A SOCIAL CATEGORISATION STUDY OF ELNATHAN JOHN'S *BORN ON A TUESDAY*

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Abstract
This paper explores the themes of violence and rebellion in Northern Nigerian fiction, focusing on Elnathan John's Born on a Tuesday. It addresses a significant gap in scholarship, as most studies on Northern Nigeria focus predominantly on fundamentalism and terrorism, without fully examining the underlying causes of these issues. Using Social Categorisation theory, as developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, this study investigates how identity-based divisions contribute to societal violence. Social categorisation, both in society and literature, accounts for how individuals classify themselves and others into social groups, often leading to an "in-group" versus "out-group" mentality that fuels conflict. This research provides a fresh perspective on Northern Nigeria conflict by emphasising the importance of political influences, which are frequently overlooked in discussions of Boko Haram insurgency, religious intolerance, and neighbourhood violence. The study also challenges the redundancy in the exploration of John's text by offering a unique political analysis of the themes of violence and rebellion. It, ultimately, presents that John's proposed solutions advocate for unity by rejecting divisive social categories, in order to secure peace and stability in Northern Nigeria.

Keywords: Nigerian Literature; Northern Literature; Rebellion; Social Categorisation; Violence

Introduction

This paper examines the representation of violence and rebellion in Northern Nigerian fiction, focusing on how *Born on a Tuesday* by Elnathan John depicts the region's ethnic and religious conflicts. Violence is a global and multifaceted phenomenon that manifests in various forms—ranging from physical aggression to psychological harm, and from localized unrest to large-scale conflict. Adegbami and Adeoye describe violence as a ubiquitous issue affecting nearly every part of the world, whether through internal or external expressions (4; Welz 215). Anifowose argues that violence functions as a conduit for expressing anger (15), while Tettey-Tamaklo emphasizes that violence often carries the underlying force of protest or resistance (17). This links directly to the concept of rebellion, which Sanusi and Ogundokun describe as one of the principal tools used by oppressed groups to demand their rights (129). In essence, violence and rebellion are deeply interconnected; the former is often the expression of the latter, with both capable of being either constructive or destructive in nature (Tettey-Tamaklo),

To further analyze these dynamics, this study applies Social Categorization Theory, which explores how individuals classify themselves and others into social groups based on characteristics like ethnicity, religion, or political ideology. This psychological process shapes identity and group behavior, often resulting in in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination. In conflict-prone regions like Northern Nigeria, these rigid social categories can escalate tensions and justify violence against the "other."

In Born on a Tuesday, Elnathan John explores these themes by portraying the complexities of identity, power, and marginalization. Through the protagonist's experiences, John illustrates how group identities—shaped by religion, ethnicity, and political affiliation—fuel conflict and alienation. However, the novel also presents moments of introspection and reconciliation, where the author advocates for unity and the rejection of divisive social labels.

Ultimately, this paper seeks to demonstrate how literature not only reflects the socio-political realities of Northern Nigeria but also proposes pathways for peace and coexistence. By interrogating the roles of violence, rebellion, and social categorization, the study highlights how fiction can function as a tool for social critique and transformation.

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hough, that whatever the manifestation of violence, the element of protest, resistance, or rebellion is still a traceable underlying force (Tettey-Tamaklo 17; and, Sanusi and Ogundokun 129). Whereas, violence, according to Anifowose, is the conduit engaged in ventilating anger (15), Sanusi and Ogundokun (129) offer that rebellion "remains one of the major instruments employed by any oppressed group to demand their rights". This implies that violence and rebellion are symbiotically connected. However, through the informative research by Tettey-Tamaklo, it was revealed that they could be positive or negative acts of rebellion which can engender equally different forms of violence. For example, the scholar, citing the Nigerian case study, notes that the Afropop legend, Fela Anikulapo Ransom-Kuti, displayed rebellion which resulted in violence, however small, yet the critic defends the musician by stating that his rebellious tendency is geared towards political accountability and value reorientation at a national level. He, therefore, classifies Fela's rebellion as what he terms "ideological rebellion" (21).

