Identity crisis, contested citizenship and the challenges of democratic governance in Nigeria since 1999

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Abstract

The article focuses primarily on the issue of identity and contested citizenship within the context of democratic governance in Nigeria since 1999. A deep understanding of the workings of Nigeria's democratic terrain may not be possible without some understanding of the identity. Given the political salience of ethnic, religious, and other social forces identities, it has led to a bifurcated citizenship crisis such as the dichotomy between "settlers" and "natives" and "indigenes" and "non-indigenes" or local citizenship. These centripetal and centrifugal forces have not only has become the rule for distributing position, power, and resources in Nigeria but have also coalesced to give rise to an identity crisis and contested citizenship. Different explanations have been offered regarding the implication of the above subject matter for democratic governance. However, the article tries to subsume these explanations under the indigene-settler perspective. Hence, the emergence of federal character, quota system, and true federalism as well as several socio-economic and political crises that became heightened since the beginning of Nigeria's Fourth Republic are the manifestation of identity and citizenship crisis. The article, therefore, articulates viewpoints that bring into forefront intellectual debate on the future of Nigeria's democratic governance amidst identity crisis and contested citizenship. The article adopts a historical research methodology and relies on secondary sources of data.

Introduction

Writing the post-colonial history of Nigeria is as good as discussing identity politics, contested citizenship, and its challenges to democratic governance. This assertion is premised on the fact that after more than sixty years of independence, a question which had baffled many borders on if Nigeria can foster a common identity, citizenship, pan-Nigerian, and a sustainable democratic state.[1] For instance, the dichotomy between "settlers" and "natives" and "indigenes" and "non-indigenes" or local citizenship has become the rule for distributing position, power, and resources in Nigeria. It has generated serious tensions and conflicts between "majorities" and "minorities" creating the logic of "we" and "them" at all levels in the country.[2] In other words, issues in Nigerian politics often reflect primordial identities and questions of citizenship in which contestation overpower, position, land, religious rights, and access to state resources heightened.[3]

Thus, with the rebirth of democratic governance in Nigeria in 1999, there is no denying the observation that what obtains in Nigeria is a bifurcated system of citizenship by which a pan-Nigerian notion of citizenship is now marred in the ongoing democratisation process and the political mobilization of identities. In other words, identity crisis was encouraged by the inability to effectively conceptualised identity crisis. It has, therefore, introduced such principles in the constitution like the federal character and the quota systems which has promoted

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[1] Joseph Yinka, Nigeria: Understanding the Contour of the Political Terrain, in Rotimi Ajayi, Joseph Yinka, ed. Nigeria Politics, Springer, 2020, 1-17

[2] Said Adejumobi, *Introduction: State, Economy, and Society in a Neo-Liberal regime in Said Adejumobi,* ed., State, Economy, and Society in Post-Military Nigeria, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, 13

[3] Said Adejumobi, *Introduction: State, Economy, and Society in a Neo-Liberal regime,*36

rather than stem ethnic and congenital problem. In addition, a strong attachment to ethnic and religious identity was encouraged by the failure of the state to promote good governance and provide democratic "dividends" that would meet the yearnings and aspirations of the citizens. More than this, the "indigene"–"settler" policy is also an instrument of political manipulation and power control by the political elite in a crisis-ridden political system.[4] Since the state could not isolate itself from the politics of ethnicity, thus, it has become an instrument of oppression of other groups. Indeed, the failure of the state to mediate in the ethnic and identity crisis aggravated civil strife in such a way as to bring the country almost to the precipice of collapse and disintegration.

One of the myths used to justify the dichotomy between indigenes and settlers is that "one can only belong to a particular ethnic group and by that, one might not be in a position to enjoy those benefits associated with settling in a place or among groups with a different history, culture, and language."[5] This myth is at the centre of the identity and citizenship crisis that has plagued Nigerian post-colonial history. Mahmood Mamdani[6] enunciated several principles in understanding this identity crisis. According to him, settlers exist because some people have succeeded in defining themselves as indigenes to exclude others, whom they have identified as settlers. The indigene/settler relationship is thus based on the principle of exclusion. Secondly, settlers are not merely defined in terms of immigration but also as a political construct with roots in conquest, state power, coercion, and law. Thirdly, the settler can never become a

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[4] Human Rights Watch, "They Do Not Own This Place: Government Discrimination against 'Non- Indigenes' in Nigeria," *Human Rights Watch Report*, Vol. 18, No. 3, (April, 2006): 17; Ojo O.E., "Guarding the Guardians: A Prognosis of Panacea for Evolving Stable Civil-Military Relations in Nigeria", Armed Forces and Society Vol. 35, No. 4, (July, 2009).

[5] Adesoji Abimbola and Alao, Akin, Indigeneship and Citizenship in Nigeria: Myth and Reality, in *The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol.2, no.9, March 2009

[6] Mamdani Mahmood, "Beyond Settler and Native as Political Identities: Overcoming the Political Legacy of Colonialism" in Peter Ozo-Eson and Ukoh Ukiwo (ed.) *Ideology and African Development* (Port Harcourt and Abuja: CASS and AFRIGOV, 2001)

native/indigene since "the basis of differentiation is the denial of civic citizenship through a political imposition of a permanent and exclusionary tribal or religious label". With these principles, identity crisis brought to the fore the problems of the definition of a citizen of Nigeria. The problem of definition, often described as the National Question[7], raises such issues as who is a Nigerian? Or are there citizens of Nigeria?

The article is divided into four sections apart from the introduction and conclusion. The first section examines the concepts of identity and citizenship. In the second section, an attempt is made to historicize the problem of identity and citizenship crisis within the Nigerian context. The third section is an explanation of post-1999 crises of identity and citizenship within the question of democratic sustainability and consolidation debate. The fourth section examines some measures taken towards understanding and addressing the identity and citizenship crisis in Nigeria. To achieve the aforementioned objectives, the chapter adopts a historical research methodology and relies on primary and secondary sources of information.

