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Contesting exclusion in a multi-ethnic state: rethinking ethnic nationalism in Nigeria

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On the surface, ideas of a Nigerian state with common citizenry, free from ethnicity, religious bigotry and regionalism were pursued by Nigerian nationalists. Generally, a state united in common political practices, equal opportunities and under the same law was envisaged. However, the process leading to independence was characterised by ethnic nationalism. In the decolonisation era, group interest was reified and elevated above national struggle for self-government. The post-colonial project of constructing a common citizenry with the same aspirations, one Nigerian identity with a cosmopolitan outlook instead of ethnic loyalty, therefore largely eluded the country. Over the last five decades, the deepest attachment has increasingly been that of ethnic and regional consciousness. Ethnic nationalism has increasingly won support in an atmosphere of greed and clientelism. Several complex crises are currently manifesting themselves in ethnic forms. The situation has been exacerbated by political and economic exclusion, which has awakened forces and organisations that fight for ethnic and regional aspirations. This paper deals with the issue of group identification during the colonial period, especially from 1945. It also explores the extent to which the pattern of nationalist struggle defined the crucial issues of ethnic crises in post-colonial Nigeria. Finally, it examines the dimensions of the contest for citizenship.

Keywords: ethnicity; exclusion; citizenship; consciousness; identity; nationalism

Introduction

One of the issues in the last decade within Nigerian space is the contest for ethnic nationalities in a plural society. The contest for 'ethno-nationalism' has gained momentum within the global nationalist claims. Due to shifting global political, social and economic contests, from the 1990s there began to emerge nationalist identities and interests in the quest for self-determination (Onuoha, 2008, p. 1). Though these may have threatened the sovereignty of the nation-states where they occurred, they are regarded by the minorities as legitimate movements for self-determination. This is reflected in the manner of ethnic nationalism and the quest for self-determination in Nigeria. Since Nigerian independence, there have been unresolved crises of state ownership and contested citizenship. The nature of Nigeria's underdevelopment has heightened the struggles for economic space and by implication turned the state into a contested arena by different ethnic nationalities (Onuoha, 2008, p. 1).

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The major issues that generate fears of exclusion among the component groups include the control of state power, resource allocation, and citizenship. Those that felt marginalised on these issues have sometimes employed violent conflicts to advance their interests (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005, p. 1). It has therefore been accepted that Nigeria is characterised by intractable conflicts and instability due to its history of a complex web of identities (Dudley, 1973; Herbst, 1996; Kirk-Greene, 1971; Maier, 2000; Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). The linkages between identities and the contest for the national space against the background of economic cataclysm need to be related to the spurt of ethnic nationalism in Nigeria. In the following section, the paper examines the key concepts that underline ethnic nationalism, colonialism, nationalist struggle and group identification. Thereafter the paper analyses exclusion and crises and the dimensions of ethnic nationalism, before concluding.

Conceptual clarifications

In the words of Osaghae (1995, p. 11), ethnicity can be viewed as 'the employment or mobilisation of ethnic identity and difference to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict or cooperation'. By this definition, ethnicity transcends the narrow view of conflict manifestation. In a broader sense, ethnicity is a social categorisation where a group is ascribed with common identity that distinguishes it from others. However, ethnicity is not only defined by 'cultural commonalities', but also by the interplay between identity and external categorisation as exemplified in the case of Nigeria (Brubaker, Loveman & Stamatov, 2004, pp. 31–32; Nnoli, 1978).

The concept of ethnicity is also rooted in the idea of societal groups, characterised by shared nationality, tribal affiliation, religious or cultural origins (Duruji, 2010, p. 94). The belief in the common root of a group provides the basis for the creation of an identity (Mbaku, Pita & Kimeny, 2001, p. 61). Sometimes ethnicity is explained in the differences in language, religion, colour, and culture in which identity and group formation occur (Nagel, 1995, p. 443). However, ethnicity has no permanent boundary as it can be subjected to changing group characteristics (Barth, 1969, p. 17).

This paper employs Varshney's (2002) schema in examining ethnicity. It distinguishes four schools, namely, essentialism, instrumentalism, constructivism and institutionalism. Briefly, essentialism is anchored on the thesis of primordialism, which restates that ethnic identities are rooted in cultural differences among kinship-based groups. In the case of instrumentalism, dormant ethnic identities are manipulated by the political class for their interests, thereby leading to ethnicisation of politics. Constructivism is based on the origins of ethnic groups and historicises the invention of identity by linking it to colonialism, missionary activities and the emergent nationalists. The critical role of political institutions and the framing of ethnic relations is the concern of institutionalism (Ukiwo, 2005, p. 4).

