Ethnic Nationalism as a Threat to Sustainable Development in Nigeria: A Discourse

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Abstract. Several years after Nigeria's independence from Britain, precisely in 1960, the political entity called Nigeria has barely survived in terms of consolidating its political structures, institutions and the like, for the overall growth, development and sustainability of the nation-state as a result of the problem of ethnicity among other factors. Therefore, ethnicity has become a major factor that could determine who get what, when and how. Political appointments and composition of the top level positions still show that certain geo-political zone(s) are not fully integrated into national life and this is an attestation to the fact that 'all animals *are equal* but some are *more equal* than others' in Nigeria. Hence, the apparent 'cold and bitter' relationship which have been mounting and increasingly intensify in greater magnitude as the years unfold. It is against this background that this study specifically addressed the issue of ethnic nationalism as it affects sustainable development in Nigeria. Being a theoretical paper, the methodology employed was secondary data and content analysis research methodology. The study revealed that ethnic nationalism was induced by certain factors such as; colonial experience, primordial loyalty, marginalization, struggle over public offices and national resources, among others. The study, therefore recommends strict adherence to the constitution, true federalism, Sovereign National Conference, ethical revolution, good governance and so on.
Keywords: Ethnicity, Ethnic Politics, Nationalism and Sustainable Development

Introduction
In the 1940's, the late sage Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the founder and the leader of the Action Group in the first republic declared that:

"Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no Nigerians in the same sense as there are English, Welsh or French. The word Nigeria is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not."(Awolowo, 1947).

Similarly, in the mid 1960's, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe met with Alhaji Ahmadu Bello and said that:

"Let us forget about our differences……..''. To which Ahmadu Bello replied no, let us understand our differences first. I am a Muslim and a Northerner. You are a Christian and an Easterner. By understanding our differences, we can build unity in our country" (John, 1986).

The above statements by our great leaders aptly described the situation in which we found ourselves during and after colonialism. Since the end of colonialism in 1960, Nigeria has carried forward the spirit of ethnicity into the post-colonial Nigeria and the trend has been discovered to be part of the factors responsible for most of the political, administrative, economic, social and cultural maladies in Nigeria. Hence, development appears to elude the nation like a mirage.

The prevalence of this state of affairs in any country has the ability to contribute to a lower social level of development and breed grievances which provide the ground for internal armed opposition and consequently the eruption of violent conflict or civil war as witnessed in Nigeria (1967-1970). Unfortunately, once conflict breaks out, it tends to make matters worse through its effects on the structure of the economy and various institutions. It is against this

background that Ake (1996) declares thus: there is nothing positive about ethnic consciousness or tribal irredentism.

This invariably confirm the saying that there can be no sustainable development without peace and also reaffirms the position of the 1992 Rio Declaration presented at the United Nations Conference on *Environment and Development* which asserted in 'article' 25 that *Peace, Development and Environmental* protection are interdependent and indivisible. In other words, the idea of peace forms an integral part of the idea of sustainable development and both are likely to become inseparable. The existence of peace, among other things, is therefore a necessary condition for development and vice-versa (Ibitoye, 2017).

It is obvious from our discussion that ethnic nationalism cannot take us to the desired place. It is against this background that this study sets out to critically appraise ethnic issues in Nigeria with a view to determining the causes, its effects and what could be done to put an end to the problem so as to move the nation forward in the comity of nations.

Clarification of Concepts

Ethnicity

The term "ethnicity" comes from Greek words, "ethnos" originally conceived on the basis of cultural and national identity. Today, an ethnic group is usually identified and set apart by itself on the basis of its unique cultural or national characteristics (Shepard, 1981). Sociologists also used the term "ethnic group" to refer to any kind of group which is socially identified as different and has developed its own sub-culture. In other words, an ethnic group is one recognized by society and itself as a distinct group (Horton & Hunt, 1980). Its identified characteristics include language, culture or sub-culture and particularly way of behavior of its people (Oyewole & Wojuade, 2014). Osaghae (1995) succinctly submits that ethnicity is the employment or mobilization of ethnic identity and differences to gain advantage in situation of competition, conflict or co-operation.