Northern Nigeria has been considered a hotbed for violence largely due to the volatile nature of the terrain (Okoli and Lenshie 69, Dawha 12, Karaye 11, and Albert 13). However, it must be acknowledged in tolerable haste that violence and civil unrest are not only peculiar to Northern Nigeria. Darma et al. aver that "Nigeria has been a theatre of war since the current democratic dispensation in 1999. From the Niger Delta struggle to the recent Biafra uprising, more than 30,000 people have lost their lives in one form of violence or another" (120). What is evidently revealed by the critics is that the menace of violence seems to stretch throughout the Nigerian landscape.

Taft and Haken consolidate the observation of Darma et al and then go further to underscore some of the underlying causes of this manifestation which include ethnic, religious, and political differences/categorisations. They point out that due to the highly polarised nature of the country, incidents can degenerate into violence especially when certain variables are implicated which range from political, economic or even sociocultural grievances (10). Toyin Falola, a prominent academic and social critic also lends his voice to the discourse when he submits that the violent situation prevalent in Nigeria is not an arbitrary phenomenon because of the extremely diverse citizenry that inhabits the Nigerian space. He, in fact, maintains that this situation engenders why an understanding of the violence phenomenon in Nigeria cannot be addressed from what he considers a mono-causal variable (22).

Even with the foregoing sustained understanding that violence is a common experiential phenomenon in Nigeria, critics such as Metivier (35) believe that among the geographical regions of Nigeria, the proliferation of violence in Northern Nigeria, in comparison to other regions, is more pervasive. The critic asserts:

> Northern Nigeria is a region characterised by endemic poverty and underdevelopment. Furthermore, the gap between the north and the south of the country is widening. Violence is widespread in northern Nigeria, in particular because of the conflict between governmental authorities and the insurgent group Boko Haram. In addition, the region is becoming increasingly vulnerable […] in 2014, the explosion of violence in northern Nigeria, associated with underlying economic, political and environmental problems, led to massive population movements. (35)

This assertion not only highlights that violence is more pronounced in the North but also presupposes that poverty and low infrastructural capital index have also fostered this debilitating situation. In his

examination of the causes and consequences of the manifestation of violence, the critic stresses that the prevalence of violence has occasioned a seemingly unmanageable situation of internal displacement of people.

Adegbami and Adeoye emphasise that "in the case of Nigeria, the rate at which violent acts are being penetrated is unprecedented, to the extent that the country always remains in the news on issues relating to violent conflict" (2); having pointed this out

the critic goes on to confirm that "violent conflict cuts across different parts of the country, but in the last 16 years, the 3 geo-political zones of North-West, North-East, and North-Central Nigeria have continued to feel more devastating cases than other parts of the country" (2-3).

It is widely acclaimed that every literary work is a product of both a period and a geographical location (Moody 3; and, Anigbogu and Uwakwe 3). This presupposes that literature offers a tempo-spatial reflection. Uwasomba unequivocally quips that "the writer irrespective of his or her ideological persuasion has a duty to discharge to the society and to self because the writer is saddled with social responsibility to communicate certain social and personal experiences to an audience" (196). In addition, African Literature has gone beyond the reality of "art-for-art-sake" (Anyokwu n.p); it has inexorably become a veritable accessory through which occurrences in societies are creatively projected with the objective of facilitating social reengineering (Ogundokun 2; and, Wellek and Warren 228). Adetuyi's assessment of the obligation of the writer and Nigerian literature captures this argument in its exactitude when he asserts:

> Nigerian literature takes "matter" from the realities of Nigerian living conditions and value systems in the past and present. In the Nigerian society the writer, be it a novelist, dramatist or poet is a sensitive "questioner" and reformer; as all literature in a way is criticism of the human condition obtainable in the society it mirrors. The writer often cannot help exposing the bad and the ugly in man and society. Thus much of Nigerian literature is a deploration of the harsh and inhuman condition in which the majority of Nigerians live in i.e. poverty, misery, political oppression, economic exploitation, excesses of the affluent, liquidation of humane Nigerian traditional values, and all forms of injustices which seem to be the lot of a large majority in most Nigerian societies. (22)

