

# UNPOPULAR MARRIAGE NOT ENOUGH EXPLANATION FOR CURRENT NIGERIA WOE

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## Abstract

This paper highlights and proffered solutions to the lingering social, economic and political quagmire that has been a cog on the wheel of progress of our dear country. Ethnicity and Identity theory was used in this article to highlight the core issues that have kept Nigeria struggling with rudimentary of development after almost 100 years of existence. The writer concluded by asserting that One and progressive Nigeria is achievable if Nigeria will be restructured to reflect reality on ground without pursuing selfish interest of any group.

**Keywords:** Politics, Federalism, Economy, Good Governance, Colonialism

## 1. INTRODUCTION

It is a common knowledge attributing current Nigerian social, political and economic setbacks to 1914 unpopular British amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorate of Nigeria into one entity. There is no need stretching it too far because there is a correlation between the amalgamation and current Nigeria problems. However, the former cannot fully explain the later.

Nigeria is a country made up with tremendous diversity in religion, ethnicity, language and or virtually every aspect of life. These may be the source of social, economic and political challenges facing the progress of the country.

Giant of Africa (Nigeria) as it is called or use to be is a great country blessed with numerous natural resources (Human, Agriculture, Coal, Crude oil etc) that have the potential to make any nation great in all aspect of life. Yet, Nigeria is still battling with rudimentary aspect of development when countries such as Ghana, South Africa and Indonesia have overtaken us; not to mention those like Brazil, China and India.

Virtually all parts of the country or structures are facing developmental challenges that other competitors (other countries) has overcome or controlling such as endemic corruption, massive unemployment, terrorism, kidnapping, leadership crisis etc; yet Nigerians are still asking questions that suggests we are not even close to development path. This leads to questions bothering on the minds of well meaning Nigerians such as: Why can't Nigeria develop like other developing Third World Countries? Is it the cause of the British colonialist? Are we better off in 'One Nigeria' or should we dissolve like old Soviet Union? Are we in the right path of development juxtaposed with other developing countries? Is ethnicity, ethnocentrism, culture, religion etc more off a problem to us than blessing? Are we practicing the best government structure for us; in terms of True Federalism, Presidential System of Government, Quota System, Federal Character etc or does it reflect selfish interest of a region or minority elite group? Do we lose hope in Nigeria or are there solutions to our problems? It is in the light of the above questions that necessitated the writing of this paper to highlight and proffer solutions to the lingering social, economic and political quagmire that has been a cog on the wheel of progress of our dear country.

### 1.1. Nigeria History & Pre-Colonial Era

After the abolition of the slave trade, there was an expansion of trade in agricultural produce from Africa to Europe, particularly palm oil from the West African coastal areas. The coastal enclave of Lagos became a British colony in 1861, a center for expansion of British trade, missions, and political influence. Late 19th century and early 20th century Lagos was also a center for educated West African elites who were to play prominent roles in the development of Pan-Africanism as well as Nigerian nationalism.

By the end of the 19th century, Britain began an aggressive military expansion in the region. A protectorate was declared over northern Nigeria in 1900. Despite the loss of sovereignty, the strong political and cultural traditions of these societies initially enabled many to accommodate nominal British rule with little change in their way of life.

Nigeria came under the colonial rule of the British (United Kingdom) during the second half of the 19th century and the first decade of the 20th century. The United Kingdom conquered the territory of present-day Nigeria, except for the section of former German-controlled Cameroon in several stages. The British dependencies of Northern and Southern Nigeria were merged into a single territory in 1914, and a legislative council, initially with limited African representation was created in 1922.

Traditional native rulers, however, administered various territories under the supervision of the colonial authorities. In 1947, a federal system of government was established under a new Nigerian constitution introduced by the United Kingdom. This system was based on three regions: Eastern, Western and Northern. The idea was to reconcile the regional and religious tensions as well as accommodating the interest of diverse ethnic groups: mainly the Ibo (in the east), the Yoruba (in the west) and the Hausa and Fulani (in the north).

Nigeria was granted full independence in October 1960, as a federation of three regions (northern, western, and eastern) under a constitution that provided for a parliamentary form of government. Under the constitution, each of the three regions retained a substantial measure of self-government.

At the attainment of independence, Nigeria comprised three loosely amalgamated regions which later metamorphosed into three ethnic based political parties namely; the Northern People's Congress (NPC), National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (N.C.N.C) in the East, and the Action Group (AG) in the West. This was the product of British colonial political culture of regionalism which was meant to effectively control and exploit these regions but on the long run, fostered crisis of nation building in Nigeria. With this political structure, the seed of minority domination was already sown. This argued by many scholars as the beginning of disunity in Nigeria and the birth of the fight to control the Federal Government by these regions or ethnic groups that was coerced into one country.

