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"A DISCONNECT RATHER THAN UNIFY": RETHINKING THE ROLE OF ETHNICITY IN NIGERIA'S NATION-BUILDING PROCESS

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria, since its inception as one political entity in 1914, has been bedeviled with diverse problems, so severe and capable of breaking up its continued political existence. One of these titling but debilitating problems, unmistakably, has been the issue of ethnicity. This challenging complex has kept resurfacing to confront almost every strive towards nation-building in Nigeria. No gainsaying that this problem is rooted in the socio-cultural and political formations of the country when it was designed by the British. Thus, the seemingly intractable ethnic pluralism and the visibly triad polarization of the country is the bane its continued existence. However, in the face of Nigeria's relentless search for viable and virile nationhood, this paper is an attempt to historically explore the enormity of the challenge of ethnicity and to show how it has continued to impinge on the very foundation and efforts towards nation-building in Nigeria. In doing this task, the paper adopts the concept of 'neo-patrimonialism' as the relevant analytical framework. Relying on scholarly publications and on-the-field experience, it contends that the challenge of ethnic polarization and politicking in Nigeria retards altruistic and authentic nation-building. Finally, the paper concludes by recommending remedies, which if proactively implemented would enhance a more coherent and rancor-free nation-building process that would benefit Nigerians despite their diverse socio-cultural and religious backgrounds, and truly uphold the Nigerian slogan, "unity in diversity".

Keywords: Diversity, Ethnicity, Nation-building, Neo-patrimonialism, and Polarization.

1.   INTRODUCTION

Arguably, aside Ethiopia, every other nation-state in Africa is indeed a colonial creation; the inversed pattern it took in Sierra Leone and Liberia notwithstanding. Different nations, entities and peoples distinct in cultural orientation and national aspirations (though may be probably contiguous) were forcefully fused into single political nation-states with neither their views nor consent taken into cognizance. Thus, Nigeria emerged as one political administrative entity with a conglomeration of distinct but un-agreeable entities. Awolowo (1996) notes:

> 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 and those who do not.

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That is to say, the cosmetic nature observable in the 1914 British amalgamation of different entities that hitherto formed the political Nigeria incontestably laid the egg of ethnic discord, which has seemingly become an unending problem severely retarding the task of nation-building and the realization of the much taunted Nigerian project. Osaghae {1988:30} observed that one of the major challenges that confronted Nigeria at her independence was the need to forge a nation-state out of the myriad of nations in it. In other words, the task of nation-building is not only challenging but daunting. Understandably, Nigeria held big promise as a bastion of democracy in Africa at her independence in 1960: there were abundant human and material resources; increasing literacy level; rise in urban middle class; good international climate to operate in; and somewhat elite cooperation, though fragile in its manifestations. Yet, this high optimism was not reconciled with the teething and ever-present fundamental question of 'ethnicity' and 'class antagonism' which were nursed and reinforced in the colonial Nigeria.

Thus, Nigeria's quest for nationhood was beset with concatenation of crises informed largely by ethnic division, political misgivings and mutual mistrust. The ugly tide, however, became more apparent in the post-colonial period. Madiebo (1980:71) posits that sheds of the coup and counter coup of 1966, the massacre of the easterners in the North, its attendant reprisals and the 30 months bloody civil war that ended the Biafra's succession were all constructed within the prisms of ethnicity. Succinctly put, according to Achebe (1983), in his book *The Trouble with Nigeria,* 'one cannot isolate ethnic politics on what has turned out to be a blame game about the troubled Nigerian nation'. Therefore, this paper examines how 'ethnicity' and sectional politics impinge on the efforts towards nation-building in Nigeria.In an attempt to address this thorny national question painstakingly and with a focus, this work is organized into sub-themes and traces the genesis of ethnic politics in Nigeria from the political beginning of the country in 1914 to March 2015, when the last Presidential election was held.

