning in the creation of identity' (Eriksen, 2002:13). Ethnicity is therefore, viewed and practiced as cultural socializations that are past-oriented but held together by a belief in common ancestry propagated in social groups, herein called ethnic groups. Having said that, it should be noted that 'for ethnicity to come about the groups must have a minimum of contact with each other and they must entertain ideas of each other as being culturally different from themselves'. In other words, 'ethnicity is essentially an aspect of a relationship, not a property of a group' (Eriksen, 2002:12).

Therefore, in defining ethnicity, interethnic relationships are defined by the following salient elements: a myth of common ancestry, a common proper name, memories of a common past, a link with a homeland, a sense of group solidarity and elements of common culture which entails a common cult, customs and language (Hutchinson and Smith, 1996:25). These core elements help every group define its identity in a way different from those in the neighborhood despite of the similarities between them. Differences in these core elements are not necessarily negative. What these core elements emphasize is that although all ethnic groups have different socializations, they all share these elements whose contents are different. For instance, they all have different names for their deity/ (ies), though with a common denominator—a supreme being—God the creator.

Ethnicity, as Ronald Cohen, rightly puts is therefore 'a series of nesting dichotomizations of inclusiveness and exclusiveness.' It is the relational process of 'assigning persons to groups...carried out by self and others,'

(Cohen, 1978:387) so as to determine who is in and who is not. It is this aspect that makes ethnicity a 'social relationship between agents who consider themselves as culturally distinctive from members of other groups with whom they have a minimum of regular interaction' (Eriksen, 2002:12).

Common ancestral history for instance is only relevant in social relationships that are meant to include or exclude one from membership of a group. Common ancestry could sometimes be fictive, but it is passed on through cultural practices retold over centuries in order to effectively differentiate between groups of 'us' and 'them.' In a nutshell, 'members of an ethnic group define who they are by who they are not' (Greifenhagen, 2001:2). Therefore, neighboring ethnic groups 'share actual similarities with the group attempting to define itself ethnically' (Greifenhagen, 2001:2) and are critical in the differentiation process of 'us' and 'them'. For instance, 'the prime conditions for the construction of Israelite ethnicity would seem to occur at the time of the Assyrian, Neo-Babylonian, and Persian phases of imperial expansion in the Ancient Near East'(Greifenhagen, 2001:3) since they had inter-group relations, though, the relations were forced.

Different sociological and anthropological approaches have been used to explain the concept of ethnicity but '[a]ll of the approaches agree that ethnicity has something to do with the classification of people and group relationships'(Eriksen, 2002:4). Ethnicity is important to the extent that it enlightens peoples' actions and behavior. It is inculcated through social processes within each group until the group's 'ethnic identity becomes an imperative status, an ascribed aspect of their personhood from which they cannot escape entirely' (Eriksen, 2002:4). Basically ethnicity is about socialization that gives members an orientation on how to manage intra-and inter-group relations. We can therefore surmise that ethnicity 'refers to aspects of relationships between groups which consider themselves, and are regarded by others, as being culturally distinctive' (Eriksen, 2002:4). In this respect, it is worthwhile discussing briefly some key aspects of this socialization process.

Ethnic groups are social organizations that socialize their members on a collective memory. During the process of socialization, all members learn certain values that define them as different from other groups. It is for this reason, that all 'ethnic groups have myths of common origin and they nearly have ideologies encouraging endogamy' (Eriksen, 2002:13)



as socialization tools which help in the differentiation. Myths of a common origin give people a collective link to a homeland while ideological orientations encourage endogamy to protect the ethnic group members from mixing ethnically through marriage. Thus, each group is able to guard their ability to act collectively and group cohesion by socializing every individual in such a way that they derive their identity from the group. Language which is the embodiment of customs and other realities of the group is the medium through which ideals are inculcated.

Over time, social interactions solidify into actual social boundaries of which the group ascribes. These ascriptions of 'self' and 'others' are not static, they keep changing depending on the need of the moment. When categorizing 'others', differences in culture play a critical role, although such differences do not necessarily contribute to social unrest between groups.