The use of any of these theories does not preclude the other as it is convenient to combine more than one perspective. However, essentialism has substantially influenced modernisation theorists, whose arguments have become the points of departure for other perspectives (Ake, 2000). Modernisation theory assumes that conflicts in developing societies are due to the varied cultures of the people that engaged themselves in constant warfare before the advent of the 'civilisers'. Such a conclusion, based on some of the works of earlier colonial anthropologists, inspired the colonial policy of separate settlements for 'strangers' in emergent urban communities like Nigeria. This policy was

intended to minimise social relations that could lead to conflicts, but it turned out to engender ethnicity.

Contrary to modernisation theory, Nigeria's identity and ethnic contest can be attributed to the widening of social horizons within the national space (Melson & Wolpe, 1971, p. 3). Coleman (1971) demonstrated how educational development among Igbo speaking people was seen as a threat to the Yoruba dominance of the colonial service due to their early contact with the Europeans. Similarly, he shows how the rising profile of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe (an Igbo) within the nationalist movement aroused rivalry from the Yoruba elite, thereby leading to the formation of alternative political platforms for the Yoruba. This clearly demonstrates how modernisation, contrary to its theory has exacerbated ethnicity. Paden (1971), examining the Igbo migrants in Kano of northern Nigeria concluded that it was not differences in values, but similarity in values that make contest for scarce resources possible. For example, it was the contest for the same social values that pitched the Igbo against their Hausa/Fulani hosts.

Turning to nationalism, it can be regarded as an ideology that creates and sustains a nation with a common identity. Nationalism is however intensified by the politics of exclusion and occurs when a group is politically mobilised to contest its exclusion from available opportunities. Therefore ethnic nationalism manifests whenever a group of people feels marginalised and excluded from the political and economic equations of a society, especially in a heterogeneous political system (Joireman, 2003). The administrative style adopted by the British colonialists created distrust, suspicion and cleavages, which resulted in unbridled contest among the major ethnic groups for the control of the Nigerian state. The political class that took over power after independence failed to repudiate those colonial policies that were opposed to pan-Nigeria aspiration and hence could not meet the demands of the various Nigerian groups (Duruji, 2010, pp. 1–3).

The theory of instrumentalism anchored on the manipulation of ethnic identity by the elites for political and economic gains is appropriate for understanding ethnic nationalism in Nigeria. The role of the elites is central to ethnic nationalism because they act in the name of their different ethnic groups, albeit not for the benefit of the group, but for their own personal benefit. The theory further explains that this sentiment and ethnic mobilisation disappears when it is no longer politically or economically expedient for the elites. The state thus lacks the capacity to properly address the interests of competing ethnic groups; this basically reduced the state to an arena for contestation by the disparate groups over its control (Ake, 1999). Therefore, elites bereft of ideology for national development, resort to ethnicity in order to capture power for the purpose of primitive accumulation to the exclusion of others (Obi, 2002).

It is always easy to appeal to the ethnic sense of many Nigerians because of the persistent poverty that alienates people from the state. It is this economic situation that sometimes pushes people to seek solace in primary group identity (Ake, 1999). In fact, the lack of socio-economic security makes many people vulnerable to a self-seeking elite that presents ethnic nationalism as a panacea for their predicament (Kaur, 2007; Jinadu, 2004). Important to note is that underdevelopment creates divisive socio-economic competition for limited job opportunities and social services by the disparate groups. This results in situations where unsuccessful people blame their predicament on the politics of exclusion by members of other groups (Duruji, 2010, pp. 1–3).

It is in this sense that most Nigerian politicians without definable program seek election into political offices through their ethnic credentials. They solicit for votes through ethnic appeals by emphasising the exclusion of their respective ethnic groups

from opportunities within the Nigerian state, as exemplified in the People's Democratic Party's (PDP) primary election campaigns between Abubakar Atiku and Goodluck Jonathan in 2011. While Atiku argued that it was the turn of the Hausa/Fulani to produce the presidential candidate, Jonathan argued that Niger-Delta should produce the presidential candidate because the region produces the oil from which Nigeria's wealth is obtained. Both camps are bereft of a nationalistic agenda for Nigeria's development. The role of the politicians in this sense promotes ethnic nationalism (IDEA, 2000).

The Nigerian political space also presents an environment for a strong belief rightly or wrongly in what an ethnic group should get. This belief informs the general attitude of the people towards resource control and the sharing formula. For example, the Hausa/Fulani plutocrats believe that the oil wealth should be controlled and shared according to their own formula of majority population. On the other hand, the minority group of Niger Delta, on whose land the oil is exploited, believes the oil wealth should be shared according to the formula of derivation. For many years, beginning from Isaac Adaka Boro's agitation, the Niger Delta people have resorted to ethnic nationalism and separatist movement in order to wrest the control of the oil resources from the majority groups in Nigeria (Attah, 2002, p. 48).