Nationalism

Onwubiko as cited in Anyaele (1991) defines nationalism as the patriotic sentiment or activity held together by the bonds of common language and common historic experience to assert their right to live under a government of their own making for the preservation of their political, economic and social interest. Kedouire as cited in Ibitoye (2005) sees nationalism as the determination of a group of people to enjoy a government that is exclusively their own, for the legitimate exercise of power in the state and for the right organization of a society. For the purpose of this study, nationalism is seen as the individual allegiance to his/her ethnic groups. Thus, the individual are concerned with the socio-economic and political development of his/her own groups and not the nation at large (Coleman, 1986; Otite & Musa, 2016).

Sustainable Development

The term sustainable development was popularized in *Our Common Future*, a report published by the *World Commission on Environment and Development* (WCED) in 1987. Also known as the Bruntland report, *Our Common Future* included the "classic" definition of sustainable development as:"development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generation to meet their own needs" (WCED, 1987). Within this understanding of sustainable development, the concept could probably be otherwise referred to as ''equitable and balanced'' development which simply means that in order for development to continue indefinitely, it would have to balance the interests of different groups of people within the same generation and among future generations and do so simultaneously

within the three interrelated areas of economic, environmental and socio-political concern. It is all about equity and equality of opportunities for human well-being.

Major Causes of Ethnic Nationalism in Nigeria

As observed by Abegunde (2015) the nation has evolved a tri-polar ethnic structure which has become a determinant and influencing factor in political mobilization and contestation. This has also given room for various forms of struggle between and among peoples and groups using both conventional and non-conventional means in their competition for access to appointments and national resources. Without mincing words, the following factors among others have been identified as responsible for ethnic nationalism\sentiments in Nigeria.

The origin of ethnic nationalism in Nigeria could be traced to the nation's colonial experience. At the Berlin conference of 1885, British interest was recognized in the Niger area and by 1900 the charter of the Royal Niger Company was revoked and its trading territory was taken over by the British authority. And coupled with the rapid expansion of the British authority in the Northern part of Nigeria by Lord Lugard, there was the existence of three separated territories; the colony of Lagos, the protectorate of Northern Nigeria and the protectorate of Southern Nigeria administered by the British officials by 1900. In 1906, Lagos colony and the Southern protectorate of Nigeria were amalgamated and became known as the colony and protectorate of Southern Nigeria (Ibitoye, 2005) and in 1914, the Southern and Northern protectorates were amalgamated and became known as the Colony and protectorate of Nigeria. From the foregoing analysis, this clearly shows that the various ethnic nationalities were forced together without adequate consultation and\or negotiation. In other words, the amalgamation was not done in the interest of Nigerians but in the interest of the colonial masters for the purpose of exploiting and transferring resources of the people to sustain the metropolitan economy. In order to sustain this system, the British policy of 'divide and rule' was deliberately introduced and the resultant effect is what we are experiencing today.

Another major factor was the introduction of the elective principle by the Clifford constitution of 1922. This principle led to the formation of many militant political parties. The first among them was the Nigerian National Democratic party; N.N.D.P (1923), led by Herbert Macaulay. Others were Nigerian Youth Movement; N.Y.M (1943), led by Ernest Ikoli, National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon; N.C.N.C (1944), led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Action Group; A.G, (1951) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Northern Peoples' Congress; N.P.C (1951), led by Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, Northern Element Progressive Union; N.E.P.U (1951), led by Alhaji Aminu Kano, e.t.c. They all revived the spirit of ethnic nationalism in Nigeria and beyond.

