The Role of Ethnicity in the Making of a Nation: The Nigerian Case

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ABSTRACT
This paper is primarily concerned with examining the place of ethnicity in the making of a modern state (Nigeria). The study contends that Nigerian did not create ethnic groups rather ethnic groups created Nigeria. They constituted the basic stuff which colonialism manipulated into shape and christened Nigeria. To put it Aristotelian terms, colonialism and ethnic pluralism were respectively, the efficient and the material causes of Nigeria. Therefore, credit for the creation of Nigeria state goes to ethnic pluralism after colonialism.
Keywords: Ethnicity, Nation, Colonialism, Pluralism

INTRODUCTION
Nigeria is made up of many ethnic nations, which have maintained their identities throughout the years of colonialism to the present. This work discusses the role of these ethnic nations in the Nigerian nation-state. It views contemporary Nigeria as a creation of her component ethnic nations to which the country also belongs in common and equally. Accordingly, it is here proposed that the secret to the progress of this country lies in an absolute acceptance by the country’s rulers of the immutable fact that Nigeria belongs equally to all the component ethnic nations which created this country and, with this acceptance, faithfully ensuring that the policies of the federal and state governments reflect this awareness in content and actual implementation. It is against this background that this work concludes that the credit for the creation of Nigeria-state goes to the ethnic groups which created Nigeria for Nigeria did not create ethnic groups, which constituted the basic stuff, which colonialism manipulated into shape and christened Nigeria. This paper has six segments. The first is introduction, the second is conceptual clarification. The third examines the making of Nigeria. The style of administration is discussed in the fourth segment. The fifth segment looks at the role of Ethnic cultural organizations. While the final segment concludes the work.

Conceptual Clarification
In popular expression, both state and nation are used as synonyms. Strictly speaking, however, they carry different meanings. In the precise language of international law and diplomacy, only state is employed to refer to such a conglomerate and an association otherwise known as country like Nigeria, Ghana, India, Bolivia or Russia. This is true for instance, in the charter of the United Nations Organization and in the statute of the International Court of Justice as well as in treaties generally (Hunt, 1961:74). Whereas a state is an association, a nation is not. The latter is a group of people with the same ethnic background and common cultural heritage. As D.D. Raphael puts it, a “nation is a community, a group with all the conditions for a common life and giving rise to natural sentiments of loyalty and identification, but not limited to a specific set of purposes (Raphael, 1971:40). Individuals in this group have a sense of personal nationality which consists in a feeling of belonging to a group that inhibits “a common territory, shares a common history, and looks forward to a common future” (Raphael, 1971). Contrasting the nation or nationality, as he chooses to put it, with the states, W.W. Kulski introduces three basic ingredients into the concept. These are belief, faith, and intent. To him, therefore, a “nationality is a group of people who believe that they share a common past, who claim a territory as their own, who share a faith in the same self-evident truths, and who want to maintain the distinct identity of their group” (Kulski, 1964:102). Example in Nigeria include Ibibio, Hausa, Yoruba, Fulani, Ibo and Ijaw, to name a few. A state, on the other hand, is also a territorial group, he admits, but unlike a nation it is organized under a government that claims supreme jurisdiction over its nationals (Kulski, 1964). Both may coincide territorially. Each state, particularly in Africa, is made up of many nations. It is an association of many nations. This is true of most states of the world. They evolve out of association of nations. It is in recognition of the fine distinction and relationship between these two terms that states in the modern world are generally referred to as nation-state. International law and diplomacy is careful about this matter and makes use of only state but not nation to avoid conceptual confusion. Because nations of a state live under the same government over a long period of time and, for that reason, develop common interests, share common history as well as experiences, and owe loyalty to a common authority, they come collectively to a sense of unity that approximates the whole associational conglomerate to a
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nation. They form a community and are made such "by the practical organization, and the consequent economic organization" (Raphael, 1971:41) that link the people socially and territorially together. A nation-state is, therefore, an associational conglomerate of cultural or ethnic groups otherwise known as nations. The nation is a community, while the state is an association. Membership of the nation is "a matter of sentiment, depending on common experience and history, while membership of the state is a matter of legal status" (Raphael, 1971) as spelt out in the memorandum and articles of association constitution of the state. In other words, ties between the individual and the state are legal, whereas those between members and their nation are emotionally bedded on their national consciousness and "an inner conviction of belonging to the same nationality" (Kulski, 1964:103). Nations make or constitute the state but not vice versa. They organize or form or are in the association for the pursuit of specific common purpose or set of common purposes. Aristotle puts these purposes globally in his Politics (1.2) as the good life, that is, the good life a whole representing the sum of all approved common purpose, including all purposes that men think worth pursuing (Raphael, 1971:39) as individuals and as groups or nations. This good life dangles before the people as needs. It includes the need for individual to have a recognized place or status in his society so that he feels secure and can behave in such a way as to be able to meet the expectations of the group to which he belongs and be happy. There is also the yearning for the satisfaction of economic needs and the desire for things like food, shelter, and clothing, all of the which help to make life good. People need regulation and safeguarding of property as well as maintenance of law and order. They also want liberty (Hunt, 1961:41-42). Because of the common biological nature of human beings and common elements in the natural environment of the people in a country, these needs are common to all the nations in the state (Arikpo, 1967:26-36). They had them prior to the emergence of and their coming into the nation-state, for the idea of good life, whose components are these needs, is not a creation of the nation-state. Prior to the emergence of the nation-state, however, nations used their indigenous political institutions and systems along with their cultural organizations to pursue the good life, including the erection and strengthening of the nation-state itself. They also used these structures to protect themselves against disagreeable and unpleasant aspects of their habitats be they physical, natural, or social, and to promote their interest. Examples of such cultural organizations include the Ibibio Union of the Ibibios, Egbe Omo Oduduwa of the Yorubas, and the Jimiyyar Mutane Arewa of the Hausa/Fulani. All of them are apparently defunct by today. But the following are current Mboho, Mkparawa, Ibibio, Afanimfere of Yoruba, Ariaw Consultative Forum for the North, Ohaneze Idi Igbo for the East and numerous others for the minority states such as Igbo National Congress and Ogbakor Ikwerre amongst others. For the defunct Cross River State, examples included the Afe Annang, Akwa Esop Imaisong Ibibio, Oron Improvement Union, and Esop Mkparawa, among others. Like individuals and languages, cultural organizations, and political institutions are among the assets and resources of the nations. When they came into and became a part of the nation-state, they also brought all these assets and resources into the state association and made them a part of the property of the nation-state. They continue to form a new cultural organizations when they feel the need for them.

