

PREBENDALISM, SOCIO-LINGUISTIC AND ETHNIC POLITICS: THE BANE OF NIGERIAN DEMOCRACY

OJO, JOHN SUNDAY

School of Politics and International Studies, University of Leeds, United Kingdom

ABSTRACT

The systemic forceful unappealing catastrophic and uncongenial institutionalized querulous cementation of divergence caste artificially orchestrated and certificated by the British colonialism mainly to ease the challenge of onerous task in socio-political milieu of Nigeria has underscored sore Achilles heel engraved with irrevocable creation of indelible pauperization of Nigerian political web consequent in a state of passivity and fait accompli. The incompatibility of multi-diverse ethnic configuration has fueled the acidulous ember manifestation of rigmarole, cataleptic, catatonic and chaotic political arrangement in Nigeria while identity politics become a prodigious threat to the sustenance of Nigerian nascent democracy occasioned with prebendalism which invigorates leadership problem within Nigerian democratic political cesspool. This study therefore carefully explored prebendalism, sociolinguistic and ethnic politics as the bane of Nigerian consociational democracy. Secondary data predominantly sourced from academic journals, newspapers and textbooks were employed. It found that occupation of British colonialism in Nigeria that coordinated forceful marriage of divergence ethnic social classes has been the major origin and reflection of ethnic jingoism and prebendal politics in Nigerian socio-political ecology. The study suggested that re-engineering of Nigerian political structure is unavoidable step to justly accommodate various ethnic groups in political representation in Nigeria. Therefore constitutional and ethnic dialogue that endures seraphic tolerance and absolute representation of the diverse ethnic configuration in Nigerian society is a necessary step to draft people's constitution for the sanitization and sustenance of Nigerian nascent democracy. To achieve this, ethnic scholars should be integrated in search of the total number of ethnic groups that exist in Nigerian socio-political landscape for absolute representation with genuine consultation and accommodation for the peaceful remarriage, inclusiveness, and conciliatory co-habitation in Nigerian political terrain.

Keywords: Prebendalism, Socio-Linguistic, Ethnicity, Politics, Democracy, Identity

INTRODUCTION

The lumping together of people of diverse, ethnic, socio-cultural and religious backgrounds and orientation by the erstwhile British overlords was aimed essentially to serve the imperialistic economic interests of the British Colonial powers. The various and incompatible ethnic nationalities that were forced into the unholy union were never consulted nor their consent obtained before the infamous amalgamation of 1914 by the British authorities with the attendant consequences which had long resulted in the unwieldy union viz: the continuous state of disunity, political instability, general insecurity of lives and property, mutual suspicion and distrust among the diverse ethnic nationalities that make up the geographical entity called Nigeria (Daily Independent, Monday, December 09, 2013).

The systemic forceful unappealing catastrophic and uncongenial institutionalized querulous cementation of divergence caste artificially orchestrated and certificated by the British colonialism mainly to ease the challenge of onerous task in socio-political milieu of Nigeria has underscored sore Achilles heel engraved with irrevocable creation of indelible pauperization of Nigerian political web consequent in a state of passivity and fait accompli. The incompatibility of multi-diverse ethnic configuration has fueled the acidulous ember manifestation of rigmarole, cataleptic, catatonic and chaotic political arrangement of Nigeria while identity politics becomes a prodigious threat to the sustenance of Nigerian nascent democracy occasioned with prebendalism which invigorates leadership problem in Nigerian political cesspool. The unjust and unequal sharing of socio-political and geographical landscape intentionally manufactured by British administration that called for Northern region domination, leaving the southern region in lassitude in political investment of Nigeria has generated a longstanding debate. Consequently, the southern region has lagged behind in the cringe worthy political representation which called for cautionary tale in the political processes of Nigeria. In furtherance and intensification of ethnicity in multi-lingual Nigerian society with its implication on democratic governance that has resulted into “born to rule” catch phrase by a region in Nigerian democratic politics.