Successful categorization of people sharing the same geographical location into 'us' and 'them' lead to the reality that all interactions become inter-group contacts. Such inter-group contacts can flare ethnic feelings depending on several factors. Competition over strained resources such as water and farmland or pastureland is one such factor that is sometimes accentuated by population growth. Political change and natural calamities are other factors that could force a group or part of the group to migrate to new territories. An example in the Bible is when the Israelites moved to Egypt in search of food and pasture. They settled in their land and over the years they increased in number and the Egyptians felt threatened by their numbers, a factor that changed their inter-group relations.

## 2. Social Identity Theory

Social identity theorists have argued that (1) individuals define themselves, in part, based on their membership in various groups (e.g., their work group, their organization, their occupation or profession) (Tajfel and Turner, 1985; Mael and Ashforth, 1988; Ashforth and Mael, 1989; Kramer, 1991), and (2) not all group memberships contribute equally to one's definition of oneself (Stryker and Serpe, 1982; Breakwell, 1986; Kramer, 1991).

Accordingly, an ethnic group serves as an identity-defining social group.

As defined by Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail (1994: 242 addressing

organizations), identification refers to a cognitive linking between the definition of the ethnic group and the definition of self. Two conditions are necessary for ethnic group identification to occur: (a) the individual must perceive their ethnic identity to be salient, and (b) the individual must self-categorize him or herself in terms of his or her ethnic group identity (Pratt 1998: 194). Relatedly, Tyler and Blader (2000:15) referred to group identification as the 'merger of self and group'.

Thus, a member's level of ethnic group identification indicates the degree to which his or her membership in an ethnic group is tied to the content of his or her self-concept. We consider ethnic group identification to be strong when members consider worthy the central, distinctive, and enduring (Albert and Whetten, 1985) values and goals of their ethnic group and incorporate these into their sense of self.

The values and goals concretized by the nature of socializations that members go through shape their perceptions of their ethnic group and their beliefs about how outsiders view them. The strength of the individual's identification with the ethnic group to a large extent depends on how well they stereotype the other group in which they are continuous contact. In this regard, intergroup relations are determined by those basic orientations in socialization. Thus, identification with an ethnic group helps individuals answer the question, "What do I stand for?" Inevitably, this is done in contrast not with the members of the same ethnic group, but with those of a neighboring ethnic group-solidifying their sense of 'Us' and 'They' on the conception of reality.

The basic orientations which are done by all community members, brings about a collective perception about the individual, and the ethnic group to which they belong. Perceived ethnic group identity is an individual-level construct and refers to the identity of the ethnic group as understood by each of its members. This perceived ethnic group identity is attractive to an individual when it satisfies three principles of self-definition: self-continuity, self-distinctiveness, and self-enhancement (Tajfel and Turner, 1985; Steele, 1988; Shamir, 1991; Dutton, Dukerich, and Harquail, 1994). Thus, a perceived ethnic group identity helps the individual maintain a consistent sense of self, distinct from others, while enhancing self-esteem, which is viewed as attractive. The attractiveness of this image, then, leads to stronger ethnic group identification.

Individuals attach importance to the status of the groups with which they



are associated. Status is conferred on a group by others, though interpretations of status are made by individuals (Tajfel and Turner, 1979; Tyler and Blader, 2000). A construed external image is inherently positive or negative since it assumes meaning ascribed by the for an ethnic group member to the extent that it corresponds with the individual's self definition. If, for example, ethnic group members perceive the ethnic group's external image as environmentally conscious, this image would likely be viewed as attractive by an ethnic group member—hence she/he would be environmentally conscious (Dukerich, Golden, and Shortell, 2002:510).

### 3. Socialization and the conception of reality

Socialization is the process whereby an individual's standards, skills, motives, attitudes, and behaviors change to conform to those regarded as desirable and appropriate for his or her present and future role in any particular society (Parke, Ross D. and Buriel, Raymond, 1988: *Abstract*). In this regard, many agents and agencies play a role in the socialization process. For instance, the family, the clan and the society in general play distinct yet interrelated and complementary roles in the socialization process. They all singularly and corporately establish the 'social system in which the full range of subsystems including parent-child, marital, and sibling systems are recognized' (Parke and Buriel 1988).

Socialization takes place through the use of the language, though it is not limited to spoken modes of language, and it also uses language because of the language's interdependence with social cultural structures and processes. Language in this regard cannot be limited to the role of integrating children into the society; it is the agent of socialization throughout the human lifespan across a range of social experiences and contexts. Furthermore, language is intimately linked to the concepts of social identity and social roles (Schieffelin and Ochs, 1986:163).

