Ethnicity, Religion and the Task of Democracy-Building in the South-West Geopolitical Zone of Nigeria

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Abstract
The paper took a historical approach to the Nigerian democratic project, and attempted to locate ethnicity and religion as central to the task of democracy building in Nigeria via the South-West geopolitical zone of the country by virtue of its peculiar position in the country's political history. The paper also tried to trace the link between ethnicity and religion, and established the nexus between ethnicity and democratization and its influence on democracy building, and how it can be extended to entrenching enduring democracy in Nigeria. We adopted the constructivist approach as a theoretical standpoint in the explanation of ethnicity and democratization. Relying mainly on secondary sources and archival materials, we argue that the experience of the South-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria places it on a better pedestal to champion democracy building in Nigeria. We conclude that this task is also enamoured with responsibilities, and therefore, appropriate recommendations are suggested as ways to ameliorate it.

Keywords
Ethnicity, religion, democracy, South-West, Geopolitical Zone, Nigeria

Introduction
Democracy, as well as the effort to make it work in Nigeria, has been an uphill task. One of the considerations and categories in identifying behavioural patterns in Nigerian politics has been ethnicity and religion. The conceptual complexities and entanglements associated with these terms will be discussed later.

Nigerian politics has undergone a chequered metamorphosis in an attempt to build a genuine, federal democratic system, where all the component units of the federation will live in peace, harmony and mutual respect for one another. At the time of independence, Nigeria inherited a skewed federal structure, with the various ethnic and nationality groups competing for the control of the state resources, while it was stated that the intention of the colonial masters was encapsulated in the statement that their objective was to see the various territories develop themselves along the lines of their own natural aptitude, their culture and tradition. In other words, groups were either divided or brought together with little or no regards to their common characteristics or features, in the process of state formation.

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In this light, Deng (1997) asserts that upon the contending nationality groups were placed new administrative frameworks, governed by new values, new institutions, and new operational principles and techniques. This led to the replacement of the autonomous outlook of the old order by the control mechanisms of the state, and this ultimate authority was an outsider, a foreigner - the colonial master. Even so, this mechanism foisted on the colonized states functioned through the centralization of power that was hinged on police and military force, which are the symbols and tools of authoritarian rule. The palliative to this illegitimacy came, however, by making the use of the traditional leaders, through the system of indirect rule, as extended arms of state control over the tribes or the local communities. With this appearance of legitimacy, the colonial masters introduced a welfare system by which the state provided meager social services and limited development to selected privileged sectors. In this guise, national resources were extracted and exported as raw materials to feed the metropolitan industries of the colonial masters.

For further explanation, the indirect rule encouraged the use of the native authority system. Aside from the reasons for the introduction of the indirect rule in Nigeria which include the vast territory, diverse ethnicity with different languages, lack of personnel and the unwillingness of the colonial masters to use their own resources to govern Nigeria, there was also the ulterior motive of the colonial master who introduced divide and rule tactics which helped to create bad blood in the polity, especially between the major contending units of the federation. lt is important to note that the structure of indirect rule was hierarchical and not horizontal. This lack of horizontal interaction between the vast majority of the inheritors of power created room for mutual distrust and unhealthy rivalry among the competing ethnic groups. Some of the signposts started manifesting as independence approached. At independence, the common enemy was removed, that is, the colonial oppressor, but sharpened the conflict over centralized power and control over national resources. In other words, the inheritors of power at independence while negotiating for self-determination, ignored vital issues on how to resolve the internal contradictions in society. More so, Nigeria inherited a skewed federal structure, and these inherent contradictions eventually led to the collapse of the first Republic. The aftermath of these events led to the series of crises confronting the Nigerian polity today. This is also why various attempts to build genuine democratic institutions in Nigeria have been very enervating and patently cumbersome.

Against this background, this paper attempts to situate ethnicity and religion in the task of democracy-building in the South-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The South-West geo-political zone is one of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria today. The rest are South-East, South-South, North-East, North-Central and North-West, which make up Nigeria's 36 states structure, excluding Abuja, the Federal Capita! Territory. The idea of the geopolitical zone was one of the outcomes of General Abacha National Constitutional Conference, which convened from June 26,1994 to June 26,1995. Though, this has not yet been enshrined as a part of the Nigerian constitution; there seems to be agreement among Nigerian politicians to adopt this method in their political actions. The South-West geopolitical zone as it is today, includes Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo States, and is inhabited by the Yoruba ethnic stock - one of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The choice of the South-West geopolitical zone for our purpose is basically because, practical political activities in the context of democracy in Nigerian politics, started there, in the Lagos axis (through Calabar, now in the South-South geopolitical zone was part of that initial democratic experiment, with one seat in the legislative council). It was among the first that came in contact with western education, which created opportunities and advantages for the Yoruba in Nigerian politics and economic activities.