The inference of Adetuyi's assertion is that it is almost impossible for the Nigerian writer to isolate his writings from the lived experiences of the Nigerian people. Perhaps, it is to this end, therefore, that Ogundipe believes that violence is an unavoidable thematic element that tinsels the tapestry of northern Nigerian narrative (133) this is, for him, due to the fact that "in recent decades, Nigeria has consistently experienced incidents of inter-ethnic hostilities and religious violence, particularly in the northern part of the country" (133). In a similar observation while citing Elnathan John's *Born on a Tuesday*, Adeleke and Omobowale argue that the text is a contemporary northern Nigerian text that has attracted huge acclaims essentially for its close representation of reality. The critics submit that "the text "fictionally represents the postcolonial condition that birthed Boko Haram in Nigeria by depicting Islamic sectarian conflicts and rivalries as well as its violent and terror effects in northern Nigeria, adopting Sokoto as a metaphor" (41).

Lola Akande in her seminal essay entitled "Postcolonial Anarchy and Minority Discourse in Elnathan's *Born on a Tuesday*, Sule's *Sterile's Sky*, and Yakusak's *After They Left*" brazenly iterates:

> "The literature of the north shows that the unresolved issues of ethnicity and religious differences have been thrown up by the riots in the north-east, the terrorism across the core north, from Kaduna, Plateau, Kano, Kebbi, Zamfara, right through to Bornu, Sokoto and Adamawa states. These are the issues that the new literature deals with. This is the new frontier that appears to have been omitted or underrepresented by the earlier literature but which has now come into its own. [… these] novels are concerned with the explosive nature

> of the differences between various factions of religious or ethnic groups. What can be regarded as new frontier fiction here is the manner in which the selected novels give explicit descriptions of the violence that has become the norm in northern Nigeria. These novels are not shy; they come out frontally to deal with the question of inter- and intra-religious crisis, ethnic differences, and the violent forms that they lead to". (29)

Akande correctly identifies the main thrust of three texts that are easily classified as northern Nigerian fiction. She deftly posits that violence which has become the norm in northern Nigeria has become one of the main features that seems to have separated the category of northern Nigeria novels from novels of other regions in the country. The remark by Akande holds true if one attempts to juxtapose it with Umar's position. The latter adduces:

> Turning the spotlight on the prevailing northern Nigerian crisis has become imperative.Among the numerous perspectives that have been adopted by Nigerian writers in presenting the historical experience and the post-colonial conflicts in the country, writers of Northern origin have recently taken on the problems of ethnic and religious conflicts, which have besieged the region. Novels by northern authors about the experiences of the north have addressed issues of ethnic conflicts, religious riots, and the insurgency in the North East, North West and North Central; as well as the settler-indigene dichotomies in the North Central, among other problems associated with the post-colonial identity in Northern Nigeria. (47)

What cannot be mistaken at the epicentre of this submission is the unassailable depiction of violence in northern Nigerian fiction which collocates with the reality of the region. The critic opines that the state of violence and rebellion in northern Nigeria has been greeted with a lot of attention by critics, and "the recent literary outputs by writers such as E. E. Sule, Richard Ali, Dul Johnson, Abubakar Adam Ibrahim, Elnathan John and Edify Yakusak, among others, have taken the subject matter of the Northern Nigeria conflict to a deeper and more poignant dimension" (50). His point is that these critics have been able to use these northern experiences of violence and rebellion as raw materials for their imaginative creations.

Nigerian Novels and the Social Categorization Theory

Although contemporary northern fiction have continued to explore dimensions of violence and rebellion in their creative outputs, critics have also appreciated these works in the light of this consciousness. However, an evidential gap is revealed in the accessible literary appreciations of these distinct novels. It is observed that no critical assessment of contemporary northern Nigerian novels that have violence and rebellion as their main subject-matter has been evaluated through the prism of Henri Tajfel and John Turner's Social Categorisation theory.