Conceptual Clarification: Identity and Citizenship
Identity

The identity crisis is not peculiar to Nigeria. In almost every multi-ethnic society, serious crisis have been recorded among different groups over one claim or the other which are based on an individual or group identity. Based on this observation, even though there might be some deviations, it seems plausible to contextualize identity in a broader perspective. According to James Fearon,[8] identity has two distinct but intertwined meanings. The two senses are referred to as the "social" and "personal" identity. For this paper, the first category which is the social appears more relevant. In this sense, "identity is just a social category, a group of people designated by a label (or

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[7] For more discussion on National questions in Nigeria, see, Abubakar Momoh, Said Adejumobi, The National Question in Nigeria, London & New York, Routledge Revivals, 2002.

[8] James Fearon, *What is Identity (As We Now Use The Word)?,* Department of Political Science, Stanford University, November 3, 1999, 10-11

labels) that is commonly used either by the people designated, others, or both. This is the sense when one refers to Nigerian, Christian, Muslim, professor, or trader as identities.[9] Mohamed Kuna also conceptualised identity from an objective and subjective perspective. According to him,

> An identity is a distinguishing label that objectively exists, is subjectively felt, and enables its bearers to experience individually and collectively a sense of solidarity. As a label, it can be assumed by, or imposed on bearers. It is also a prism by which objects, people, and collectivities are sorted, organized, mapped, and ordered into meaningful [and] understandable units. Identities are socially constructed, dynamic and multifaceted. Subjectively, identification with a category is simultaneously a definition of self, so that groups come to identify themselves as ethnic, religious, occupational, national, and other terms. Objectively, individuals do not identify in general but do so in relation to others' definitions of themselves and the boundaries implied in such definitions.[10]

Based on these conceptual definitions, it could be argued that each Nigerian group before their forceful colonial amalgamation is a social category with distinct features that delineate them from each other. Although, it could also be argued that in the strict sense of it, these groups have ways of life that are similar, notably in their socio-political organizations and belief systems. However, it must also be pointed out that differences among these groups in the pre-colonial period did not prevent them from associating with one another. They intermarried among themselves, traded together, and enjoyed good diplomatic relations. They also accommodated strangers and groups of other

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[9] James Fearon, *What is Identity (As We Now Use The Word)?*, 13-14

[10] Kuna M., "Variations in Perceptions and Impact of the Sharia in Twelve States in Northern Nigeria", in Alemika E., Okoye F., (ed.) *Human Rights and Sharia Penal Code in Northern Nigeria* Kaduna: Human Rights Monitor, 2005, 183-194

ethnic backgrounds in their communities by giving them land for settlement and agricultural purposes. To this extent, a difference in identity or indigene-ship was not a major factor responsible for the allocation of resources and giving of favours in the state. Also because of the accommodative nature of different communities the citizenship status of an individual was not a subject of major contest. Although tributes were paid by strangers to leaders of their host communities as an acknowledgement of benefaction, they were not always denied their right to participate in the social and political activities of the communities.

Citizenship

Citizenship in its modern form, as pointed out by Idowu, "consists of three essential and three central propositions: the notion of individual and human rights, the idea of political participation, and the principles of socio-economic welfare."[11] According to T.H. Marshall, "citizenship is a status bestowed on those who are full members of a community. All who possess the status are equal to the rights and duties with which the status is endowed."[12] For much of intellectual discussions on the concept of citizenship, the central argument has always been between the political and legal component and the social component. The former component refers to the "political and legal standing of an individual in a particular country that entitles him, from the constitutional position to an array of rights such as the right to participate in the exercise of public power, political decision making, right to life, and a fair hearing"[13]. The latter, according to Marshall refers to a person's right to "share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of civilised being".[14] Usually,

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[11] William Idowu, "Citizenship Status, Statehood Problems and Political Conflict: The Case of Nigeria", *Nordic Journal of African Studies* 8 (2): 73-88 (1999)

[12] Marshall T. H. "Citizenship and Social Class", cited in William O. Idowu, "Citizenship Status, Statehood Problems and Political Conflict

[13] William Idowu, "Citizenship Status, Statehood Problems and Political Conflict:, 81

[14] Marshall T. H. "Citizenship and Social Class"

this is the product of history and culture and an outgrowth from inter-personal relations.[15]

Both the political/legal and social conceptions of citizenship are very relevant to the understanding of the Nigerian situation. In the former sense, there are no citizens in Nigeria but citizens of Nigeria. In this regard, Nigerian citizenship is merely geographical which lacks moral-ideological content.[16] "Specifically, citizenship in the political and sociological histories of Nigeria is now defined in exclusionary rather than inclusive terms. The emergence of citizenship sentiments in Nigeria has its profound base in the particularities of birth, ethnic considerations, [and] emphasis on geographical location…".[17] In the modern conception of the relationship between state and citizenship, less emphasis is placed on geographical boundaries within the state as people, irrespective of their background are free to live anywhere in the country without being challenged or molested by other groups. On the other hand, the social conception emphasizes the fact that citizenship is an outgrowth of culture and history. As explained by John Scott,[18] the importance of the social component is to transcend the limitations of the political and legal components which fail to account for the social conditions that establish contradictory conventions and practices that define the boundaries of citizenship.