Nigeria is a very complex country. Our problems did not start yesterday. It started about 1894. Lord Lugard came here about 1894 and many people did not know that Major Lugard was not originally employed by the British government. He was employed by companies. He was first employed by East Indian Company, by the Royal East African Company and then by the Royal Niger Company. It was from the Royal Niger Company that he transferred to the British government (The Sun Newspaper, February 3, 2012). The colonial tripartite division of Nigeria prevented a Nigerian nationalistic movement, manipulating geographical boundaries to reinforce separation between ethnic groups and transforming ethnicity into an identity by which to gain political power; this structure along with other administrative decisions emphasized ethnic nationalism and regional politics, resulting from significant uneven development within each region. The colonial division of Nigeria that reinforced ethnic groups, the rise of ethno-political consciousness, and the development of ethnic/regional political parties demonstrated that the British administration intentionally prevented the rise and success of Nigerian nationalism, instead promoting ethnic nationalism as a means to gain political power (Ebegbulem, 2011). Indeed Lord Frederick Lugard's 1914-18 constitutional exercises, which resulted in the amalgamation of the separate protectorates of Southern Nigeria and Cameroon with the protectorate of Northern Nigeria, were carried out without any explicit consent from Nigerians. Thereafter provinces and other divisions were created according to the wisdom and convenience of imperial British officials (Okoye, 2005). The wave of ethnic crisis in the country can also be traced to the creation of three regions by the British government using the two major rivers, the Niger and the Benue rivers to divide the country into three geographical units, namely, the North, East and West. This division according to Suberu (1999) cited in Ako-Nai (2008) compounds and exacerbates the country's ethnic problems. Firstly, the regions were not equal; the Northern region was the size of the Eastern and Western regions combined. Secondly, the three regions were created without due consideration of minority groups that abound in these regions.

Over the years, ethnicization of politics coupled with identity consciousness in socio-political terrain of Nigeria has continued to breed abysmal performance of political

machinery revolving around vicious cycle of agitation for political disunion and dismemberment which makes politics incorrigible championed by the political elites who have considered politics to enrich themselves and their regional political mates. Therefore, politics has become a pontificated investment in prebendal socio-linguistic ecology of Nigeria with its adverse effect on Nigerian nascent democracy. The problem of Nigerian democracy revolves around the multi-ethnic and socio-linguistic structures emanating from British colonial legacy. The diverse socio-classes welded without effective consultation has been considered as the origin of political hostility and animosity that continue to inject bitter politics in Nigerian democratic governance.

The emergence and entrenchment of ethnicity in the country's politics has its manifestation within the various democratic experiments. The feeling of belonging and rejection became the basis for distinguishing individuals within the polity as evidenced in the behavior of political elite with lack of cohesiveness and threat to the unity of the country, suspense and conflict, ethnic consciousness increased in scope while inter-ethnic tension continued to manifest in Nigeria. Therefore, ethnic consciousness became entrenched as a particular Nigerian ideology in the political process till date (Azeez, 2008). The political class often manipulates ethnic sentiments to its advantage, while leaving the masses impoverished and uncared for (Ako-Nai, 2008). It is also frequently the case in Nigerian political history that ethnic majority nationalities 'gang up' against others with consequent status deflation on the part of ethnic nationality(ies) which is/are the target object of the gang-up. Such political alliances of convenience include: NPC-NCNC against AG, AG-NCNC (UPGA) against Akintola-led AG-NPC (NNA), NCNC-NEPU against NPC and AG, AG-UMBC against NPC and NCNC (Iwara, 2008).

Democratic politics and prebendal politics are two sides of the same coin in Nigeria: each can be turned over to reveal the other (Richard, 1987 cited in Obadare and Adebani, 2013). The reflection of ethnic and prebendal politics in Nigerian political system has been an age-long and primordial crisis from independence of Nigerian Republic. This has become a colossal political imbroglio in forming and establishing viable democratic system of government that is devoid of ethnic suspicion and identity in Nigeria. The

