

Ethnic Issues and National Question as Threat's to National Development

Ahmad Ibrahim Raji,

Department of History and International Studies,
Federal University Gashua, Yobe State.

Abstract

The issue of a National Question has arisen because of diverse character of Nigeria as a plural and multi ethnic society. The concept of the National Question can be traced to the amalgamation of the two protectorates of the North and the South of Nigeria. The process which was completed on the 1st of January 1914 created a structural defects and imbalances which is quite evident in the social, political, and economic affairs of Nigeria. It must be noted that all these structures embarked upon by the British government was to enhance administrative convenience, stop internal rancor among the protectorate, access to raw materials and finally to save or reduce administrative cost. Nigeria since Independence have not been able to stand the test of time, subsequent administrations have been unable to provide a structural path for National integration, economic development, Intolerance among different ethnic groups, as insecurity and strife have continued to shape the affairs of the Nation. The study found that National question had a lot of negative consequences that impeded Nigeria and Nigerian's truly National development. This paper concludes for economic development and National integration, tolerance among different ethics groups, Insecurity needs an outstandingly economic blueprint that will foster National development. This paper employs secondary sources to reconstruct ethical and National questions in Nigeria.

Introduction

National Question, National identity and Ethnicism are worldwide phenomena that disregard borders territories ideologically, systematically, race, religion and cultural differentiations. Kwame Nkrumah explains that ethnic groups or tribes are natural phenomena bestowed on mankind independent of his or her own free will. The wrong operations of it to gain undeserved advantage against perceive or an opponent constitutes negative relations in the community. Nkrumah remarks that tribalism or ethnicism in Nigeria and Africa in general is not reality but a by-

product of colonialism and when colonialism is removed, tribalism or ethnicism in Nigeria and Africa will disappear. While one may agree with Nkrumah that tribe or ethnic belonging is natural condition of man, the use of both (tribalism and ethnicism) in prediction of the removal of colonialism will end tribalism and ethnicism is not accurate. More than 60 years of the formal departure of colonialists, tribalism and ethnicism still dominate consociate behavior patterns of people in Africa.

National Identity refers to the feeling of attachment an individual has to his or her country, its government and people. It is the individual's identification with the political system. It is a feeling of not being marginalized in the scheme of things. A sense of National question and national identity starts with the individual asking himself questions and answering them. These questions are:

- To what extent do citizen and groups feel a sense of identity with the Nigerian state?
- Do you belong to majorities ethnic or minorities?
- Do we want to live together as one country? How?
- To what extent is political leadership of the Nigerian state justice in its decisions and execution of matter affecting various groups and constituencies? Answering to these questions shows clearly that there is an urgent need for fundamental reform of the faulty legal architecture of the country through conditional process that would deal with power / privileges and how they shared across the various levels of government.

National Questions

Ask any Nigerian at home and in Diaspora what was their biggest concern about their country, and the collective and overwhelming response will be the growing insecurity in Nigeria. Forget the poor economy and forget the political disenfranchisement, forget hunger, the foremost problem is insecurity¹. National Question is one this basic premise that lies behind the views of advocate of Sovereign National Conference (SNC) in Nigeria. That brings to observed a lecture delivered by great Nationalist, Chief Anthony Enahoro, at Lagos 2002, the title of the lecture simply, "National Question": Towards a new constitutional order. Enahoro spoke in his capacity as Chairman of the Movement for National Reformation (MNR) to produce alternative for Nigeria during Chief Obasanjo administration. Enahoro Lecture was a powerful analysis of the Nigerian National Question, the challenges facing the country in the 21st century and imperative of the new constitution, which must be the product of a National conference "composed representative of people of Nigeria freely chosen by people themselves for the purpose" when that is done, according Enahoro the name of the country would be changed to "Union of Nigeria."²

In arguing in support to this proposal Enahoro urged Nigerians to learn from "The experience of successful multi-nationality state like the United State, United Kingdom and European Union, as against unsuccessful one like Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia and Soviet Union of (Russia)³

Millions of Nigerians share Enahoro's views on matter prominent among them is the renowned professor of constitutional law, Ben Nwabueze of course, the bulk of advocates of National conference have been from the southwest geopolitical zone, which has championed the position for well over three decades. The list is long but mention few of the advocates are from recently Ahmad Bola Tinubu, Gani Fawehinmi, Wole Soyinka, Tunji Braithwaite, Femi Okurounmu, Ago Adebayo e.t.c.