2.   CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Ethnicity

Apparently, scholars in the rank of sociologists, historians, anthropologists, and political scientists have approached the concept of 'ethnicity' from different but not mutually exclusive perspectives. Defining the term is no easy exercise because of its predominantly both racial and cultural overtones. Heywood (2002:115) sees ethnicity 'as the sentiment of loyalty towards a distinctive population, cultural group or territorial area'. Thus, members of ethnic groups are often seen more or less to have descended from common ancestors, and the group are thought of as extended kingship groups, united by consanguinity. More commonly, ethnicity is understood as a form of cultural identity, albeit one that operates at a deep and emotional level. To Glazer and Moynihan (1975:89), "ethnicity encompasses values, traditions and practices but, crucially, it gives a people a common identity and sense of distinctiveness usually by focusing on their homogeneity in origin and descent". Some see nations simply as extended ethnic groups others stress that while ethnic groups are essentially cultural and exclusive; nations are more inclusive and are ultimately politically defined. That is to say that in addition to cultural sense of organic identity', ethnicity reinforces political identity struggles: ethnic nationalism. This is a form of nationalism that is fuelled primarily by a keen sense of distinct ethnic identity and the desire to preserve it.

According to Otite (1990:128), what accounts for this style of politics, politics of ethnic loyalty and identity, is largely the desire to challenge economic and social exclusion, political marginalization, and many a time racial-cum-cultural oppression within the body-politic of nation-state. Thus, structural inequalities and internal socio-political contradictions in a nation-state can raise the embers of ethnicity where civil loyalties to the nation are weakened by a deeper sense of organic identity in the ethnic composition. Succinctly put, ethnicity emphasizes deep loyalty and strong sentiment to the ethnic groups than they are needed to preserve a nation-state. It is equally important to note that ethnicity may not only erode the political stability of existing nation-state but can lead to emergence of a new nation-state.

Nation building

Understandably, the concept of 'nation' is the outgrowth of a commonality of identity held by a particular community of people. It involves a territory, language, mores and values, culture, and a common heritage. On the other hand, the 'state' refers to a sovereign political entity that governs people within a particularly defined territory. Thus, a 'nation-state', therefore, can be understood as a sovereign political entity whose territorial jurisdiction extends to all persons that share

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ethnic, linguistic, cultural and historical traits, and who identify themselves as constituting one nationality. However, reality shows that there is no nation-state whose bounds are in complete correspondence with a single ethnic, linguistic or cultural group. In other words, most nation-states comprise a plurality of groups within their territories and a number of such groups can be found to overlap the boundaries between nation-states; hence, the task of nation-building in a nation-state becomes imperative.

The explanation above is essential to the understanding of the concept of nation-building. It is important to point out that nation-building is both a 'concept' and a 'process'. Many a traditional literature on nation-building see it, in the mechanical sense, as a process involving the transfer of commitments and loyalty from small ethnic nations to larger political entities such as the nation-state. Thus, nation-building implies the process of constructing a national identity using the instrument and machinery of the state. As Nwabughuogu (2001:22) notes, "…the aim is unification of the culturally diverse and heterogeneous people within the nation-state to ensure sustainable, viable and stable polity". In another sense, Geller (1983:106) posits that nation-building can also involve the use of propaganda and/or infrastructure development to foster social harmony, political stability and economic progress. Thus, essence of nation-state is to see that parochial ethnic jealousies and identities are progressively transferred to and translated into broader political and civic culture for a sustainable nation identity. However, people cannot automatically erase what they are in their memory.

