

## FUNCTIONAL RELIGIOSITY, A PANACEA TO THE DIVISIVE AND MILITANT FORMS OF ETHNICISM IN NIGERIA

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### **Abstract**

*By nature, human being is a social being who desires to interact and enjoys companies of other fellow beings. Most often, this interaction adversely affects other beings within the society. Undoubtedly, Nigeria seems to be synonymous with deep divisions that have caused and continues to spark off major socio economic and political issues. These issues are often vigorously and violently contested along the lines of intricate ethnic and regional divisions. The real problem associated with ethnicism rears its ugly head when there is a contact among different ethnic groups. The desire to dominate and the fear of being dominated by other ethnic groups dominate thoughts and ideologies of many people. This thought often leads to outright declaration of hostilities resulting inexorably in the loss of lives and property. This study investigates the history of ethnicism, its features and implications on the survival of Nigerian nationhood.*

**Keywords:** Functional, Religiosity, Panacea, Divisive, Militant and Ethnicism

### **Introduction**

It has been repeatedly posited that for the ease of governance and other selfish economic interests, the British amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorates each consisting of diverse ethnic nationals to become one political Nigeria in 1914. But the hitherto indigenous brotherliness among these nationals could not be fused into one central brotherhood as it is obtained in the coerced central political authority. After sixty years of the fusion, the colonialists left and handed political power to Nigerians. However, as soon as they left, inter-tribal suspicions resurfaced and it has remained a recurrent decimal in the country's landscape. Several coups and countercoups motivated by ethnic sentiments and perceptions culminated in the avoidable 30-month (1967-1970) civil war which claimed millions of innocent lives. Incidentally, more than 90% of those killed are

said to belong to an ethnic extraction which further exacerbates distrust among the conglomerate ethnic nationals. Initially, at independence, Nigerians were full of expectations as they looked forward to a stable, enduring political and economic system that would enhance speedy cohesion and economic development. But little did they know that it was not yet “uhuru” for them simply because one of the monsters called ethnicism was on hand to take over the steering wheel of the vehicle that should have conveyed the country into a virile nation. A fundamental impact of ethnicism in Nigeria is a culture of distrust amongst various ethnic groups in the country leading to the repeated calls and moves for the balkanizations of the country by some ethnic militias. Existentially, while many people have benefitted from ethnicism, it has adversely affected many others yet all these people meet or worship under some forms of religious organizations. Undoubtedly, Nigeria has continued to experience all round instabilities thus making the country unsafe for social development and growth. This study tries to analyze how objective and functional religiosity can be used to checkmate the adverse implications of ethnicism on the survival of Nigeria.

### **Clarification Of Terms**

**Functional:** The word “functional” comes from the Latin word “functionem”, meaning “performance and execution”. It can also be employed to describe whether something is working properly or not. Functional is the adjective of the term, “function” and it is used to describe something that performs an action. It connotes a practical and useful action. It means something that has a special activity, purpose or task.

**Religiosity** from the word “religion” though yet to have a generally accepted definition, means the quality and act of being religious, strong piety and devoutness.

**Panacea:** The Greek word for panacea is “panakés” and it is a combination of two words “pan” meaning “all” and “akēs” meaning “cure or aches” meaning the cure for all aches. It means total-healing, remedy and cure for all diseases or ills. It means an answer or solution to all problems or difficulties.

**Divisive:** This term is derived from the Latin word, “divisivus” and it is in the adjectival form which means creating disunity or dissension, hostility and discord.

**Militancy:** Militancy is the noun form of the term “militant” and is defined as aggressiveness or a person who is ready and willing to fight for a cause.

***Ethnicism:*** This could be seen as a relationship, concern, favour or regard shown to person or people because of common language, culture and origin. Ethnicism in the Nigerian context can be defined as a social phenomenon associated with the identity of members of a competing communal group(s) seeking to protect and advance their interest in a political system. The relevant communal factor may be language, culture, race, religion and/or common history. For the purpose of this study, Achebe's (1997) version of ethnicity "as discrimination against a citizen because of his/her place of birth" is considered as the divisive form of ethnicism and it shall so be regarded throughout the work.