The clamor by Nigerians for National Conference has been for many years. Nigerian leaders, especially the military which rule for the most of the years after independent were fully aware of the posed by the National questions as well while as persistent clamor for National Conference unfortunately they lack political will to tackle the question. Frontally, the nearest to attempt was constitutional conferences converted by former president Obasanjo to secure a third for himself consequently the report and recommendation was roundly rejected by Nigerians.⁴

The challenges facing Nigeria grew by the day as disenchantment mounted and insecurity spread across the Nations. Ethnic formations spouted Afenifere, Ohanaeze Ndigbo, Arewa consultative forum, etc, all are expressed ethnic sentiments.⁵

These unfortunate developments are sure signs of disenchantment that are capable of tearing our country apart. They are manifestations of fear of marginalization, domination, inequality, unfairness and injustice. Not long ago the southern secessionist ask the Northerners to leave their business in that regions while the Northern youth forum gave a deadline for Southerner to vacate their region too, however the conflict was a highly of conspiracy. However with measures taking by both sides to bring end to the issue.⁶ they point to several creak in our inter-ethnic relations. They are a reminder of National questions, which must be tackled to save Nigeria from disintegration. Sadly some of the advocate of National Conference, who stood firmly with Enahoro, suddenly made a U- turns, claiming that the National Conference was not longer needed. What precisely is their reasons for change of heart is yet another National Question unanswered? None other than politics and perhaps, the fact that the initiative came from former President Jonathan.⁷ They saying, that they would have loved to good things for Nigeria but not with president Jonathan as president. What manner of politicians are these?

There are a lot of contending issues and misconception about what a National Question is all about. According to Obaro Ikim, National questions are conceived thus: "The ethnic problems in Nigeria are indeed the National questions around which a great deal of our National life revolves, and in name of which all sorts of crime have been perpetrated against the Nation. It is this issue which has produce the 'we want your man' syndrome in Nigeria National Politics" in giving credence to Imike's position, Toyo see National questions as integrity, Unity or autonomy of Nation States or Would be a Nation states. But National question in Nigeria, The added concerns the relationship between different nationalities Nigeria; he concluded that discussion of National questions involved discussion of ethnicity.⁸

The consistent and regular calls for a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) become so pronounced after the annulment of June 12, 1993, Presidential results.

This claim that all ethnic groups in Nigeria have not been fairly treated, and indeed the core North had since independence dominated the federal to the detriment of other sections of the country. Hence, annulment of the election result Northerner believes to have been won for the first time in Nigeria history, by Southerner, raise serious questions about Nigeria future political arrangement need to find solution to this National questions.⁹ Further concludes that the issues of peaceful co-existence and having the question for a conference to resolve once and for all, the National questions. Available evidence with democracy and rotations from North to South, there has been tangible improvement on life of people hence it would be naive to conditional question within that context.¹⁰ This sort of conception no matter how plausible it seems to be insures that reality of contending issues of contemporary Nigeria.

National question can be seen as totality of political, economic, territorial, legal, ideological and cultural relations among nationalities and national groups in various social -political formations and how these interaction ships between various groups are handling with measurable level of inclusion of people. But of this study in contemporary Nigeria, National question is first and foremost a question of solving vital problem of social development, abolishing National oppression and inequality, eliminating obstacle to formation of Nations and assuring freedom for the development of peoples including achievement of factual equality and internationalism¹¹

On the contending issue of whether we still want to be together or not, after hundred years of amalgamation, there are still some Nigerian elite who regrets and blame our woes on what they described forceful unification of separate people into one country.¹² Hence many Nigerians have been calling for sovereign National Conference at which the Nigerian nationalities would discuss and debate on whether we want to remain together in one country or not and term of reference. But historical evidences as shown by historians have established that centuries before the coming of the British, there had been close contacts between the various peoples of the territories which British later called Nigeria.¹³