Thus, Idowu points out that the social component would help us to "understand the idea of citizenship which is found preponderant in people's mental awareness and acceptance. This conception identifies the idea of citizenship as a whole complex

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[15] Ifidon A. E. "Citizenship, Statehood and the Problem of Democratisation in Nigeria"., cited in Idowu "Citizenship Status, Statehood Problems and Political Conflict

[16] Femi Taiwo, "Of Citizens and Citizenship" cited in Idowu "Citizenship Status, Statehood Problems and Political Conflict

[17] Idowu William, "State Formation, State Failure and Nation Building in Africa", in Alao, Akin, Ed. *The Nigerian State: Language of its Politics, Essays in Honor of Stephen Oladipo Arifalo*, Nigeria: Rex Charles and Publishers, 2006, 141-152

[18] Scott J., *Poverty, and Wealth, Citizenship, Deprivation and Privilege,* cited in Idowu "Citizenship Status, Statehood Problems and Political Conflict., 82

of institutions, practices, and conventions that are embodied, in often contradictory ways, in the cultural and sub-cultural perspectives of a society and which informs its political and ideological struggles."[19] Thus, taken from the perspective of the history of Nigeria, its culture and its people, it could be argued that citizenship in Nigeria is a social phenomenon, "involving contradictory patterns and conventions."[20] The contradiction is validated in the observation that while a Nigerian nationality is non-existent, citizenship is operative at the homeland level. This point is further underscored by the fact that the concept of citizenship in Africa is defined in inclusive terms rather than exclusive. Every individual is a member of the community he belongs; and whether he lives within this community or not, the attachment to his kith and kin is ever-present.

Identity Crisis and Contested Citizenship: A Historical Perspective

Nigeria, as it is today, came into existence in 1914 through the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates into a single entity.[21] This singular act of amalgamation brought together people from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, which to a greater extent has continued to affect the political landscape of the country. In explaining the origin of identity and citizenship contestation, Peter Ekeh contended that colonialism was responsible for duality and contradictions in identity and citizenship because it encouraged rights with no civic duties, in contradistinction to the European states where citizenship rights came with civic duties. Thus in the post-colonial states, "there is the diminution of duties and inflation of rights".[22] This for him has implications for morality and immorality in both the traditional and primordial sphere and the public and civic sphere because citizens now believe they owe their communities some

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[19] Idowu "Citizenship Status, Statehood Problems and Political Conflict, 82

[20] Ibid., 82

[21] Crowder M., *The Story of Nigeria*. London: Faber and Faber Press, 1980,.11.

[22] Peter Ekeh, "Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement" in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 17. No.1, January, 1975.

duties while they expect rights from the state or the government."[23]

Also, as explained by Mamdani,[24] the colonial system created legal dualism in African countries; one civil and the other customary. The settlers were governed by civil law while the natives were under customary law. Under this system, the settlers could exercise their rights while the natives were under the traditional rulers where they only enjoyed temporary privileges. Meanwhile, the natives were subjected to the same laws by the colonial authority on a national scale together with their traditional rulers while the traditional rulers had control of their lives at the local level. This dual allegiance is further compounded by the racist ideology of the colonial system. As a principle that discriminates against the blacks, racism united the Europeans while ethnic ideology was used to divide the subjects. Inadvertently, race empowered the settlers while ethnicity disempowered the natives. Against this background, Mamdani contended that the logic of this colonial system for the post-colonial society is one of reversal in which yesterday's native became today's indigene, and yesterday native who was disempowered became empowered. Yesterday's settler who was the white racist was now replaced with a black settler. However, unlike the colonial situation where the settler had power and rights, today's settler is disempowered and cannot make claims to rights based on national citizenship. This contradictory trend is thus at the heart of the citizenship and ethnic conflicts of the post-colonial African societies today.[25] Explaining this further, Obianyo observed that:

> an Igbo person from Anambra state or Imo state (all within the geographical region occupied by the Igbo ethnic group) in Ibadan town will be

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[23] Obianyo Nkolika, *Citizenship and Ethnic Militia Politics in Nigeria-Marginalization or Identity Question? -the case of MASSOB,* Paper presented at the 3rd Global Conference on Pluralism Inclusion and Citizenship, at Salzburg, Austria November 18-19th 2007.

[24] Mamdani, Mahmood, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism,* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

[25] Mamdani, Mahmood, *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Colonialism,*

seen by the Yorubas as Igbo, if he happens to relocate to Onitsha in Anambra state which is an Igbo state, he still does not enjoy the rights of other Igbos from Anambra State. He is discriminated against as non-indigene. An Anambra Igbo will suffer a similar fate in any of the other Igbo States. Similarly, Anambra State citizens resident in communities other than the ones of their ancestral origin faces the same discrimination based on 'indigeneship' or what has also become known as the 'son of the soil' in Nigeria, meaning a son of the relevant community.[26]

Yet, it has been observed that the indigene factor does not define the contestation for power at the centre as much as ethnicity. The indigene factor is mostly observed in local politics at the state and local government levels where an ethnic group does not feel it should be represented by members of other ethnic localities except their own.[27]

Beyond the theoretical origin of the indigene/settler divide, it is a well-established fact that the 1914 amalgamation of different Nigerian groups signalled the beginning of identity crisis and citizenship contestation in Nigeria. But amalgamation itself was not the problem; rather it was the system of administration after the amalgamation that fostered the crisis. The colonial administrators promoted a divide and rule policy whereby different ethnic groups were consciously administered separately. It was a strategy meant to curb the resistance and nationalism of Nigerian groups to maintain the colonial power. For much of the period of colonial administration in the country, the British administrators reminded Nigerians that they did not have a common destiny because they were separated by differences in history and tradition.[28]

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[26] Obianyo Nkolika, *Citizenship and Ethnic Militia Politics in Nigeria-Marginalization or Identity Question? -the case of MASSOB,*

[27] Obianyo Nkolika, *Citizenship and Ethnic Militia Politics in Nigeria-Marginalization or Identity Question? -the case of MASSOB,*

[28] Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Violence in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective,* Okwudiba Nnoli: 2003

As pointed out by Nnoli[29] and Coleman,[30] the colonial government seized every available opportunity to spread the myth and propaganda that they were "separated from one another by great distance, and by ethnographical, racial, tribal, political, social and religious barriers". This myth was further encouraged "structurally by the administrative system of indirect rule and regionalization. Indirect rule started as an instrument for overcoming the pervasive financial personnel and communications problems of colonial administration in northern Nigeria but ended up as a means for reinforcing communal identity among Nigerians, creating a new sense of communal identity where none existed, and providing a new symbolic and ethnocentric focus for the urban population."[31] Today, as contended by Adesoji and Alao,[32] this myth has been sustained by many groups in Nigeria.