In the context of this work, "Functional religiosity, a panacea to the divisive and militant forms of ethnicism in Nigeria" implies the form of religiosity or belief system which promotes a united Nigeria where peace, love, fairness, justice, equity and equality of opportunity for all and sundry are mutually pursued. The policy of promoting the aforementioned virtues regardless of the creed, ethnicity, gender or political affiliation will help checkmate the militant, discriminatory, destructive and divisive aspects of ethnicism in Nigeria. The study acknowledges however that ethnicism is a natural reality and not entirely a negative or bad phenomenon rather the militant, discriminatory and divisive dimension is very dreadful. It also admits that to have the concept of functional religiosity implies that the same religion can be dysfunctional.

### **Features Of Ethnicism**

Virtually every "ism" in the existence of humanity has some peculiarities, features, characteristics and remarkable identities and ethnicism is not an exception. One remarkable feature of ethnicism is the attitude which people portray because of their common descent, language and cultural values. These common factors are emphasized by frequent interactions between the people in a larger group. Nnoli (2008) posits that the peculiarity of ethnicism involves demands by one group on other competing group(s). Okpanachi (2010) identifies other features of ethnicism to include things such as an emotive tie to a group, love and belief in a group (p.4). It is also characterized by an individual's and group's avowed commitments to the cause, agenda and duties, the vision and mission of a particular, group or tribe. Salamone (1991) opines that ethnic groups are quite simple groups organized around the principle of common descent with the purpose of attaining a goal. It is driven by an interaction that creates a common consciousness of being a brother to one another. Ethnicism is also characterized by common blood or ancestry. It is made up of more than one ethnic group and the group may differ numerically or geographically and in size.

Meanwhile, there exists the psychological feeling that accompanies the awareness of a common origin and it is these feelings that engender togetherness and solidarity among the members and almost endanger those outside their cleavage. These groups may be identified by geographical location, culture, religion, tradition, morality, language, profession, dressing among others. Iwe (1987) observes that ethnicism in the ordinary man arouses pity in the society (p.22). Naturally, an ethnic group maintains relative peace and less internal contradictions among them. When there is an internal conflict, the terms of war and peace are known and applied. Most of the times, they chose to follow due process in seeking redress. In Nigeria, the ethnic groups are occasionally fusions created by intermarriage, intermingling and sometimes assimilation. Ethnicism is a natural phenomenon in almost all societies. Virtually, every organization in Nigeria is much concerned with ethnic interests.

### **Ethnicism In Nigeria**

One intriguing feature of the Nigerian social composition can be found in her multi-ethnic nationalities. Akanni (1999) posits that Nigeria is a country of different persuasions, religions, languages, cultural backgrounds and socio-economic areas that was arbitrarily couched together by the Europeans in the 19th century. There are about five hundred and ten (510) languages spoken in the country which, means that there are over five hundred and ten ethnic groups in Nigeria (p.61). Sowunmi (2017) made a list of the three hundred and seventy-one (371) tribes in Nigeria (p.3). Both scholarship and experience may have not come to agreement with the exact number of Nigeria's multi-ethnic groups but often there is the idea of the ethnic tripod consisting of Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo while others are generally referred to as minority groups. Ethnicity has historically been an aspect of virtually everything in Nigeria. It was one of the reasons for the rise to the Colonial Investigatory Commission usually referred to as the "Willink Commission", which seems to become the precursor of the multiple creations of sub-system states in the country between 1963 and 1996. Apart from religion, ethnicism is seen as the most basic and politically salient identity of Nigerians. A survey conducted by Lewis and Bratton (2000) revealed that almost half of Nigerians (48.2%) labeled themselves with an ethnic identity compared to 28.4% who labeled themselves with respect to class and 21% who identified with a religious group (p.27).

There are many ethnic associations in Nigeria and they include Arewa consultative forum, Afenifere, Ohaneze ndi Igbo, Pan Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF) to mention but a few. These ethnic driven associations are also

extended among the governors hence there are southern, southwestern, southeastern, south southern, north, northeastern, northwestern and north central governors' forums. Each is formed with an aim of gaining political advantage over the rest. With all these, the unity and progress of Nigeria as a country is secondary. However, three of these numerous associations shall be succinctly analyzed.