crystallization and dynamics of identity politics has had its way in formation of political parties with ethnic colourization in Nigeria. There are various political parties that were established with ethnic affiliations while some ethnic groups established political amalgamation purposely to achieve their parochial objectives to the detriment of the masses in Nigeria. The multifarious socio-lingual political ecology has backpedaled meaningful development efforts by the various political administration dated back from 1960 in Nigeria. The threat to security of lives and properties by Boko Haram terrorists insurgent in the Northern Nigeria and militancy occupation in the southern Nigeria has been the consequence of ethnic rivalry that may devastate political unionism of multilingual Nigeria if not quickly addressed. The politics of ethnic domination will continue to foster prebendal ethno-linguistic politics if a genuine dialogue is not called upon to address the various aggrieved members in Nigerian federal union. In a similar vein, Haliru (2012) cited in Joshua (2010) opined that the ethnic and religious composition of Nigeria and its manipulation by the political elite poses a lot of threat to governance and security of Nigeria. The inability of the state to perform its constitutional duties of maintaining law and order, justice and providing social services for the people has culminated in the emergence of ethnic militias in several parts of the country such as the Oodua People's Congress (OPC), Bakassi boys, Egbesu boys and the emergence of Boko Haram in Northern Nigeria. It is against this backdrop that this study explored prebendalism, socio-linguistic and ethnic politics as the bane of Nigerian democracy.

STUDY DESIGN

This study introduces prebendalism, socio-linguistic and ethnic politics as the bane of Nigerian democracy. Secondary data predominantly sourced from academic journals, newspapers and textbooks were employed in carrying out the research. The study looks into the corollary of amalgamation on Nigerian democracy, it reviews various related literature and theoretical framework. It investigates the nature of prebendalism, and ethnicity in Nigerian multi-lingual society. The paper recommends dialogue as a necessary step to draft people's constitution and political restructuring in a pragmatic manner in Nigeria.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- To examine prebendalism, sociolinguistic and ethnic politics as the bane of Nigerian democracy
- To dig into the effects of colonial amalgamation on Nigerian democracy
- To explore the nature of prebendalism, ethnicity and socio-linguistic in Nigerian democracy
- To recommend dialogue as an imperative to draft people's constitution and political restructuring in Nigeria

COROLLARY OF BRITISH COLONIAL AMALGAMATION IN NIGERIAN DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

Nigeria was amalgamated in 1900 by the British colonialist purposely for their own convenience in day to day general administration of the colonies. It was observed that the cementation of these various social groups was intentionally done to proffer solution to the problem of inadequate staff experienced by the British colonialist in Nigeria. The political configuration of Nigeria by the British was not purposely to create a nation-state called Nigeria; it was rather a strategy to ease the onerous task of socio-political administration of the colonies. The effects of the amalgamation in the sphere of native administration were much greater in the Northern Nigeria than the south. One result of amalgamation was that each region i.e. south and North was able to offer each other a share in its own peculiar advantage e.g. the political experience of the North was put at the service of the south while the North benefited from the fusion with its prosperous neighbors. Therefore, the effects of British amalgamation on Nigerian democratic governance are examined below:

- **Creation of Artificial Boundary and Northern Region Domination:** The greatest effect of amalgamation on Nigeria is the creation of artificial boundary by the British colonialists in Nigeria. The manifestation of artificial creation of boundary is traceable to large portion of geographical acquisition allocated to Northern region by the colonialists which makes the Southern region to be at

disadvantage. Looking at the geographical allocation of Nigerian landscape, it is incontrovertible that the Northern Nigeria takes more than half of the geographical portion; hence, the Northern region becomes dominant group in political representations which has been the major reason for ethnic rivalry in political contestation in Nigerian democratic governance. For instance, in the National Assembly and House of Representative, Hausa dominates legislative arm which makes it difficult for the southern representative to succeed in sponsoring bill. The implication of this is that any bill that is not favouring Northern region will not see the light of the day. According to Akinbade (2008) the North came into the fray in 1950 at the Ibadan general conference where it made major demands. First, the Northern region demanded that it should have at least 50 percent of the seats in the House of Representatives, and second, that revenue allocation should be based on population. Both the Eastern region and Western region were vehemently opposed to these demands. In spite of their oppositions, the conference allotted 50 percent of the seats in the central legislature to the Northern region. The conference created a political arrangement in which power was tactically conceded to the Northern region.

- ↳ **Manifestation of Ethnic and Identity Politics:** The various ethnic groups, especially the dominant ones (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) and recently, the minorities, are engaged in politics to gain access to the control of natural resources of the state, throwing aside the democratic principle of good governance. The main virtue of democracy is set aside for the advantage of group interests. This has led to fervent pursuit, by the various ethnic groups, for power at the centre at all costs. This ethnic divide in recent times has led to the politics of ‘marginalization’, in which the various ethnic groups, even the dominant ones, complain of being marginalized. The Nigerian political class, which consistently refuses to shelve its domineering attitude and the use of force for political gains usually relies on ethnic cleavages and religion for protection and assistance (Ako-Nai, 2008).