Those contact according to Maduagwe manifested themselves especially in trade, marriage but sometimes war. There is today abundant history, sociology and anthropology and even science to prove the ethnic nationalities that makes up Nigeria and probably descendant of common ancestors. Equally aside of geographic and genetics evidence, the scientific origin of Nigeria language would make all squabble in Nigeria base evidence and linguistic different ridiculous.¹⁴ Historically, some have described Nigeria as a historical accident but Uzoigwe has noted that if Nigeria is historical accident, then, it was an accident anxiously waiting to happen. Chief Awolowo in 1947 in his book Path to Nigerian Freedom said Nigeria was not a Nation but “a mere geographical expression” and there was no Nigeria Nation as there is in English, Germany or French, He such regretted the bringing together of Nigeria as a mere geographical expression.. While Sir Ahmadu Bello burst out in anger during one of the session of constitutional conference in 1953 that the mistake of 1914 has come to light. The basis of association is acceptable according

to¹⁵Awolowo while Ahmadu Bello often disagree to agreed on National issues with Awolowo on must occasions, because of their differences in political philosophies.

The twin goals of development are Nation Building and socioeconomic process of people in State, but in our own case the Nigeria federation has been unjustly manage. Hence, the major issues that should dominate our National issues should be good governance (how to administer the National resources of country more prudent, equitable accountable and transparent manner) and national integrity which must be pursued and realized. In the light of the forging there is need for us to depart from the false consciousness paradigm by which contending issues or National questions are consciously paradigms with the purview of ethnicity and start a rethinking the contending issues.¹⁶This is because, the Nigeria experience has shown that ethnicity is used both the dominate and subjugated groups of the society particularly political elites and masses resistance. It also served as fabric that binds sections ruling elites to civic society.¹⁷According to Verba, national identity has to do with the people's belief that they really are members of a particular society, that is, the extent to which they consider themselves as members of the Nation-state. National identity does not really deal merely with the individual's physical location of himself in a particular place, but includes self-identity a psychological attachment. It is only when one lives within a state and has the feeling or sense of belonging to it that one can rightly say that one has a sense of National identity.¹⁸

The number of ethno-religious conflicts and acts of terrorism; absence of responsible leadership and good governance in Nigeria since her independence has made Nigerians to reevaluate themselves on the questions above. The ambiguity of this sense of belonging shows that most Nigerians cannot answer these questions correctly and therefore lack the sense of national identity. Each Nigerian identifies himself/herself first as a member of his/her ethnic group and then a Nigerian. Verba distinguished two kinds of identity in his discussion of national identity: Vertical identification which deals with the individual's sense of attachment to his political unit – the country, the state, local government, the village, and the governments at these levels; and for the symbols of the government or the state. Horizontal identification which deals with the individual's sense of integration and identification with other people who inhabit the political system. It deals with the extent to which the individuals identify with each other as members of the same society; and also the extent to which they have trust and confidence in their fellow citizens. Some cultures and groups have much more favorable view of some cultures than others.

The limit of trust and confidence in fellow citizens also sets limits to the extent one can interact freely with others and build confident economic and political relationships. Hostilities to those outside ones group signifies that inter-group conflicts exist in the system as has been the case with Nigeria. Each group has been on the other group's throat though it is possible for one to have a different view of another group quite different from his own group's view about that group.

The internal and external colonization of Nigeria created the absence of national identity and integration in the country. These problems still linger as the various ethnic nationalities that constitute the country never met to discuss the basis upon which the ethnic nationalities would continue to exist as a united and indivisible country before or after her independence from the British. This paper examines the consequences of the colonization processes (problems of national identity and integration, and the clamor for a discussion of the national question) on the unity, security and democratic governance in the Nigerian state.

The vast majority of Nigerians have always reduced the national question to contradictions and antagonism between the various ethnic nationalities in the country. In other words, they see the national question in terms of inter-ethnic hostilities only. But the national question is far bigger and more complex than this. The national question is a big complex of political, economic, ideological, cultural, historical, religious, legal and other problems that arise during a people's struggle for liberation and for favorable internal and external conditions for further development; and also in the course of establishing equal, friendly relations between them and others.