Curiously, it seems plausible to state that the identity crisis that was created by the myth of individuality of Nigerian groups was the beginning of a period where, as pointed out by Fearon, there could be disputes between membership rules and the content of the social category.[33] In this period, differences among groups that were hitherto salient are brought to the fore as members questioned each other's identity and became more aware of differences that separate them.

Certainly, some measures were adopted by different governments to stem the tide of ethnic sentiment and manage the identity crisis. Such measures include state creation, establishment of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme, and federal unity colleges, the Quota system, the Federal Character Principle, revision of the revenue allocation formula, creation of local governments, and multi-party democracy. Indeed, these measures have only provided a smouldering truce in identity contestation. More than this, some of these measures have been responsible for heating the crisis. The examples of the

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[29] Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Violence in Nigeria:*, 5
[30] James Coleman, *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism.*,193
[31] Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Violence in Nigeria:*, 5
[32] Adesoji, Abimbola and Alao, Akin, Indigeneship and Citizenship in Nigeria: Myth and Reality…
[33] James Fearon, *What is Identity*, 13-14

Quota System and Federal Character principle are worthy to note in this regard. Although, it must be stated that the Federal Character principle was also motivated by the need to promote an even development especially in less developed areas of the country; be that as it may, it has produced a new set of problems in the indigene/settler debate.[34] Apart from this, the principle itself is, by and large, a product of contradictions. The contradiction is reflected in the imprecise way it is defined by its proponents. It is vague in terms of its contribution to the ethnic-moral debate on the one hand and the politico-moral balance on the other.

To this end, it must be emphasized that the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria made no distinction on who a citizen of Nigeria is, the document, therefore, confers every right to Nigerian citizens wherever they may be across the country. The constitution affirms that nobody must be discriminated against in any part of the country based on the circumstances of his or her birth. But the same constitution affirms the rights of indigenous people to protection from extinction and domination. The constitution recognized the right to equal representation and enjoyment of privileges of all Nigerian states and groups in public services and welfare amenities. The constitution made it clear that all appointments by the federal government shall be done in such a way as to reflect the federal character of Nigerian peoples. The implications of this for national security and development have thus been very alarming. The constitutional provisions became a constant factor in the appointment of public office holders, admission of students into universities, job recruitments, giving of contracts, allocation of development projects, and enjoyment of other privileges like scholarships, housing, and healthcare services. The phenomenon of *omo a ni e je o se* (our real son must be allowed to rule*)*[35] which most times encouraged the appointment of square pegs in a round hole thus became a normal practice in state's civil services across the federation.

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[34] For quota system, see Ambrose Ihekwoaba Egwim, The Dynamics of Federalism in Nigeria, Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.
[35] Adesina Olutayo, "Sub-Ethnic Identities and the Crisis of Development in Contemporary Nigeria: Perspective from Ife-Modakeke Conflict."

Perhaps, it is also important to underscore the debilitating crisis the principle has caused in the Nigerian education system, especially in the higher institutions. Virtually all State Universities in the country discriminate against academics and staff from different states for different job appointments. Also, in admission requirements, different criteria are used for indigenes and non-indigenes which are mostly in favour of the former. These practices encouraged more states to establish their university where similar discriminatory practices are continued. As a result of this, it would appear more difficult today for a Southeastern or Southwestern academic to become Vice-Chancellor even in a Federal University in Nigeria as obtained in the University of Ibadan and the former University of Calabar where Professors Takena Tamuno and Emmanuel Ayandele were Vice-Chancellors respectively.

Apart from the constitution, it is also important to underscore the role of the political class in a breeding identity crisis in Nigeria. As inheritors of the colonial government, the political class had realized that being in control of political power was an opportunity to manage the apparatus of the state and its resources. Fearing attempted domination from other groups, the political elites used series of measures to prevent opposition and competition from other groups for political power and recruitment into public services. This competition for power had become the most debilitating blow to the nation-building project of Nigeria since independence. And all of these have been mostly perpetrated in the name of ethnicity. To secure an advantaged position for themselves, the political elites have used ethnicity to drum support from their ethnic groups and region. As observed by Jega,

> The faction of the ruling classes that control political power at the federal level tends to rely on reactionary ethnicity to generate group solidarity to secure its hegemony. Those who lose out of this power game in the accumulation process, also, whip up 'fairy tales' and reactionary ethnicity to cultivate group

solidarity to prop up and strengthen their contest for hegemony.[36]

It is, therefore, not surprising that fifty years after independence, the question of zoning of presidential ticket became the headline news on virtually all news dailies in the country. The desperation of the political class and the damage done to the Nigerian nation by their political machination was observed by the governor of Edo State, Adams Oshiomole in his Independence Day Address when he stated that Nigeria today:

> Has a new colonial order as many of our leaders imposed themselves against the will of our people. In the process, many of our leaders have perfected the art of ethnic and religious manipulation. Today our leaders have replaced a healthy competition for development with destructive ethnic and religious sloganeering.[37]

However, it must also be noted that the world economic depression of the late 1970s and 80s which affected many businesses and governments across the world added to the deepening citizenship crisis in Nigeria. Rescue efforts from the World Bank which introduced the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) further worsened the economic woes of developing countries like Nigeria as many people lost their jobs due to retrenchment in public services and privatization and commercialization of public corporations. To keep soul and body alive, many people turned to their homeland for available opportunities and resources. The need to seek opportunities in homelands led to the rebirth of ethnic consciousness between hitherto friendly but different ethnic neighbours in various parts of the country. For example in Jos/Plateau state citizenship crisis developed between Hausa/Fulani and other groups over land and politics, while the Niger-Delta region witnessed a resurgent face-off between environmentalists and rights activists and multinational corporations on the one hand and between the

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[36] Jega A.M., "The Political Economy of Nigerian Federalism", in Elagwu J.I., Akindele R.A.,eds., *Foundations of Nigerian Federalism, 1960-1995,Jos:* Institute of Governance and Social Research, 87-104

[37] *Saturday Punch*, 2,October 2010

rights activists and the government on the other hand over the pollution of the environment and lack of infrastructural facilities.