- **Emergence of Terrorism and Militancy:** The emergence of Boko Haram terrorists in the Northern region and militants in Niger-Delta region has been a reflection of ethnic colorization in Nigerian nascent democracy. These groups aimed at frustrating the government in power who has no ethnic affiliations with them. For instance, during the political era of late president Umaru Musa Yara'dua's, there were various evil perpetrations of militancy in the Niger-Delta trying to frustrate the Hausa led presidential democratic leadership government, similarly, the regime of President Goodluck Jonathan's administration has been witnessing the activities of Boko Haram insurgent in the Northern Nigeria aimed at destabilizing the government in power.
- **Agitation for Resource Control:** The corollary of amalgamation also reflects in agitation for resource control especially the oil producing states. This has been a great challenge to survival of democratic politics in Nigeria. Many states have been clamoring for resource control or to pull out of the federal union. The recent legal battle between the littoral states and the federal government is a typical example of this centrifugal tendency of the south-south oil producing states in Nigeria.
- **Formation of Ethnic Political Parties:** The ethnic symbolic formation of political parties is a direct implication of amalgamation. Ethnic groups do gang-up against each other in order to control the political affairs of Nigeria. This was evident in the second republic when Northern led political parties gang up against AG which was tagged with Yoruba political ethnic group led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo in south western Nigeria. Coleman (1960) cited in Ebegbulem (2011) buttressed that the Hausa/Fulani led the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) and the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU); in the East, the Igbos formed the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC); the Yorubas formed the Action Group (AG), a regional political party dedicated to strengthening ethnic politics in the west.
- **Agitation for State and Local Government Creation:** The continuous agitation for state and local government creations has been a direct implication of ethnic divide in Nigerian democratic politics. The restless ethnic agitation for separate

state and local government emanates as a result of the nature of Nigerian political configuration. For instance, the Western and Eastern regions have been nagging on the political structure orchestrated by the colonialists as unfavourable in terms of number of states and local government in possession of Northern region.

- ✎ **Nepotism and Favoritism in Public Establishment:** As a result of injustices in appointments, promotions, people became restless as the nature of military governments became more sectional than federal. This phenomenon aggravated ethnic consciousness as the major and minority ethnic groups became suspicious of one another. Even admission into schools and appointment of head teachers became based on quota system. This resulted in many junior teachers from the North becoming head teachers at the expense of the senior ones mainly from the south. The deliberate subversion of democratic principles by successive military regimes increased ethnic tension and disagreement, which encourages conflicts that threaten to tear the country apart (Ako-Nai, 2008).
- ✎ **Election Violence:** The country has also witnessed electoral violence especially in the Northern Nigeria. Many lives and properties have been destroyed in the course of conducting election in Nigeria. One remarkable and deadly election's violence was the recent 2011 violence, which claimed the lives of many Youth Corps members that were serving in the Northern region.
- ✎ **Political Corruption:** Corruption has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian democratic politics. A very good example of ethnic dimension in political corruption is traceable to recent allegation of corruption tagged with current serving Minister of Aviation in Nigeria, Mrs Oduah. She was alleged of inflating the purchase of armour car. The committee saddled with responsibility of investigating the matter came out with concrete evidence of corruption in the Ministry of Aviation; however, the President Jonathan has refused to take appropriate step due to ethnic affiliation with the Minister of Aviation. This has become a major problem in Nigerian democratic politics.
- ✎ **Proliferation of Ethnic Militias:** The Nigerian state has in recent times been at the receiving end of a dramatic upsurge of ethnic militias. In Nigeria, this