The Making of Nigeria

Before the advent of colonialism, the various ethnic groups that make up Nigeria lived and related as distinct nations in their separate territories. Their varying indigenous political structures and cultural organizations catered for their political administrative, and social needs. They exercised full control over their lives and all their affairs. It was not until about the 15th century that the Europeans started to make their inroads into the territories of these peoples. They came as adventurers, explorers, missionaries, merchants, merchant companies, scientists, and government officials. As the Europeans penetrated these ethnic areas, they used flattery, cajolery, deceit, intrigues, and violence, among others, to extort what they called treaties or agreements of friendship, trade, protection, or cession from the people. Quite often, they signed such agreements with any body across whom they came in their scramble for territory without regard for whether or not such individuals were the legitimate leaders or rulers of the people or had any right to sign such agreements to subject the people and their land to such commitment (Hunter, 1966:3-16). With the heinous decision of the European nations at the conspiratory Berlin Conference of 1885 to share up Africa among themselves, political domination which provided a protective umbrella for full imperialistic exploitation of the continent succeeded all other European motives and pretensions in Africa. By the terms of that same Berlin Conference, European nations constructively conceded to Britain the area that is now Nigeria, excluding, of course, the portion that now forms part of the Adamawa State but belonged to Germany before World War 1. Accordingly, British interests in the various ethnic territories of the area- missionaries, merchants, naval fleet, British officials, etc- joined in an unholy alliance for a ruthless rape of the peoples' sense of self-esteem, their pride, their culture, and their personality.
Upon the ruins of all these, Britain established her colonial suzerainty and racial superiority while continuing her violent suppression of peoples who resisted that domination (Umoh, 1975:65). In November 1913, the Nigerian Protectorate Order-in Council was issued by the British government. That order brought under one central administration the separate ethnic groups already connected with Britain through a network of treaties and agreements or compelled to do so by the latter’s use of brute force, flattery, deceit or intrigues in what were formerly the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria and the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. The order took effect on January 1, 1914 and constituted Amalgamation. Thus modern Nigeria was born (Arikpo, 1967:36). Although a similar event took place in 1906 when, by Letters Patent and Royal Instructions, the administrations of Lagos and the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria were merged into the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria (Hunter, 1965:64), the amalgamation of 1914 credited to Frederick Lugard was an important historical milestone in the evolution of the Nigerian nation-state. Before the amalgamation, the various territories already connected with Britain in the area declared Nigeria had separate governments with separate staff and followed separate courses of development as well as distinct theories and systems of administration. Whereas the 1906 event brought together two laterally juxtaposed areas administered under separate authorities by Britain, the 1914 act juxtaposed all such units under one stratified administration and policy orientation. Nigeria became, as it is today, a conglomeration of ethnic nations that also constituted those territories. It was, at best, a forced association of man nations. In retrospect, therefore, and without the least anticipation by Britain, the amalgamation of 1914 appears to assume the stature of the first significant act of nation-building and attempt at national integration in the political history of Nigeria. While colonialism, acting through its officials undeniably served as the efficient cause of the country, without the ethnic nations, there would have been no Nigeria. They served as the material for the formation of the country. In Aristotelian terms, therefore, the ethnic nations created Nigeria materially.