The definition of nation-building can also take socio-historical evolution of a society into consideration. Barkley (2000:109) views it as 'the progressive development of behaviours, values, political identity in attaining a virile nation-hood'. Thus, it is about the intangible and tangible threads that hold and sustain the unity of a nation-state. Awa (1982:66) incisively notes:

> *Nation-building involves two dimensions. The first is closely linked to the process of 'state building' - the progressive acceptance by members of the polity of the legitimacy of a central government and identification with it as a symbol of the nation. The second dimension involves accepting other members of the community as co-equal members of a political community, (nation-state). It involves the existence of a shared expectation among all the community members of equal obligation, and in the distribution of values by the state.*

To this end, nation-building is endogenously conceptualized, and it is a socio-historical and psychological process. In this sense, the actors and forces that drive the process can be found within the nation-state itself and the process is evolutionary, taking place over a reasonable period of time. Thus, 'political and civic culture' is pivotal to nation-building as the end-goal is democracy.

In African context, the idea of nation-building is relatively unique. Ajayi(1984) states that the conception and definition of nation-building in Africa has been influenced by the historical phenomenon of the anti-colonial involvement and the resultant profusion of independent nation-states. To these newly formed states for which the construction of united, stable, and prosperous nation was imperative, the concept of nation-building involved the widening of the scope of identity of parochial and primordial ethnic units to achieve larger entity as nation-state. The 'national identity' needs to be constructed by molding the heterogeneous ethnic groups into a political nation. The idea being that the understanding of the virtue of 'unity in diversity' among the culturally diverse groups in the nation-state would transcend the primordial tribal tendencies orchestrated by colonial practices, and at least, preserve the continuous political existence of the states in the face of ethnic pluralism.

3.   THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

For better understanding of the nature of ethnic politics and character of nation-building in Nigeria, it seems most appropriate to adopt 'neo-patrimonialism' as the relevant theoretical tool of analysis. The thesis espoused the ideas of Gero Erdmann, Naomi Chazan, Peter Lewis, Robert Morfimer, Donald Rothchild, and John S. Stedman in the analysis of democracy, development and nation-building in the developing world. It is an outgrowth from the Weberian concept of patrimonialism - where traditionally oriented administrative systems in which relationship between subordinates and their superiors tend towards being personal. Power subordinates tend to display personal loyalty to the ruler. The 'neo-patrimonial system' is therefore, a modern bureaucratic type that is suffused with the traditional primordial practices that are reminiscent of patrimonialism. Where there is an identifiable public sphere that should be characterized by legal-

rational relations, the system tends to be permeated by personal relationships. This inter-permeation gives rise to various systemic dysfunctions (Sanderson, 1992).

The focal centre of its argument is that it engenders 'political clientelism and corruption in a society - where established networks of political patrons and their clients, whose interactions are directed primarily towards arranging services and resources in return for political support, take the centre stage. Erdmann (2010) observes that '…with the capture of political power patrons perceive themselves to be in charge of an arena that serves as a source of wealth, benefits, and the disbursement of patronage'. That is to say, it encourages a vicious cycle of competitive corruption, political factions and class antagonisms in the process of capturing political power and control of national resources; and this becomes more internecine and dangerously fashioned in a plural but diverse ethnic society like Nigeria To Eliagwu (1998:39), 'a zero sum approach to politics in a state riveting with ethnic pluralism, where winners take all to appease their backers, and to make use of their positions before other patrons take control and divert resources to their own end, must encourage 'corruption' and 'intra-class rift'.

The raging elite conflict (intra-class tussles and antagonism) could exploit ethnic consciousness thereby breeding ethnic mistrust, factionalization and violence capable of undermining the political stability of a nation-state; hence, strives for a virile nationhood become a difficult task. Thus, Hughes (2001:106) observes:

> *Where the nation-state exists for the materials interest of the few elites' class or a given dominant ethnic group, there would be the tendency for the generality of the masses to relapse to their different ethnic ideologies as against forging of a larger common national identity. Ethnic irredentism will always be competing, and to a large extent tends to suppress national identity as a common political and civil culture would be eroded.*

Obviously, Nigeria fits into this logical picture so painted. The relationship between Nigerian politicians and their power brokers (political barons) is one of political clienteles. They use the politicians they sponsor to exploit the collective material benefits accrued to the Nigerian state, and extend their political and economic base at the expense of the mass majority of Nigerians. The Nigerian state appears no longer interested in taking the welfare of different Nigerian peoples into utmost consideration. Masses indiscriminately resort to ethnic irredentism and religious bigotry as alternative. This has led to mutual mistrust, violence, and even civil war that broke out in 1967. In a related manner, the very nature and character of intra elite conflict and contending contestations among and between Nigeria's political class relate directly to the issues of power and political leadership.