### **Afenifere**

Akinrefon (2015) avers that Afenifere, the pan-Yoruba socio-cultural organization was formed as a rallying point for the Yoruba people. The organization has been in existence since "Egbe Omo Oduduwa" days that was founded by the late, Chief Obafemi Awolowo. He was the leader of Yoruba people during the Nigerian struggle for independence. After his death, the mantle fell on the late Adekunle Ajasin, who led the group from 1987 and Ajasin was succeeded by Abraham Adesanya while Chief Bola Ige served as his deputy leader. Other founding members of the organizations were Pa Onasanya, Chief Reuben Fasoranti, Adegbonmire, Femi Okurounmu, Ganiyu Dawodu, Olanihun Ajayi, Olu Falae, Adebayo Adefarati, Alhaji Adeyemo and Ayo Adebajo. It is considered as the mouthpiece and defender of the Yoruba ethnic group on the national sphere. However, this movement has given birth to other associations fighting for the interests of the Yoruba tribe.

### **Ohanaeze Ndi Igbo**

Some prominent Igbo individuals had after the avoidable Nigerian civil war converged to outline the need to unify Igbo people under a common umbrella body. This initiative was much welcomed by the Igbo people considering maximum displacement and inhuman treatment meted out on them during and after the war. Ogonna (2019) avers that an organizational assembly was created and it was named the Igbo National Assembly (INA). This organization was later banned by the Federal Military Government at the time, probably because of the fear of a grand suspicious agenda presumed to be cultivated by the Igbo people through the organization. After series of thoughts and realignments, Ohanaeze Ndigbo was created in 1976. Professor Ben Nwabueze, a foremost constitutional lawyer, gathered prominent Igbo leaders to form the organization. Two eminent Igbo sons Dr. Akanu Ibiam and Chief Jerome Udoji were the President-General and Secretary General respectively at its inception. The organization was effectively championed and supported by other notable Igbo personalities such as Chief Kingsley Mbadiwe, Dr. Michael Iheonukara Okpara and Dr. Pius Okigbo among others. The organization is considered as the mouthpiece of Igbo

race in Nigeria and beyond. Just like the Afenifere group, this movement has given birth to other associations fighting for the interests of the Yoruba tribe

### **Arewa Consultative Forum**

Kukha (1993) states that the idea of Arewa is derived from the conglomerations of tribal associations that fused into the Jamar Muntanen Arewa in 1949 (p.7). Ekeh (2007) describes Arewa as “Northern” in Hausa, the primary language of the region. The current form of the forum is a successor to the Northern People's Congress which collapsed after the coup of 1966 (p. 637). The name Arewa has been a philosophy holding the people of the north together right from the colonial era. It seems to have been soft pedaled some reasons such as the tyrannical nature of military regimes and the population and domination of military dictatorship era by their men.

Meanwhile, Labaran (2008) posits that on March 7, 2001, a meeting of nine northern Emirs, two former heads of the state, about thirty-one prominent personalities from all over the North and Leaders of thought was held at Arewa House in Kaduna. The meeting was presided over by the late Sultan of Sokoto, His Eminence, Alhaji Muhammadu Maccido. The purpose of that meeting included the wave of ethnic violence in the region which was threatening the survival and the unity of the people of the North. They reminisced on how the first premier of the Northern Region and the Sardauna of Sokoto, late Alhaji Ahmadu Bello was able to wield the various peoples of Arewa into one united block imbued with dignity, a sense of purpose and history. They resolved to arrest the situation by spearheading a process of restoring the legendary unity of Arewa involving all the people of the region. Similar to other previously discussed tribal associations, this movement has given birth to other associations fighting for the interests of the Hausa/Fulani tribe.

There are many other ethnic associations and organizations in Nigeria but similar to the three discussed above, they are formed to defend the interests of their race and sometimes a platform to express their minds on national issues. They are all reactionary organizations. For example, Ohanaeze forum was formed in reaction to the brutal Biafra civil war, Agaju and Adedoja (2001) argue that Arewa Consultative Forum was revived because of the shift of power to the south together with the submission of Igbo people at the famous Oputa Panel where the causes and issues of the bloody Nigerian civil war were highlighted and publicized. All these were believed to have threatened the northern interest.

### **Ethnicism In The Nigerian Politics**

Ethnicism has been playing manifest roles in Nigerian politics since the pre-colonial era and is arguably one of the important causes of conflict and an overall obstacle to economic development of the country. Ibrahim (2017) observes that in 1939, the regional autonomy was reinforced with the division of the country into three regions. Since then, Nigerian politics has had a very strong ethno-regional character and the political elites have always sought to exploit it for their political ends (p.3).