The National question according to Odion-Akhaine involves the unresolved contradictions in the society that have continued to entrench Nigeria in a vicious circle of crises. The national question posed politically refers to the right to self-determination including the right to secession. This meaning is necessitated due to the oppression of some ethnic nationalities by others in a multi-ethnic setting as Nigeria.¹⁹ The national question is always subordinate to the main problem of the socioeconomic development of the society, and has a different content and significance at various stages of a nation's development.

As Ismagilova pointed out, the National question includes the abolition of all forms of ethnic oppression and ethnic inequality. It involves the establishment of real equality, friendship, and fraternal cooperation between peoples.²⁰

It is a means at the abolition of the exploitation of a region by the other. This must be discussed to bring about equity and justice in the allocation of the nation's resources to create a sense of belonging on the peoples of the country and to foster national identity and integration. It is only when the various groups and peoples in the country are involved in the formulation of governmental policies and their implementation, get a fair share of the nation's resources and are not considered as peoples whose values, opinions and feelings do not matter in the country that they can cultivate the necessary sense of belonging and identity with their fellow citizens and the governments at all levels; and work in unity toward the building of a united and strong nation-state in which all will be proud to belong.

The National question is evident on daily basis in the reports of violence against people in the various ethnic nationalities in the country especially in the South-East and the Niger-Delta; against the peoples of the Middle Belt region; against South-Eastern Nigerians living in the Northern region of the country; and in the discussion of revenue allocation and resource control²¹ and in the calls for fiscal federalism by the southern states in Nigeria. In the South-East geo-political

zone, it is seen in their cries against the marginalization of the Igbos in the political and economic processes of the country for having lost a war of independence in the Nigeria-Biafra war²² and in their agitation for state creation in their geo-political zone as the zone has the least number of states when compared to other geo-political zones. In the Niger-Delta, Isa and Adejuwon observed that the Niger-Delta crises are directed against the State and the oil companies operating in the region²³ And a close look at the demands of the people of the Niger-Delta shows that their agitation is against frustration, environmental degradation and general socio-economic deprivation of the people when compared with peoples of the other ethnic nationalities. They have been afflicted by oil related problems as environmental degradation due to oil spillage and neglect in terms of developmental projects in their region and employment even after the establishment of a Ministry of Niger- Delta and the Niger-Delta Development Commission.

The concept "Nation" is just like that of a state and denotes a group of people having or sharing common biological characteristics as race and color; historical origin and ancestry; cultural practices as language, religion, artifacts, customs and heritage; and the group lives together in a defined geographical territory.²³ It approximates to what sociologists and anthropologists refer to as tribe or ethnic group.

In Nigeria, there are about 400 ethnic nationalities and linguistic groups. Each of these groups is a nation of itself. The Ibos are a Nation just as the Hausas, Yorubas, Jukuns, Tivs, Efiks and Kanuris are Nations of their own. Each of these nations is located at a specific geographical area on the map of Nigeria. Before now the entire northern Nigeria was seen as the Hausas/Fulani, but recently, most ethnic nationalities formerly referred to as Hausas/Fulani are now declaring their ethnic identities and autonomies. The Jukun is a Jukun and a Kanuri is not a Hausa/Fulani. A fight would ensue between you and a Jukun if you identify him as Hausa. He is a Jukun and would be happy being seen as such. So would a Tiv or a Nupe want to be seen as a Tiv or a Nupe and not a Hausa/Fulani. Each Nation has an identity it now declares and wants autonomy from a perceived colonizer; while those whose identities are obscure are trying to carve out one for them at all costs.²⁵

Each ethnic nationality sees itself as a state because when a group of people live together in a geographically defined territory under the traditional or legal authority of a government, or a ruler, a state has been formed. A fully fledged state has the following characteristics: It has a population – the size of the population does not really matter. It has a defined geographical territory or national boundaries that separate it from other states. The boundaries make it distinct from other states. A state has permanence – geographically, every state is located at a specific point on the earth's surface and exists there permanently. But it could have as many governments as situations would warrant. It has a government – a state has a government or an administrative organ to oversee its smooth operation as an entity. Membership to a state is compulsory – everyone comes from a state. Even where a person claims to have fallen from heaven, he/she must have fallen on a specific spot on the earth's surface. It has sovereignty – a state has independence

to make laws and to enforce such laws within its territory without reliance on other states and without question from other states. These are the marks of a fully fledged state and in this context, every ethnic nationality approximates to a state in Nigeria.