Historically, ethnic identities in Nigeria have been categorised into the two broad majority and minority groups. The origin of this categorisation lies with British colonial policy, which grouped Hausa/Fulani in the north, Igbo in the east and Yoruba in the west into the major ethnic groups while the remaining groups are regarded as minorities. Prior to these categorisations, there were neither major nor minor group distinctions. The post-independence creations of states and local government areas, however, led to the emergence of new majorities and minorities identities. This did not however alter the old historical contexts, especially with regard to the majority groupings (Osaghae 1986).

While the majority groups' categorisation remains intact, there have been reconstructions of minorities in a way that there are now inequalities among them. Ekeh (1996) has identified other minorities such as the 'historically dominant minorities' and 'political minorities' who are marginalised and excluded from power. It is in this sense that it became fashionable for non-minority groups, namely, Igbo and some Yoruba sub-groups, to redefine themselves as 'minorities' in view of their alleged exclusion from the process of a more equitable access to power in the 1990s. However, their positions have not changed the historical context of their majority status.

Next to ethnic identity is religious identity. Religious identity is more common among the Hausa/Fulani than ethnic identities. In fact, it serves to activate ethnicity. While Islam has served to activate identity in the core northern Nigeria, it has not been so with the Christian dominated southern Nigeria (Lewis & Bratton, 2002, p. 25). Christianity, Islam and traditional religions are the leading religions in Nigeria, but the last is less politically active. In effect, Christian and Muslim identities have been the mainstay of religious differentiation and contest. However, underneath the broad Christian-Muslim categories are several sub-cleavages that have at one time or the other generated intra-identity conflicts.

Islam in Nigeria has different sects that have generated the most identity contest. Muslims belong to different sects, which include the Ahmadiyya, Sanusiyya, Tijanniyya and Quadriyya, among which there have been conflicts. Another notable sect is the Jamaatu Nasril Islam (JNI), which was founded by the Sardauna of Sokoto in 1961 to propagate the ideals of Islam. There has been, however, a surge of radical and fundamentalist activities, especially among Muslim youth, since the Iranian Islamic

Revolution of the 1970s. It is in this context that some fundamentalist Muslim sects, notably the *Maitatsine*, *Izala* movement, the Muslim Brothers or *Shiites*, and most recently the *Boko Haram* emerged to violently demand, amongst others, purist *Sharia* law. The activities of these sects have precipitated major religious conflicts in Nigeria since the 1980s. Many of these Islamic-induced conflicts have clear ethnic undertones. Factors that have accentuated the politicisation of Muslim identities include state policies on *Sharia*. The adoption of *Sharia* law by a number of states in Nigeria has remained a contentious identity issue.

Colonialism, nationalist struggle and group identification

The single most divisive policy of British colonialism was the establishment in late 1954 of a federal structure of three units, namely, the northern, western, and eastern regions (Attah, 2011, p. 82). Although it reflected the historic patterns by which the colonialists acquired and administered Nigeria, the three-region federal structure based on tripartite major ethnic configuration was inherently divisive, disintegrative and unstable. The structure fostered ethnic majority chauvinism by erecting the boundaries of the northern, western and eastern regions around the identities of the major ethnic formations, namely, Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Igbo. Majority chauvinism resulted in the fuelling of ethnic minority agitation because of the exclusion and threat to their groups' identities.

The socio-economic and political structures created by the colonial administration made the different groups begin to compete along ethnic divides. This trend was demonstrated in the struggle for the control of the leadership of the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) between the Yoruba and Igbo extraction in the late 1930s and early 1940s. Ethnic consciousness among Nigerian elites began to manifest when those who migrated to the urban centres started to identify with their tribal groups in the 1930s and 1940s (Nnoli, 1978, p. 95). Nnoli (1978, p. 110) further noted that communal associations and unions became umbrella institutions for the people's social relations. Prominent among these communal unions were the Yoruba's *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, Igbo State Union and the Hausa/Fulani *Jarma Nasir Islamiya*. Although these unions have become extinct, in their places have emerged *Afenifere* from the Yoruba group, *Arewa* Consultative Forum from the Hausa/Fulani group and *Ndi Igbo* from the Igbo extraction. Minority groups peripheral to these major groups have also demonstrated some concern for ethnic affiliation and affinity.