The foundation of Nigeria's party politics was ethnically-oriented as portrayed from the First until the Fourth Republics. Shortly after independence, the political scene of the First Republic transmitted a pure picture of Nigeria's ethnic divisions. Igbuzor (2011) asserts that the Action Group (AG) was dominant only in the Yoruba Western region and was headed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo. The National Council of Nigerian Citizen (NCNC), formerly National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons) allied with the Igbo people and dominant only in the Eastern Nigeria while the Northern People's Congress (NPC) formed by the Jammaa mutanen Arewa among the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group was dominant only in Northern Nigeria. These parties later transformed into the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the Nigerian People Party (NPP) and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) in the second republic. Therefore, even when there seems to be a shift from the first and second republics ethnic driven party politics, ethnicism has remained a force in the Nigerian party politics.

### **Precursors Of Divisive Ethnicism In Nigeria**

*Social Insecurity:* The idea of insecurity laid the foundation for the rise of ethnicism because it is the most pressing need of man. Nigerian rulers have not built social security both in the psyche and the general existence of the people and that is why whenever a Yoruba man is at the helms of Nigerian affairs, Igbo or Hausa man will feel insecure. If an Igbo man makes it to the presidency, Hausa or Yoruba man feels insecure. When Hausa man becomes the president of Nigeria, other ethnic groups feel insecure. The culture of impunity, brutal lopsided and parochial approach to governance against dissenting voices and other ethnic groups have heightened the fears in the people hence they naturally resort to the cleavages of their ethnic nationals.

*Colonialization Policy:* Apart from social insecurity, the partitioning and scrambling by the British merchants whose interest was nothing but trade increased the consciousness of ethnicism among the people. The disregard of the British colonialists to the territorial and historical claims of the people led some people to still themselves as ethnic champion instead of a nationalist.

Apparently, Igbuzor (2011) argues that the British colonial administrators' ethnic policy and the regional autonomy reinforced the division of the three regions- a factor which contributed to ethno-regional character of governance in Nigeria. Regardless of that validity of the policy, the idea of keeping the southerners in separate quarters known as sabongari in the northern parts no doubt exacerbated the culture of ethnicism amongst Nigerians. This is because people that should ordinarily view themselves as one people started seeing themselves from the lenses of strangers and ethnic dichotomy.

*Suspicious and Prejudices:* The existence or reality of suspicions, intolerance, hatred and unhealthy competitions also caused ethnicism in Nigeria. For largely myopic, uninformed, preconceived and uncritical reason, an average Hausa or Yoruba man sees an average Igbo man as a dubious trader, an Igbo or Yoruba man sees Hausa man as a parasitic politician who is so lazy to fend for himself hence he has to depend on the public coffers for survival. An average Igbo or Hausa man also sees an average Yoruba man as an unreliable sellout. This is the reasons why a little misunderstanding from any section of the country usually lead to reprisals even when there is no need for it.

*The thirst for self-Governance:* Osaghae and Suberu (2005) maintain that issues that raise dust sometimes are those regarded as essential for the existence and the validity of the state (pp.2-4). There were no appreciable pre-independence ethnic crises in Nigeria but as soon as Nigerians started choosing their leaders' the problem of ethnicity became obvious. The desire to aggressively pursue the principles of self-determination and sharing of national cake no doubt, led to the formation of ethnic associations cum militias. Many of these associations are currently disquieting Nigerian nation state. Many times, over-ambitious politicians used these militias for political thuggery and other electoral malpractices. Some of these ethnic warlords are mainly the creation of disgruntled and opportunist politicians.

*The Culture of a Winner-takes it-all Syndrome:* The combustive and combative composition of Nigerian state has enabled any body that controls the central government to behave in near absolute and reckless show of powers. He can appoint and disappoint, he can make and unmake and virtually all his desires become the national policy. Anybody or group who questions his policy is visited with the state arsenals. In appointments, he appoints his people into strategic positions of government without recourse to the sensibility of other Nigerians. For example, there is yet to be a time this culture is more pronounced like in the present government. The government has since its inception on 29<sup>th</sup>

May, 2015 appointed all the heads of security and para-military agencies from the north and almost Muslims except the Chiefs of Defence, Naval Staff and Federal Road Safety Corp that came from the south. Opposing and contending assemblages have a tendency to assume an exclusionary winner-takes it-all approach.