The distinguishing feature of the new order at this point, was that four Nigerians would be allowed in the Legislative Council, following the introduction of the elective principle in the Hugh Clifford constitution of 1922. It is also aptly observed that:

> *Before now, there had been no political party in Nigeria, and there was no election to any government position. Majority of those in the first council (the 1914 Lugard's Nigerian council-emphasis mine) were white men who were appointed based on the economic and business positions of the organizations they represented. They were businessmen who joiner administrators from England to run the affairs of the country... the old council would have its final sitting on February 26, 1923, and election was fixed for September 20, of the same year to usher in the new council (Ogunjobi, 2015:29-30).*

A look at Nigeria's political history shows that this selected political activity was to have serious implications in the country's political future. The north, for instance, was excluded from this early political activity as they were ruled by proclamation. The east joined the political frenzy in the West with the likes of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Mbonu Ojike, K. Ozumba Mbadiwe and many others. The further implication of this imbalance was to resurface later in 1953, when Anthony Enahoro of the Action Congress (AG) raised the self-government motion in 1956, on the floor of the National Assembly at the present Tafawa Balewa square, Lagos, South-West, Nigeria. Many other logical implications of this separatist politics, abound in Nigerian politics, which may not be necessary for our purpose at this time. Our simple qjuestion is, what happens where ethnic and religious boundaries intersect, and how do they affect democracy-building? Again, in the interactions between ethnicity and religion, how are they distinguished or merged in the process of building enduring democracy? Does ethnicity advance or obstruct democracy-building in Nigeria? We shall attempt to answer these questions, as they affect the South-West of Nigeria within the Nigerian democratic experiment. Again, we shall try to contextualize ethnicity and religion, and then conceptually define democracy, theoretically explore ethnicity and the nexus between them, in relation to democracy-building, in order to appreciate how it affects the South-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria. This shall 2nd recommendations.

Contextualizing Ethnicity and Religion

There are some complexities in the definition of ethnicity and religion. Ethnicity simplicita attempts to represent the self-identity of various human societies. In asserting self-identity, it is important to take into consideration how a group will choose to identify itself in contrast to perhaps similar neighbouring groups of people. Religion is often a basic way of doing it, consciously or unconsciously, for social integration and cohesion for a group. Therefore, religious identity may be the main way in which a people understand themselves to be different or unique from other people. In this sense, religion is understood as a collection of beliefs, cultural systems, and worldviews that relate humanity to an order of existence as understood by its founder, and perpetuated by the followers. In the case of Nigeria, "Religion has been transformed from a non-political issue into a leading volatile political phenomenon" (Sabo Bako, cited in Young, nd:20). In this context, it has been used as a political weapon to serve the interests of politicians. Nevertheless, because of the encumbrances associated with this, we prefer to discuss the issues around religion within the broader concept of ethnicity.

It is instructive to note here that this intermixture of ethnicity and religion may not be entirely true in the Nigerian situation, because some of the ethnic nationality groups may not entirely be identifiable on the basis of religion alone. There could be as oasis of cultures that lays claim to being entirely identified on the basis of their religion. The core Northern part of Nigeria could approximate this categorization. The South-West is more liberal in their religious practices, as all the main religions cohabit within the region. The South-East is in larger percentage, Christians as Islamic penetration into the region remains insignificant. The same can be said about the South-South geopolitical zone. In this part of Nigeria where religion seems to be the primary identifying factor for distinct social or lineage groups, as in some parts of the North, to attempt to change religions would mean a denial or rejection of one's family, heritage, history and culture. This attachment is so strong, and it perhaps contributes to the reason for the Boko Haram Islamic insurgence in the North-Eastern zone of Nigeria, particularly, Borno, Yobe and Adamawa States, and whereby it is also in their agenda to Islamize the entire country. In essence, we could say that in reference to this section of the country, religion is one of the ethnic 'descriptors', which is also essential to the identification of ethnicity. In other words, religion is an integral, even defining characteristic of the unique ethnic identity of some human social groups. This is, perhaps, why Deng (1997) avers that ethnicity is more than skin colour or physical attributes. It also goes beyond language, song and dance. It rather embodies values, institutions, and patterns of behaviour. In essence, it is a comprehensive whole representing a people's historical experience, aspirations, and worldview. He further contends that if you deprive a people of their ethnicity, their culture, you automatically deprive them of their sense of direction or purpose.

Among social scientists, Varshney (2002) claims that there are two distinct ways in which the term 'ethnic' is used. (1) in a narrower sense: 'racial' or 'linguistic' and this is the sense in which it is understood in popular discourse. (2) the broader sense, which according to Horowitz's (1985) argument, conflicts based on ascriptive group identities - race , language, religion, tribe or caste - can be called ethnic. Varshney (2002: 5), therefore, avers, "The larger meaning ... is also increasingly becoming the standard meaning in the social sciences, even if that is not yet true of politics and activism .... Ethnicity is simply the larger set to which religion, race, language, and sect belong as subsets."

The relevance of this definition to our discussion is clear; that religion is only a subset of ethnicity. Even so, the nexus between the two in building democracy is instructive to the extent that the attitude and political behaviour of people including Nigeria, and particularly the South-West geopolitical zone, is shaped by this worldview. Before we can adequately appreciate this fact, it is important that we have an understanding of democracy.

Conceptualizing Democracy

The word, democracy, was originally coined from the Greek words demos, "the people", and kratia, "to rule" at a time Athenian society participated directly in deciding on matters of politics. Hence, there is a popular definition of democracy ascribed to Abraham Lincoln, "Government of the people, by the people and for the people". At this point, it is important to differentiate between direct democracy and representative democracy.

Direct democracy, first, refers to face-to-face decision-making in an assembly (or general forum, more broadly) of citizens, without elections or the use of representatives. In other words, community members come together at a particular venue and make decisions on the things that affect them as a people. There

is, therefore, the element of proximity, and there is no formal mediation. The Athenian experiences of over 2,500 years ago approximate this example.

The second example of direct democracy is what political scientists refer to as referendum, also called referendum democracy. This is a vote on a particular issue where a decision or outcome is reached directly by the people's vote. The people's representatives have no part to play here, but the body of voting people themselves. This is popular in some parts of Europe and America.