However, though the forceful merging together of sharp culturally diverse groups by the British colonialists for clearly selfish economic reasons cannot be exonerated as the beginning of the problem that is facing the continued unity and progress of Nigeria, we cannot proudly say that it is still while the country is where she is. This is because many countries (United States, India, Canada, Australia etc) that have same ethnic and religious differences are managing the situation and even becoming stronger by the day. Now the question is: Why after 99 years of existence or 53 years of independence, Nigeria is yet to fix its social, political and economic structures in order to move this great country towards development path?

## **2. THEORETICAL EXPLANATION**

### **2.1. Ethnicity and Identity**

Basic identity-related factor such as religious and ethnic affiliation are often of fundamental importance to the psychic and moral well being of communities. Many of today's functioning multi cultural societies such as Canada, Australia and the United States have built their success on being a melting pot of many different cultures and religion (international IDEA, 1998:30). However, such diversity can be as threatening as they are energizing (Sulaiman 2004). As Osaghae (1994) has put it, "the experiences of Balkan regions and the defunct Soviet union are pointer to the damaging impact of ethno-religious conflict on national cohesion" (p. 34).

In view of this, it is needful to kick off the theoretical discussion with a conceptual clarification of the term ethnicity. There is no universally acceptable definition of ethnicity: sociologically, ethnic group is defined as a collectivity of people who share the same primordial characteristics such as common ancestry language and culture. Ethnicity then refers to the behaviour and feeling (about oneself and others) that supposedly emanates from membership of an ethnic group (Assefa, 1996; Ekwu, 1999). Thus an ethnic group is not a mere aggregate of people but a self conscious collection of people united, or closely related by shared experiences and a common history. Ethnic conflict has therefore come to mean cleavages between groups based on differentiations in ethnic identities. In this sense, few states (such as Somalia) are ethnically homogenous and many are poly-ethnic in composition (Sulaiman 2004).

It is however wrong to assume that those who share a common ancestry, language, culture, and religion should have a relationship of solidarity and harmony with each other but one of cleavage and conflict with those who do not share their ethnic identity. Ethnic similarity in Somalia has not assured social harmony nor avoided the outbreaks of large scale conflict. In Somalia there is great deal of evidence that an ethnic group divided into lower-level identities and fought each other with as much zeal as they might fight other ethnic groups. Alternatively, there are also societies in the region where ethnic diversity has not been a prescription for violent conflict (Assefa, 1996:32-5).

Egwu (1999) identified five major characteristics of ethnicity. First, ethnicity involves contextual discrimination and exclusive practices and claims which seek to edge out members of other ethnic groups as it is in different regions of Nigeria. It thus fosters and grows on the common consciousness of being one in relation to others. Built into the concept therefore is the in-group/out-group or “we” versus ‘them’ reference. The second important attribute relates to the conflict generating nature of the phenomenon because it is essentially a tool of competition for individuals and groups for scarce public goods. This is clearly the issue with Nigeria where positions (Political post, employment etc) are allocated not based on merit but on ‘who you are and who you know’, therefore undermining productivity. It is this that presents ethnicity as a negative and reactionary force in the social process. The third deals with the fact it is primarily a political phenomenon in so far as it deals with the central issue of “authoritative allocation of values”. For this reason it is a state-linked category rather than an archaic survival mechanism of the African people. Fourthly, ethnicity interacts closely with other cleavages such as class and religion. They cross-cut and interpenetrate at various levels of the social formation resulting in some complexity that can compound the analyst. As a form of consciousness, it can hardly exist in a pure form. Indeed, “as a social phenomena, it converges, by imperceptible steps, with related yet distinct phenomena that it is difficult to draw the line” (Yingar, 1994:3) The final issue here is the situational character of ethnicity group definitions, identities and alliances are not fixed or static as all these are contingent on what is at stake, the size of resources involved and the strategy which the interest bearers may choose out of several alternatives.

Several explanations have been proffered for the emergence and persistence of ethno-religious conflict in the society. In the first place conflicts portend the presence of instability in the society. The latter is related to, or proceeds from, the rules governing organizational process in the society (Dudley: 1973:10). In studying conflicts, Obserchall (1978:107) emphasizes opposing goals of interdependent parties “such that the probability of goal attainment for one decreases as the probability of goal attainment for the other increases”. This is clear picture of Nigeria situation; resource control agitation of the South and argument that it is vehemently resisted by the North on the ground that it will decrease their financial capability. Obserchall sees conflicts, as encompassing class, racial, religious and communal conflicts riots, rebellions, strikes and civil disorders, marches, demonstrations, protest gatherings and the like” (P.291).