Given the multiple cumulative ethnic contradictions and tensions built into the colonial experience in Nigeria, it is not surprising that this period witnessed the initial major instances of inter-ethnic violence in the country. In 1945, for instance, amidst a general strike and food shortages, violence erupted in the mining town of Jos between Igbo and Hausa migrants over residential and trading opportunities in the city (Nnoli, 1978, p. 235). The violence, which lasted for two days, left two people dead, many others injured, and a considerable amount of property damaged (Nnoli, 1978, p. 235).

In 1953, Hausa and Igbo again clashed in the northern city of Kano over the attempts by southern parties to hold rallies in the city in support of their anti-colonial campaign for Nigerian independence. The riot left at least 36 people dead (21 of them of Igbo group) and more than 200 people injured (Feinstein, 1987, p. 159). The violence reflected the bitter opposition to Nigerian independence by northern politicians, who feared they might be excluded from the benefits of a sovereign Nigeria if independence were granted then. The riot also reflected the resentment of Igbo domination of socio-economic opportunities

in northern Nigeria by the Hausa/Fulani population. In fact, the 1953 Kano riot could be described as the prelude to ethnic violence in Nigeria (Suberu & Diamond, 2003, p. 120).

During the decolonisation era, nationalist activities were rooted in ethnic associations that provided the platform for mass mobilisation against British rule. Consequently, ethnicity became politicised because the nationalist leaders – Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, the leader of Northern People's Congress (NPC), Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe of the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), and Chief Obafemi Awolowo, leader of the Action Group (AG) – became regional leaders who championed ethnic, rather than national causes (Ake, 2000, p. 99). It is in this respect that Post (1963, p. 13) contends that, 'from 1951 onwards… nearly all Igbo supported the NCNC, most Yoruba backed the Action Group, and the Hausa/Fulani were associated with the NPC'. These developments contextualised the upsurge of ethnic nationalism before independence in 1960.

It should be noted that within each region, there were ethnic minorities that contested the 1954 arrangement because of the dominance of the major ethnic groups within the federating regions. For example, the minority middle-belt group as exemplified by the Tiv has always contested their exclusion from the mainstream politics of northern Nigeria. Ethnic minorities within each region were subjected to 'majoritarian dictatorship' in a situation where majority interests held sway and minorities had no say (Mustapha, 2000, p. 87). This development influenced the setting up of the 1956 Willinck Commission to address the minority question.

One of the issues that also dominated nationalists' debates in the 1950s was the development of a competent and trained national civil service that could replace expatriate officers. The thinking in the north was based on the 'northernisation' of the civil service that would ensure northerners gained the commanding positions in the country's civil service (Osaghae & Suberu, 2005). The desire from the 1950s by northerners to control the country's civil service like the other majority groups seems to point to ethnic nationalism, but in their thinking it was an opportunity to provide political cohesion for northerners in post-colonial Nigeria. Political movements therefore manipulated nationalism for group interests thereby setting the stage for exclusion and the inevitable contest for ethnic nationalism.

Exclusion and crises

Post-colonial Nigeria has witnessed two contradictory tendencies. The first is the continuation and even proliferation of colonial conflict legacies, leading to at least two waves of violent identity conflicts in Nigeria from 1960–1970 and since the early 1980s. The second tendency in post-colonial Nigeria involves a more or less concerted attempt to manage identity conflicts through innovative federalist practices. The colonial state, to reiterate, pursued divide-and-rule policies that entrenched systems of ethnic segmentation and polarisation. These included the policy of recruiting Hausa/Fulani into the army and the police to the near exclusion of southerners and Christians from the core north. Similarly, the restriction of Nigerians from the south to strangers' quarters in northern Nigeria bequeathed a fatal legacy to Nigeria. Kirk-Greene (1980) rightly referred to this legacy as *damnosa hereditas* (burdensome inheritance) in post-independence Nigeria.

The lopsided colonial ethno-regional federal structure in particular, which favoured the majority groups, was strongly cited as one of the causes of the first wave of violent ethno-political discontent and conflicts in the post-colonial era, as exemplified in the Tiv riots of 1962 and 1964, and the Ijaw secessionist campaign of Isaac Adaka Boro in 1966.

All these underscored the continuing disenchantment of ethnic minorities with their unequal amalgam into the majority-dominated regions. The effects of the inequitable ethno-regional federalism were similarly expressed in other political crises in the 1960s. Some of these crises included the 1962–1963 census ethno-regional disputes, the 1964 federal election crisis and the 1965 Western region election problem. The fall of the First Republic in 1966, following what some perceived as ethno-military coup, can be traced to the post-independence crises of exclusion. In fact, the May 1966 Unitary Decree that followed the January 1966 coup was interpreted by the northerners as an attempt to replace Hausa/Fulani domination with Igbo hegemony (Onuoha, 2008).