Prior to modern democracy, as was introduced during and after the American and French revolutions of the late 1700s, representative democracy had a complex political life. In its original sense, political representation had little to do with elections, or other material means of choice. Likewise, democracy until about two hundred years ago meant face-to-face assembly decision-making as practised in ancient Athens. It was even derogatory at a point in time to be called a democrat. Hence, James Madison, the Chief architect of the American Constitution was very clear that he was not establishing a 'democracy' but a 'republic', which for Madison, was a government, "in which the scheme of representation takes place" (Wood, 1992:97).

As Wood (1992:98) also states, in time, this 'republic' as envisaged by Madison, was called a 'representative democracy' and later it became simply known as 'democracy'. This notion has remained with us.

As Saward (2003:57) observes:

> Today we tend to see 'representative democracy as normal and natural in politics, certainly not a contradiction in terms. But the difficulties we have today in seeing how it may be internally contradictory is the by-product of major historical shifts in meaning and practice. Acknowledging this fact can be the first step to towards questioning the democratic character of systems built around representation.

This is the main reason why arguments in democratic theory over the years have been advocates of purely representative democracy and their critics, the advocates of 'participatory democracy' who lay emphasis on going beyond the minimal models of democratic possibility.

 Among political scientists around the globe, there is no generally acceptable definition of democracy, especially as to how it can be implemented into a functioning statehood. However, scholars of democracy can be placed in two spectra - the maximalists and the minimalists. One of the major proponents of the maximalist approach, Robert Dahl (1989:221) advances three necessary conditions central for a well functioning multiparty democracy. They include:

1. Healthy and extensive competitions by political candidates and their parties;
2. Political participation that offers opportunity or choice for the electorate to select candidates in free and fair elections;
3. Civil and political liberties that enable citizens to express themselves without fear of sanctions.

The minimalist approach argues that democracy is not synonymous with rule by the people, but"... a method by which decision-making is transferred to individuals who have gained power in a competitive

struggle for the votes of the citizens" (Schumpeter, 1942, cited in Moshi and Osman, 2008:19). The assertion here is that when the above conditions are met, competitive politics would create majoritarian rules.

We must note that the democracy practised by the West today, with its variations, was "... born in the fires of revolutions and ideas of liberty, equality and popular sovereignty that germinated in the enlightened brains of philosophers and found its popular manifestation in the famous battle cry of the French revolution: liberty, equality, solidarity" (Crepaz, 2008:23).

These principles gave birth to the "children of democracy" (Weber 1946: 102, cited in Crepaz 2008: 23) over a hundred years later, and gradually became married to the institutional trappings of democracy, such as political parties, and pressure groups. It will be wrong for anyone to think that there is one and only one kind of democracy, since the development in various countries where it is practised is different and under different circumstances. African countries have different experiences in their practice of democracy, which is quite at variance with what obtains in the West. African states had democracy imposed on them by the colonial masters and, therefore, did not follow the same pattern of development with states in the West. In the same vein, Western standards of democracy, was imposed on Africa, including Nigeria. In this sense, Crepaz (2008:25) contends that"... imposing western democracy on an African country is like putting an adult jacket on a five year old and then tell her to run. This will most likely end in a bad spill and perhaps with a bloody nose."

This does not mean that there are no principles of Western democracies that are universal and can be applied to Nigeria or elsewhere in Africa. If we apply the works of the minimalist for our purpose, Schumpeter (1950) produced a popular definition on democracy as a system, for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote.

On the other hand, the maximalist Robert Dahl (1971) lists eight elements, as follows:

1. Freedom to form and join organizations;
2. Freedom of expression
3. The right to vote
4. Eligibility for public office
5. The right of political leaders to compete for support
6. Alternative sources of information
7. Free and fair elections, and
8. Institutions for making government policies depend on votes and other expressions of preference.

Out of these eight elements, Crepaz (2008:37) has derived a middle of the road approach which could be applicable in the Nigerian experience, as follows:

1) The power to rule emanates from the people;
2) The rule of law applies to everybody equally,
3) Rulers must be accountable to the people;
4) People should be able to hire and fire governments; and

5) That transparency is necessary in order for people to find information necessary to make informed choices.

There is a level of agreement between Westerners and others on the above listed principles (Crepaz, 2008:37). With respect to Nigeria and other African countries, most of these elements could be found in the relevant sections of her constitution and other applicable laws. All Mazrui, a foremost scholar and historian affirms most of these elements in his work (2002:1), as necessary for determining when a political system becomes a democracy. This he calls:

> *Most fundamental of the goals of democracy, these are: (1) to make the rulers accountable and answerable for their actions and policies (2) to make the citizens effective participants in choosing those rulers and in regulating their actions; (3) to make the society as open and the economy as transparent as possible; and (4) to make the social order fundamentally just equitable to the greatest number possible.*

At this point, it would be more expedient to stop looking at definitions of democracy, but to focus more on those elements that make democracy preferable to other forms of government. In essence, democracy is culture-bound, but there are general and essential ingredients that make it stronger. When they are functional and the people have confidence in them, and the institutions habour them, and they produce affordable goods and services, good roads, good education and health care systems, available social services, obedience to the law and there is research and development taking place, that is what the people will attach significance to as a workable democracy. Even so, this is sometimes made difficult by the variability of regimes that are labeled democratic and the nature of democratic deficit found in others. Again, inasmuch as we look out for certain elements in the democratic process, such as procedure (holding free and fair elections), recognized human rights (freedom of association and speech), extensive participation and equality, among others; the degree to which these elements can be measured is problematic in terms of comparison with the standard principles of democracy.