However, two main factors led to the emergence of political parties in Nigeria, the first is the militant nationalism while the second is ethnicity. The British colonial rule, apart from being alien, was also oppressive and discriminatory. That was why the Nigerian nationalists strongly opposed it. This unpalatable situation encouraged them to form political parties to be able to provide a united front in the opposition. Secondly, political associations/unions also emerged along ethnic lines and these later transformed into political parties. For example, in the 1930's, Ibo unions were formed in major cities like Port Harcourt and Lagos and they later became the strength of the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (N.C.N.C) when it was inaugurated in 1944. In 1945, the "Egbe Omo Oduduwa" (society of the descendants of Oduduwa) was formed for the unity of the Yoruba people and this was transformed into a political party known as Action Group (A.G) in 1951. The Hausa\Fulani also formed associations such as the Bauchi General Improvement Union and the Youth Circle of Sokoto, among others. All these associations later turned into one single political party known as the Northern Peoples'Congress (N.P.C) in 1951 (Adeyemo, 2000). This trend of cultural

associations, clubs or unions acting as the spring-boards for the formation of political parties has posed a serious threat to the corporate existence of our great nation as a result of ethnic sentiments embedded in the formation.

The struggle over public offices and national resources has always been problematic as succinctly captured by Lasswell (1936), "Who Gets What, When and How?" The struggle over public offices and resources sharing formula has always involved the call upon ethnic sentiments and the instigation of ethnic groups by the elites for militant actions. For example, the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential election result by the top military class headed by General Babangida. Although, the result of the election revealed that Chief M.K.O Abiola of the Social Democratic Party (S.D.P) won the election to defeat his National Republican Convention (N.R.C) counterpart, Alhaji Bashir Tofa, even at that, the military went ahead to annul the result alleging irregularities and widespread use of money during party primaries among other reasons by the candidates as its reasons for its action. This action by a predominantly Northern cabal within the military has undermined in a fundamental way the Nigeria's national unity because the Yoruba felt that while their son won the election, the North wanted to deny them the chance of ruling the country. Agitations therefore started mounting through pan Yoruba organizations such as Afenifere, Odua Peoples' Congress and the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) for the actualization of June 12 result. However, Abacha's regime which sacked the Interim National Government headed by Ernest Shonekan (earlier foisted by the departing Babaginda regime) rejected the Yoruba agenda of Sovereign National Conference as a means of pacifying the Yorubas. Instead, he carefully organized a Constitutional Conference which eventually produced the 1995 draft constitution paving the way for his self-succession. As opposition to Abacha's autocracy mounted, the regime became more repressive, thereby intensifying the division among the various ethnic groups in the country (Arojo & Adegboye, 2009).

Another factor undermining the cohesion of the Nigeria post-colonial state is the lingering problem of marginalization and deprivation. Marginalization has been the complaints of almost all the ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. Afigbo (2000) states that marginalization is a deliberate disempowerment of people in the federation politically, economically, socially and militarily by another group or groups from either having access to and\or taking due possession of common key positions and common resources as manifested in the political, economic, military, educational, media and bureaucratic realms in Nigeria. However, judging from the Nigeria's experience, public policies are not primarily formulated from the stand point of objectivity and overall national interest and\or on the basis of justice, fair play and equity. Rather, it is from the point of parochial ethnic considerations such that the ethnic groups whose members dominate the federal government always swing the political pendulum to their favour. It is therefore, instructive to state that this phenomenon is prevalent in our society where component groups are bedeviled by unequal and antagonistic relationships, hence, the struggle among the various ethnic groups is inevitable (Uduma, 2015). The table below speaks volume of Nigeria situation from 1960-2015.

Table 1. Composition of Highest Decision Making Bodies of the Military/Civilian in Nigerian on the basis of Region/States: 1960-2015

S/N	Administration/Regime	North	West	East
1.	Balewa [Cabinet]	37.30%	37.30%	25.40%
2.	Ironsi [SMC]	50%	33.30%	16.70%
3.	Gowon [SMC]	60%	40%	0%
4.	Gowon [Cabinet]	41.70%	41.70%	16.60%
5.	Muritala/Obasanjo [Cabinet]	44%	36%	20%
6.	ShagariCabinet]	57.50%	22.50%	20%