development has taken on the guise of ethnic militia movements purportedly representing and seeking to protect their different ethnic interests in a country in which the state is largely perceived as nonchalant to the demands of the ethnic nationalities in the country. The most prominent among these militias include the plethora of the Niger Delta militias like the Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), the Niger Delta Volunteer Force, and the Chikoko Movement. Other recent and more visible militias include; the O’odua People’s Congress (OPC), the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Arewa People’s Congress (APC). The number grows daily and so far, the government appears to be at a loss as to how to deal with this problem in an environment where individual and group rights need to be upheld, quite apart from the ethnic and political implications. These groups are now contesting not just the political space and the dividends from democracy as it was orchestrated prior to the transition but also the social and economic spaces as part of the liberalization of the political environment (Agbu, 2004). The phenomenon of the rise of ethnic militias in Nigeria did not just start overnight. It arose as a result of certain circumstances in the body politic that the ordinary people on the streets could not tolerate any more. This is not the only time that the country has experienced some form of ethnic militancy or secessionist agitations. There have been the Agbekoya uprising in the Western region in the mid-1960s, the Tiv riots, the secessionist bid by Adaka Boro and his colleagues in the Niger-Delta and, of course, the fratricidal Biafran war of self-determination between 1967 and 1970. By the late 1980s and in response to the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) of the federal government, several groups in the civil society emerged to oppose state autocracy and to complement the activities of the Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASSU), the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), the Nigerian Union of Journalists (NUJ) and the Muslim Student’s Society (MSS). Some of these groups include the Civil Liberties Organization (CLO), Committee for the Defence of Human Rights (CDHR), Constitutional Rights Projects (CRP),

Human Rights Africa (HRA) and a host of other professional and civic organizations. These organizations were fighting the case for accountability, the rule of law, the right to free association and dissent, the freedom of the press, an end to detention without trial and other basic civil liberties (Olukoshi, 1995; Agbu, 1998; cited in Agbu, 2004).

Above all, the British colonial amalgamation has truncated peaceful atmospheric condition of various ethnic groups that found themselves in the forceful political union in Nigeria. It has done a long damage to the multi-diverse ethnic castes in Nigeria. Each ethnic group becomes suspicious of one another in order not to be marginalized in the political representations in Nigerian democratic politics.

CONCEPTUAL APERTURE

Prebendalism is associated with the discourse of neo-patrimonialism, patron-clientelism, and the existence of trust networks that enable corruption to find provincial applause with every new public appointment. It is embedded in the predilections and failures of Nigerian federalism as a aperture political order predicated on the need to share state revenue and never produce it. It is this neo-patrimonial mindset – Joseph’s “prebendalism” that accounts for the slow progress of democracy in Nigeria and led to the end of its Second Republic. Ordinarily, a prebend is an allowance to which clergymen are entitled – like tithes. Joseph derived his concept from this and theorized that Nigerian officials have a sense of entitlement to state revenue even if this entailed the use of criminal means to access it (Business Day, Tuesday, 06 September 2011). In pluri-lingual Nigeria, where languages number more than four hundred, a number of indices can be used to describe the languages so as to highlight the differential levels or status, relative influence, function etc. some of these indices include origin, population, spread, constitutional legitimacy and prestige (Awonusi, 2008). The paradox of the language situation in Nigeria lies in the fact that while the multilingual setting creates opportunities to define people in many ways, it also has the potential to create identity conflicts between the diverse socio-cultural values emanating from the coexistence of traditional and western ways of life (Oloruntoba, 1992 cited in Ofolue, 2008). Since independence, Nigerian have been faced with identity conflicts brought about by the lumping together of

several language groups into a nation state. The conflicts arise from the coexistence of traditional and western ways of life on one hand and from country's ethnic diversity on the other hand. This is why the language question remains unresolved. The choice of a national language from over four hundred languages spoken in Nigeria is a daunting one particularly in the light of strong sense of identity people associate with their indigenous languages (Bangbose, 1991 cited in Ofolue, 2008).