Against this background, there is no gainsaying the fact that the Nigerian state faced critical challenges of nation-building and development before the return to democratic governance in 1999. Before this time, many had called for an end to the military rule which not only failed to resolve ethnic militia activities but had also lost its popularity in the country. Implicitly, it could be argued that the new call for democratic governance was predicated on the advantages noted in democratic institutions and its potentials for managing conflicting group interests in Western countries. But how far this is true will be examined below.

Post-1999 Crisis of Identity and Citizenship in a Democratic Nigerian State

The 1999 transition to democratic governance in Nigeria was considered as holding great promise for managing the identity and citizenship crises in the country. Democratic systems are noted for various ideas and principles which accommodate the interests of diverse elements and groups in multi-ethnic societies like Nigeria. One of the major concepts found in democracies is the principle of good governance. Governance is "the processes and systems by which a government manages the resources of a society to address socio-economic and political challenges in the polity," while a good governance system "is defined by its relationship to some key prerequisites, including accountability, transparency, participation, and predictability."[38] Good governance is a system that is based on a strong belief in the people and views widespread participation as crucial for responsible and responsive government. Also, in the system, citizen "involvement is characterized by a sense of shared responsibility in public policy, ordinary people have strong voices in the political process, and there are opportunities to hear diverse views and take them into account in policy

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[38] Natufe Igho, "Governance and Politics in Nigeria," being a lecture delivered at the Staff and Graduate Seminar, Department of Political Science and Public Administration, University of Benin, Benin-City, Edo State, Nigeria. 2, November 2006

formulation and implementation… With good governance, no one is subjected to the whims and caprices of another, to repression or any form of inhuman treatment."[39] Therefore, with good governance under a democratic system, it was expected that identity crisis and citizenship contest would be effectively managed in the country. Given the current situation, there is a sense in it could be said that this has not been achieved.

The problematic nature of Nigeria's citizenship is a major challenge facing Nigeria's federal structure. In no small measure, it has undermined the efficacy of the federal structure, Unlike in India where there is no dual citizenship, in which case there is only one Indian citizenship, and where the concept of a state citizen does not exist.[40] To be employed outside one's ethnic base at the state level in Nigeria is a big risk in the sense that such a person would bear the burden of a 'non-indigene'. Indeed, there is a conscious notion of 'my state' or 'my home' which afflicts every Nigerian who lives outside his state of origin and makes him go 'home' to marry a wife, to build a house, or to vote. Even the dead are rarely buried outside their states of origin. The implication of this is that citizens' allegiance to the federation is truncated because of the state's preferential treatment of its citizens. A system whereby the state cannot effectively tackle the problem of citizenship negates the tenets of federalism.[41]

As a result of the mismanagement of the system, in recent times, there has been a dramatic surge in xenophobic expressions, the hardening of ethno-religious positions, and the proliferation of ethnic militias that have unleashed varying degrees of violence and terror on the polity.[42] In a perceptive work, Ikengah-Metuh identified three broad types of religious violence in Nigeria, viz, (i) interreligious disturbances which occur between different

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[39] Okwudiba Nnoli, *Ethnic Violence in Nigeria,* 22

[40] Sangma P.A., "Understanding Federalism in India" in Roundtable on Mechanism of Intergovernmental Relations, Institute of Social Sciences, New Delhi, India, 2002

[41] Laski H., A Grammar of Politics, (7th Impression), London, Allen and Unwin. Mabogunje, A.L. (1998), 'Nigeria', in Regional Survey of the World: Africa South of the Sahara, 28th Edition, Europe Publications Limited, London.

[42] Egwu S., Ethnic and Religious Violence in Nigeria, African Centre for Democratic Governance (AFRIGOV), Abuja, Nigeria, 2001, 1

denominations or sects; (ii) interreligious conflicts prevalent between adherents of different religious beliefs but capable of assuming socio-economic dimensions; and (iii) interreligious conflicts, which though have socio-economic origins, end up in the form of religious conflicts.[43]

A survey of ethno-religious conflicts between 1999 when democracy was inaugurated till date shows that they are worrisome developments that threaten harmonious coexistence and jeopardize the unity of the Nigerian nation-state with its fledging democratic experiment far more than any other challenge of democratic sustenance and consolidation.[44] For instance, one of the most virulent of these clashes was the Ife/Modakeke indigene/settler conflict in Osun State in the South-Western region of Nigeria. In the crisis, Adesina highlighted the causes as "first, the desire of the Ife to retain age-old relations of production, which had led in the pre-colonial period to the formation of a system based on a tenant-derived social and economic organization; second, grievances that have to do with the distribution of resources and power, most especially, the ability of the Ife to use their stature and positions to divert the most important infrastructures to their territory to the detriment of their neighbours; and finally the desire of the Modakeke for self-identity and territorial domination.[45]

The Tiv-Jukun clash in Taraba state in 2001 was another incidence of identity and citizenship crisis in the post-1999 transition to democratic governance in Nigeria. According to Moses Aluaigba's[46] research on the crisis, three major factors

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[43] Ikengah-Metuh E., Two Decades of Religious Conflict in Nigeria: A Recipe for Peace, Bulletin of Ecumenical Theology. Vol. 6, No. 1, 1994
[44] Ojo O.E., "A Survey of Ethno-Religious Crisis in Nigeria and its Implications for Democracy", in Ojo, O.E. (ed), Challenges of Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria, John Archers Publishers, Ibadan, Nigeria, 368–378.
[45] Adesina Olutayo, "Sub-Ethnic Identities and the Crisis of Development in Contemporary Nigeria: Perspective from Ife-Modakeke Conflict." In *AAU: African Studies Review, Journal of the Department of History and International Studies, vol.3 No.1(2004)*Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Nigeria,pp.1-24
[46] Aluaigba T., Moses T., *The Tiv-Jukun Ethnic Conflict and the Citizenship Question in Nigeria,* Aminu Kano Centre for Democratic Research and Training, Bayero University, Kano.

were found to be responsible for the face-off. These are the land issue, the political factor, and the indigene/settler question. Although the three factors are intricately intertwined, the Tiv-Jukun conflict raises such issues as the ownership of land, trespassing over properties, and fear of domination of one group over the other.