However, viable and sustainable democracy must grow from a people's culture, because there is no culture that does not have standards of morality, justice and equality. Therefore, as Nyerere states:

> *The organization of democracy, the form in which people are enabled to express their freedom, has to be in accordance with people's culture, history and development. It has to be an outgrowth of the people's experiences and worldview. They can see it, feel it, touch it, smell it, taste it, and generally believe in it. It is not supposed to be a wholesale importation of strange values to replace the people's fundamental basis of existence (cited in Eesuola, 2011:41).*

If this wholesale importation of strange values to replace the people's fundamental basis of existence is allowed, it is bound to create social disequilibrium, and most expectedly with untoward consequences.

In this light, the paper advocates that democracy be home grown, a democracy that adjusts the old traditional structures of governance to meet the challenges of the imposed modern state. We must realize that no people can claim cultural integrity if they have nothing to say about their past. We note this

because before colonialism which also imposed the modern state system, Nigerians (Africans) had a way they lived their 1'ves. They had state and stateless societies with rich and essential elements of democracy. There were checks and balances in the structures of governance in the traditional institutions which made for orderly society. There were inter- group wars and other forms of conflicts, but with the advent of colonialism, there was disequilibrium in the system.

There has to be a formula of incorporating part of the old structures to enhance African democratic experiment. We shall explore this further in the next section, with the extant theoretical perspective.

The Ethnicity-Democracy Nexus: A Theoretical Explanation

The starting point in this explanation is that there is a fundamental linkage between ethnicity and democracy. This is because there is little doubt that ethnicity and democratization are interconnected, particularly in the context of Africa's development. In other words, it would be meaningless to address democracy without considering the influence of ethnicity on political behaviour, including issues such as, voting patterns and elite politics, while ethnicity becomes important in the context of the politicization of ethnic identity in the struggle for power or political competition. As Agbu (2011:12) asserts:

> *It is possible to argue that the situation sometimes is almost akin to an antithesis as the two concepts appear to be in contention in the nation-building project in Africa. Attempts to suppress ethnicity in the first decade of independence in many African countries did not quite succeed. Rather, what is noticeable is that in the face of the crisis of citizenship and the nation-state project in many African states, and increased globalization, ethnicity has resurged, posing challenges for democratization.*

There are vibrant theoretical perspectives on ethnicity, with regard to its influence on democratization. The emphasis here is on ethnicity and conflicts, and how these conflicts generate and impact on the democratization process. In the light of this, Agbu (2011) has attempted to synthesize the theoretical approaches adopted by Lake and Rothchild (1996), which is an outcome of a critical analysis of the perspectives the different scholars and policy-makers who participated in the University of California-based Institute on Global Conflict and Cooperation (IGCC) Project on the International Spread and Management of Ethnic Conflicts. These scholars categorized their approaches into three, namely:

- **The primordialist**: This approach takes ethnicity as a fixed characteristic of individuals and communities, and they see conflicts as flowing from ethnic differences. This approach has been generally criticized on grounds of its assumption of fixed identities and its failure to account for variations in the level of conflict over time and place. It is incapable of explaining the emergence of new and transformed identities, or providing adequate answers to the long periods when ethnicity is not conflictual.
- **The instrumentalist:** This perspective presents ethnicity as a tool in the hands of individuals, groups or elites, with the objective of attaining some larger, typically material ends. To them, ethnicity makes more meaning in the context of politics, and in which collective ends are sought. It, therefore, symbolizes ties used for political advantage, just like interest group membership or political party affiliation. The major criticism of this approach is that ethnicity is useful only when it is within the control of the larger society, and has no place where the individual can have the

choice to decide at will. It is rather argued that ethnicities are inherently social in nature, and can only be understood within a relational framework.

- **The constructivist:** This view seems to be the emerging consensus as it seeks to provide the relational framework with emphasis on the social origins and nature of ethnicity. Ethnicity is seen not as an individual attribute, but a social phenomenon, particularly as a person's identity remains beyond the choice or control of that individual.

This third limb of the ethnicity-democratization debate can be useful in the explanation of the Nigerian experience. This is so, in the sense that the individuals that inherited political power at independence failed to understand themselves beyond their individual interests and selfish aspirations. As we stated earlier, they negotiated for the handover of political power, ignoring the inherent but potent social contradictions within larger Nigerian society. The attendant socio-political conflicts and explosions that erupted after independence, could be alluded to certain pathological factors in the socio-political system, which the individual politicians could not control. On the basis of this understanding, therefore, it is the socially constructed nature of ethnicity that generates, and perhaps triggers off conflicts. Also in this sense, the constructivists' accounts of ethnic conflicts are generalisable, "... but only to other conflicts that are also based on socially constructed groups and cleavages. These include clan, religious, regionalist or nationalist groupings, but exclude class and other material interest-based conflicts that are more likely founded on individual attributes" (Lake and Rothchild, 1996; cited in Agbu, 2011:15).

It is, therefore, possible to identify the nexus between ethnicity and democracy and the issues around them. As Agbu (2011:19) opines:

> ... there is this intricate linkage between ethnicity and democratization at the conceptual level that has to do with how individuals and groups relate to each other and the state in the context of power relations. Whether, this relationship ensures stability or is perpetually prone to conflict in a given instance depends on the nature of the society and the mechanisms put in place for the maintenance of peace and stability. The assumption, however, is that when societies are open and governance is based on transparency, accountability and free choice (between equal competitors based on fair rules), democracy tends to promote stability and non-violent resolution of conflicts.

It is, therefore, the failure of the Nigerian elite to understand the intricate linkage between ethnicity and democracy, among other contradictions, that capsized the ship of state. This position is supported by Deng (1997), when he posits, that Africans (Nigerians) won their independence without negotiating internal social contract that would win and sustain national consensus. The position of Young (nd:7) is reinforcing in this regard, as he argues that "The actual agenda of African nationalists was above all occupation of the institutional infrastructure of the colonial state. The aphorism attributed to Ghanaian independence leader Kwame Nkrumah, "Seek ye first the political kingdom, and all else shall follow", was the well-articulated major premise in the conquest of sovereignty".   .