The manner which the Hausa/Fulani group perceived the January, 1966 military coup and the May, 1966 Unitary Decree provoked the killings of Igbo in northern Nigeria. There was a counter coup in July, 1966, carried out by young Hausa/Fulani military officers. Several Igbo soldiers, including Head of State General Aguiyi-Ironsi, were murdered during the counter-coup. The massacres of thousands of Igbos in the north forced many of them back to south-east Nigeria. The forced migration from the north of the surviving Igbos generated support for Igbo nationalism and the bid to break away from Nigeria to form a separate State of Biafra. The 1970s were also not entirely free from sectional tensions, as evident in the north-south dispute over the 1973 census and the various inter-group disputes over the boundaries of new Local Government Administrations.

The deluge of inter-group conflicts that has afflicted Nigeria since the 1980s may be classified into four main, but overlapping, categories, namely, ethno-religious clashes, inter-ethnic violence, intra-ethnic and/or intra-religious conflicts, and inter-group economic clashes. Partly because of the tendency to spill over from their initial theatres into other localities, ethno-religious clashes have proved to be the most violent instances of inter-group crisis in Nigeria. They have occurred mainly in the Middle Belt and cultural borderline states of the Muslim north, where Muslim Hausa/Fulani groups have been pitted against non-Muslim ethnic groups in a 'dangerous convergence of religious and ethnic fears and animosities' (IDEA, 2000, p. 296). The major examples of violent ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria have included the Kafanchan-Kaduna crises in 1987 and 1999, Zangon-Kataf riots of 1992, Tafawa Balewa clashes in 1991, 1995 and 2000, the Kaduna Sharia riots of 2000, and the unending Jos crisis, which began in 2001.

Like ethno-religious violence, the recent inter-ethnic clashes in Nigeria have also been particularly combustible, especially when they have involved relatively large groups such as the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Tiv, Urhobo or Ijaw. The major cases of inter-ethnic violence in Nigeria since the late 1980s have included the Tiv-Jukun conflicts in Taraba and Benue states, the three-cornered Urhobo-Ijaw-Itsekiri clashes in Warri, Delta state, the Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba clashes in Lagos, Ogun, Oyo and Kano states, and the recurrent clashes between Hausa-Fulani and Igbo groups in Kano state. While the Tiv-Jukun, Urhobo-Ijaw-Itsekiri, and Hausa/Fulani-Igbo clashes are long-running conflicts which have erupted periodically from the 1980s to date, the Hausa/Fulani-Yoruba clashes took place mainly in 1999–2000 in the wake of the transition from northern-dominated military rule to a Yoruba-led civilian administration (Attah, 2011, p. 87).

The major instances of intra-ethnic clashes in Nigeria are the Aguleri-Umuleri conflicts in the Igbo state of Anambra and the Ife-Modakeke conflicts in the Yoruba state of Osun. Like many inter-ethnic clashes, the intra-ethnic Aguleri-Imuleri and Ife-Modakeke conflicts were rooted in the contest for land and the government's ill-advised and inconsistent demarcation of boundaries. The violent conflicts involving the

Maitatsine movement resembled an intra-religious crisis in so far as the movement's lethal uprisings took place in northern Muslim towns and cities. Significant tensions have also developed in the Muslim north between the two major brotherhoods of *Quadriyya* and *Tijanniyya*, between these brotherhoods and more puritanical or radical Islamic movements like the *Izala* and the Muslim Brothers (Shiites), and between these puritanical or radical groups themselves.

Although virtually all inter-group clashes in Nigeria have involved the mobilisation of identities in the contest for some socio-economic and/or political resources, there are classes of conflicts that are almost exclusively defined by the competition for scarce economic goods. The conflict over grazing opportunities across the country between Fulani herdsmen and settled farming populations falls within this categorisation. Similarly, many communal clashes in the oil-rich Niger Delta have been attributed to sectional contests for opportunities accruing from the oil industry operating in the region. Some of these opportunities include, among others, infrastructural and financial compensation provided by the multinational oil corporations.

The increasing failure of the post-colonial state to meet the expectations and aspirations of the masses has therefore become the defining factor of ethnic identity. The state, instead of delivering the goals of development to the people, has become the private property of the ruling class. The role of the political class in the under-development of the Nigerian peoples through disempowerment has made them vulnerable to the exploitation of international capital. The situation of poverty thus created aggravates the struggle for the limited economic space. There are therefore recurring conflicting claims between the people over land, resource control and other economic spaces. Lamentably, members of the political class have always capitalised on the people's conflicting claims by further fuelling the conflicts and divisions for their own goals of primitive accumulation. Some of the notable crises are the Nigerian civil war, military coups and the annulment of the 12 June 1993 Presidential election. All of these reinforced the mistrust and divisions among Nigerians.