Closely related to the Taraba conflict is the Jos/Plateau crisis. According to the findings of Umar H. D. Danfulani,[47] the remote causes of the Jos-Plateau crises are "first and foremost a struggle over land." This was not a major cause for a crisis in the past until the economic downturn of the 1970s and 80s and the decline in the fortune of the tin industry in Jos. The difficulties caused by the economic crisis led to an increase in the number of people looking for land for the cultivation of agricultural goods. Before this time, Jos had accommodated different ethnic groups including Europeans, Christians, and Muslims. Indeed, the favourable weather condition of Jos was also a factor that attracted many people to the region. As observed by Danfulani, Jos was regarded as almost the most peaceful state to live in Nigeria, and this earned the state "Home of Peace and Tourism" by the Federal Road Safety Commission. But the peaceful atmosphere enjoyed by the state for many years began to deteriorate from the 1990s when Berom indigenes and Hausa/Fulani settlers clashed over farmlands and local chieftaincy titles.

Another remote cause of the Jos-Plateau crisis could be described as the politics of participation in government by both "indigenes" and "settlers". Some of the issues involved the "creation of Jos South Local Government out of Jos North by the military administration of Babangida, along religious lines, with the former purportedly for Christians and the latter for Hausa-Fulani Muslims."[48] More so, "appointments in Plateau State which is predominantly Christian during the long military rule was along

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[47] Umar H. D., Danfulani, *The Jos Peace Conference and the Indigene/Settler Question in Nigerian Politics,* ASC, Leiden/University of Jos, Nigeria

[48] Umar H. D., Danfulani, *The Jos Peace Conference and the Indigene/Settler Question in Nigerian Politics,* ASC, Leiden/University of Jos, Nigeria

religious lines with the Muslim minority sometimes having more portfolios than Christians. With the return to multi-party democracy, however, the Hausa-Fulani Muslims were left out in the cold, since they lacked the numerical strength to successfully back their candidates."[49] This situation, therefore, increased the indigene and citizenship question in the state.

Apart from the factors highlighted above, the inability of the Muslim Hausa/Fulani to tolerate other groups in the state is also a major factor in the crisis. As observed by Danfulani, most people in Jos who are Christians detest the fact that the Hausa/Fulani do not encourage much social interaction with them in terms of marriage. They also detest the way the Hausa/Fulani are wont to denigrate the cultures of other groups in the society. Within the context of these remote causes, therefore, it seems plausible to affirm that the lingering Jos/Plateau crisis is caused by three inter-related factors which are; the contest over land, political participation, and religious intolerance.

The Niger-Delta crisis and agitation was another major challenge in the 1999 post-democratic Nigeria. The causes of the Niger-Delta agitation are based on the devastation of the region's environment and ecosystem, the refusal to develop social infrastructure in the region, and the unequal compensation for resources and wealth generated from the oil-rich delta region. The host communities of the region, "are of the view that since oil is mined in their land, and they suffer from the pollution and environmental degradation attendant to oil production, they have the right to adequate compensation, a clean and safe environment, and a fair share of oil rents, while the state and its partners, the multinationals, insist on the optimisation of rents and profits based on the modalities defined exclusively by the partnership."[50] Therefore, they called for the stoppage of oil exploration in the region and requested compensation for the damage done to the environment. They also campaigned for

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[49] Umar H. D., Danfulani, *The Jos Peace Conference and the Indigene/Settler Question in Nigerian Politics,*

[50] Wunmi Williams, "Citizenship Questions and Environmental Crisis in the Niger Delta: a Critical Reflection", *Nordic Journal of African Studies 11(3): 377-392 (2002),* 383

resource control of their territory and called for an improvement in the quality of life of the region and the provision of social amenities. More than this, they questioned their identity and allegiance to the Nigerian state that failed to improve their economic and social conditions. Through the struggle for resource control, infrastructural development, and economic empowerment, therefore, the people of Niger Delta linked their fight with the tendency of successive Nigerian governments represented by the Northern oligarchy to marginalize the region and deny them their means of survival.

Despite these arguments, the government was more determined to repress the right activists and environmentalists like Ken Saro-Wiwa. This, therefore, led to the growth of militia groups who almost brought the region to a state of collapse through bombing and blowing up oil and gas pipelines, vandalism of public and private properties of multinational corporations like Shell, and killing and kidnapping of oil staff and state officials. Although, the administration of President Obasanjo sought to address the problems of the region through schemes like the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and an increase in revenue allocation to the region. But these were not enough to bring peace to the region as the wave of bombings and kidnapping extended beyond the shores of the Niger Delta region to states like Lagos and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. The Government, therefore, responded by deploying the army under the Joint Task Force (JTF) to dislodge the militia groups. This made the security situation worse. Thus, in 2009, the administration of President Musa Yar'adua tried another initiative when it implemented an amnesty package that called for the laying down of arms from militia groups, a presidential pardon for the militias, and an infrastructural development programme for the region. To some extent, this has brought a 'relative peace' to the region. However, the Jos/Plateau crisis remained a threat to be addressed by the government.