Social Categorization theory suggests that individuals categorise themselves and others into groups based on shared characteristics, leading to in-group and out-group distinctions that influence behaviour, attitudes, and social identity ((Tajfel and Turner 7; Stets and Burke 225)). This categorisation process can result in biases and stereotypes, reinforcing social hierarchies and impacting intergroup dynamics (Hogg and Abrams 25; Hornsey 206).

Through this theory, it becomes evident that the trigger that births rebellion and ensuing violence, more often than not, begins with a distorted sense of self-categorisation. Kaplánová admits that categorisation "influences our behaviour towards other people and could even create the behaviour of the whole group where we belong to" (138). She then adds that "the examples of identities which we can daily observe are based on age, gender, ethnicity, nation, political views, social status, occupation e.t.c" (138). The inference here is that certain variables are capable of creating a distinct individual or group identity which can in turn become the basis of social categorisation. Even though Spears maintains that it is impossible for humans as social beings to avoid some sort of community

of social categorisations (20), the point remains that social categorisation can be so fluid that it can easily slip from having a noble agenda to a distorted one (Trepte and Loy 1), and the consequences of a distorted manifestation of social categorisation is that it often results in unmanageable breakout of conflict and violence (Weaver 369 and Festinger 117).

Rebellion from people who perpetuate violence is an expression of their dissatisfaction with certain issues in society (Zagorin 17 and Walzer 128). Therefore, group and individual behaviours need to be studied to understand the motivation behind the carrying out of violent actions by these people. It is upon this inquest that social categorisation becomes imperative. Turner et al state that social categorization is a key concept in social psychology that refers to the process by which individuals classify themselves into social categories based on shared characteristics or attributes. For them, this process is fundamental to the formation of social identities and plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's behaviour toward others (47).

Ford and Tornander express that, the "mere categorization of people into an in-group ('us') and an outgroup ('them') is sufficient to elicit attempts to positively differentiate the in-group **along available dimensions"** (373; my emphasis). In this regard, even if the available dimension resorts to violent behaviour, it is embraced as long as it will preserve the in-group from the aggression of the out-group. It then stands to logic that through this paradigm of social categorisation, rebellion and acts of violence can be properly investigated because, through such a lens, we are empowered to understand motives, motivations, and identity and how they contribute to triggering violence.

While certain critical essays on northern Nigerian fiction and the discourse of violence bring the subject of identity and identity behaviour to the fore, they deviate from utilising an imperative tool as social categorisation theory to examine the depiction of rebellion and violence. For example, Ogundipe's assessment of violence in some northern Nigerian fiction projects the idea of neighbourhood identity/behaviour using Slavoj Zizek's framework of neighbour (133). Yet, the analysis does not as much as hit on the causal factor for violence in the selected texts which implicitly suggests the pervasiveness of social categorisation. Akande also investigates the commonalities among contemporary northern Nigerian fiction (29). Her investigation suggests that violence is the common denominator of these texts. While her findings suggest the manifestation of social categorisation, she does not pay attention to that line of argument. This becomes a gap that needs to be filled in order to have a holistic understanding of the nature of violence in northern Nigerian novels.

Categorisation, Ideological Differences, and Political Intolerance in John's Born on a Tuesday

In John's *Born on a Tuesday*, instances of social categorisation manifest through political ideology, religious orientation, support for recreational groups, among others. The narrative begins by exposing the reader to the deep entrenchment of social categorisation within the depicted society. As noted by Moghaddam in *Multiculturalism and Intergroup Relations: Psychological Implications for Democracy in Global Context*, "there is no society that does not have permissible or impermissible growth of social categorisation" (45). While Tajfel agrees with this observation, he adds that "an unmanaged situation of social categorisation is a breeding ground for hostility, intolerance, violence, and social unrest" (23). The text provides instances that validate the commentary of these critics. It thus appears that John may have used his narrative to encode a message of unity and peaceful coexistence achievable through the eradication of all forms of vile competition engendered by social categorisation. To substantiate this from a cursory dimension, the author relies on Dantala to reveal the situation of social categorisation and its propensity to spark unrest. He expresses his disgust by saying:

> It annoys me to hear boys who can barely afford to eat fight over Arsenal and Manchester and Madrid. Do any of those footballers or clubs even know they