7.	Buhari [SMC]	52.50%	27.50%	20%
8.	Babangida [AFRC-1985]	50%	36.70%	13.30%
9.	Babangida[AFRC-1991]	54.50%	36.40%	9.01%
10	Babangida[AFRC-1992]	55.60%	38.80%	5.60 %
11.	Shonekan[ING]	47.90%	31.20%	20.90%
12.	Abacha[PRC]	63%	27%	10%
13.	Abubakar[PRC]	65%	26%	9%
14.	Obasanjo [Cabinet]	55.50%	25%	19.50%
15.	Yar' Adua [Cabinet]	64.50%	12.50%	23%
16.	Jonathan [Cabinet]	20%	32.50%	47.50%

Source: Adapted from Uduma, 2015.

The introduction of Sharia legal system was another source of division in the country. On the 27th October, 1999, the Zamfara state of Nigeria declared Zamfara state as an Islamic state by the adoption of Sharia (Muslim law). States like Bauchi, Niger, Kaduna, Kano, Kebbi, Sokoto and Yobe later joined the race (Aladeghola & Ibitoye, 2014). In November of the same year, the Cross River State House of Assembly, passed a non-binding resolution declaring the area a Christian state in protest against Zamfara state's action. These two actions by both states were, however done in negation to section 10(1) of the 1979 constitution which specifically prohibited the state from adopting any religion as state religion (FGN, 1979). The outbreak and the effects of the communal\ethnic violence that followed the introduction of Sharia law cannot be easily forgotten as several people were killed, properties destroyed and several others fled their homes. The reprisal killings\attacks in the South East as well as the Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC) and Hausa ethnic clashes in Lagos are all indicative of the fragility of unity in Nigeria as a nation-state.

The Implications of Ethnic Nationalism on Sustainable Development
Ethnic nationalism has a lot of negative consequences on Nigeria as a nation-state. Among its resultant negative consequences are as follows.

It has adverse effect on census and/or development in Nigeria. In the annals of political history of Nigeria, no census has been generally accepted by all ethnic groups. It has always been controversial as each ethnic group is trying to outsmart the other in a bid to have higher figure. The resultant effect has always been poor planning and developmental crisis.

Another critical consequence on the nation is the perennial leadership crisis and tussle. The needed emergence of a national leader and a national consensus has always been problematic in Nigeria. Even debates on the floor of the National Assembly that should have considered national interest are in most cases underlined with ethnic bias on the part of the so-called distinguished Senators and/or Honorable members of the two houses – House of Senate and House of Representatives.

It has also resulted into sharp line of ethnic segregation, national disunity and\or integration problems. This has created a situation of permanent distrust and suspicion among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria which has constituted an impediment to national development.

Furthermore, it has effect on who occupies which position in all hierarchy of governance in Nigeria. This is the reason why every part of the nation is accusing one another of marginalization in the distribution of political offices and national resources. Hence, national cohesion and national coherence necessary for development is nowhere to be found. The various forms of struggle among all the different ethnic groups e.g Odua Peoples' Congress (O.P.C), Egbesu Boys, Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (M.O.S.O.P), Arewa Youth Forum, e.t.c, using both conventional and non-conventional means in their competition for

access to national resources has always encouraged the proliferation of arms and ammunitions and their acquisition by unauthorized persons and groups and all these engenders or results to social tension and general insecurity in the country.

Other consequences as enumerated by Babangida (2002) include wastage of enormous human and material resources in ethnically inspired violence, encounters, clashes and even battles, heightening of fragility of the economy and political process, threat to security of life and properties and disinvestments of local and foreign companies with continuous capital flight and loss of confidence in the economy; and increasing gaps in social relations among different ethnic nationalities including structural suspiciousness and hatred for one another.

Conclusion

Efforts have been made in this paper to establish the fact that the advent of colonialism among other factors is largely responsible for ethnic nationalism in Nigeria. Honestly speaking, there is no doubt about the fact that this has had serious implications for the socio-economic and political development of the nation. The problem of ethnic nationalism, particularly the reckless struggle by the ethnically inclined political leaders to gain control at the centre has contributed to ethnic consciousness, competition and under-development of the country.