It impact upon such things like political appointments, policy direction, and governmental allocation of resources. In multi-ethnic Nigeria when factions of the elite class are outweighed or frustrated out of power, they cheaply but dangerously resort to ethnic banters to strengthen their lost political base: the issues of ethnic marginalization, economic and social exclusion and religious-cum-cultural oppression would be re-ignited to national limelight. Political criminals in the face of national loot will turn champions of ethnic irredentism over night. Therefore, the neo-primordial tendencies exhibited by politicians in Nigeria further polarized the country along ethnic lines; and an albatross in attaining nationhood.

4.   ETHNICITY, POLITICS, AND NATION-BUILDING IN NIGERIA: TRACING THE COLONIAL ROOTS

It is pertinent to note that 'British colonialism' from the onset was aimed at ensuring full control of the economic resources and political control of Nigeria. The divide-and-rule policy was effectively utilized by the British as a strategy to this effect in Nigeria amidst religious, cultural-linguistic, and political diversity. From the foregoing, it is obvious that the British ulterior economic motives rather than sheer similarities in political and cultural practices of the component independent societies constituted the major reason for the 1914 amalgamation in Nigeria. Unlike the pre-colonial relations which was borne out of mutual co-operation and natural evolution, the amalgamation was foisted from without, divorced from vies and aspirations of the Nigerian peoples. In the words of Tamuno (1978:111), "amalgamation gave Nigeria its present size, shape, and political complexity: one measure which is the diversity of culture and politics". Understandably, the amalgamation did not just go down well with peoples in both protectorates in the south and north as great resentments, especially from the south, greeted the policy. These resentments were muted in the north but received

greater expression in the south; hence, the popular cliché of Nigeria being 'a mere geographical expression'. Therefore, the amalgamation exercise in 1914 was indeed a watershed in the Nigeria's political evolution.

Before the beginning of the 1920s, the British system of indirect rule appears to have been successfully domesticated in the North while it showed a high level of incompatibility in the South, especially in the southeastern parts. At another look, the element of 'Christian missionary education' had created an emerging 'civilized' elite culture in the South while the less penetration of the North by Christian missionaries shielded it from the stimulating influence of western-education; hence, the slow-down in the process of social change in the Muslim North became obvious. As Nigeria was fashioned along North-South divide, it soon became the advantage of the British colonial administration to widen the gap rather than bridge it and unite Nigerian peoples. For instance, the Legislative Council created in 1922 under Clifford constitution had its jurisdiction covering only the Southern Protectorate. The Northern Protectorate was administered by the Governor's proclamations. To Ikpeazu (2001:136), "…this was an act of encouraging disunity among the peoples in a society regarded as one political entity".

In rationalizing this divisive arrangement, the British colonial administration noted that the size of Nigeria and the difficulty posed by communication made it uneasy to be administered by a single legislative body. The ethnic diversity was also cited as a challenge: a council sitting in Lagos could not successfully legislate for the North which was a largely a Muslim society, as it would be resented by the Emirs. Nevertheless, the argument about ethnic diversity appears to be pointless in that the North itself had the largest sub-ethnic groups in the country, and bringing the North and South in one legislative body may have not created new problem, if indeed ethnic diversity was considered a huge problem during British colonial rule in Nigeria. In fact, this seemingly 'mindless policy' of dividing the country along North-South lines socio-culturally and politically was soon to pose serious challenges to building a Nigerian nation.