The Style of Administration
Colonialism constituted and superimposed on the ethnic systems in the country a new administrative and executive class dominated by British officials. This structure supervened over and worked through the indigenous ethnic administrative systems under the leadership of the chiefs to control the society. Much of the indigenous patterns of authority and structures for social control were left fairly undisturbed. This style of administration was described as the Indirect Rule. The British colonial officials adopted this style of administration for obvious reasons. A handful of British officials could not successfully rule the vast ethnographically diverse country directly. For that reason, the chiefs were used and their authority preserved. Moreover, such an administrative structure enhanced the attainment of colonial goals which did not, in the beginning of colonialism at least, include nation-building. A primary concern of British colonialism in Nigeria, as elsewhere at this time, was to rule and to keep order so as to give full rein to effective imperialistic exploitation of the society. “If there were existing local rulers who could be used, the colonial power ruled through them. If there were many languages and cultures… then languages were left in tact” (Breton, 1962:10). Furthermore, the indigenous systems proved to be a “more effective means of law enforcement and general administration than direct intervention” (Whitaker, 1970:27). This was, indeed, consistent with the economic interest of the colonizers. In view of the traditional relationship between the chiefs and both the local ethnic institutions and the indigenous forms of government, to rule through the existing chiefs was a cheap method of controlling the colony. Britain had realized that to rule directly “would require an army of colonial Magistrates.” Thus, the administration made of “these born rulers a high type of officials” carrying on colonial policies on the principles that they had evolved for themselves (Breton, 1962:16). The indigenous power structure was, therefore, made an integral part of the colonial administration “without incisive revolutionary changes imposed from outside” (Crowder, 1970:28). Traditional rulers exercised power with authority over the masses of their peoples as they had always done in pre-colonial days. Michael Crowder reports, for example, that

Emirs and chiefs ruled as sole native authorities, a position which gave them for practical purposes more power than they had in pre-colonial days where they were either subject to control by a council or liable to deposition if they became too unpopular... They administered political units that corresponded to those they would have administered before the arrival of colonial power (Breton, 1962:16).

That was why Henry L. Breton concluded in his evaluation of the colonial system of government in Nigeria that “western democracy never operated in any colonial areas; instead the ... modes of government and administration that did operate were... traditional” (Cameron, 1954:3). In other words, a dual structure of administration was created. At the lower level was the one headed by the indigenous rulers.
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It formed the foundation upon which colonialism established itself. Chiefs administered their people, at this level, by "the instrument of their own indigenous institutions which function with the assent of the people... who are willing generally to obey the authority because they acknowledge its ascendancy" (Arikpo, 1967:45-46). Secondly, there was the structure run by the colonial officials themselves. The orders issuing from here were given to the chiefs who passed them to the masses of the people through the traditional channels of communication and administration. Like those issued by the chiefs or their councils, colonial orders were implemented through the same machinery of the chiefs' administrative structure. Colonial officials took the major decisions but "left the day-to-day work of administration to the control of Nigerians whose claim to authority was based on tradition" (Noah, 1980:16 & 51). Accordingly, the traditional power structure was annexed to and made effectively as well as functionally a part of the colonial administration. Chiefs, thus, served as the connection between British colonial officials and the people of Nigeria. In other words, ethnic nations used their systems to consolidate and preserve the nation-state association that they created in 1914. By utilizing the traditional administrative machinery to support colonialism and implement its policies, the chiefs also brought cultural organizations into the service of that alien rule and the process of building Nigeria into a nation-state.