Perhaps, it is important to emphasize that certain issues have made the indigene/citizenship issue more troublesome in Nigeria. One of the factors responsible for the deepening crisis is the role of religion in the debate. As an identity, Bangura noted that "religion is about solidarity and setting of boundaries between those who are considered to be believers and those who

are not. This deals with issues of sentiments, feelings, and norms that may be a result of shared experiences. This identity is used to create a sense of order, meanings, and hope to the insecurity of everyday life or to what may be perceived as unjust social order."[51] Nowhere was this demonstrated more than in the northern region of Nigeria? As observed by Egwu, "ethnicity and religion are what shape and define (ethnic) identity formation in Northern Nigeria."[52] And "the closer an ethnic group's link to a particular religious identity, the higher the level of religious significance in socio-political matters, which eventually breeds intolerance and ethno-religious violence."[53] It is amazing to note for instance that virtually all appointments in the Executive Council of Kebbi State between 1999 and 2004 were only given to the Muslim Hausa-Fulani groups. To be sure, there were more educated and qualified Christian groups mostly in the Zuru community of the state, but were mostly denied any access to power and other privileges.[54]   Students in the community, according to Danjibo, were also frequently subjected to discrimination in schools, which include denying them the right to study courses like Medicine, Law, and Accountancy.[55]

Another instance could be cited in the wave of crises generated over the imposition of the Muslim law in some of these northern states. According to Ibrahim, "the introduction of Shari'ah and the attendant controversy surrounds the question of collective versus individual rights. While the Muslim Shari'ah activists insist on their individual and collective rights to religion, others are looking at how such rights may infringe on the individual and collective rights of others. Non-Muslims are afraid that the laws would be made to discriminate against them and be made

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[51] Bangura Y., "The Search for Identity: Ethnicity, Religion and Political Violence, 3

[52] Egwu Samuel "Ethnic and Religion Violence in Nigeria" (Jos Nigeria: St Stephen Inc., Book House, 2001) in Ojo Emmanuel, ed. *Challenges of Sustainable Democracy in Nigeria* (Ibadan: John Archers Publishers Ltd., 2008) p.316

[53] Suberu Rotimi "Religion and Politics: A View From the South" in Ojo Emmanuel, ibid., 317

[54] Danjibo Nathaniel, "Democracy and the Paradox of Domination Politics: The Caliphate Versus the Zuru in Northwestern Nigeria" in Ojo Emmanuel, op cit., 314-329

[55] Danjibo Nathaniel, "Democracy and the Paradox of Domination Politics:

second-class citizens."[56] In addition to this, one can also mention the crisis in 2010 in Kaduna State over the emergence of a Christian Deputy-Governor after the incumbent Muslim Governor was selected as the Vice-President of the country.

Given the situation just described above there is no gainsaying the fact that when issues that are germane to human survival could not be guaranteed by institutions in the state, people are bound to react in various ways. As noted in the functional and anomic perspective of Robert Merton,[57] their reactions could either be to 'conform to that society, retreat from it or react against it. Whichever option they seek to take would affect their relationship with that society and the development therein.

Also, it is important to note the discriminatory practices against some segments in the country. A married woman for example cannot perform some transactions in the banks without the consent of her husband. She also needs the consent of her husband before she can obtain an international passport. The fate of the people of the Southeastern region of Nigeria is also worth mentioning. A noticeable trend after the Nigerian Civil war is perhaps an attempt to deny the Igbo group from holding certain positions of authority in the country. This has made the Igbo renew their agitation for the separate Republic of Biafra away from the Nigerian nation. According to Obianyo,[58] the agitation for a separate state by MASSOB is underscored by what the people referred to as the attempt of the ruling oligarchy to marginalized people from the region. As pointed by a Pan-Igbo group, *Oha n'eze ndi Igbo*, marginalization is:

> the deliberate disempowerment of a group of people in the federation politically, economically, socially, and militarily, by another

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[56] Ibrahim, J.,"The National Conference and the Challenge of Developing Federalism in Nigeria" in Abdu, Hussaini, *Religion and Citizenship in Northern Nigeria: The Politics of Shari'ah*. Centre for Development and Advocacy, Kaduna. p.12

[57] Cuff E.C., Payne, G.C.F., ed., *Perspectives In Sociology*, London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979, 49-50

[58] Obianyo Nkolika, *Citizenship and Ethnic Militia Politics in Nigeria- Marginalization or Identity Question? -the case of MASSOB,*

> group or groups, who during the relevant time frame wield power and control the allocation of materials and financial resources at the centre of the federation… It entails the apparent deliberate exclusion of any particular group(s) by another similar group or groups from either having access to and or taking due possession of common key positions and common resources, as manifested in the political-economic military, educational, media, and bureaucratic realm.[59]

Against this background, it is important to emphasize that the post-democratic Nigerian state has not been able to manage effectively the critical challenges of nation-building since independence. The problem posed by identity and citizenship contests in the last fifty years of the country's independence is a pointer to critical areas where the government should concentrate its effort. As the nation enters the second half of its centennial independence year this paper contends that despite the challenges faced in the past, the prospect for a better Nigeria is not elusive.

Facing the Challenges of Identity and Citizenship Crisis

To tackle the challenges posed by the identity and citizenship crisis, Nigeria needs to adopt a federal system of government that emphasizes the principles of good governance and democratic tenets. This will ensure that political power would be used to promote the public good or the welfare of the people. The advantages of federalism and a good governance system are significant for a multi-ethnic Nigerian society. As a system of governance, federalism unites separate states or units within an overarching political system in such a way as to allow each to maintain its fundamental political independence and integrity.