Many conditions are linked to rise of conflicts. The key ones, according to Bande (1998) are: a. Differences in economic structure; b. Values; c. Changes in times difference issues generate controversy at different time; d. Population shifts and heterogeneous values; and e. Existing cleavages in the residuum of past controversy.

According to Nnoli (1989), the persistence of ethnic problem in Africa is linked to the failure of democracy:-

There is a democratic side to the ethnic question in Africa. It concerns the right of each group to be treated equally with all the others, for their member’s lives and property to be secure, from arbitrary arrest and punishment, and for them to enjoy equal opportunity in trade, business, employment, schooling and enjoyment of social amenities (Nnoli, 1989:206).

In conflict political situations, ethnic, cultural, religious and other identity differences are less pronounced than is often assumed even if it looms large in the imagination.

What is important is the initiation of and subsequent accumulation of acts of mutual punishment, deprivation and destruction of groups which builds up hate memories and a self perpetuating and punishment as groups, however defined, accumulate the fear that they could be annihilated. (Ibrahim, 1999:6).

Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi and Yugoslavia are a very good example of this process. Ibrahim (1999) is of the view that it is necessary to rehabilitate the analysis of the state in understanding extreme forms of identity conflicts. This is because the legitimacy of the modern state is linked to its capacity to present itself as a provider of necessary public goods and more important, a neutral arbiter that guarantees the security of all sections of society. When the state is generally perceived as serving the particularistic interest of one group, it starts losing its legitimacy, and indeed, its authority. As state capacity declines, fear of “the other” rises and become an objective factor of survival. People are forced to resort to other levels of solidarity-religious, ethnic, regional etc. in search of security.

With particular reference to Nigeria, cultural identity, economic factors and politics are important elements in ethnic conflict. As Nnoli (1982; 1994) has observed, many ethnic conflict can be explained not in terms of the mere contact between different ethnic groups but by the competition between them, one that makes a particular group to consider the other as “stranger” or “parasites”. The forcible incorporation of ‘incompatible’ culture groups by the colonial masters as exemplified in the works of Schwarz (1965) and Olurunsola (1977) is another

explanation preferred for ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Osaghae (1994) and Usman (1986) on the other hand traced the emergence and, particularly, the persistence of ethnic antagonism to the manipulation of ethnicity and religions by elites in their competition for economic resources and political power. According to this line of argument, because of the centralization of state power over the distribution of resources, “ethnicity and religious bigotry are used as expedient tools by ethnic and religious missionaries” (Sulaiman 2004). Interestingly, Osaghae (1994) emphasized that ethnic violence gets exacerbated during the process of democratization. This is because people’s attention becomes focused on whom controls state power and, therefore, the distribution of resources. This situation gets compounded when democratization is combined with economic restructuring such as privatization and commercialization which gives room to “pent-up tensions”.

### 3. CHALLENGES OF NATIONAL BUILDING

Nigeria observed 53 years of Independence from Britain last 1<sup>st</sup> October. Like in previous Independence anniversaries, Nigerians as usual have started to debate issues concerning the economic, social and political development achieved by the country over the past years. Tools for measuring economic development of countries have over the years evolved. These tools are not themselves perfect and, in fact, may not always have easy universal application at all times. Nevertheless, most countries, especially those with political and economic systems in the image of the so-called Western Capitalist democracies have accepted the current parameters of measuring economic development of countries around the world. The early concept of measuring economic progress relied on the index of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) as the only tool (Ango 2012).

By mid 1990s, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) succeeded in introducing a more comprehensive concept it called “Human Development” as a more realistic measure of economic progress. It is the components of Human Development concept which were adopted as “Millennium Development Goals” (MDGs), most countries including Nigeria, have adopted for monitoring progress towards achieving their socio-economic objectives.