***Promotion of Mediocrity and Suppression of Justice:*** Ethnicism flourishes in Nigeria because it is an effective tool that gives the dubious, weak and mediocre an edge over the first class brains and capable hands in the struggle to gain government's patronage. This attitude often manifests in political appointments and award of contracts. Most of the time, after getting the appointment, these appointees resort to ethnic sentiment as a cover to carry out offensive abuse of office. They employ the same tactics to escape justice after leaving the office. Of course, the promotion of mediocrity and suppression of justice promote the idea of ethnicism.

Moreover, in virtually every part of Nigeria, the Constitutional provision of a national citizenship is never honoured. For example, students who are not indigenes of a particular state pay higher school fees than indigenes and settlers are often denied of certain Rights. Hence, a capable Yoruba man who was born in Abia state even when he possesses the capacity to develop Abia state cannot win a governorship election in the state simply because he is not from there. The people would rather vote in an individual who cannot pay ordinary workers' salaries continues who will continue to experiment with the peoples' destiny in the guise of leadership. A resourceful Igbo man can never dream of winning a governorship position in Kano state because he is not from there. To buttress this point further, Uwechue (1969) notes that the bulk of recruitment of Biafra soldiers came from angry refugee youths who tried to defend themselves against the Nigerian federal forces in 1966. The Biafran army had no strong weapons but was spurred by the burning desire to avenge themselves for the 1966 mascara of Igbo people in the north.

***Dubious Political Ambitions and Callous Utterances:*** Ethnicism is also caused by the attitudes of Nigerian leaders like the one reflected in this short but profound conversation between Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, leader of NCNC and Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, the leader of NPC which took place in the mid-1960s, as submitted by Paden in Amanambu (2013), Rt Hon Nnamdi Azikwe had said to Sir Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, "Let us forget our differences..." But Bello responded, "No, let us understand our differences. I am a Muslim and a Northerner. You are a Christian, an Easterner".

In view of the above, every national election in Nigeria is akin to war. For example, prior to the general election in 2011, the Nigerian political arena was so hotly tensed along ethnic lines that many Northern politicians vehemently kicked against the candidacy of Dr Goodluck Jonathan. When he insisted on contesting in the 2011 Presidential Election, some politicians of Hausa/Fulani extractions decided to use every available means to ensure the return of political power to the Northern region. These politicians operated under the aegis of the Northern Political Leadership Forum (NPLF). They adopted various crude approaches like hate campaigns to undermine Jonathan's candidacy. Courtesy of this platform, notable politicians in the likes of Alhaji Adamu Ciroma, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar, Junaid Mohammed, Mallam Nasiru El Rufai, Shehu Sani and president, Muhammadu Buhari who was reported as the frontline opposition candidate and first runner up during the 2003, 2007 and 2011 presidential elections. They all contributed to the enmeshment of the political atmosphere with hate speech, made various provocative, incendiary and calumnious speeches against the aspiration and candidature of Jonathan.

The former Vice President and Presidential aspirant, Abubakar Atiku had come out openly to say according to Umoru (2010), "let me again send another message to the leadership of the country, especially the political leadership that those who make peaceful change impossible make violent change inevitable". He threatened that the country would not know peace and would break into pieces should a Northerner fail to grab power in 2015. Binniyat (2012) notes that president Muhammad Buhari who lost the presidential election to former President Jonathan in 2011 said that "if what happened in 2011 should again happen in 2015, by the grace of God, the dog and the baboon would all be soaked in blood" (pp.1-5.). In the same vein, Umoru (2012) and Yemi (2014) concur that Alhaji Lawal Keita, another prominent northern Nigerian politician issued another threat thus, "we hear rumours all over that Jonathan is planning to contest in 2015. Well, the north is going to be prepared if the country remains one...we are going to fight for it. If not, everybody can go his way".