Ethnicity according to Nnoli (1978) cited in Iwara (2008) entails a social phenomenon associated with communal competition among members of different ethnic groups. Ethnic groups in turn, are social formations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries and membership, especially language, culture or both, with language constituting the most crucial variable in Africa. An ethnic group, however, is not necessarily linguistically or culturally homogeneous, insofar as it often subsumes sub cultural, linguistic, dialectic, occupational and class differences, depending on the prevailing level of socio-economic development and cultural differentiation. According to Casselli and Coleman (2006) if the population is ethnically heterogeneous, coalitions can be formed along ethnic lines, and ethnic identity can therefore be used as a marker to recognize potential infiltrators. By lowering the cost of enforcing membership in the winning coalition, ethnic diversity makes it less susceptible to ex-post infiltration by members of the losing one. Hence, from the perspective of a "strong" ethnic group, i.e. a group that is likely to prevail in a conflict, a bid for a country's resources is an ex-ante more profitable proposition than it would be for an equally strong group of agents in an ethnically homogeneous country. Without the distinguishing marks of ethnicity, this group would be porous and more subject to infiltration. *Ceteris paribus*, then, we should observe more conflict over resources in ethnically heterogeneous societies. Nnoli believes that the awesome power of the African state impels individuals and ethnic groups to seek to control the state or, at least, to have access to it as a matter of security. This security is necessary since the state has largely failed to live up to the 'social contract'. Hence, each ethnic group mobilizes its people in order to ensure this access, and this mobilization invariably heightens ethnicity and ethnic consciousness. In the case of Nigeria and other

African countries that had been under military rule, the military interventions in the body politic usually had an ethnic character, and this prevents other ethnic interests from being expressed and accommodated politically. Therefore when military rule ends, these forces re-emerge at a higher level of intensity and the people then resume the historical experience of learning to accommodate one another (Nnoli, 1995 cited in Agbu, 2004).

The failure of the Nigerian state to come to terms with ethnic problems results mainly from the fact that the state itself is ethnicized and is used by the power elites in perpetuating certain sectional interests to the detriment of other social groups in the polity and this invariably breeds a recourse to primordial loyalties. In view of this, he argues that the Nigerian state may be more meaningfully explained along the lines of the pluralist theory that sees the individual as owing allegiance to the primordial group. Be that as it may, the advent of such primordial attachments may ultimately lie with the nature of the state and its role in mediating ethnic conflicts. Therefore, a more realistic explanation is that the Nigerian state has because of structural deficiencies from the onset fostered a spirit of ethno-nationalism (Idowu, 1999 cited in Anugwom, 2002). The nature of ethnic distrust has taken another monumental dimension in Nigeria as Vickers (2000) cited in Agbu (2004) argued that we live today in an “era of militant ethnicity”, with its grave social, economic, political and human costs. Among the most critical and indeed violent of this new brand of unleashed political forces which many have referred to as ‘resurgence’ is the intractable phenomenon of ethnic nationality/identity movements. In Nigeria, this development has taken on the guise of ethnic militia movements purportedly representing and seeking to protect their different ethnic interests in a country in which the state is largely perceived as nonchalant to the demands of the ethnic nationalities in the country. The most prominent among these militias include the plethora of the Niger Delta militias like the Egbesu Boys of Africa (EBA), the Niger Delta Volunteer Force, and the Chikoko Movement. Other recent and more visible militias include; the O’odua People’s Congress (OPC), the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and the Arewa People’s Congress (APC).

In the view of Eddie (2003) cited in Ali, et al (2012) posited that the reason why people embark on identity politics is simply because, “political dominance translate into control of political offices and better access to jobs, housing, and other valued services. Competitions for increased access to such scarce resources favour mobilization and collective actions along ethnic lines”. Furthermore, the winner takes all style of politics in Nigeria also encouraged collective actions based on identities, because political practice perpetuated economic deprivation among, or denied overall opportunity to, losers in election. In the political realm, this meant that only members of the ethnic-based regime controlled the best access to jobs, housing and other valued resources.

The issue between the north and south rotating the President is due to the poor approach to true democracy. Some groups assume that they have the monopoly of governance and leadership, instead of assenting to the selection of virile leadership with interest of the country at heart. With over 50 political parties in the country of over 250 ethnic groups, making a mockery of the Nigeria democracy under PDP, to dictate where the President must come from is undemocratic. Nigeria must revisit the issue of the Federal Character leading to the rotational presidency. If Nigerian political parties were established on the platform of meaningful principles, based on the challenges facing the country, either Left or Right Wings, Nigerians would accordingly ally with such party. Nigerians must discourage any group claiming to have the monopoly of governance or leadership (Ajayi, 2013).