With the creation of three regional political-cum-administrative structure in Nigeria under the 1946 Richards constitution - Northern region, Eastern region and Western region, it became clear that the shortcomings entrenched in the 1922 constitution were not mere errors but conscious act of furthering ethnic divisions among Nigerians. Nigerian peoples were further drifted apart as the bar of ethnic politics was consequently raised. "Most illogical", as Tamuno (1980:294) states, "was the fact that the 1946 constitution created three regions with one being larger in population and geographical size than the two others put together". As riveting opinions and criticisms began to trail this tripartite arrangement, the behind-the-scene interests and deep misgivings of ethnic nationalities in Nigeria were becoming more pronounced. It appears that while the East and the West wanted a centralized authority at the federal level with elected representatives of the people, the North was not very much comfortable with such arrangement. O.B.C. Nwankwo (2005:65) recalls that the East and West wanted executive council with a Nigerian majority and a ministerial system. The North, on the other hand, recommended that the Chief Commissioner should continue to exercise executive powers but be advised in the discharge of his duties by a purely advisory regional executive council made up of officials. Thus, ethnic differences were becoming sharper and apparent over national issues.

Arguably, the inundating criticisms and protests that trailed colonial policies in Nigeria from the 1940s till the late 1950s informed several political conferences as part of colonial reform process. Anene (1988:98) observes:

> At all Nigerian Constitutional Conference which followed in 1953, the North insistently held that it must have half of the seats in the National Assembly that was to be set up on the ground of its large population, while maintaining there would be no form of boundary revision. The East on its part opposed the creation of House of Chiefs in the North and West, while arguing for creation of more states along ethnic lines rather than the unequal tripartite structure in place. Azikiwe on his part would have preferred the division of the country along linguistic lines, while Awolowo frowned at the unequal size of the regions.

Thus, more fundamental to the 1951 Constitution was that it brought to the fore the schisms which had been developing over the years among the component ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. These events showed that in as much as the Southern politicians were hungry for more reforms, leaders of the North felt more than necessary had been achieved and that a break was needed.

Dramatization of ethnic politics appeared to have taken the centre-stage in the Nigerian political scene in the last decade of British colonial rule in Nigeria. With the formation of Action Group (A.G) and Northern Peoples' Congress (N.P.C) both of which had Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani ethnic leanings respectively, the National Council of Nigerian

Citizens (N.C.N.C), which had been somewhat national in its outlook, was forced by the political realities of the time to restrict its base in the Igbo dominated Eastern region. The elections which soon followed were to further reveal these divisive ethnic antagonisms and political recriminations. These political parties only won substantial number of seats in their ethnic base, giving credence to the claim that they were formed along ethnic lines. Lagos had always enjoyed a special status of a separate entity. However, the 1951 constitution co-opted it into the Western region and provided five seats for it in Western Regional Assembly. A section of the constitution equally made for members of the Federal Legislature to be nominated from the Regional Houses. This was soon to result in sharp disagreement between the N.C.N.C and the A.G (which controlled the Western Regional Assembly).

For instance, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe who had won a seat in the Western Regional Assembly on the platform of N.C.N.C later had his plan of moving to the House of Representatives thwarted by the A.G elements in the Western Regional Assembly. This display of ethnic chauvinism by Awolowo and his A.G elements forced Azikiwe to his ethnic base in the East and the consequent displacement of Eyo Ita, an Efik minority, from the leadership of Eastern Regional Assembly (Nwadi, 2003:103). Thus, this side of ethnic politics and the dimension it took was to play a suspect role in future political misgivings and fragile alliances among ethnic groups in Nigeria. It is in this sense that Dr Azikiwe's clamour for regionalization along linguistic lines makes more meaning. In short, one point is made clear here: the division among Nigerians was not only limited to the North-South or North-West-East but also obtained among differing ethnic minorities in the country. More so, the issue of minority question was one of the major problems raising its head in the Nigerian federation.