In addition, Nnoli (1995) also avers:

> *To many of the nationalists and African leaders who received the mantle of leadership after independence, the nation-state project was very attractive as it promised not only internal order, but also development and the ability to contain the varied interests of the multifarious ethnic groupings. This would have been possible if the post-independence state was able to transcend the traditional group loyalties in favour of an abstract sense of community (cited in Agbu, 2011:16).*

Again, the constitutions for independence were laden with idealistic principles developed outside the continent, and of which the regimes built upon them lacked legitimacy. This flawed process inexorably led to the series of military interventions and outright usurpations of political power by the military in Africa, oftentimes without public regrets. More so, the attendant upheavals also involved only a rotation of like minded elites, or worse, military dictators, with the intent of occupying the seat of power vacated by the colonial masters. unfortunately, some of them became their colonial masters' images. Deng (1997) also admonishes that if Africans avoid confronting ethnicity, by failing to develop norms and means for managing diversity within the framework of unity, peace and stability, so long will these conflicts recur.

The problematique created by the flawed democratic process drove the Nigerian, nay African political space into 'political decay'. Under the circumstances, external pressures for democratization came from the international financial institutions and major Western powers, especially the United States. The brand of democracy they pushed for focused on socio-cultural forms borrowed from the West which:

> *... ignored the dense networks of indigenous institutions that surround and pervade them, features of historical experience and the social landscape that are idiosyncratically African and usually ethnically or religiously specific. Such organizations mean that civil society is neither a democratic dues ex machina or a movement of popular empowerment, but traversed by inequalities, and anti-democratic and authoritarian politics revealing interests of ethnicity... and deep and potentially violent conflict (Fatten, 1995; cited in Berman, 2010:26)*

In the effort to emulate liberal democracy, the Nigerian (African) governments have been wobbling and fumbling, as a result of the failure to adapt to the enervating circumstances of the Nigerian (African) conditions. This is why the democratization efforts produced 'illiberal democracy'. Young (nd:16) states that Claude Ake suggested that the electoralist form that an important version of democratic transition took is of a relevance "problematic at best and at worst prone to engender contradictions that tend to derail or trivialize democracy in Africa".

In the same vein, Joseph (cited in Young, nd: 16), states that the "really existing democracy" on the continent was merely "virtual democracy", marked mainly by its external appearances and driven by an urgent need of the African state for international presentability.

Muna (nd, 2) observes that Western systems of democratic governance may not necessarily be suitable for every single country, especially those of the developing world. In consonance with the prevalent opinion on the best option of democracy for Africa, we support the view expressed by Young (nd, 26-27) that, only a stable synthesis of an Africanized version of the democratic and constitutional polity can

assure the political order indispensable to any economic progress, and the effective accommodation of the cultural diversity which is a defining feature of most African states (including Nigeria).

Therefore, the South-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria, approximates the experience in relation to our discourse. We explore this possibility in the next section.

Situating the South-West within the Nigerian Federal Structure
Scholars have offered various explanations on federalism from different perspectives. An ordinary understanding of this tries to provide a solution as to how diversity could be managed. In essence, federalism entails unity in diversity. In other words, it addresses how people from diverse ethnic backgrounds manage themselves as one united people under one government. In this sense, K.C. Wheare (1946) who wrote with the American constitution in mind admonishes that the component units in a federation should be coordinate and independent. This position has been criticized as being too legalistic. Other schools of thought have since proffered possible solutions to the federal idea. For instance, while the historical school argues that as long as the relationship between people of diverse ethnic backgrounds in a federation is functional, they should continue to live together as one people, the sociological school contends that people from diverse ethnic backgrounds who desire a federation should discuss how such a relationship should be consummated. Our discourse may not warrant elaborate intellectual engagement at this juncture. Suffice it to say that the hint on the federal principle could serve our purpose.
 Nevertheless, there have been as many definitions of federalism as there are scholars of federalism. According to Tamuno (2004:13), federalism is:

> *That form of government where the component units of a political organization participate in sharing power and functions in a cooperative manner though the combined forces of ethnic pluralism and cultural diversity, among others tend to pull their people apart. Delicate arrangements of this kind where carefully worked out, provide sufficient room for the coexistence of centre-seeking and centre-fleeing forces. Peace, for lucky a community which achieve and sustain measures of this, under these arrangements, is not necessarily that of the grave. Where people agree sometimes, concerning the goals and means of cooperative government of this kind, friction do occur. Where also their systems work, as planned, conflict resolution is quite possible: through the timely and effective intervention of accredited authorities and organs of government.*

In essence, federalism advocates a power sharing arrangement among the contending ethnic groups in such a way that the ground rules are expressly stated and known to the power players. In other words, the constitution which is the guiding document provides for areas of jurisdiction between and among the component units. What this implies is that the component units know their areas of authority and could defend and lay claim to them when the need arises.

It may be necessary here to sate the economic theory of federalism, because the allocation of economic resources has always been at the core of political struggles. Basically, this theory states that powers of governments should be applied at the lowest possible level. The basis for this stand is supported on the following grounds:

1. Decentralization increases the chance that policy-making follows the preferences of citizens and that powers can effectively be controlled by citizens. In essence, the more a society in a federal

system reveals territorial cleavages, that is, the more citizens with similar preferences are concentrated in a region, the more policies are to be decentralized.

2. If citizens are mobile, a decentralized polity gives them the opportunity to choose between different units in which governments offer different sets of public policies.