A critical analysis of ethnically based crises in Nigeria also reveals the nexus between the political and economic failures of the state. When the Nigerian state adopted the Bretton Woods institutions sponsored Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) in the 1980s, it further exacerbated the country's economic crisis. In the face of the deepening economic crisis, the people became pauperised, frustrated, insecure and intolerant. Inter-ethnic relations therefore assumed a violent character and there is hardly any region of Nigeria that has been insulated from crisis since then. In fact, ethno-religious crisis has become another way through which some groups now vent their anger and frustration over the crushing economic crisis that has been accentuated by globalisation. This has been demonstrated by the looting of goods and properties that has always accompanied most conflicts in Nigeria.

Fear and suspicion of exclusion have heightened tension and violence in most Nigerian communities. For example, the protracted communal violence in Warri area of the Niger Delta has been accentuated and deepened by mutual fear and suspicion of exclusion among the warring groups – Ijaw, Urhobo and Itsekiri (Best, 2009, p. 69). There had been a fear of domination and possible takeover by the oil-rich Warri within each of the three ethnic groups. The Itsekiri had always been in constant fear of losing Warri to either the Ijaw or Urhobo (Best, 2009, p. 70). This fear is located most of the time in economic and political exclusion. The 1990s Zangon-Kataf crisis between the

indigenous Atyap and Hausa settlers was largely precipitated by political relationships (Attah, 2011, p. 88). The Atyap accused the Hausa of domination in the Zaria emirate under which Atyap had been ruled. The Atyap were not happy to be ruled by the Hausa settlers in their own land (Okpaga, 2006, p. 789). The Atyap also accused the Hausa of enjoying undue economic advantage over them (Okpaga, 2006, p. 790). These reasons can also be used to explain the crises in Ife-Modakeke, Tiv-Jukun, Jos and others.

Religious crises also occupy an important place in the contest over exclusion and identity. Traditional religions, Islam, and Christianity are the major religions in Nigeria. However, the adherents of Islam and Christianity are most intolerant of one another. Although both religions preach peace, they have recorded the highest number of inter-religious conflicts in Nigeria. The level of fanaticism and intolerance in these two religions has contributed to cases of intra and inter-religious conflicts (Ayinla, 2004). From the 1980 Maitatsine religious mayhem to the Boko Haram insanity, Nigeria has experienced the three broad dimensions of religious conflicts as identified by Egwu (2001). One of the religious crises is the intra-religious disturbances between different sects such as the 1980s Maitatsine and the 2005 Sunni/Shia Muslims crisis in Sokoto. The second is inter-religious conflicts between adherents of different religions, which are capable of assuming a socio-economic dimension, as demonstrated in the 1990 Muslims/Christians clashes in Kano. The third dimension is inter-religious violence of a socio-economic origin as exemplified in the 2000 Jos crisis.

The stiff contest for political and economic space has also engendered the formation of militant ethnic groups to advance the cause of their respective interests. For example, the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) emerged in the 1990s with an objective to protect the interest of the Yoruba group. It has been estimated that 60 per cent of ethnic violence in Lagos alone was attributed to the OPC (Akinwumi, 2003, p. 351). OPC masterminded the killing of a Hausa woman in Shagamu for flouting the restriction on women in the night during the Yoruba Oro festival on 17 July, 1999. The crisis led to the killing of about 50 Hausas in Shagamu, while a reprisal attack in Kano against Yoruba people on 22 July 1999 resulted in the death of over 100 southerners in Kano (Dokubo, 2005, p. 131).

The clash of rival factions of dock workers at Apapa port, Lagos, also gave the OPC the opportunity to intervene in support of the Yoruba faction. The OPC was said to have intervened in order to prevent the domination of the Apapa port by the Ijaw faction who had won a trade union election in Port Harcourt port (Akinwumi, 2003). The factional crisis at the port of Apapa spilled over to Ajegunle, inhabited by both Yoruba and Ijaw people, and resulted in the death of about 20 people (Dokubo, 2005, p. 131). The OPC was also involved in the fight between Hausa and Yoruba traders for control of the famous Mile 12 market in Lagos on 26 November 1999 (Akinwumi, 2005, p. 142).