In 1953, Chief Anthony Enahoro of the Action Group (AG) moved a motion in the House of Representatives for 'self government' for Nigeria in 1956. This noble move was again interpreted on the prisms of ethnicity. The motion, in as much as it received support in the West and East, was kicked against by the N.P.C leaders in the North on the basis of lack of preparedness of the region for self rule. Independence at the time was seen as spelling doom for the North who feared domination from the educated South. The humiliation of the N.P.C legislators and the retaliatory attack on A.G politicians who went to canvass support for self determination in Kano further heightened the North-South tension, and indeed showed that Nigeria was anything but not united. As the constitutional reforms, which followed afterward, could not resolve the deep-seated divisions among Nigerians, leaders of the major ethnic groups continued to seek political and economic protection of their peoples: a development that has continued to derail the national cohesion.

Nonetheless, the surging of minority agitations has taken its toll in Nigeria before the independence: a major but thorny issue that has continued to trouble the very unity of Nigeria's corporate existence. Alade (1988:189) observes:

> It is in the 1957 Willinks Minorities Commission of Inquiry and 1958 constitutional conference held to consider the report of the commission that the mischief of the Nigerian nationalists was made manifest. The question of ethnic minorities was not addressed before independence was granted because bad ethnic politics. Alas, in this, the national politicians failed.

This is the picture of the political atmosphere pervading the Nigerian landscape until the 1960.

5.   THE POST-COLONIAL EXPERIENCE

As the euphoria of political independence raged on, the politics of ethnic competition intensified. Not only did the mutual mistrust and combative politics amongst the Hausa-Fulani, the Yoruba and the Igbo take a new but dangerous dimension, the political irredentism of ethnic minorities within the geography of the tripod ethnic majorities multiplied the political difficulties of the Nigerian state. In this light, it is incisive to capture the words of Professor Ikime, thus:

> The politics of the first republic were necessarily a carry-over from the politics of decolonization. In each region, the party of the dominant ethnic group installed itself and sought how best to win power at the federal level. A winner-takes-all attitude became firmly entrenched in our political style, making politics a do-or-die, and therefore very corrupt affair. The dominant ethnic group in each region sought to use political power as an instrument of blackmail against the minority groups. Those who succumbed were given tantalizing crumbs of office without their ethnic groups necessarily benefitting as groups.

Those who refused to yield to blackmail suffered observable neglect. In circumstances such as these, development, already uneven since the colonial period, became even more uneven (Ikime, 2006:129).

Thus, one could see that most of the problems that challenged the continued political existence of the Nigerian nation in the first decade of independent Nigeria, arguably, were orchestrated at the altar of ethnic chauvinism and competition.

Ultimately, that the First Republic collapsed appeared to be as a result of the unbridled struggle to control the centre among the three known ethnic majorities in Nigeria, and the political resentment and contestations it brought with. The tussle for the control of the soul of the Nigerian state by 'ethnic jingoists' who paraded themselves as national politicians came into open manifestation in1962. Olusanya (1998), for some obvious reasons, argued that the declaration of state of emergency in Western region in1962 by the N.P.C and N.C.N.C coalition government at the centre, and the consequent creation of the Mid-Western region in 1963 widely ostensibly meant to solve the political crisis in the West region were politically engineered to emasculate Chief Awolowo and the A.G elements in Yoruba land. Thus, there was a deliberate design by the leading politicians in the North and East to use Chief S.L Akintola and his N.N.D.P to sweep off the political leadership of Chief Awolowo in the Western region, and to foreclose any chances of A.G, the dominant Yoruba party, from gaining in-road to the political booties at the centre.