Contributions of Ethnic Cultural Organizations

Cultural organizations are an important agent of socialization. They help to break the individual into the nation and imbue him with the societal mores and values as well as socio-cultural and politico-economic ethos. In other words, they participate in the processes that make the individual a part of his nation so as to perpetuate the group and fortify its unity. Like the Medieval church in Europe, they regulate conduct and behaviour. In addition, they educate the members, regulate morality, and demand a high degree of self-discipline of the members as well as strict observance of their rules. High level of maturity and stability of personal character buttressed by impeccable moral life are among the important credentials that qualify one for admission to many of these organizations as well as the necessary requirement for the maintenance of membership in them. These organizations also belong to the community. The ruling chiefs who are, quite often, members or patrons themselves, call them to communal service at any time such a need arises within the nation or community. In a way, the relationship between some of these organizations and the formal traditional political structure is comparable to that between the Christian missions or the labour unions and the government. Apart from taking free initiatives to provide some social services like entertainment and medical care, these organizations assist the formal political structure, by the very nature of their relationship with the administration of the society. Moreover, tradition assigns to them some important political and administrative functions like law enforcement, maintenance of law and order, ensuring security of the nation, and supervision of economic and political activities. They perform these functions on the orders and directives of the chiefs (Noah, 1980:72). This has been the personality of cultural organizations since pre-colonial days. Apart from having helped to build the nations that later became parts of Nigeria, and in addition to being used by the chiefs to implement colonial policies, some cultural organizations also served colonialism directly and made outright contributions, therefore, to the building of the Nigerian nation-state.

The colonial government itself gave credit for the notable progress of the development of Native Authority in Ibibioiland, for example, to the "salutary influences" of Ibibio Union, a cultural organization founded by Ibibio people on April 28, 1928 (Noah, 1980:75-114). That same government officially acknowledged in 1973 that it was the Union that "prevented the worst manifestations" of the riots that hit the colonial government in 1929 "from appearing at Ikot Ekpene" (Noah, 1980:19). As long ago as 1941, Ibibio Union embarked upon an enlightenment campaign in support of payment of taxes to the colonial government and against corruption in public office. The Union toured all the six divisions of Ibibioiland which, then, included Abak, Ikot Ekpene, Itu, Ekpe, including Oron at that time, Ikot Abasi, known as Opobo then, and Uyo carrying its message to the people in each of those divisions. It assisted the colonial administration to establish itself firmly in what was then the Calabar Province but forms now a part of the Akwa Ibom and Cross River States. The colonial government, too, readily sought the assistance of the Union at bewildering nodes in the process of bringing the territory under its control. When, for instance, the colonial officials failed in their attempts to crush the menace of Ekpene Ikpa Ukon (Man Leopard) at Abak, it as to the Ibibio Union that the colonial government turned for rescue. The Union succeeded where the colonial might and intellect failed. It stamped out the criminal cult (Arikpo, 1967:59-60). Cultural organizations did not perceive any conflict between their support of the colonial rule and their organizational goal of the social improvement of their respective peoples. They pursued their objectives along with their support of the alien rule in the expectation that the policies of the colonial government would also enhance the attainment of their goal.
Accordingly, they remained faithful to both. Where they observed a contradiction between their goal or expectation and the policy of the colonial government, however, they became realistically and naturally impatient. They began to act politically as pressure groups in the affairs of their local administration and organized press campaigns to focus the attention of the government on the social needs of their respective areas. Their demands included better roads, dispensaries, and maternity hospitals (Awolowo, 1960:116-117).