> exist? Sometimes, especially when boys gather behind the mosque in the morning, arguing about which club is better, I just want to come out and just pour cold water on their bodies. (170)

Dantala's commentary highlights the categorisation of young individuals within the community based on their club preferences, offering the reader insight into the workings of social categorisation. John employs this episode as a microcosm to illustrate the broader system of social categorisation. The narrator elucidates the tense situations that such categorisation fosters, situations invariably preceded by antagonism. The narrator observes that these boys, despite struggling to meet basic needs, irrationally invest in proving their allegiance to their clubs. This irrational behaviour manifests in their willingness to fight over abstract associations that hold no tangible significance to their dire circumstances.

> People are shouting right behind the window of Sheikh's office […] The commotion is getting louder and I walk out to see what it is. As I approach, I see boys in a circle around two people. I moved closer and saw that it was Jibril squeezing someone's neck inside his arm and giving head butts. The other person is struggling, trying to use his knee to hit him in the stomach. […] The other person is one of Sheikh's new bus drivers in the motor park. Jibril's grip is too firm. I get a stick and whip them both on the legs and back. They both let go and the driver falls to the ground; his eyes and lips are swollen and blood trickles from his nostril. Jibril has bite marks on his right arm. (170)

Through the illustrative portrayal of Dantala, John appears to critique the formation of antagonistic social groups. This depiction underscores that the fundamental cause of civil unrest and violence stems from issues related to social categorisation.

Huntington argues that the construction of social categorisation based on political ideology, if poorly managed, can devolve into chaos.

John provides insight into this form of politically motivated anarchy. The narrator describes a society divided between two political parties, viz, "The Big Party" and "The Small Party". Dantala remarks, "I am excited about the elections and the way everybody in Bayan Layi and even Sabon Gari likes the Small Party. They will surely win. Insha Allah!" (10). This statement underscores that party preference, not grounded in the credibility of candidates, has led to pronounced categorisation. The narrator further reveals that their political party choices are primarily influenced by financial incentives. Dantala uncovers:

> Banda gets a lot of money now that it is election season: to put up posters for the Small Party and tear off the ones for the Big Party or smash up someone's car in the city. He always shares his money with the boys and gives me more than he gives the rest. I am the smallest in the gang of big boys in Bayan Layi and Banda is the biggest. But he is my best friend. (3)

The revelation underscores that allegiance to the Small Party movement is often motivated by financial inducements, forming a system of social categorisation. As noted in "Corruption, Politics and Governance in Nigeria", Folarin highlights that forms of corruption such as bribery and other types of inducement are often responsible for people's choices in aligning with a political party in rural Nigeria (Folarin 21). This observation elucidates how such practices contribute to the formation of distinct social groups based on these incentives.

In Bayan Layi, a fictional rural environment, social categorisation is quickly embraced not because of the core principles of the Small Party, but primarily because the party addresses the immediate needs of the locals. By exploiting the pervasive poverty in the vicinity, the Small Party utilises these conditions to create divisions, thereby gaining an advantage in securing the people's support. As Smith notes, "political parties often exploit socio-economic vulnerabilities to create divisions that serve their electoral interests" (56). This dynamic illustrates how the Small Party capitalises on poverty to fan the embers of social categorisation for political gain. The conversation between the

leader of the vagrant group loafing under the Kuka tree, Banda, and Dantala, provides the reader with an inkling of the political categorisation here:

> "We will win these elections,' Banda says. 'of course, who can stop? We are talking like real politicians now, like party men. 'Will they really build us that shelter?' I ask. 'I don't like to think of that; all I want is that they pay every time they ask us to work for them. After the election, where will you see them? I am thinking Banda is very wise and I should stop expecting anything from the Small Party men. (11)

This discourse unveils the socio-political realities in Bayan Layi. Here, politicians create divisions among the populace by perpetuating propaganda, which the people subsequently internalise. Dantala discloses, "No one likes the Big Party here. It is because of them we are poor. The boys don't dare come here because people will drive them out" (John 8). While this rationale may seem justified, it conflicts with their expectations from the Small Party. Consequently, it can be inferred that the poverty cited as the reason for support is intertwined with a sentimental interest in the party that promises to meet their immediate needs. Textual evidence reveals that the Small Party lacks integrity, is equally indifferent to the welfare of the people, and sponsors violence. The propaganda promoted by the party leads the populace to develop a misguided identity, ultimately shaping their social categorisation and fostering antagonism towards the opposing group. Dantala narrates:

> Banda and I head for the polling centre between Bayan Layi and Sabon Gari even though we will not be voting. The day is moving slowly and the sun is hot very early […] plenty of women are coming out to vote and the Small Party people are everywhere; they are handing out water and zobo and giving the women salt and dry fish in little cellophane bags. Everyone is cheerful, chatting in small groups. (10)

The reality is that the Small Party has weaponized the poverty of the people to incite hostility towards the opposing group. The provisions given to the populace support the argument that poverty allows the Small Party to effectively market their propaganda, despite their practices and strategies being similar to those of the Big Party. The satisfaction of the people's immediate hunger needs, which is ephemeral, leads them to form a sense of identity and group categorisation. This irrationality, as Dantala narrates, accounts for the hostility shown towards members of the outgroup. Dantala notes:

> The Big Party agent arrives in a plain bus and takes off his part tag as soon as he gets there. I think he is afraid he will be attacked. He doesn't complain about the things the Small Party people are doing; he can't because not even the two policemen can save him if he does. He knows, because he used to live in Bayan Layi before he started working for the Big Party and moved to get a room in Sabon Gari. (10)

Rhodes and Baron aver that "a misguided perception and ideology underpinning social categorisations or groups can devolve into uncontrolled behavioural manifestations" (359). Consequently, the sanctioned divisions within this community render it volatile, resulting in hostility and physical violence directed towards perceived opposing groups.

The narrative underscores the fact that the Small Party leverages social categorisation to manipulate the populace into committing electoral fraud and engaging in vandalism. Dantala narrates, "After prayers, we will gather all the boys behind the mosque and give them one hundred fifty each. Then we wait. The party men will tell us what to do" (John 10). He further adds, "Those who have their voters' cards will get an extra two hundred and I will collect all the cards and take them to their office" (John 10). This testimony suggests that the Small Party, which masquerades as the saviour of the people and seeks to win their sympathy by portraying themselves as small, poor, committed, altruistic, noble among other associated correlatives, is in reality engaging in dubious practices. These actions implicate them in the very misconduct they accuse the Big Party of perpetrating, thereby revealing their hypocrisy given the substantial sums they distribute to vagrant groups to cause mayhem.

The propaganda surrounding poverty has been effectively utilised, positioning the Small Party as the representative of core northerners, while the Big Party is perceived as aligned with southern interests and thus met with resistance. This dual-layered manipulation underscores the complexities of political and ethnic stratification within the society. Dantala reels out:

> We hear screaming and chanting. The counting is over and as we expected, the Small Party has won here. I don't think the Big Party has more than twenty votes in this place. We get up and join the crowd, chanting, dancing and beating empty gallons with sticks. I am exhausted. I slowed down […] Banda disappears again. He comes back early in the morning and says […] we have been cheated in the elections […] they have switched the numbers. We have to go out […] These Southerners can't cheat *us* after all *we* are in the majority. (11-12; my emphasis)

The disputation stemming from their perception of a flawed election is characterised by a 'we' versus 'them' mentality. Brown posits that "associating social categorisation with an antagonistic ideology of 'we versus them' frequently engenders prejudice, which often escalates to physical violence" (Brown 134). This scenario manifests as the Small Party leverages their influence within the community, which is now inflamed by a misguided notion of social categorisation, to incite mayhem:

> I don't know the boy who is shouting, but he is holding a long knife. There were no southerners here, I think, why is he holding out his knife? We all have knives here. […] The crowd is agitated. Banda looks like he can barely stand […] 'we are going to teach them a lesson,' he says. 'we must scatter everything belonging to the Big Party in Bayan Layi […] Banda tells us there are machetes, daggers and small gallons to fuel in the back of the truck. We will get two-hundred naira each for taking back the votes that were stolen. (12-13)

What can be discerned here is that the categorisation has taken a more divisive turn to encompass ethnicity. In the paper entitled, "Ethnocentrism in African politics: The Nigerian experience", Godwin Ehiarekhian Oboh argues that ethnic bigotry is a serious problem because it can suspend rational thinking and create grounds for hostile behaviour (463). This is precisely what is observed in this context.