However, the 1962 census controversy, which was widely rejected in both the West and the East as against the popular acceptance it received in the Hausa-Fulani North, was virtually interpreted from ethnic fist; hence the 'marriage of convenience' struck by NPC and NCNC acrimoniously broke up. Nnoli (1978:218) observes that the build up to 1964 Federal elections showed that the basis for unity and survival of the Nigerian political nation was severely endangered. Politicians employed ethnic embers as a political weapon against their opponents to ensure cheap victory. Political parties hardly campaign in areas outside their ethnic base. It was in the mist of this ethnic-informed political hate and divisions that the divisive slogan 'North for the Northerners, East for the Easterners, West for the Westerners, and the Federation is for all' gained wide popularity.

The political realignment of political parties and politicians saw the A.G and the N.C.N.C merging as U.P.G.A while the N.P.C merged with the N.N.D.P as N.N.A in the elections. Although, U.P.G.A boycotted the elections, the elections went ahead as the N.P.C-led federal government had their gains to count despite the protestations from the opposition Yoruba A.G and Igbo N.C.N.C. The election results stood and the Hausa-Fulani N.P.C formed the government at the center. Thus, with the ugly exercise of 1964 federal elections and the Western regional election of 1965 where Akintola, with the tacit connivance of the N.N.A elements at the centre, was rigged into power against the popular choice of A.G candidate, the hypocrisy of Hausa-Fulani oligarchy, veiled in N.N.A as a political party, to emasculate other major ethnic groups in the allocation of national resources and power was further laid bare.

In other words, the political situation unavoidably bred political corruption, quite unprecedented in the country. Merit and professionalism were neglected for party loyalty and ethnic expression. No wonder, Ikime (2006:130) posits, "…in the First Republic national interest counted for little while everything revolved around the self-interests of political parties, all of them ethnic-based". In the face of these daunting challenges, most Nigerians got disillusioned, and began to recoil into their ethnic shells instead of genuinely building for a Nigerian nation. It was obvious that the Nigerian state was degenerating, and that something urgent needed to be done to restore normalcy and reposition Nigeria on the path of progress. This attests to the fact that the January 1966 military coup was hailed by Nigerians as deliverance from the state of lawlessness to which the nation's politics had degenerated. Unfortunately, the coup was later seen as ethnic coup. It was widely dubbed 'Igbo coup' in the North and parts of the West because of the way the coup was handled in the East, and the unpopular policies of Lt Gen. J.T.U. Aguiyi Ironsi, an Igbo man, who took over as the military head of state.

Hausa-Fulani lost prominent leaders in the coup while the Eastern political leaders, mainly from Igbo extraction, were spared. As Ironsi took over the reins of power after the coup, the first promotion announced in the Nigerian army contained a clear preponderance of Igbo officers; and then came the declaration that Nigeria had been made 'a unitary state'. Unavoidably, the unfolding drama sent wrong signals to the Northern elements; hence, the conclusion that Ironsi was seeking to impose Igbo domination. This political atmosphere prepared the path for the July 1966 counter coup, ostensibly organized to bring back the Northern hegemony in the Nigerian political landscape (Uwechue, 1971:21). To give credence to this claim, at the time of the July 1966 counter coup, the most senior officer in the Nigerian army was Brigadier Ogundipe, a Yoruba. That he was not asked to take over the government was evidence that the leaders of the

coup were not prepared to tolerate a Southern leader, and that the coup was carried out with Northern ideology and not a national objective.

This tide of ethnic politics also shaped Lt Gen. Gowon's creation of 12 states structure in Nigeria; partly intended to remove the cross River and the Rivers people from the political orbit of Igbo dominated Eastern region and isolate them from Biafran cause. Arguably, this was designed to strategically emasculate Col. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu and to deflate Igbo hegemony in the former Eastern region (Igbokwe, 1996). Coupled with the killing of Ironsi and the mass murder of Igbo men and women in the North and the reprisals that followed in the East, the declaration of Biafra as an independent republic within was made possible. Therefore, it is largely believed that ethnicity and sectional politics were a major factor that caused the Nigerian civil war that lasted from 1967 to 1970.