This shift in concept is justified from experiences in many countries which record stupendous growth in their GDPs while the majority of their citizens wallowed in abject poverty. This is a classical example of what is often termed as “economic growth without human development.” Therefore, there is a need to examine the current state of the Nigerian economy after decades of efforts to develop it. Using these Human Development indices, ie the Millennium Development Goals, various recent surveys conducted by National and International Agencies have concluded, rather sadly, that Nigeria’s socio-economic progress remain very unsatisfactory. Their major findings and conclusions according to Ango 2012 are summarised as follows:

- Nigeria is presently grouped among the 20 poorest countries in the world, and among the 30 least developed countries in Sub Saharan Africa.
- Of Nigeria’s estimated 160 million population, (projected from 2006 census) about 100 million people live on less than US\$1.0 a day. That is an estimated 70 per cent of all Nigeria’s are classified as poor.

This unfortunate state of affairs is as paradoxical as it is embarrassing to Nigerians especially in view of all known indicators that Nigeria would become a great African country within a very short time after independence in 1960. At this juncture, I will attempt to explain the various factors which alone or in inter-play, brought us to our sorry situation today and way forward.

- **Political instability:** From 1960 to date Nigeria had not experienced the kind of stable political atmosphere necessary for orderly continuity of good governance for development and growth expected in truly democratic societies. Within a relatively short period of 53 years, Nigeria has had 14 heads of state (an average of three years each), and of this number nine were not elected, and of the remaining five only on two occasions were their election deemed free and fair. The political instability which retarded Nigeria’s rapid development since independence in 1960 is rooted in tribalism, ethnicity and sectionalism. It is my contention that tribalism, ethnicity and sectionalism played the most part of Nigeria’s political instability. Most of the military interventions experienced in Nigeria were inspired by tribal and ethnic tendencies inherent in the country’s social diversity.
- **Structural organisation:** Nigeria is said to be practicing Federal System of Government but in reality, the country is ran as a Unitary Government with the Federal Government welding social, political and economic power more than the 36 States put together. This many have argued to be the major structural problem that is challenging the development of the country. This type of structure encourages lack of productivity buy State Governments since ‘National cake’ will be shared at the end of the month. The

introduction of 'Federal Character' by the military has de-emphasised merit and enthrone a situation where unqualified people lead professional. The result is lack of direction and reduction in productivity. This may explain why no government establishment (crude oil refinery) function to its capacity.

- **Corruption:** In his widely acclaimed book, "The Trouble with Nigeria", Professor Chinua Achebe in a whole chapter on corruption boldly proclaimed "His frank and honest opinion is that anybody who can say that corruption in Nigeria has not become alarming is either a fool, a crook or else does not live in this country". This was some twenty years back. In Nigeria today, corruption has become so common a word that few really bother with the actual meaning (Farida 2010). According to the global Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) 2009 by Transparency International (TI), which generated healthy debate, Nigeria occupies 130th position out of the 180 countries surveyed. The effects of corruption in Nigeria have not been insignificant such as under-development, lack of basic infrastructure like good road networks, misuse of natural resources, inadequate power and water supply, mediocrity in professional and leadership positions, defective leadership outputs, fuel scarcity in an oil producing nation, falling standards of education and work output, high unemployment rates, the ever-widening gap between the rich and poor to mention just a few. The multiplier effect has been the mass spread of poverty and our unenviable position in the list of poor and under-developed countries amidst rich natural resources.
- **Unemployment:** A 2009 World Bank report on 'Employment and Growth', warned that, "The share of young people between the ages of 15 and 24 outside the labour force is growing, despite the Nigeria's strong growth performance over the years" (Allafrica, 2010). The UN-Habitat study on crimes and violence stressed that socio-economic inequality and the lack of opportunities for social advancement and employment are some of the root causes of crime and violence. Children and youth from disadvantaged families are vulnerable to fall prey to criminal networks. Of the estimated 1 billion people living in slums, over half are under the age of 25, and 40% are estimated to be under the age of 19. They are the primary victims of social exclusion through unemployment, lack of access to health and education (UN-Habitat, 2008). The society already has expectations for individuals and established means of achieving them. When the means are limited as the youth unemployment is 46.5% in 2011, people are forced to achieve the goals through illegal means to fulfil societal expectations. Kidnappings are on the increase across Nigeria and the unemployed youths view the business lucrative. They are available for recruitment by politicians. In the Northern part, they are recruited both by politicians and religious groups to be used in political, religious and terrorism acts. In the SW Nigeria, they find easy employment in petty criminal activities (Ajaegbu, 2012). Meaningful development cannot be experienced in a country where safety of lives and property cannot be guaranteed.
- **Education:** Education is the bedrock of development. But unfortunately Education in Nigeria is bisected with myriads of problems. These includes; poor funding and thus poor educational infrastructures, inadequate classrooms, teaching aids (projectors, Computers, Laboratories and libraries), paucity of quality teachers and poor / polluted learning environment. In addition to these inadequacies, our school system is plagued with numerous social vices such as examination malpractices, cultism, hooliganism and corruption (Odia and Omofonmwan 2007). As an instrument of nation building, education builds the mass to build the nation. But regrettably, the education system in Nigeria has collapsed to the extent that nothing in the name of functional education goes on in the educational system (Mezieobi, 1994).