3. The competition between decentralized governments induced by mobile tax-payers increases the efficiency of public policies, as governments have to provide for an optimal ratio of services and tax burden. On the other hand, for many policies, decentralized units are too small for effective governance and intergovernmental coordination causes considerable costs. Hence, centralization of competences is justified if common goods reach beyond the scope of lower level governments, if they produce external effects, or if they cannot exploit economies of scale. Moreover, negative dynamics of competition require central regulation and so do economic disparities in public revenues which violate social norms of distributive justice.

Nevertheless, in political debates, the economic reasoning on federalism has often been used to support pleas for separation of powers. In fact, the economic model of competitive federalism presupposes fiscal equivalence'. It requires that a government takes account of all costs and benefits of a public policy. On the other hand, differentiated reasoning based on this theory has to consider costs and benefits of decentralization and centralization, and more often than not, the balancing leads to a rather complicated allocation of competence varying between regulative, executive and fiscal functions of a policy. Moreover, the degree of centralization depends on the size of a jurisdiction with the consequence that the smallest unit of a multilevel system decides on the vertical structure. To avoid such a result, the sharing of powers turns out to be inevitable. This is part of the contentious issues in the Nigeria federal democratic process. The issue of revenue allocation has remained intractable for long and in recent times. In fact, in the 2014 Jonathan administration's Constitutional Conference, the issue was stalemated, and it had to be sent back to the Presidency. The federal government still retains 68 items in the exclusive legislative list, with over 52 per cent in revenue allocation, thereby making the centre too powerful. This further goes to complicate democratization, because in the ensuing competition for political power, the groups mobilize ethnicity in a maniacal zeal to outmaneuver one another.

However, with regard to the South-West geopolitical zone, as we stated in the introduction, the division of Nigeria into geopolitical zones was one of the outcomes of Abacha's National Constitutional Conference of 1994/1995, where Nigeria was divided into six geopolitical zones as follows: South-East, South-West, South-South, North-East, North-Central and North-West. Today, the states that fall within the South-West geopolitical zone include the six Yoruba speaking states of Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo, and the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) controls four of the states, as follows: Lagos, Ogun, Osun and Oyo, while the now opposition party the People's Democratic Party (PDP) controls the remaining two states, Ekiti and Ondo. Politicians seem to have found some convenience in this arrangement because it largely defines the political space in Nigeria along ethnic lines, which have characterized the Nigerian politics from the First Republic. However, the PDP was able to penetrate the two states, Ekiti and Ondo, because of fundamental disagreements among the stakeholders in these two states and the 'mainstream' Yoruba politicians. This discussion may be relevant elsewhere.

These explanations are necessary because they would enable us to understand the reason(s) why the colonial master wanted each component unit of the federation to develop separately. This is so because,

it is the application of the true principles of federalism that continues to obstruct the development of the Nigerian polity and also hinder democracy-building.

Ethnicity and Democracy-building in the South-West

If we go back into history, we could remember the way and manner Nigeria was amalgamated and the nature of her political development. In the 1922 Hugh Clifford constitution, for instance, the North did not benefit from the elective principle that ushered in electoral politics which started from Lagos and Calabar. This led to the emergence of party politics in the South from which they gained practical experience in the art of politics. This was shown later during the self-government motion on the floor of the National Assembly, which made the leader of the Northern delegation to argue for 'as soon as practicable'. This is a case of skewed political development which inherently affected the unity of the country, and subsequently the pursuit of regional and sectional interests.

Again, the way and manner federalism was introduced raised doubts as regards the place of the component units in the federal arrangement. The dilemma of the 1951 John Macpherson situation was whether to implement the constitution as a truly federal constitution or a unitary constitution in a federal structure. Eventually, when federalism was consolidated in the 1954 Oliver Lyttleton constitution, the contradictions of the Nigerian project which led to the collapse of the First Republic, dealt a fatal blow to the federal experiment with military intervention, which under Major General Aguiyi Ironsi, introduced the Unification Decree No.34 of 1966. Even though, this was reversed when General Gowon took over power, following the assassination of Ironsi in a coup, Gowon continued to rule Nigeria as a unitary system in a federal structure. In other words, the inheritors of power found it convenient and comfortable to rule with the skewed federal structure of power. It has been argued that:

> *Most Nigerians waited silently during the 1st Republic when politicians abused their sacred trust by systematically destroying a great fabric of constitutional government Some even applauded the wreckers when perpetrating heinous crimes against fellow Nigerians. This is why people must oppose any abuse of power however caused. To wait patiently until a messiah comes to deliver us from our own abuse might be a forlorn hope (Ojo, 1985:169).*

This aptly describes the position of the inheritors of power at independence, in the sense that there was mad pursuit of regional and sectional interests. It could even be argued that they did not set out to create a true Nigerian national identity. As it were, Nigeria has existed as one country only on paper, and that it was still far from being considered as one country, much less to think of it as being united (NAI, 1947: 208).

In reality, the two main objectives of Nigerian nationalism, namely self-government and the attainment of national unity, explain the background to the federal idea. More so, there are differences among the Nigerian peoples in terms of language, religion, custom and tradition, historical background and the different stages of their development. This contributed in no small way to attitude of the inheritors of power to fight for their personal and group Interests and primordial identities.

A consequence of the skewed political arrangement was structural imbalance of the federal framework, and became a very potent source of fear of domination among various groups. It, therefore, implies that:

> *Although, the federal idea was appropriate to the socio-political situation of the country, the form of federation was not appropriate framework capable of protecting the groups from internal strife. Regionalism in Nigeria had given rise to federalism, which In effect meant that the main political parties were to recognize their regional bases as their only and proper sphere of political action (Osadolor, 2004:43).*

This very observation has great implications for the inheritors of power in the Nigerian project. This is so because everyone of them has as his primary base of loyalty - his region and ethnic stock. In this manner, when things fall apart, the centre cannot hold.