THE NATURE OF PREBENDALISM AND ETHNICITY IN NIGERIAN SOCIO-LINGUISTIC DEMOCRACY

The establishment of British colonialism in the Nigerian region did not help matters. Rather, from the beginning, issues of national unity were not in the front burner. In 1960, the independence constitution was promulgated. Three years later, another constitution was put into force which gave the country a republican status. These two major constitutions, especially that of 1963, was later suspended by the military when they staged a coup d’etat against the civilian administration under Alhaji Sir, Abubakar

Tafawa Belewa in 1966. Thereafter, the country never knew peace and has continued in its quest to achieve both stability and unity (Erim, 2013). Ethnic politics and rivalry had been the handiwork of colonial manipulators who used the method of divide and rule to govern. The ethnic groups were used against one another for the colonizers' economic gain. At the inception of colonization, the British authorities emphasized separation. It is against this background that one can readily appreciate the nature of continued conflict among the major ethnic groups even after independence was attained in 1960 (Ako-Nai, 2008).

The politics of ethnic and regional security plays a key role in Nigeria's political and economic development as well as its role in Africa and the world in general. It is the major source of growing political crisis in Nigeria. It undermines the selection of responsible and responsive national leadership by politicizing ethnicity. National leaders are recruited on the basis of ethnicity and region, rather than their ability, experience and vision, hence, Nigeria's political and economic performance falls below par in comparison with other countries of comparable size and resources. The primacy of ethnicity has resulted in periodic outbreaks of violence between different ethnic groups in Nigeria. Census enumeration for economic planning and electoral representation has fallen victim to the same ethnic politics as different ethnic groups and regions claim bloated population numbers in order to secure more government funding and representation. It is also often the factor that determines the location of industries and development projects rather than feasibility studies or viability of the location (Ebegbulem, 2011). Since Nigeria achieved political independence in 1960, there has been struggle among the various ethnic nationalities in the country over control of political power and natural resources which led to the civil war from 1967 – 1970. Since independence, Nigeria's democracy has been characterized by ethnic-based politics. In the First Republic, the incidences of ethnic and prebendal politics were evident in the power tussle between the three dominant parties, notably Action Group (AG) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, with its base among the Yorubas of the Southwest; the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe with its base

among the Igbos of the Southeast; the Northern People's Congress (NPC) led by Sir Ahmadu Bello with its base among the Hausa-Fulani in the Northern part of the country. This tripod balance reverberated again in the Second Republic with the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) under the leadership of Chief Obafemi Awolowo holding sway in the Southwest. The bulk of its loyalists were former disciples of Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The party was dominated by the Yorubas. The Nigeria People's Party (NPP), led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, like the NCNC, held sway in the Igbo states of Southeastern Nigeria while the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) which had a more national outlook, had its major support base in the North and reflected the legacies of the defunct NPC. It must be noted that these ethnic based political parties were more of a reincarnation of the ethnic politics of the First Republic (Ebegbulem, 2011). In the prevailing circumstances, various social groups started to question the real basis of the Nigerian Union. They organized opposition movement especially led by the Workers Union called for the restoration of the Independence constitution and the convening of a sovereign national conference to discuss the future of the country afresh. Other sections called for strict regional autonomies or confederation. In the Niger Delta- the source of the wealth where deprivation was more acute, the people would not wait for mere words as they organized themselves into concrete resistance. Led by MOSOP, the struggle for the soul of Nigeria began in earnest (Edeh, 1999). The situation is clearly worse today, as the outrage against legislative salaries indicate. State offices are regarded as prebends that can be appropriated by officeholders, who use them to generate material benefits for themselves and their constituents and kin groups. Nothing could be more conceptually apt as a depiction of contemporary misrule in Nigeria (Business Day, Tuesday, 06 September 2011). Intra and inter-ethnic and inter-religious clashes have produced more crisis and bloodshed in Nigeria since 1999 than at any other time in Nigeria's history, with the exception of the period of the civil war. "Also, since the termination of the Second Republic, the coalition of anti-democratic forces, which eventually failed to prevent the democratization and humanization of the Nigerian space, has seized the commanding heights of the current democratic space (DailySun Newspaper, Monday, September 12, 2011). Therefore, democracy has not strived in Nigeria; rather, ethnicity has solely

become a riding horse to acquire power in democratic political space in Nigeria. The consequence of ethnic and prebendal politics has been pauperizing democratic dividends of the citizens in Nigeria.