Social knowledge acquired in the play groups for children and social groups for adults assumes shared meanings to the extent possible in familial and ethnic group settings. Consequently, such knowledge formulates differential participation in intra-group and inter-group relations, inevitably with an 'us' and 'they' conception in socialization. In this regard, ethnicity is socially constructed with permeable boundaries that are in continuous flux to accommodate changing realities between the ethnic groups. We take seriously socialization processes that account for the 'cultural and ethnic variations in family traditions, beliefs, and

practices' (Parke and Buriel 1988) in our contemporary society.

Stereotypes are simplified conceptions and beliefs about other social groups, or types of individuals based on assumptions or generalizations. They are not based on objective truth; they are subjective categorizations meant to prejudice the others. From the example above, it is unlikely that all Cretans were always liars, always evil beasts and always lazy people who loved overeating. There may be a kernel of truth about the claims laid about them, but it is unnecessarily true that they were always those categories.

At least such a way of depicting of Cretans gives us a clue of how Titus' audience viewed them and we can infer the nature of their intergroup relations. Ethnic groups employ derogatory stereotypes to 'fulfill a clear social function in explaining and justifying actions' (Hogg and Abrams, 1988:65). The Israelites, for instance, drove the seven nations from the land of Canaan because they nursed a belief that land was illicitly occupied by the nations so they needed to get them out.

In times of social conflict, some ethnic groups use language to discriminate and ostracize those from other ethnic groups. A good example is the use of pronunciation differences and other generalizations as a way of differentiating people especially on who belong or did not belong. In the book of Judges 12, The Gileadites would differentiate themselves from the Ephraimites based on pronunciation of words with 'sh' such as Shibboleth. The Ephraimites had a problem pronouncing 'sh', they instead pronounced such words with 's' sound. During one of the conflicts between the two ethnic groups, the Gileadites waylaid Ephraimites who walked past the fords of Jordan and asked them to pronounce the word Shibboleth. This was done because people from the two communities had similar physical features that it was difficult to differentiate who belonged to which tribe. Those who were unable to pronounce the word shibboleth properly were killed. When stereotyping, 'there is a tendency to attach derogatory stereotypes to out-groups and favorable ones to ingroup' (Hogg and Abrams 1988:65). There is no material difference in the linguistic meaning of the word, whether pronounced as shibboleth or sibboleth.

In a pluralistic society comprising of diverse ethnic groups such as ours, all ethnic groups have languages and cultural practices that are different. Some languages however, have a higher degree of cultural and linguistic similarities. Languages with such similarities more often than not are



from ethnic groups that share the same geographical region. Others have cultural and linguistic characteristics that are strikingly different and in most cases such do not share a common boundary. Every ethnic group usually has a language, considered as a mother, through which members are socialized. Since ethnic groups have social boundaries, ethnic group relations are dynamic and vary from friendly to hostile.

#### 4. Socialization and inter-ethnic relations in the Old Testament era

Humans are created by God with an intention of living in harmony with each other. God commanded Adam and Eve to procreate and fill the earth (Gen. 1:28). To this end, God declared it a blessing for obedience and from Noah onwards a genealogical line is provided to point out how different groups were socialized around a common ancestral figure. Each ancestor occupied a geographical territory and people in his genealogical line constructed their social identity through him, and his territory as their homeland (Genesis 10).

Although the socialization provided in Genesis 10 started from Noah because the flood exterminated everyone else except Noah and his family, it is a fulfillment of the command given to Adam and Eve. Population explosion from Noah's time onwards spread and settled on the in different parts probably due to pressure on natural resources. Each group was socialized in clans, with its own land, language and finally formed their own nations/ethnic groups. Claim to a separate language, family/clan, territory and nation as part of primary socialization enhanced group belongingness.

The generations that stemmed from the three son of Noah were socialized not as one family/group with a common ancestor but as separate groups with a different language, territory and nation. The descendants of Japheth were coastland peoples and they 'spread in their lands, each with his own language, by their clans, in their nations' (Gen. 10:5). The descendants of Ham and generations in that lineage were also socialized 'by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations' (Gen. 10:20). In like manner, the descendants and generations stemming from Shem occupied the hill country to the east and were socialized 'by their clans, their languages, their lands, and their nations' (Gen. 10:31).