There were times when they addressed petitions to the colonial government on purely local political issues or criticized government actions (Azikiwe, 1961:244). Later on, these organizations became action propagandists for the nationalist movement and joined the latter in demand for self-government. To say, therefore, that they were the precursors of nationalist movement and even political parties, particularly in the hinterland outside Lagos and Calabar where for a long time they were the only organizations, is to state the obvious. Cultural organizations were, indeed, the harbingers of Nigerian nationalism. Over political activities of cultural organizations became understandably minimal when the nationalist movement came to full bloom. For one thing, nationalists shared the views and aspirations of the cultural organizations of their ethnic origin. Having been socialized since their formative years into that culture, they naturally became one with the group. Some of them, like Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe who was the President of Ibo Union, also held prominent positions in the organizations. In their participation in the nationalist movement, therefore, they were not unmindful of the interest of their cultural units. In fact, they defended, protected and promoted their ethnic identity and interest in line with and just as the cultural organizations (Awolowo, 1960:135). For example, it was Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, a leading nationalist at the time, who, in his presidential address at an annual conference of Ibo Federated Union in 1949, bamboozled the Ibos with a litany of colonial government’s sins against the Ibo nation and, at the same time, created for them an apparent African continental apocalyptic mission and successfully strengthened the bonds of unity in his ethnic group which he thought was dangerously divided (Peil, 1976:73). Where there was a clash between the nationalist and the ethnic cultural interests or between the nationalists themselves on similar grounds, a serious crisis occurred. Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe parted ways politically, fundamentally, because Awolowo charged Azikiwe of pursuing a policy calculated, as he put it, “to corrode the self respect of the Yoruba people as a group; to build up the Ibos as a master race” (Peil, 1976:73). As the nationalist struggle for self-government progressed and the prospect for independence became real, cultural organizations flung back to overt political activities. They advocated a federal constitution for the country so as to allow their ethnic groups to operate as separate entities with internal liberties as they had been doing within the colonial set up. Nationalists teamed up with their ethnic cultural organizations. Both Ibibio Union and the Ibo Federated Union changed their names to Ibibio State Union and Ibo State Union respectively. Cultural organizations teamed up with and provided, in membership, the substrate of the political parties when the latter fully emerged. The Ibo State Union and Ibibio Union pitched their camps with the National Council of Nigeria Citizens- originally Nigeria and the Cameroons (N.C.N.C.), the Egbe Omo Oducuwa went into marriage with the Action Group (A.G.), while the Jamiyya Mutanen Arewa became the Northern Peoples Congress (N.P.C.). With and within these parties, cultural organizations as well as the various ethnic nations in the country fought for Nigerian independence on terms that they thought would be favorable to their cultural interests within a federal constitution. It is from here, too, that ethnic groups derive this share of credit for the creation of Nigeria. Quite outside the best imagination of Britain whose interest was to facilitate the administration of the colony, the structural framework which operated the amalgamated units exposed the different ethnic peoples unavoidably to the notion of belonging in one country and having one central government whose policies applied to all of them in common. In addition, it provided them with a framework and a scope within which to evolve into and create a state or nation-state as understood by the modern world in international law and diplomacy. They developed common interests, shared common colonial history as well as experiences, and owed loyalty to a common authority. Inter-ethnic interfacing increased. In time, they extended some amount of their sense of ones with and feeling of attachment to their individual ethnic nations to the entire amalgamated set-up. While the adoption of indirect rule as the method of administering the country established and sanctioned multi-ethnicity as the fundamental character of Nigeria, the administrative structure planted the seeds of federalism whose germination and growth process spans the history of constitutional development in Nigeria. Finally, the multi-ethnic association attained its nation-state goal on October 1, 1960 when it gained independence from Britain as Nigeria. Three years later, October 1, 1963, the nation-state matured into a republic. Nigeria is, thus, a political polymer whose molecules- the constituent ethnic nations are effectively both its creators and at the same time its inextricable parts. Accordingly, Nigerian political history up to the present has been one long drama of inter-ethnic ogling for advantage or dominance. The state creation exercises, the civil war, the independence constitutional crises and parliamentary upheavals,
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and even the current fantasy called WAZOBIA are expressions of the indomitable reist of the multi-ethnic nature which is the real characteristics of the Nigerian nation-state. This characteristic is exhibited in all sectors of social strata of the society and even more so among the elites than the people in the middle or lower ranks of the society. The country functions as series of ethnic power groups (Peil, 1976). Nigeria is not a melting pot. It is not likely to change to this soon, for and as Margaret Peil put it,

neither the police nor the army has proved to be a ‘melting-pot’ which would transform ethnicity into true nationality, since both soldiers and police men maintain contacts with their communities of origin and are responsive to attitudes of the wider population (Gutteridge, 1969:71-72).

She made reference to the events of 1966 and deduced from them that soldiers demonstrated in those incidents “that they shared prevailing ethnic projections and were willing to share in communal violence” (Gutteridge, 1969:83). In his The Military in African Politics, W.F. Gutteridge agrees with Margaret Peil. The coup of January 15, 1966 was, in his view, “about the distribution of power in Nigeria which appeared to be about to shift farther to the disadvantage of the opposition groups (Gutteridge, 1969:87-89). He did not hide his “belief that the Army’s intervention in politics was only an assertion of Ibo aspirations.” The Daily Times opinion of September 3, 1985 discussed tribal unions and the army. It made reference to the existence of tribal unions within the Army Forces presently.

CONCLUSION

From the above experience and granted their numbers and spread across the country, ethnic groups serve as veritable potential centres for development without prejudice to other structural devices. Nigeria will be better for it, to recognize this fact and effectively mobilize the potential judiciously for development.

REFERENCES