Similarly, the Arewa Peoples Congress (APC) (a Hausa militant group) was formed in January 2000 in response to the violent attacks of the OPC against Hausas in the southwest Nigeria. The objective of the APC was to safeguard and protect the interest of Hausas in any part of Nigeria. It was also formed to act as a counterpoise to any attack targeted at the Hausas, particularly in the southwest where they have been constantly attacked by the OPC (Akinwumi, 2005, p. 145). The APC used the Yanbaga (Hausa hoodlums) to carry out retaliatory killings against Yorubas and Igbos in Kano. One of the retaliatory attacks precipitated by the APC resulted in more than 100 deaths in 2001 (Akinwumi, 2005, p. 147).

Dimensions of ethnic nationalism

From its formation as a colonial state, and particularly during the decolonisation period, Nigeria has faced the problem of territorial legitimacy which has often led to ethnic or regional nationalism. The delicate nature and fragility of the Nigerian state created by the colonialists was brought to fore when the Nigerian Civil War broke out in 1967. Since the Civil War, agitation for group identities has not abated. In fact, there are now more groups agitating for self identity than during the Nigerian Civil War. The trend of the current drive towards ethnic nationalism is such that disintegration continues to be contemplated by aggrieved groups as one of the possible ways of resolving perceived exclusion from the Nigerian project.

Most of the ethno-related crises which have assumed ethnic nationalism stem from rival contestations for power and resources by factions of the civilian elite operating from ethnic platforms. Even the military was not immune from the ethno-nationalist syndrome that has characterised almost every aspect of Nigeria. For example, the Nigerian military has been seen by some sections of Nigerian society, other than the core north, as serving the interests of the north that dominates the officers' corps (Duruji, 2010). Similarly, democracy presents an environment for constitutionalism and has also favoured the north by its increased representation in federal institutions and the unequal distribution of resources based on Nigeria's federal character (Fearon & Laitin, 2006). The south that provides the wealth for the country has always demanded this situation to be redressed so as to reflect what each contributes to the federation.

It was natural therefore that inequality and exclusion in the Nigerian state were bound to generate crisis among the disparate groups, thereby leading to group agitation. This happens against the background of weak state structures, poor performance, illegitimacy, corruption and failure to ensure the security of lives and property (Agbu, 2004, p. 12; Nzongola-Ntalaja, 1999, p. 38). The weak state therefore breeds excessive coercion, repression and an atmosphere of violent challenge in Nigeria (Allen, 1999, p. 371; Ikelegbe, 2004). This antagonistic characterisation is associated with the framing of politics in the mould of ethnic contests where claims are seen as largely exclusive (Ake, 1999). The image thus created is that of the promotion of sectional interests, which results in counter claims of political and economic exclusion among the different groups.

Ethnic nationalism thus becomes the major avenue of support mobilisation available to the elites struggling for power. Given the multicultural nature and the high level of ethnic identification in Nigeria, political and economic opportunities are thus pursued along highly divisive ethnic lines (William, 2004). It is therefore understandable that the major ethno-national movements are concentrated in the south and among other minority groups who have been excluded from the power and economic equations as a result of northern (Hausa/Fulani) hegemonic control of the Nigerian state (Awodiya, 2006, p. 2). The return to democracy in 1999 witnessed the explosion of ethnic feelings thereby calling into question the domination of the Nigerian political space by the Hausa/Fulani. The annulment of the 12 June 1993 presidential election, believed to have been won by a Yoruba man, M.K.O. Abiola, was viewed by Yoruba and indeed the southern elites as a Hausa/Fulani plot to prevent southerners from becoming president. The cancellation of the election further led to strong ethnic and regional fears that the Hausa/Fulani ruling class will always sacrifice democracy to remain in power (Africa Today, 2000).

The Niger Delta region also presents a classic case of the manifestation of ethno-nationalism in Nigeria. The region has witnessed intensified militia activities against

degradation of the Niger Delta by the activities of multinational oil companies in collusion with the Nigerian state (Ikelegbe, 2004). The insurgency in the Niger Delta, which began in 1998, was motivated by the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP) that agitated peacefully in the early 1990s against the degradation of the Ogoni environment due to oil exploration (Emmanuel, 2006; Isumoha, 2004; Obi, 2002). The hanging of MOSOP's leader, Ken Saro Wiwa and nine others, by General Abacha's military regime, however, intensified violent agitations in the region (Ojeifa, 2004).

The Kaima Declaration of 1999, which was meant to actualise the independence of the Ijaw state spurred insurgency in the Niger Delta due to the failure of the Nigerian state to address the problem of the region (Duruji, 2010). The Kaima Declaration, however, provided the government with the excuse to militarise the area by deploying a joint police/military unit called Joint Task Force (JTF) that brutalised the people. Though the government reacted against the Kaima Declaration with force and brutality, the fighters refused to capitulate. Rather, the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) was formed to prosecute a liberation war against the Nigerian state. Though the leader of NDPVF, Asari Dokubo, was arrested and imprisoned by the Nigerian state, this action further fuelled the Niger Delta struggle and gave birth to the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND).