What the genealogies reveal is that socialization took place in groups which had their own language, clans, land/territory, and nation. Such

socialization shaped inter-group relations and helped define who an insider and outsider was. For instance, it was evident that those from the coastlands, though they initially had a common ancestor—Noah, they were different from those on the hill country on the east. In modern sociological and anthropological terms, any social group with a distinct language, a claim to common ancestry, a land or territory they claim as their homeland and organized in social units like clans is referred to as ethnic group.

The genealogy of Noah's family provides information on the future history and geographical distribution of peoples in the ancient Near East. Clues are given about the settlement of the coastal areas, northern Africa, Syria-Palestine and Mesopotamia. All of the major regions are thus represented, as well as most of the nations who will in some way interact with the Israelites, among them Egypt, Canaan, the Philistines, the Jebusites, Elam and Asshur.

Ancient peoples were more concerned with distinctions based on nationality, linguistics and ethnicity (Mathews, et al, 2000: s. Gen. 10:1). These distinctions became the key tenets on which the processes of socialization were based. Kinship language which reflects geopolitical affiliations rather than blood ties was used (1 Kings 9:13). In this regard, some of the names in the list appear to be the names of tribes or nations rather than of individuals. In Hammurabi's genealogy a number of the names are tribal or geographical names, so this would not be unusual in an ancient document (Mathews, et al 2000, S. Gen 10:29).

The Japhethites from Israelites perspective were defined as people who come from across the sea or maritime peoples (Gen. 10:2-4). Maritime people were categorized by the Israelites as 'considered on the outskirts of civilization beyond the sea (ibid). Categorizing the Japhethites and other ethnic groups that lived across the sea is indicative of the sort of the intergroup relations they enjoyed.

Another example is the Hamites. The Hamites refers to a wide group of people important economically to the Israelites. They enjoyed cordial trade relations and in some instances they became rival nations. Interestingly they are ethnically classified as Semitic peoples (Canaanites, Phoenicians and Amorites). Other groups that literally surrounded Israel are groups within Egyptian sphere ((Cush, Put, Mizraim and his descendants) and the Canaanite sphere (various peoples like the Jebusites and Hivites) (ibid: S. Gen. 10:6-20). During times of rivalry intergroup relations turned sour but in good times ethnic groups



trades with others in cordial relations.

The author of Genesis does not give us a clue of how their inter-group relations were, but this silence can be interpreted to mean that their inter-group relations were cordial and relevant in their different contexts. Ethnic diversity was a divine idea of socializing groups and promoting inter-group relations.

Socialization takes place through different processes that are 'involved in generating and maintaining ethnic groups' (Barth in Hutchinson and Smith, 1996:75). In this regard, when investigating biblical communities, it does not suffice to look at the internal constitution of ethnic groups, instead it is more profitable to look at the processes that create ethnic boundaries and maintain those boundaries. Reason being that ethnic groups are basically 'categories of ascription and identification by the actors themselves, and thus have the characteristics of organizing interaction between people' (Barth in Hutchinson and Smith, 1996:75). Some of the socialization tools are worth highlighting.

#### **4.1. Religious and social-cultural orientations**

Societies gave their children orientation to life through stories, riddles, proverbs and parables. These played a key social function of inculcating beliefs about God, self, others, and land. Such categories helped in the differentiation process of 'us' and 'them'. For instance, all Israelite children were instructed on what was a communal practice 'to love the Lord your God and serve him with all your heart and with all your soul' (Deuteronomy 11:13). Socialization on the aspect of deity was so specific that their reference to God was followed by a qualifying clause 'He is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob'. By so doing, the young ones could not confuse their God with the gods of the neighboring ethnic groups. Obedience was demanded especially on cardinal matters such as the commandments. The reason given was that by obeying God, he would be pleased and consequently send rains to their land in its season. He would also grant them good harvest of both grain and wine and even oil. God would also give grass to their livestock in abundance. This continued wellbeing of the people, the land and their livestock was dependent on keeping religious ideals.