May be, the most daring move undertaken by these militants was the condition given to the former President Jonathan by the BokoHaram sect that he be converted to Islam or resignation as panacea for laying down their arms. His silence then made their bombings almost uncontrollable. Consequently, Amanambu (2013) asserts that many people, especially the Ijaw, kinsmen of Goodluck Jonathan were extremely provoked by these audacious utterances. One of them, the former President of Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC) and Leader of

Niger Delta Volunteer Force (NDVF) Alhaji Mojaheed Dokubo-Asari thundred fire and brimstones against the sect.

In the same way, Abubakre and Oyewo (2015) state that Patience Jonathan, the wife of the then president was reported to have encouraged her supporters to “stone anyone who supports change during a campaign rally in Calabar, Cross River State”. Daringly, Salihu (2017) notes that on June 6, 2017, the Arewa Youth Consultative Forum comprising the nineteen northern states of Nigeria in rather destructive terms issued a ninety-day ultimatum to Igbo people in the North to vacate the region before October 1, 2017 and ordered their kinsmen in Igbo land to return to the north. This was in response to the sit-at-home protest held by pro-Biafra groups - Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in the South Eastern and some south southern parts of the country in honour of millions of their forbears who were massacred between 1967 and 1970 in the avoidable civil war. These groups in their protests were not short of provocative utterances.

With these comments, one wonders what is left in the Nigerian polity. Apprehensions from all these utterances have not only enveloped the polity but have also led to the untimely death of many innocent people through series of explosions carried out by the ethnic warlords who are ready to carry out the utterances of their ethnic leaders. The presence of ethnic militia in Nigeria's political scene cannot be said to be compatible with the Nigerian democracy even though Powell (1982) argues to the contrary to that when he posits that democracy had a very special relationship with political conflict especially with the groups and individuals who see themselves as permanently excluded from the real power which the government has used to disadvantage them (p.21).

### **Ethnicism And The Rise Of Militancy In Nigeria**

The militant nationalism in the post-World War period and Colonial era being the brain child of Herbert Macaulay and Dr Nnamdi Azikwe's journalism and charismatic qualities gave the historical clue to the rise of ethnic militancy in Nigeria. The militant nationalists include genuine idealists, communalist sympathies and political opportunists who took political militancy of the NCNC during the pre-independent era. The struggle was heightened with the activities of these groups to protest against the 1948 Constitutional reforms.

Similarly, ethnicism fertilizes the ground for the rise of many militant movements such as the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), formed in 1992 and spearheaded by Ogoni playwright and author,

Ken Sarowiwa, the Ijaw Youth Council and Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) led by Mujahid Asari Dokubo, Niger Delta Vigilante (NDV) led by Ateke Tom. The last two were founded in 2003 and based in Portharcourt and other neighbouring towns. The Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), spearheaded by Raph Uwazuruike and the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) led by Nnamdi Kanu situated in Igbo areas. The duo is aimed at securing the resurgence of the defunct State of Biafra from Nigeria State.

Others are the Oodua people's congress (OPC)-a Yoruba nationalistic militia situated in the Western Nigeria, the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND), Arewa Youth movement, Arewa Youth Forum, Coalition of Northern Groups (CNG), Arewa Consultative Youth Movement (ACYM), Yandaba, Omabtse and the AlisSunna Lidda'awatiwal jihad otherwise known as Boko Haram though the categorization of the latter as ethnic militants remain an issue of diverse opinion. The rise of these warlords has been the undoing of the unity of Nigeria as a country. There seem to be an underground articulations and subtle movements by these champions of ethnic nationalism to dismantle the federation and secede from Nigeria.

### **The Negative Impacts Of Divisive Ethnicity In Nigeria**

The constant reference to ethnic animosities and differences doubtlessly has affected the psyche of the country. It has promoted ethnic defenders instead of Nigerian defenders. It has established a pattern or legacy of hate and suspicions which the successive generation carries like a mantle. Other negative impacts of divisive ethnicism include:

***Recruitment of Mediocre:*** In the civil and public services, the employment opportunities that should have been ordinarily competed for so as to enlist the best brains and hands seem to have been reserved for the people from particular ethnic group. Apart from one's art of bribery, the award of contracts in public service has been a subject of ethnic and connection to the persons in the position of authority hence the phrase "it is our turn". Thus, merit and excellence are sacrificed on the altar of primordial thinking. The ministries, parastatals and government agencies are largely filled with incompetent officials and this has dwarfed the growth and development of Nigeria. It is fearful to have a vacuum in the place of authority but it is deadly to have a mediocre in place.