Although the immediate post-civil war years from 1970 till 1975 when General Gowon was ousted from power witnessed efforts to heal wounds of the civil war through reconciliation, reconstruction and rehabilitation, but a true nationalist leader failed to emerge to cement the reconstruction process. The short-lived tenure of General Murtala Mohammed was cheered, but the regime lasted for barely seven months, and thus was too brief to make indelible marks to Nigeria's nation- building process. Similarly, successive military regimes in the 1970s and the 1980s also failed to make proactive contributions that could have engineered the much desired march to an all- embracing nation-building process. The status-quo remained till the birth of Nigeria's Fourth Republic in May 1999. The enthronement of civilian democratic government since May 1999 can be said to have exacerbated efforts at effective nation-building process.

The above state of affairs is due to the existence of ethnic and sectional politics that became the major feature of Nigeria's Fourth Republic till date. Nigeria, since 1999 has not been able to produce nationalist leaders who could have, through their followers ensure the actualization of cohesive nation-building process. Thus, those issues that stunted nation-building process in the years that preceded independence and the immediate post- independence years have remained a clog in Nigerian march towards an effective nation-building process. This recurring trend made Olusanya (1978:4) to observe that Nigeria since independence lacked leadership, which in the Nigerian context demands extra skills, political maturity and wisdom, selflessness and the ability to rise above such leader's ethnic group and ability to approach problems from a national perspective devoid of ethnic and sectional colorations.

6.   CONCLUSION

No doubt, the amalgamation of differing but not mutually exclusive ethnic nationalities into one political nation-state called Nigeria in 1914 has a major bearing to the socio political crisis that has continued to wreck the very political foundation of the country since its inception. As it is well understood, no society with such huge socio-political and cultural differences among its constituent population/ groups could easily survive without steady experience of tilting problems from time to time. Azaiki (2003:40) observes that the British colonial policies further amplified these differences by heightening inter- ethnic tension and suspicion. However, this riveting ethnic politics which could have been tamed as soon as power was handed over to the indigenous elites rather became more pronounced and took a grave dimension leading to overdose of stress on the Nigerian body-politic. Thus, the selfishness of the political elites, political greed, and lack of patriotism on the part of these self styled leaders further endangered the task of nation building in post-independence Nigeria.

Therefore, the amalgamation in 1914 is far from being enough explanation for the crisis, paddled on ethnic politics, which engulfed Nigeria. Thus, the colonial policies which created political cleavages rather than build bridges among Nigerians is not enough explanation for ethnic politicization and lack of altruistic nation-building process in the country. Therefore a holistic appraisal must factor in the unpatriotic, ethnic, sectional, and self-centered attitude of Nigerian peoples and politicians from diverse ethnic backgrounds, whose attitudes have continued to undermine effective nation-building process for nearly fifty-five years of political independence.

Against this backdrop, this essay recommends that for a proactive nation-building process to be actualized in Nigeria, all Nigerians from diverse backgrounds must be involved. Nigerian political leaders and the citizenry must realize that the task of nation-building is a social contract between the people and the government (followership and leadership), and each party must show commitment towards the course through proactive actions in the interest of the nation-state. To actualize effective nation-building process, Nigerian leaders should learn from a statement made by the

late foremost nationalist, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, who observed that ethnic chauvinism should be shunned and the positive aspects of ethnocentricism should be adopted to promote nationalism, solidarity and national development (Azikiwe, 1964:69). Finally, it is instructive to assert that Nigeria, as the most populated black country in the world and "the giant of Africa" should live up to expectation, through its political leaders and citizens, who should utilize the positive aspects of their diversity to actualize the much desired effective nation-building process as soon as possible. The task is difficult, but possible, given the motto of Nigeria, "unity in diversity". The horizon looks bright, considering the successful Presidential election on March 28, 2015, which led to the emergence of a new government on May 29, 2015.

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