Other ethnic groups worshiped other gods, whom Israelites were instructed not to believe or serve lest rain was withheld from heaven leading to drought and lack of food for both animals and people (Deut. 11:14-17). It was imperative to socialize their children to observe

religious norms since their collective observance or lack of it had a way of affecting the socio-economic fabric of the community as well as inter-group relations.

Therefore religious ideals are pivotal in shaping ethnic identity for all communities. Every ethnic group has stories about community deities whose worship is central in that particular group. Such supreme deity(ies) had actions intertwined with all the communal activities. The Israelites for instance, involved God in their social relations such as (1) inquiring of him whether or not to go to war. Importantly, God directives were definitive in all aspects of life, shaping what activities as a community they could engage in. (2) on who to marry and not was influenced by religious thought. It was considered inappropriate to marry women from other communities because this would come with religious beliefs not acceptable in the community. The story of Samson and Delilah's marriage is told as a warning of the tragedy that would befall the individual and indeed the whole community for not strictly adhering religious norms. The deities in every community play a social role of differentiating people into groups of 'us' and 'them'. One could not belong to the Israelite community if they believed a different God, other than Yahweh, the creator God. All the other gods were referred to as idols.

#### **4.2. Dietary, clean and unclean laws**

The Jewish people were very particular on what one was supposed to eat and not to eat. Although dietary laws are popularly regarded as intra-ethnic norms regulating what should be eaten, such legislation is comparative in the sense that it entails the 'they' in its very framing. The laws are boundary markers. In the actual sense it was a law guarding the ethnic identity of the people. These laws are primarily concerned about who would belong or not belong on the basis of the food they eat. Leviticus 11 and Deuteronomy 14:3-21 are such examples that illustrate this point.

Acts 15:20 dramatically demonstrates what was at stake on dietary laws. They were used to decide who can be included and who cannot. In this text, the Judeans would interact with the Gentiles if they abstained from food polluted by idols, from unchastity, from meat of strangled animals and from blood. These were the irreducible minimums for the Judeans to interact with any person from a different ethnic group—especially the Gentiles. Dietary, clean and unclean laws regulated social behavior by generating social boundaries and maintaining those boundaries. Although all the laws are given religious significance they directly affect the practice of the people and govern who can belong and who may not.

Paul picks up on these laws and addresses himself on the inter-group contact of Judeans and Gentiles. He redefines the laws so as to explain on who is inside and outside.

None of the laws forbids the Judeans from eating with the non-Judeans. It is the ethnic interpretation of these laws that bring the issue of 'us' verses 'them'. God's law did not prohibit ethnic mixing. It is the interpretation of this law that leads to the current prohibitions. Jewish interpretation of the Deuteronomic law gave credence to what was practiced then and even in early Judaism, and sadly in the contemporary world. God's law was meant to socialize everyone in their ethnic diversity encouraging inter-group relations. This principle is reiterated in Gal 3:28.

### 5. Changing inter-ethnic relations in early and late monarchy

During the time of Joshua's and the Judges, inter-group relations were very hostile. This was specifically so because the Israelites were socialized to believe that they needed to displace other ethnic groups from the land which they occupied, to make it their own. This kind of socialization of replacing other ethnic group informed the inter-group relations. A similar socialization is practiced among the Maasai community in Kenya who believe all cattle, owned by the neighboring ethnic groups belonged to them. This has led to constant cattle raids by the Maasai and other pastoral communities which share a similar socialization.

During Ezra-Nehemiah period, interethnic relations were so friendly that there was ethnic mixing in all neighboring communities. People from different ethnic groups had intermarried and traded goods even on the Sabbath day, a day Israelites were meant to rest. The neighboring groups influenced the Israelite group ideals, an instance of mobility of social ideals between communities and warmth of inter-group relations.

