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## **THE DIALECTICS OF ETHNICITY AND NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract:**

*Many observers of the Nigerian state and its politics blames the country's failure to actualizing its potentials on the doorstep of the country's diverse ethnic competing groups that is yet to integrate into a unified people with a national consciousness aiming towards a deliberate crafted agenda with specific identified national interest. The paper exposes through its theoretical framework (dialectism) that the expression of ethnicity and national integration necessary produces dialectical relationship that is diametrically opposite. The making of Nigeria through the British colonial administration utilized the native authority institution to nominate and propagate ethnicity, leading to weakness in penetrating and integrating society to cause national integration. Ethnic associations evolved into political parties in colonial and postcolonial administrations, entrenched ethnicity and prevented national integration to cause development. As evidence by the series of intensify unending conflicts till date, the Nigerian state is manifesting weakness in its substructure (economy), since the social relations of production are affected by the manipulations of the ethnic groups. To achieve the desire development, a deliberate focus on the economy to produce surplus for the citizenry will naturally delink the effect of ethnicity since ethnicity thrives on scarcity.*

### **Introduction:**

As the world largest black populous country and currently Africa largest economy, Nigeria offers great opportunities with its vast untapped natural and human recourses spread across a federation of 36 states habiting 774 local government area with a central capital territory. The Significance

of these opportunities are still largely residing in the potentials of the country as it is still grappling with a sense of direction and strategy to actualize its capability in the international system.

Many observers of the Nigerian state and its politics blames the country's failure to actualizing its potentials on the doorstep of the country's diverse ethnic competing groups that is yet to integrate into a unified people with a national consciousness aiming towards a deliberate crafted agenda with specific identified national interest.

The intensity for conflict by these diverse ethnic competing group over access to power and wealth (Salawu and Hassan 2010, Alao 2007) exposes the Nigerian state weakness on its failure to penetrate and integrate society; The Nigerian state influence and capacity is faced with decline and progressive loss of controls over territory, the citizens, economy regulations and internal order. (Ikelegbe 2016)

It is with this challenge that Kew and Lewis (2013) described Nigeria as unfinished state characterized by instabilities and uncertainties; a rich resources endowed state that is struggling to distribute or allocate rent to more than 250 competing ethnic groups crosscut by two major religion that have produced low levels of popular legitimacy and accountability, and a persistent inability to meet the most basic needs of its citizens.

It is with the concept of ethnicity and national integration we now turn our attention to understand their dynamics relationship and how they both affect the capacity of the Nigerian state to develop.

## **Conceptual and theoretical issues**

Ethnicity as captured by Nnoli (1978) is a complex social phenomenon associated with the interaction, consciousness, exclusiveness and conflict disposition expressed among members of different ethnic groups (accounting for differentiation in social formation, communal boundaries, cultures and language) in a political plural society. Dakyen and Zungdet (2014) defined ethnicity as a common form of social construction that distinguishes a group of people with one or more things in common such as race, religion, national origin, language and culture.

Nnoli (1978) significantly expressed that ethnicity can be mental, philosophical, ideological or mythical construct of persons who experience threat or scarcity in urban contact situation in relation to their role (or exclusion) in the social relations of production and consequently

socioeconomic rewards. The perception of insight on inequality to access of opportunities in the face of limited social resources among competing communal groups' interest; ethnicity therefore is protective mechanics and adaptive strategy expressed for communal group member's loyalty and affiliation.

Adenike and David (2013) identified that scholars have interchanged national cohesion, national unity and nation building with national integration. Similarly, Frank and Ukpere (2013) expressed that national integration, it would first mean 'state-building', that is the processes in which the different people in a state transfer primordial allegiance to one central authority, which becomes the representative of the people, who take conscious steps towards nation-building. Nation building would then involve the various processes by the central authority (state-building) causes the composite social group to cohere and regard one another as member in the same state with obligation towards one another.

National Integration is therefore express as a process of consolidation of diverse interests of a society into a collective enterprise or state construct that is significantly expressive of the objective interest of citizens captured in the social contract they willingly entered.

The operationalization of both concept (ethnicity and national integration) therefore connote the contestation, struggle or competition between ethnic group(s) and the state over the loyalty of citizens or their cooperation to policy objectives . This struggle or competition between the ethnic group (that is protective and ideological) and the Nigerian state (that is political) over citizens' loyalty for development, necessary create a dialectic relationship that is diametrically opposed to the survival of the duo.