Dantala narrates an incident where, during their destructive activities, they encounter Tsohon Soja. Despite acknowledging familiarity with the security guard, Dantala remarks, "None of the boys wanted to be the first to hit him" (John 14), he is killed all the same because of his affiliation with the Big Party. He continues, "Gobedanisa charges forward with his machete, striking him on the chest and on the neck" (John 14). The actions of the Kuka Tree boys reveal a manifestation of hatred and unbridled aggression. Dantala also narrates:

> A fat man runs out of the burning building towards me […] coughing and smashing over things […] A Big Party man. Traitor! One boy shouts. The man is running with his hands in the air like a woman […] I hate that he is fat. I hate his party, how they make us poor. I hate that he was hiding like a rat, fat as he is. I strike behind his neck as he stumbles by me. He crashes to the ground. He groans. I strike again. The machete is sharp. Sharper than I expected […] Banda picks up the gallon and pours some fuel on the body […] the man squirms only a little as the fire begins to eat his clothes and flesh. He is dead already. (John 15-16)

The narrative detailing the killings of the fat man and the security guard offers insight into the detrimental outcomes of misdirected expressions of social categorisation. The narrator highlights how their misguided actions, stemming from a distorted group identity, subsequently lead them to engage in burglary after setting ablaze the Big Party's office. Dantala states that "at first we make a distinction between shops belonging to Big Party people and those belonging to Small Party people, but as we become thirsty and hungry, we just break into any shop we see" (John 16).

Ethical Leadership and the Mitigation of Divisive Social Categorisation

John explores not only the repercussions of erroneous group identities but also proposes methods to mitigate such expressions. Through the characterisation of Sheikh, John illustrates how issues arising from social categorisation can be managed effectively. Sheikh, a central figure in the narrative, demonstrates a conscientious approach to social categorisation. Despite leveraging his influence to mobilise votes for his preferred political party, Sheikh refrains from coercing individuals into extreme loyalty or promoting divisive ethno-religious politics. Dantala recounts, "all of us who follow Sheikh voted for the same party. But he told us he would not force anyone to do anything" (John 117). Thus, Sheikh achieves his objectives without radicalising his followers into blind allegiance.

By and large, John uses Sheikh as a model to advocate for mitigating politically motivated unrest. He argues that influential figures should educate rather than manipulate, encouraging informed voting decisions without coercing allegiance. Sheikh's approach fosters a less tense atmosphere and promotes tolerance within the community.

Conclusion

In conclusion, born on a Tuesday by Elnathan John offers a portrayal of violence and rebellion as both reflections and consequences of the ethnic and religious divisions that characterize Northern Nigeria. Through the protagonist's journey, John presents how young people, particularly those on the margins of society, become entangled in cycles of violence driven by political manipulation, religious extremism, and a fractured sense of identity. The novel demonstrates that rebellion, while often portrayed as chaotic or destructive, can also emerge as a response to systemic oppression and social exclusion.

John's narrative does more than depict conflict—it engages with its roots and proposes a moral vision that encourages empathy, understanding, and unity. By highlighting the dangers of rigid social categorization, he challenges readers to reconsider how identity is constructed and weaponized in divided societies. His rejection of simplistic group labels in favor of shared humanity underscores the novel's commitment to healing and reconciliation.

This study adds to existing literary scholarship by introducing Social Categorisation Theory as a useful lens for interpreting the psychological and social mechanisms that underlie conflict in Northern Nigerian fiction. It reveals how literature can deepen our understanding of the ways group identities are formed, entrenched, and ultimately used to justify violence. In doing so, the study not only sheds new light on Born on a Tuesday but also opens a pathway for future research on the intersection of identity, conflict, and narrative in African literature.

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