NECESSITY FOR DIALOGUE AND POLITICAL RESTRUCTURING IN NIGERIA

Calls for a sovereign national conference are an accurate barometer of the political climate in our country. These calls resurface periodically whenever things seem to be going awry in the polity. The calls seem to heighten whenever the political competition, which is often violent on our shores, transcends the bounds of what we consider “normal” even by wide and broad standards of our political culture (Fayemi, 2013). Ken-Sarowiwa (1993) cited in Inya (2008) proposes a new Nigerian confederacy to be constituted by contiguous majority and minority ethnic nationalities who agreed through dialogue, conciliation and consent to agglomerate into respective, relatively politically autonomous and self determining states. Therefore, an acronym ERECTISM was postulated which means Ethnic Autonomy, Self Determination, Economic Resources Control and Environmental Self-Management as a sustainable solution to Nigerian problem. The above concept was proposed as a new confederal restructuring model for the socio-economic and democratic sustainability of the confederating ethnic nationalities constituting its general basis.

It has become imperative therefore for the people of Nigeria to come together and genuinely discuss the affairs of the nation in a free, sincere and cordial atmosphere in a round table conference called National dialogue or by whatever name called. The issue of national discourse or dialogue had for many years been a subject of controversy and heated debate by both the protagonists and antagonists alike. For the past ten years or thereabout, the thorny issue of national dialogue on the way forward for our dear country had been on the front burner of national agenda. Many patriots led by the indefatigable, foremost nationalist and freedom fighter, the late Chief Anthony Enahoro of blessed memory had championed the call for an urgent national conference to discuss the future

of the geographical entity called Nigeria (Daily Independent, Monday, December 09, 2013). In providing structures and modalities for the national dialogue, the committee should not hesitate in ensuring that all interests are represented: women, youths, children, the physically challenged, victims of the recent flood, and families of those whose parents, children, sisters, brothers and extended relatives died in the eve of political violence in this country. The yardstick on which interest will be recommended should be divorced from political affiliation, ethnic nationality, religious background or socio-economic advantage. The proposed conference should be seen as a potential factor that could mediate our collective sense of existence, and should not be interpreted along lines of political violence, or failed political conferences in the country (The Tide, Monday, December 09, 2013). It has become imperative for reconstitution and reconstruction of Nigerian political arrangement that is devoid of ethnic sentiment and jingoism. Having considered forceful amalgamation of Nigeria by the British colonialism, it is evident that all the major ethnic groups that comprised Nigeria were not consulted during the sociopolitical marriage which has become a centerpiece of political chaos engulfing day to day political administration in Nigeria. For the sustainable federal union, each ethnic group that exists within Nigerian political landscape should be called upon to fathom various irregularities that pervaded Nigerian democracy. In the course of doing this, all the concerned ethnic castes will be able to table their grievances which should be addressed promptly and justly. The restructuring of political arrangements should also be considered as a political necessity to balance the regional and ethnic representations in Nigerian federal polity.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has examined prebendalism, socio-linguistic and ethnic politics as the bane of Nigerian consociation democracy. It found that amalgamation of Nigeria has been a direct origin of ethnic sentiment and prebendal politics in Nigerian multilingual democracy. The various ethnic classes become suspicious of one another in power acquisitions. Therefore, a genuine dialogue that will comprise various ethnic groups is a

necessary step to address and resolve various quagmires that engulfed Nigerian democratic politics. People's constitution should be drafted through the efforts of diverse ethnic representatives in Nigeria. While political restructuring should also be debated upon to facilitate peaceful coexistence within Nigerian federal political union. Re-engineering of Nigerian political structure is a panacea to justly accommodate various ethnic groups in political representations in Nigeria. Therefore constitutional and ethnic dialogue that endures seraphic tolerance and absolute representation of the diverse ethnic configuration in Nigerian society is an imperative to draft people's constitution for the sanitization and sustenance of Nigerian nascent democracy. To achieve this, ethnic scholars should be integrated in search of the total number of ethnic groups that exist in Nigerian socio-political landscape with genuine consultation and accommodation for the peaceful remarriage, inclusiveness, and conciliatory co-habitation in Nigerian political terrain.

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