The issue of sovereignty arose because of internal colonization of one ethnic group by the other, and the external colonization of all the ethnic groups by the Europeans. Every human community is a state because it operates under specific norms and under a sovereign authority. The character and number of people exercising power and authority in a state often determine the origin and kind of state in existence and the purposes or functions of the state and possibly its level of civilization or development. Irrespective of the fact that each of these ethnic nationalities in Nigeria is a nation and was a state before colonialism, they all belong to the Nigerian state. They all share a common nationality – they are all Nigerians. When all the ethnic nationalities in a country come to see themselves as one irrespective of their ethnic or natural differences, they have created a nation-state, and there is national identity and integration. However leadership qualities played a significant in answering National question, Dike has opined that Nigeria has had many non leaders in leadership position. He add further that the disaster that Mark the administration of Alhaji Shehu Shagari Babangida's atrocious regime and horrible looting that occurred during the time of General Sani Abacha are quick reminder.²⁶

During Shagari incept regime, there was widespread of corruption and economic mismanagement. This corruption consider the period of declined in oil prices which led a downturn in the Economy. This economic downturn caused increased hardship for majority of Nigerians. It is true that Alhaji Shehu Shagari wasted the unique opportunity created by General Murtala Muhammed and General Olusegun Obasanjo to keep light of democracy shinning in Nigeria, his administration was incapable of settling the political and economic crisis unfolded during the second republic. This led to disorder and chaos. The people lost faith in him and military utilized the opportunity and stage a comeback and rewind the trickling clock of democracy in the country. It is argued all these are national questions to be answered by the poor leadership quality of the country.

After fifty years of Nigeria's existence a sovereign a political independent state, Nigeria has been described either a house that has fallen or it intend to confirm the prediction of Robert Kaplan, in his widely reads book "The coming of anarchy which he foreshadowed a future of chaos arising from political turmoil, social unrest and armed conflict in most third world countries especially those of Africa. The plethora of grave social economic and political situation in Nigeria especially with the return of democratic rule in 1999 is a way of warning signal of Kaplanian anarchy. In the area of research, Nigeria has been described by DFID Research group as recursive economy characterized by two steps forward and three steps backward. For IMF Nigeria has been metaphoric per excellence failed development experience.²⁷

Conclusion

It is only until favoritism give way to merit individuals, irrespective of their ethnic groups, It will create ethnic consciousness which will only deepen the crisis within the state. Equally it is inappropriate to regard Nigerian situations as a failed case or a collapsed state, even though the recent release by Fund for Peace (FFP) and Annual failed state index (FSI) ranked Nigeria the 15th most failed state in the world: If by that term according to one, we mean a system that lack major attribute of sovereign or cohesion. In Nigeria, the state exercises a modicum of political control, there is basic level of public institution and overwhelming agreement among the Nigeria population on some Nigeria faces development challenges in economic, political and social dimensions.

However it could be argued that “rethinking leadership is the first step to revitalizing it’s noted by Professor Chinua Achebe in the trouble with Nigeria” The trouble with Nigeria is Simple and squarely a failure of Leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigeria land, climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigeria problem is unwillingness or inability of it leader to rise to the responsibility, to challenge of personal examples, which is the hallmark of true leadership..... “

Finally, the intellectual Leader of Sokoto jihad Sheik Othman Dan Fodio, wrote extensively on Nation building and problem confronts the process. This become apparent when he noted “any society that favors one tribe or ethnic group against the other, that society is finished” the implication of the above statement is that the factor of ethnicism is seen as important one that impair meaningful resources allocation and utilization for development which affects the Nation.

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