The eventual release of Asari Dokubo from prison shortly after the assumption of office by Umaru Yar'adua in June, 2007 was not enough to stymie the Niger Delta struggle as MEND's activities led to instability in the economy (Ebiri & Etim, 2008). The violent actions carried out by MEND became the core issues revolving around the Niger Delta question with its attendant consequences (Aderemi & Osahon, 2008). In fact, the intensified activities of the militia groups under MEND led to stoppages in oil production in the region. For example, in July 2009, oil production dropped to 1.46 million barrels per day as against the projected 2.2 million barrels per day. These disruptions had a negative impact on the 2009 Nigerian budget which depended on earnings from oil (Igbikowobo, 2009).

The Bakassi Boys and the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) are the two major ethnic militia groups in south eastern Nigeria. The Bakassi Boys were established to protect the interest and identity of the Igbo and to ensure their security. On the other hand, MASSOB was formed to revive the abortive Igbo sovereignty throughout Biafra. The revival of Biafra sovereignty came from the perception that the Igbo had been treated as second class citizens in the Nigerian state since their abortive secession bid. Beyond that, the grievances of exclusion that propelled them into the secession bid in 1967 are still visible (Attah, 2011, p. 90).

Boko Haram terrorism has added another dimension to the crisis of ethnic nationalism. Though Boko Haram is a purely Islamic terrorist group in Nigeria, its activities have generated further agitation for ethnic consciousness and nationalism. The group's several attacks on churches have been targeted mainly at non-Hausa/Fulani groups who are predominantly Christian. On 25 December 2011, Boko Haram carried out fatal attacks on Christians in three different churches. The churches included St. Theresa Catholic Church, Madalla, Niger State (Attah, 2012). The attacks on the churches on Christmas Day appeared to be aimed at igniting the latent tinderbox capable of disintegrating the country.

On 5 January 2012, Boko Haram militants armed with automatic weapons attacked a town hall in the city of Mubi, Adamawa State and killed 18 people that were gathered to

mourn three Igbo Christians that had been shot the previous evening. Some Christians were also ambushed and attacked on 6 January 2012 on their way from a church service in Yola, leaving at least eight people dead. Most of the victims were ethnic Igbo who were returning from a church service. In a separate attack in Gombe, the sect opened fire on a Church congregation killing six people (Attah, 2012). Similarly, Boko Haram members attacked Christian worshipers within Bayero University in the city of Kano on Sunday, 29 April 2012 leaving 18 people, including two professors, dead (Attah, 2012). Most of the churches that have been attacked and the victims were from southern Nigeria, thereby reinforcing doubts about Nigeria's survival as a single entity.

Conclusion

This paper has focused on the development and trajectories of ethnic nationalism spurred by the politics of exclusion in Nigeria. The contest against exclusion started manifesting during the decolonisation period. The situation was shaped by the British colonial project, which created a culturally artificial and divided Nigerian state in an unbalanced manner that set the people against themselves prior to independence. The colonial regionalist legacy fuelled majority tribe hegemonic ethnocentrism on one hand and ethnic minorities on the other. Lamentably, the dichotomy created by this colonial policy was not redressed before independence, neither did the political elite who took over from the colonialists do anything to solve this problem. Therefore, almost all issues in post-independence Nigeria can be viewed from an identity perspective. The identities are mainly ethnic, regional and religious, around which most conflicts occur.

Perhaps the most recurring feature of Nigeria's post-colonial history has been that of how people relate with themselves, especially in sharing political and economic opportunities. The manner in which opportunities are distributed among the disparate groups has been the source of conflict most of the time. This is because of the perception of some groups that this distribution has not been equitable. The distribution has always benefited the perceived or real majority groups to the disadvantage of the minority groups. Even among the three majority groups, namely Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa/Fulani there have been serious contestations that have almost torn the country apart.

There were high expectations that the election of southern presidents would mitigate the contest for exclusion in Nigeria but events have proved otherwise. For example, the election of Olusegun Obasanjo from the Yoruba south-west between 1999 and 2007 and that of Goodluck Jonathan from the Ijaw Niger-Delta since 2011 could not stymie the contest for exclusion. Given the many structural pathologies and violent conflicts that plague Nigeria as a multi-ethnic polity, the re-enacting of the Rwanda or Darfur crisis should not be allowed to be replicated in Nigeria; hence the quest to accommodate multiple identities should not be trivialised.

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