Part of our argument on the problematic of the federal project as part of reasons why the inheritors of power deviated can also be seen from the trend of fiscal federalism as Nigeria approached independence. One of them is the minority agitation which was not properly handled before the handover of power at independence. It has to be noted also that gradually the source of national revenue shifted to the minority areas, specifically the Niger Delta. When the majority ethnic groups were also the providers of national wealth, their sharing formula was 50 per cent for the regions and 50 per cent for the centre. As the Niger Deltans now became the major source of national income, the drumbeat changed together with the dance steps. This is part of the injustice that triggered off the Niger Delta struggle. In fact, the Niger Delta was the worst hit with over 80 per cent of Nigeria's resources coming from there, but with only a mere pittance of 13 per cent derivation for them as the oil bearers. This has led to the establishment of many associations with ethnic sentiments all claiming to be fighting for the freedom of their people.

It would be recalled that the minority agitation in Nigeria started in the country during the decolonization period. As Ekeh (1996) contends, the minority in Nigerian politics is more or less a colloquial expression of Nigeria's constitutional history. It emerged in the period of decolonization and virtually at the threshold of Nigerian independence from Britain.

As Suberu (1992) also states, the 1954-1960 marked the beginning of the institutionalization of the regional system and the development of ethnic minority discontent in Nigeria. It further witnessed the establishment of the colonially appointed commission of inquiry due to the fears of the minority and the means of allaying them. By and large, the Willink Commission failed to achieve its objectives, because all the major issues raised prior to independence are still major challenges today. Hence, we can also see why they are the main reasons why the inheritors of power deviated and why perhaps, Nigeria has been going round in circles.

Suberu in this context argues that the root of Nigeria's minority problems could be traced to the following three factors:

1. The transformation of the three culturally artificial administrative regions initially established for the North, East and West in 1939 into full autonomous units of a federal polity in 1954;
2. The movement towards regional and national self-government, and the attendant tension among the minority groups regarding the replacement of the British colonial rulers with indigenous ruling elites drawn from the majority ethnic groups, and;
3. The aggressive mobilization of big tribe nationalism around electoral majorities as part of the process of transition towards self-government.

The implication of these is that the inheritors of power, the three major ethnic groups gained dominance over the minorities as a result of the enactment of the 1954 Lyttleton constitution. This made it seem that the interest of the major ethnic groups was the interest of the generality of the people of Nigeria.

By logical extension, the victims of this regional arrangement naturally became the minority groups which accounted for a third of the population of each of the three regions. These ethnic groupings consisted of the Ilorin-Kabba Yoruba in the North; the Edo, Urhobo, Ijaw, Itsekiri and the Western Igbo in the Western region; and the Ibibio-Anang, Efik and Ijaw in the East. Therefore, as a result of palpable and perceived fears of political domination and socio-economic discrimination, these ethnic minority groups launched a campaign for the creation of new regions or states to checkmate their would-be oppressors.

As independence approached, the rallying point of the minority groups was to have an equitable system based on true federalism. This hope was dashed as the 1957-1958 Colonial Commission of Inquiry skillfully evaded the issue of establishment of new regions. In other words, the Commission which was influenced overtly by the colonial government, refused to create new regions. The Commission in fact held that to create new regions was not only affirmatively undesirable, but also manifestly incompatible with the scheduled granting of independence in 1960. Although, they agreed with the reality of the minority fears, it thought they were highly exaggerated. The Commission concluded that state creation was unnecessary.

In the opinion of the Commission, such new units would not eliminate the problems of the minority. It would impose heavy administrative and financial burdens on the new federation and would also perpetuate tribalist or separatist sentiments that 'might otherwise disappear'. The Commission, therefore, thought that the federal system would adjust itself. As we can see in our present circumstance, it has proved to be difficult.

A proper evaluation of the process that brought about independence to Nigeria, shows that she came to independence with an unusual composition and a weak foundation of legitimacy among the ethnic minority groups. Diamond (1988) observes that this patently flawed federal structure was an important source of the political crisis and ethnic conflicts which convulsed and consumed Nigeria's first post-independence experiment in democratic government.

From our analysis above, it is easy to explain that the present Nigerian problems lie in the course of the country's historical development. Right from amalgamation, it has been series of intrigues, treachery and political shenanigans. As Osadolor (2004:45) describes it:

> *... the situation has been that of political intrigue and bloodshed-nationalist aspirations turned into inter-regional, inter-ethnic and inter-party antagonism and mutual distrust; collapse of the First Republic; coup and counter coup; a bitter civil war; collapse of the Second Republic; unending barrack revolts or coup d'etat; the aborted Third Republic; confused political direction—of which there have been obvious signs of reverses in some, if not all aspects of, national development.*

From the above assertion, it could be seen that our problems started ab initio. This is because right from the point of amalgamation and prior to independence, there were structural imbalances inherent in the system. The statement attributed to Alhaji Tafawa Balewa aptly describes the situation:

> *... Nigeria's political future may lie in federalism so far as the rate of regional progress is concerned. The regions of Nigeria as you are aware have reached different stages of development. Some of them seem to have advanced very much more than others and they are therefore now naturally asking to be given the opportunity to make rapid political progress... North is afraid of making this rapid and if I may call it artificial advance at this stage .... Since 1914 the British Government has been trying to make Nigeria into one, but the Nigerian people themselves are historically different in their background, in their religious beliefs and do not show themselves any willingness to unite .... Nigeria's unity is only a British creation for the country (Meredith, 2011:8).*

This position was also affirmed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, when he said that Nigeria is a 'mere geographical expression'. But in spite of these fissiparous tendencies and centrifugal forces which pervaded the political space and the pervasive ethnic sentiments prevalent at the time, Nigeria's political leaders went ahead to form a bogus Nigeria instead of studying and solving the problems, whose spill-over effects hastened the collapse of the First Republic, and which have remained with us today.