Ethnicity is subjective and seek to promote identity interest, it adopt exclusiveness as a strategy against other ethnic groups. It is a field of contestation while national integration is objective and seek to promote collective interest. It adopts inclusiveness as a strategy to pursue development.

## **Theoretical Framework**

The expression of ethnicity and national integration necessary produces dialectical relationship that is usually diametrically opposite to each other. The struggle and conflict creates unending

tensions or contradictions (Johnson 2008, Ake 1981) and distrust between the two agents of society (ethnic group and the state) over competition for citizens' loyalty and distribution of scarce resources (Nnoli 1978, Alao 2007).

The conflict situation between the contending duo reinforce perpetual confusion for the citizen which reproduces instability and crisis as a result of counter hegemonic resistance on where to place his loyalty (Dunaway 2003). It is on the basis of this dialectic relationship to which the individual is called to surrender his loyalty that Ekeh (1975) accredited to the individual to belong to 2 public in a society that is problematic (with opposing values) and deeply divided. (Osaighae 2002)

### **Creation and consolidation of ethnic politics in Nigeria.**

The establishment of colonial rule in Nigeria disrupted traditional African institutions (Kingdoms, empires and autonomous republican societies) and in its place created native authorities that were inferior and subjected to the colonial administration. The consequence of the acceptability of native authorities representing only ethnic interest against the rest of civil society's aggregate in the British West Africa territories, underscore the determination of the British colonial imperial administration to undermine the capability of the colonized.

It is from the native authority that the colonial administration nominated six uneducated Africans chiefs (out of a 36 council members) on non official capacity to seat on advisory legislative councils in the 1914 Lugard constitutional arrangement. At this point, even with the amalgamation policy, northern Nigeria was still effectively isolated from the southern Nigeria. Ikelegbe (2016).

The 1922 Clifford constitution maintained the six nominees from the native authorities in addition to four other persons to be elected from Lagos and Calabar (which were urban enclaves). Out of 46 members' legislative council, only 10 were Nigerians and northern Nigeria was still effectively isolated from contact with the south. The bulk of the unofficial members were from native authority structure who were absent from sittings.

The 1946 Richard constitution create three regions for the northern, western and eastern regions with their respective houses of assemblies and both the northern and the western region had houses of chiefs; candidates for these positions were the responsibility of the native administration which had the power to nominated persons to be voted to represent the regions. The Richard constitution

provide a majority of unofficial members of the legislative council; with 24 members nominated from the native authority and 4 elected. Imuetinyan (2015), Orugbani (2005)

The 1951 Macpherson constitution provided for central house of representative with 36 members from each regions, a president and 6 ex-official members; a central executive council known as council of ministers. A bicameral legislature in the northern and western regions and a unicameral legislature at the eastern region; elections was conducted through the nominations of the native authority to the regional houses while the house of representative were elected through the regional legislature. Thus the native authority still have significant influence.

The 1954 Lyttleton constitution provide for a regional autonomous legislature and a federal house of representative with 184 members consisting with 92 seats for northern region, 42 for western and eastern region each. Southern Camerouns and Lagos got 6 and 2 seats respectively.

Ethnic associations formed in urban centers to mobilize and protect ethnic interest in socioeconomic competitions over scare resources distributions were latter converted into political parties, these parties were ethnic base and regionally dominant. Ikelegbe (2016)

The dominant political parties of the first republic were majorly created to suit ethnic agenda as the National Council for Nigerian Citizens was an Eastern regional party, Action Congress was a Western regional party and Northern People Congress was a Northern regional party. For the second republic, the United People Party was an extension of the Action Congress and specifically created to serve the interest of the Western region, similarly, the National Party of Nigeria was an extension of Northern People Congress and was designed to serve the interest of the Northern region; the Nigeria People Party was an extension of the Nigerian Council for Nigerian Citizens and designed to serve the interest of the Eastern region. Ikelegbe (2016)

The Major political crisis in Nigeria all have thread of ethnicity weaving and holding the regions of various ethnic groups and pushing the country into disintegration. From the kano riots of 1953 to the census crisis of 1962/63, the continuing Action Crisis of 1962, the Nigeria 1966 coup and counter coup, the Nigerian civil war, the electoral crisis of June 12th, 1993 and 2011 post election violence, the Niger Delta crisis and the Boko Haram terrorism.