However, Nehemiah's leadership sought to reverse what was the practice among the groups. He reintroduced Israelites claim to maintaining a common culture, language, customs and religion. He therefore prohibited Israelites from marrying from other ethnic groups for it was not customary to do so since it was against their religious teachings and ideals. He however, does not abolish inter-ethnic trade relations save for the Sabbath day trading.<sup>1</sup>

Intermarriages between the Israelites and women of Ashdod, Ammon, and Moab brought the challenge of language. The foreign women married in Israel taught their children their own language, a socializing

<sup>1</sup>Nehemiah 10:28-31

that brought confusion among the Israelites because 'half of their children spoke the language of Ashdod, and they could not speak the language of Judah.'<sup>2</sup> Language as a major tool of socializing people on the ideals or community norms enhances cohesiveness and ability of an ethnic group to act collectively. In this respect then, the Jews in Nehemiah's time were so lax on communal ideals that other ethnic groups entrenched their ideals among the Jews by giving them their daughters, as wives.<sup>3</sup> This scenario in Ezra-Nehemiah attests to the fact that inter-group relations are not always hostile. The communities had an open border policy that allowed free interactions between members of the neighboring groups, leading to social exchanges like intermarriage. Ezra and Nehemiah in an attempt to re-socialize their ethnic group—the Jews, to prevent further ethnic mixing, they barred intermarriages and forced all the Israelite men who had married foreign women to chase them out of the community.<sup>4</sup>

So, inter ethnic group relations change when a dominant group foster social beliefs that weaken the 'cohesiveness and ability to act collectively' of the less dominant groups (Hogg and Abrams, 56).

Through the process of proselytization, the Israelites allowed members of other ethnic groups to become members of the Jewish community. This weakened the cohesiveness and ability to act collectively since the less dominant group or 'low-status' group such as the gentiles had their members migrating socially and becoming Jews, through the process of proselytization.

Another good example of weakening group cohesiveness and ability to act collectively was the conquests. Israel was conquered by the Assyrians and the Babylonians at different times, taking them to exile. During those times, they commanded the region as the dominant groups in military warfare. Taking the Israelites and making them slaves weakened Israelites cohesiveness as a group and further weakened their ability to act collectively because of the harsh punishments every individual was to fight for his/her own survival. In so doing, the Assyrians and the Babylonians strengthened their perceived legitimacy over other ethnic groups. This is a case of a group that social boundaries are not impermeable.

Israelites, under the leadership of Joshua conquered all tribes that occupied the Promised Land hence weakening their ability to act collectively. Although some would form alliances in order to fight a

<sup>2</sup>Nehemiah 13:24 ESV

<sup>3</sup>Nehemiah 13:23-27.

<sup>4</sup>See Ezra 9:1-15; 10: 1-16 and Nehemiah 13:23-30

common enemy, this wasn't very effective since, attacks were more of ambushes than organized and announced military strategy. The group relations between the Israelites and the proximate neighbors at the time of the Joshua were hostile and antagonistic.

In Old Testament times, the basic socialization unit was the family. Children were taught and instructed at the family. The next level of socialization was the ethnic group or the tribe through the clans and extended families. Concerted efforts transformed the social world of the child to the extent that they lived the ethnic values and goals.

## 6. Socialization and inter-group relations in the New Testament era

In contradistinction with Old Testament ethnic ideals, New Testament teaching downplayed ethnic group differences uniting all groups under new socialization of kingdom of God.

The Gospel was preached to all ethnic groups (at the time called nations) socializing them using scripture instead of a cultural script.<sup>5</sup> Jesus' teaching allowed inter-ethnic relations among Judeans and the Gentiles without entertaining what historically differentiated them.

This way of looking at other ethnic groups was crowned by the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost<sup>6</sup> where all people gathered from different languages, ideals and different socialization. This is to say that the New Testament people, as demonstrated in Acts 2, moved from their linguistic and cultural homogeneity to living with others, who had cultural and linguistic notions different from theirs as long as they held on the new ethos fostered by the gospel.

Resources like land, watering points and pastureland were sources of ethnic conflict in Old Testament. In the New Testament teaching people were to recognize that God placed people in the areas they live and expected them to share resources available. Paul and other apostles taught in public and private homes the same basic teaching in Genesis 1 that God 'made the whole world and everything in it'<sup>7</sup> but went further to add a new dimension that changed peoples view of living with others especially those from different ethnic group(s) as neighbors.

The author of the book of Acts explained how ethnic groups came about by tracing their origins, from one man, who procreated by obeying Gods command to fill the earth. Essentially, Luke rightly re-socializes all his hearers that other ethnic groups had a right to live the land they occupy since it is God who 'determined allotted periods and the boundaries of

<sup>5</sup> Mark 13:10 and Mathew 28:18-20

<sup>6</sup> Acts 2

<sup>7</sup> Acts 17:24

their dwelling place.<sup>8</sup> Through such explanation the issue land and who had a right of ownership was fixed in a way that fostered friendly living across shared boundaries.