In recognition of the need to redirect Nigeria to the path of development, President Goodluck in his Independent Address to the nation on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2013 revealed that there is need for a National Conference; where Nigerians will come together and chart the way forward for the nation. To match words with action, the Federal Government constituted a panel of National Conference planners that will report in six weeks on the modality for the conference. In his word, president Goodluck noted that 'Today, we are taking historic and concrete steps that will further strengthen our understanding, expand the frontiers of our inclusiveness and deepen our bond as one people under God'.

This article could not have come at a better time than now that the thought of 'way forward' and National Conference to discuss the future of the country has cut across virtually all social class in the country. The major problem will be the implementation of the out-come of the conference. This is because Nigeria has history of non-implementation of the out-come of such gathering. However, I dedicate the remaining part of this article to discussion of critical areas that need restructuring for the country to be back on the path of development.

- **True Federalism:** A situation where everybody or other branches of the country depend on the centre for virtually everything (political, economic, security etc) makes this country ungovernable and leaves many things unattained. It is only Nigeria that still practices Unitary Federal System of government in



the world. There is need for True Federalism in this country where federating units will be stronger than the centre. This will encourage competition and development as it were in the first republic. A situation where all States depend on the centre for monthly allocation creates unproductive federating units. All parts of the country can never grow at same pace. When States are allowed to source for their own fund and pay some certain percentage to the Federal Government, it will allow them to look inward on how to generate fund for their own sustenance. Though some States may develop faster than others, but at the end it will encourage utilization of all potential recourses in all States to its maximum.

- **Strengthening of Arms of Government:** There is need for us to have strong structures (Executive, Legislature and Judiciary) than strong human beings. It is a common knowledge that the Executive wield more influence on other arms of government. This most times jeopardizes the probability of the common man to get justice and rubbishes the Judiciary as the last hope of the common man. A situation where a man that stole a phone was jailed for 42 years and one that stole billions of Nigerian Police Pension fund was jailed 6 years with option of fine having pleaded guilty to three counts of an amended 20-count charge (Sahara reporters, 2013) is a pitiable situation. Therefore, there is need to review the laws and punishment of offender of this country in order to reflect reality of current situation and also strengthen the arms of government to guarantee independence of each arm to enable them function for the good of the country.
- **Corruption:** It is time those in authority in Nigeria declare war on corruption. There is no institution both government and private that can be exonerated from this cankerworm that if not checked, will definitely grind the economy of the country to a halt. If there will be meaningful development in this country, corruption must be rooted out of the system.
- **Education:** Education is the bedrock of development in any country. Investing on human development is the greatest investment a country can make on its citizens. This is because education builds the masses and they in turn build the nation. With poor funding of education by the government and series of strikes by university lecturer, half baked and unemployable graduates are turned out every year to populate the already saturate Nigerian labour market. Therefore, for this country to move back to the path of development, our education institutions must be strengthened.
- **Unemployment:** In order to attract both local and international investment to the country, security of lives and property must be a top priority for the government. Massive unemployment in the country creates fertile ground for availability of army of potential criminals, ready to be recruited by both religious and unscrupulous people in the society for all types of crime. Therefore investing in massive and meaningful employment of qualified people that are ready and willing to work will no doubt reduce the number of people available for crime, reduce crime in the society and increase the probability of local and international investment in the economy of the country.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

Nigeria is a country blessed and has the potential to compete with the developed world. Yet majority of Nigerians live on less than a dollar a day. Though 1914 amalgamation contributed to the present Nigeria problems, I think that we are supposed to have overcome the issue by now if we truly want to remain as one progressive country. One and progressive Nigeria is achievable if Nigeria will be restructured to reflect reality on ground without pursuing selfish interest. Thanks to the call for National Conference that will discuss the future of the country. If this step will achieve desired result, this conference must not have any 'no go areas'. This is because if after 100 years and we still experience the same problem we had then, then something is wrong with the structure of Nigeria. Therefore, for us to go another 100 years and look back and say we have made great achievement, everything must be discussed in this conference and its outcome must be subjected to referendum before it become law and not to be subjected to the approval of National Assemblée.

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