Following the consequence of ethnicity with it character of exclusion deeply entrenched in its body politics, Adenike and David (2013) acknowledged that Nigeria is a host to unwilling and

variegated partners, efforts have been put in place starting from the colonial era to create systems, institutions and programmes of government aimed at promoting national integration which have not really yielded the desired results.

## **Conclusion**

Having attained independence for 57 years, it is now expedient that the colonial political economy put in place should be radically revised. Nnoli (1978) have argued that ethnicity and politics are superstructure elements in the structure of society and that it is the economy (control and structuring) that determines the pattern of social interaction of groups in it.

Class character in the form of economic elites often mask as ethnic representative to promote personal agenda of elite with marginal benefits for patrimonial concern. Therefore to deal with the problem of ethnicity in Nigeria and promote national development, is to reconfigure the economy to be essentially productive and be allocative according to the liberal economy doctrine of individualism. The individual must be free from ethnic manipulation, its attendant scarcity mentality and narrow mindedness of exclusive politics must be liberated.

## **Recommendations.**

As is presently constituted, the structure of the Nigerian society and state is standing on its head and must be addressed urgently to deal with the mirage or myth of ethnicity. To do this, the following are mandatory.

1. The economy is the foundation and base of every society, it must be effectively delink from the encumbrance of the politics and ethnicity (ethnic politics) that is exclusive. The economy must be massively privatized to free up the Nigerian state to concentrate on good governance. The privatization process must be open and transparent to enable optimal utilization of efficient organizations to take charge of the economy and provide opportunities to people based on merit and their capacity to drive opportunities for development. The leaner the state, the better will be its politics. The core function of government therefore will be to regulate the economy and provide security for people and their property. This will give room for the economy to become broader, complementary and diversify to enable opportunities to be created for employment, equity and social justice.

2. The restructuring of the Nigerian state from its current over-centralize structure to allow the 36 state to focus on their capacity to develop according to their pace and capacities. This will effectively reduce the pressure on the central government. Decentralization and decongestion policy should be adopted to give room for state and local government to utilize the untapped resources and opportunities in their environments.

3. The series of ethnic conflict in Nigeria have shown that they are the results of elite manipulations of ethnicity for prebendal and patrimonial usage. Ethnicity have created exclusiveness, promoted scarcity and unnecessary socio-economy competition leading to strive and bitter politics. At most this have promoted bad governance and extractive institutions. To reverse this trend, strong institutions must be encourage to allow good governance and democratic principle to prevail. Concern must be directed at the enforcement of the rule of law, transparency and accountability. It is bad governance encumbrance by ethnic elite manipulation that has provided deficit in government performance and service delivery to the citizenry. It is the irrelevance and failure of governance to deliver that has promoted and encouraged ethnicity and citizens' attachment to an alternative institutions from government. Once good governance is put in place the value of ethnicity will disappear.

4. National integration can only take place when good governance is operational. Ethnic sentiment and opportunities for ethnic identification should be removed from all government activities. The use of federal character and quota system are safe heaven for the propagation of ethnicity and mediocrity which invariable hurt the possibility of efficiency and productivity in public bureaucracies and government affairs. It is becoming usual not to expect any good thing from government establishment as it is riddled by incompetence and laxity. These operational deficiencies are the handiworks of ethnicity.

5. Policies and programme to upscale the capacity of individuals to take up opportunities in the economy with ease to do business and access to capital should be encourage under a National Citizens Enhancement Programme (NCEP). Once citizens begin to benefit from their participation on a national scale without ethnic input, the quest for national integration will grow as the integration must demonstrate inclusiveness as a right. Citizenship and its attendant rights are fundamental in promoting social justice, equity and fairness. Citizen will only demonstrate

reciprocity if the Nigerian State is committed to a policy of genuine inclusiveness. Government can earn its legitimacy and autonomy from the guarantee that citizen observe and experience.

6. Civil education, mass enlightenment and intense information sharing on the need to promote citizen opportunities should be a deliberate policy of government to accommodate inclusivism. This will enable citizens to trust and identify with their government(s) rather than ethnic groups used by elites to create identity politics that is unproductive and destructive.

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