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[59] Oha-Na- Eze Ndi Igbo, "The Violations of Human and Civil Rights of Ndi Igbo in Nigeria (1966-1999): A Call for Appropriate Restitution" A Petition the Oputa panel on Human Rights Violations Investigating Committee, Reported in Nigeria/Africa Masterweb News Report, 1999, Retrieved 18, May 2021 from http://www.nigeiamasterweb.com/. Cited in Obianyo E. Nkolika, *Citizenship and Ethnic Militia Politics in Nigeria- Marginalization or Identity Question? -the case of MASSOB*

Federal units do this by requiring that basic policies be made and implemented through negotiation in some form so that all the members can share in making and executing decisions. This system does not encourage the concentration of power in one unit to be able to ride roughshod on other units. The Nigerian constitution, as is presently constituted, gives enormous powers to the presidency in such a way as to promote dictatorship and tyranny. One of the dangers of this system, as experience as shown in the country, is to increase tension in the polity, as many groups compete for the centre where power is mostly concentrated.

Institution building is also imperative for curbing the threat posed by identity and citizenship clashes. The ability to manage" political and social disputes peacefully, without lapsing into conflict, or sustain economic growth without creating huge inequalities, critically depend on the quality of the relevant national institutions."[60] There is a need to strengthen the operations of various security outfits like the Police to enable it to cope effectively with incidences of indigene/settler crises. There is also a need to have institutions that can manage the post-conflict clashes in such a way as to prevent a re-occurrence. Unfortunately, one of the features of post-conflict clashes in Nigeria is the inability of authorities to prosecute people who were guilty in the crisis. More than this, most of the reports of the post-conflict investigations are also kept secret, thereby frustrating any effort to implement findings of the report and prosecution of offenders. Indeed, the inability by the government to publish reports of indigene/settler clashes constitutes another threatening factor in the Jos-Plateau crisis.[61]

At a point, it must be noted that the Obasanjo Administration's initiated the National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) where such issues like identity and citizenship were discussed. In one of the debates, the conference was to decide on the question of

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[60] Gambari Ibrahim, "The Challenges of Nations Building: The Case of Nigeria" being a lecture delivered at the *First Year Anniversary Lecture Mustapha Akanbi Foundation*, 7 February 2008 http://www.mafng.org/ accessed on 26 September 2010.
[61] Umar H. D. Danfulani, *The Jos Peace Conference and the Indigene/Settler Question in Nigerian Politics*,..

whether or not to extend full indigene status to every citizen wherever they chose to reside, irrespective of birth, religion, sex, and group. It was interesting to note that in the build-up towards the would-be decision, the media survey showed for the first time that all the three more mobile and dominant ethnic groups (Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba) were united over an issue. Their common position was that there should be no distinction in status between the two; that a citizen should be regarded as an indigene and be accorded all indigene rights wherever they find themselves or chose to reside. Unfortunately, the NPRC did not resolve the controversy before it folded up.[62]

Against this background, the review of the nation's constitution is another significant imperative for tackling the identity problems in a newly democratic Nigeria. The process of constitutional amendment must include the participation of various segments of society. The voice of the people must be reflected in the constitution and the document must be made available to them. A review of this constitution must redefine the notion of citizenship, human rights, and social justice. This must include a review of the rights and powers of married women in the pursuance of any endeavour. Therefore, provisions must be made to give equal powers and rights to both sexes. In the same vein, the constitution must be able to tackle the problems of rights, identity, indigene, and settler questions once and for all. A situation where a citizen who has been resident in a particular geographical location or state for more than ten years, and yet cannot claim substantial benefit or services from such state must not be encouraged to secure the loyalty of the citizens towards the state. A constitutional amendment must also seek new ways of protecting fundamental human rights and recommend appropriate sanctions against erring culprits. It must state in clear terms that crime against any citizen is a crime against all Nigerians. It is particularly disturbing that little has been achieved in bringing to justice the perpetrators of various ethnic and religious crises in the country where such measures would have to serve as a deterrent to intending perpetrators.

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[62] Bala J. Takaya, *Re-Examining the Question of Citizenship and Indigeneity in Modern Nigeria*, posted online by KG Nesta on 2010-08-07

Finally, there is a need to reform various sectors of the economy to make them useful for various needs of the citizens. There is a need to reduce the level of unemployment and job losses through the expansion of industries and diversification of the economy to include investment in solid mineral development, agro-allied, and services. Other sectors like the educational system, health, and power are also in need of urgent attention in the country. Reform of these sectors and provision of needed facilities therein are necessary to make the citizens have the assurance that the government is interested in their plight. This will, in the long run, help to build a cordial and formidable relationship between the government and the citizens.

Conclusion

The identity and citizenship crisis is the most important challenge in the post-1999 democratic governance in Nigeria. The crisis itself is an outgrowth of the conditions of the foundation of the nation which dates back to the pre-colonial period. However, it must be stated that the amalgamation itself cannot be blamed for identity contests in the country; rather it is the failure of the post-independence Nigerian state to manage the identity crisis. It has been argued that the notions of indigene and settlers have no scientific or rational basis but the government has tended to promote the notion of individualism of various groups in the country in such a way as to promote violent clashes across the country. However, it must also be stated that the country has been able to wriggle itself out of the threats posed by identity crises on many occasions.

Be that as it may, there is an urgent need to carry out critical reforms in the country's social and political systems. There is a need to adopt a federal constitution that would help to reduce overwhelming power at the behest of the centre. This will not only put more power in the hands of states, but it will also help to foster healthy competition among them. Also, there is a need to review the constitution of the country to correct the theory of identity and citizenship (i.e. the Quota System and the Federal Character principle) as practised in virtually every social and political sector of the nation. Significantly, a review of this principle is necessary to redefine when a settler becomes a citizen of another state. This should also include the rights and

privileges such a person can enjoy. In addition, institutions like the police must be strengthened to enable them to cope effectively with the threat posed by indigene/settler clashes. There is also a need for the government to properly prosecute offenders and violators of human rights abuses irrespective of religion, belief systems, sex, and ethnic background. Finally, serious sectorial reform is needed to ensure that the basic needs of Nigerians are met any time of the day. All of these are needed to help in promoting the ideals of democratic governance in the country.

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