As rightly observed by Ake (1996) this competition among different nationalities and communities has further weakened the solidarity of the people towards development. He therefore concluded that:

> *"Ethnic animosity has created not only strong division within their own ranks but strong antipathies and exclusivity in the society. As always, the exclusivity of the competing political formations increased the premium on political power and the intensity of political competition. Political intensity was further reinforced by the tendency to use state powers for accumulation of wealth" (Ake, 1996: 20).*

Political power, therefore has become synonymous with access to wealth and reproduction of the hegemonic faction of the political elite. This pattern of the reproduction of leadership in Nigeria has not fundamentally changed in the last fifty-nine years of her independence, hence, Nigeria can be likened to a barber's chair rotating on the same spot.

Recommendations

In view of the above discussion, this paper therefore recommends the following mechanisms through which ethnic nationalism can be reduced and/or eliminated totally.

It is very important to remind ourselves about the fact that most of the Asian countries equally experienced the same colonial 'misrule' as we did but the same continent has achieved great results characterized by focus, vision, initiative and progressive programmes. To seize the opportunities offered by the wave of democratization and globalization, Nigeria must look beyond any form of ethnic prejudice but develop a consistent long-term policy framework that will reduce the vulnerability of her citizens to the factors impeding the attainment of sustainable development in the country through fiscal consolidation and better governance entrenched with politics of social justice and inclusion. In other words, for Nigerian leaders to move forward, there is need for our leaders to wake up from their slumber and join the progressive nations of the world by adopting sound economic policies and building institutions that stimulates growth and development.

The European experience and sample also provide fundamental wisdom on how to curb, resolve and manage negative ethnic bonding otherwise called ethnic nationalism. The documented histories of mankind point to Europe as being guilty of atrocities of war, persecutions and wickedness based on inability to manage ethnic diversities: Before 1648, Scots, Irish, Welsh, English, Hungarians, Austrians, Turks, Slavs, Polish, Germans, Bavarians,

Nordics, Romans, Greeks and many other European tribe fought wars of unbelievable proportions and destruction.

However, the introduction and practice of vibrant capitalism produced a more beneficial bonding for the people which weakened tribal bonding. The opening up of factories and the use of equipment for production led to the employment of different persons in many of the dangerous factories of production. The forces of production meant that shift partners had to look after each other's interest so as to prevent accidents, deaths and serious injuries. In the process, many new friendships were forged, formed and established via factory work that became superior to mere ethnic bonding. Indeed, within thirty years, the problems of ethnic militancy had been curbed by almost 70%.

Europe also used superior jurisprudence and legal means to deal with ethnic chauvinism. Between, 1775 and 1890, the issue of citizenship became central all over Europe. In Germany for instance, joining the German military conferred superior citizenship, reward and remuneration than joining tribal associations. Within twenty years, people moved from the tribal to the more dignifying central citizenship.

The structural imbalance in the Nigeria's federation should also be properly addressed by reviewing the basic principles of federal characters in order to ensure social justice and equity especially in the distribution of federal positions.

The three tiers of government [federal, state and local governments} should as a matter of principle de-emphasize the spirit of indigene and settler phenomenon and lay emphasis on residence as this will give a sense of belonging to every Nigerian irrespective of where they find themselves.

Strict adherence to the constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria so as to allay the fear of the various ethnic groups – both the majority and the minority groups and the need for urgent Sovereign National Conference where issues affecting various ethnic groups will be thoroughly discussed and implemented without delay.

There is an undeniable need for ethical revolution for Nigeria. This therefore suggest a deliberate and fundamental change of a long term decisive impact to move the nation steadily and permanently in a discernable new direction of self-reliance and dedication to excellence in leadership, discipline, orderliness, hard work, honesty, morality, mutual respect and tolerance (Oji, 1982).

Finally, good governance must be embraced. Good governance simply means competent management of a country's resources and affairs in a manner that is open, transparent, accountable, equitable and responsive to people's needs. Good governance is an essential precondition for sustainable development.

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