As a result of the illusion of bogus Nigeria and skewed federal structure, the leadership of the various regions went ahead to make unfortunate concessions, which eventually led to some policies as, federal character, educationally backward states, etc. These policies only contributed to mediocrity and sacrificed meritocracy. Mediocrity breeds inefficiency, corruption, favoritism, nepotism, etc. The political implications of this for us today are that the politics of dominance has taken the centre stage. The core of this maniacal struggle is control of socio-economic and political power among the different ethnic groups.

In the context of the scenarios stated above, the simple question could be asked, how does the South-West geopolitical zone advance democracy-building in Nigeria? The South-West as presently constituted includes the six States of Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo. Among these states, the two states of Lagos and Oyo, seem to be most outstanding in terms of their ethnic composition. There is no doubt that these are core Yoruba ethnic states, but the infiltration of other ethnic nationalities is quite tremendous, and this will also in a meaningful way affect the building of democracy in the geopolitical zone.

Against this background, the results that can be extrapolated from our discussions include:

- The South-West geopolitical zone of Nigeria had the advantage of experiencing electoral democracy, earlier than other nationality groups,
- It took the advantage of free education offered by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the first Premier of Western region to advance her people,
- It benefited from being the federal capital at independence, and became the melting pot of multiculturalism, business and political activity,
- Even with the relocation of the federal capital to Abuja, it has remained the business capital.

- It was and still remains the press centre of Nigeria,
- Because of these advantages, there is hardly any ethnic group that does not have a representation in Lagos, or other states in the South-West, and
- These, therefore, create the enabling multicultural environment for democracy building.

However, this task also has its responsibility. It would require the politics of accommodation by the hosts (the Yoruba). There are still lapses in this area. This is because to some South-Westerners it is unacceptable for a non-citizen to aspire to any political post in the South-West. The settlers should enjoy rights not privileges. The outcry of deportation of destitutes of Igbo extraction to Anambra State (South-East Nigeria), at the dead of the night by the Fashola administration in Lagos State in 2013, remains a minus to the task of democracy and nation-building. As it were, this anti-democratic attitude was re-echoed by the traditional ruler of Lagos, threatening the Igbo voter in Lagos, to vote his anointed candidate or perish in the lagoon. Anya (2015:23) in his recent lecture noted with regret the anti-democratic activities that accompanied the 2015 general elections in Nigeria, when he observes that:

> *Scurrilous attacks of individuals and name calling replaced the discussion of alternative policies and programmes of governance. The deliberate manufacture of unfavourable stories against opponents became the stuff of political narrative with the popular refrain: it is all politics. In this new climate of fairy tales, the ethnic baiting of the prewar period re-emerged with once revered leaders including traditional leaders leading the vanguard. It was as if these ethnic gladiators were competing not to be outdone.*

This anti-democratic posture of some individuals does not augur well for the nurturing of democracy in Nigeria. It further raises the vexed issue of the citizen-settler dichotomy, begging to answer the question; when does a settler become a citizen? It is instructive to note here that residency is being globally recognized and encouraged as the basis for citizenship. If we must pursue and face the challenges of democratization, then ethnicity, democracy and modernization should exist like triplets, not protagonists. If we mean well for democracy-building in Nigeria, then these are potent issues that call for urgent attention, and which in a wider context have serious implications for the entire Africa.

Conclusion

At present, the South-West states are ruled by the All Progressives Congress (APC) with the exception of Ondo and Ekiti States. While it is rather too early to declare that APC will offer significantly different governance value, compared to the People's Democratic Party (PDP), there is no doubt that the party is positioned towards enhancing a hegemonic pattern in the South-West geopolitical zone. The hegemonic value can assist in building democracy in the zone.

Many scholars have established the link between education and democracy, and the South-West has generally made remarkable leaps in this direction. Therefore, reinforcing such practice through deliberate policies and campaign may assist the region in advancing democratic culture and practice, which can be emulated and replicated in other geopolitical zones of the country. There was this kind of healthy competition in the First Republic, especially between the Eastern and Western regions, where people from other regions were appointed in political positions. Furthermore, the South-West has a vibrant civil

society, and the civil society organizations in the zone can also be mobilized to diffuse the divisive tendencies of ethnicity, as a means of encouraging ethnic harmony and enhancing democracy.

Recommendations

- Encourage inter-ethnic marriages as a means of encouraging and deepening relationships among the ethnic groups.
- The elites should increase business investments across the other geopolitical zones to create confidence and the idea of oneness among the competing ethnic groups.
- Whenever any of the ethnic groups is having festivals, invitation should be extended to the members of other ethnic groups, with deliberate and conscious effort to understanding and respecting each other's culture and sensibilities.
- Continuous enlightenment programmes and youth empowerment activities should be instituted and nurtured to create understanding in future generations.
- There should be periodic town union meetings especially to discuss occasional misunderstandings among the ethnic groups.
- Alternative dispute resolution should be encouraged in settling conflicts among the ethnic groups, because of the consequences associated with legal litigations.
- There should be deliberate and conscious efforts by various ethnic groups to discourage and exterminate ethnic biases, mistrust and prejudices by the competing ethnic groups.

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