Social interactions among ethnic groups and other social groups in the time of Paul were characterized by hostility and suspicion. It is for this reason that Paul wrote to his ethnic groups and social groups in Galatia that 'there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for all are one in Christ Jesus.'<sup>9</sup> On the same note, Paul explaining what Christ had done to the mutually intolerant Jews and Gentiles in Ephesus, declared that through Christ the 'dividing wall of hostility'<sup>10</sup> was broken down bringing peace and making all people 'one body through the cross, thereby killing the hostility'.<sup>11</sup> This is re-socialization that was meant to bring an end the perennial problem that existed between the Jews and the Gentiles. It is in achieving this coexistence, that Paul in Antioch sharply opposed Peter to his face, 'for before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles, but when they came he drew back and separated himself fearing the circumcision party.'<sup>12</sup> In this regard the gospel became the unifying factor.

To achieve a lasting mixing among ethnic groups, some of the dietary rules, earlier set in Leviticus 11 were revised to accommodate those from other ethnic groups. Commensality rules were amended maintaining what became the irreducible minimum for peaceful coexistence. The Gentiles and other ethnic groups were to 'abstain from the things polluted by idols, and from sexual immorality, and from what has been strangled, and from blood.'<sup>13</sup>

Alongside easing dietary laws, the barn on interethnic group marriage was indirectly lifted. Paul in his teaching to the Corinthians emphasized the centrality of faith in Christ as the central norm which would therefore allow any two to marry, irrespective of their ethnic group.<sup>14</sup> Thus, having faith in Jesus, became the communal norm, through which all peoples were socialized.

The culmination of this re-socialization for all people is foretold. People who have been re-socialized are looking forward to the time prophesied when 'a great multitude that no one could number, from every nation,

<sup>8</sup> Acts 17:26

<sup>9</sup> Galatians 3:28

<sup>10</sup> Ephesians 2:14

<sup>11</sup> Ephesians 2:16

<sup>12</sup> Galatians 2:11-14

<sup>13</sup> Acts 15:20

<sup>14</sup> 2 Corinthians 6:14—7:1

<sup>15</sup> Revelation 7:9-10

from all tribes and peoples and languages,' will stand before the throne and the Lamb, and cry aloud salvation and deliverance 'belongs to our God who sits on the throne and to the Lamb'.<sup>15</sup> All ethnic groups, in their diversity will gather and sing to their creator God in gratitude for what initially had become a point of separation has finally the point of integration and beauty.

In the New Testament Era the basic socializing agent are the home churches and the apostles with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit broke the barrier that existed between the ethnic groups when came on the Gentiles just as he came upon the Jews. Over time the people acknowledged that they have one Lord and one Baptism.

### Conclusion: Contemporary Application

The findings of this paper reveal that in the final end, God will not be expecting a monocultural and a monolingual group before his throne. Each ethnic group, every nation, all peoples and tongues are expected to gather before the lamb and express themselves.

God's ultimate idea is to socialize people in groups with a particular ancestry, a common proper name and with a sense of solidarity in shaping communal ideals that are in line with God's ultimate agenda for human-coexistence within their predetermined geographical territories nested with common borders. Every language was God created, and it was meant to socialize a certain group of people, and will be important before God in the final end.

Therefore ethnic diversity is not a curse but a blessing. Ethnic borders were intended to be peaceful even when resources such as land, watering points and pastureland are shared among neighboring communities.

In Africa for example, inter-group relations and by extension, ethnicity has continued to receive bad press. This has been precipitated by reported hostile ethnic group relations. The Rwanda genocide in 1994, the Rift Valley clashes in Kenya in 1992 the Mount Elgon clashes in early 2007 and post election violence of 2007 have characterized the media report on ethnic relations. These relations have come to define ethnicity to the extent that whenever it is mentioned, it is in terms of distrust, clashes, genocide, hatred and intolerance between neighboring ethnic groups.

However, inter-group relations are not always hostile. In our contemporary world, media houses have only given coverage to hostile inter-ethnic relations. The friendly inter-ethnic relations have been ignored, yet a majority of ethnic groups around the world have positive inter-group relations.



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