***Ethnicism kills rational thinking, and breeds Hatred:*** Divisive ethnicism beclouds the sense of objective reasoning especially when it comes to churning

out senseless sentiments aimed at sparking off unhealthy rivalries between groups in Nigeria. Many Nigerian analysts have often argued that Lugard did not consult anybody before he unilaterally amalgamated Nigeria. There others who because of this usually describe Nigeria as a child got out of wedlock and base their agitations for dismembering the country yet nobody has killed a child because it was got out of wedlock. Admittedly, the present Nigeria people may have no historical, cultural and economic background but then when the North and South were amalgamated, Lugard did not ask Igbo man or Yoruba man to go and live in Sokoto, Bauchi, Maiduguri or Hausa man to go and live in Lagos, Aba, Owerri, Enugu, PortHarcourt and Calabar. He rather chose to keep the North separate from the South.

Historically, the southerners who went to the north were forced to live in Sabongari known as Strangers Quarters. Southerners were not allowed to own land in the North. There was no mixing or interaction between the people from the South and the inhabitants of the North to avoid the latter being contaminated by the evil influences from South. In other words, Lugard's Indirect Rule Policy, needless to say, was designed to produce Northerners, Easterners and Westerners not Nigerians yet Nigerians upheld "one Nigerian project" after independence. Meanwhile, no particular nation or country of the world especially the Developed ones had grown on its own without the combinations of other groups hence the idea of a nation-state. Countries like, Egypt, Germany and Japan are clear examples of countries with the conglomeration of other ethnic nationalities and there is yet to be an ethnic group that constitutes a country. Therefore, ethnicism should not kill Nigeria because a nation is not built by history but by men. The force in ethnicism has been so pronounced that it has continued to dominate national discourse in Nigeria. It controls how people think, act and talk and it determines what they oppose or support. It is promoted by the political elites, embraced by the young and the old, passed from generation to generation and even has a base in the country's constitution.

Furthermore, the pretext for unleashing genocide against the Igbo people during the Nigerian Civil War seems to be an imaginary conjecture of a grand conspiracy aimed at setting the race against other ethnic nationalities in Nigerians. Mainasasa (1982) affirms that Major Nzeogwu did not arrest Kashim Ibrahim because the later was a good man yet the same Mainasasa dubbed the first Nigerian coup in 1966 Igbo coup organized to prevent the north from effective participation in government of the country (pp.8-9). However, Amanambu (2013) argues that it sounds strongly unconvincing for a critically

fair-minded individual to credit the people with the intelligence of the Coup. This is because there was no sort of power or position the Igbo people could have wanted before 1966 which they did not have. A question that can be asked is what sort of power did they need that would warrant a conspiracy by way of a coup plot to achieve it? For example, in 1966, the President of Nigeria, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was an Igbo man, the President of the Senate, Dr. Nwafor Orizu was an Igbo man and the General Officer Commanding the Nigerian Army, Lt. General Aguiyi Ironsi was an Igbo man and Uwechue (1969) has earlier posited that Colonel Unegbe, an Igbo man was an Officer in charge of national ammunition store in Lagos while Achebe (2012) avers that 45% of the managerial positions in the country (p.77). How could it be said that the January 15, 1966 Coup was organized to promote the interest of Igbo people?

Meanwhile, there was a direct account from Ben Gbulie, as noted by Ezeani (2013) that the January 15, 1966 Coup plotters intended to replace Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe with Chief Obafemi Awolowo as the President of Nigeria (p.28). Ironically, Ademoyega (1981) points out that those who quelled the Coup were Igbo Officers-namely the General Officer Commanding Nigerian Army, Lt. General Aguiyi Ironsi and Colonel Patrick Agwuna (p.15). How could Igbo interest be put down by Igbo Officers? This is the kind of subjectivity obtained when divisive ethnicism is at work in a society.

The other reason often adduced for branding the January 15th, 1966 an Igbo Coup is that most casualties were northern political figures but Uwechue (1969) notes that Colonel Unegbe, an Igbo Officer was killed during the 1966 Coup for failing to hand over key to the ammunition house to the coup plotters not to talk of the former finance minister, Chief Okotie Eboh who was also killed. He observes that Chief Michael Okpara, the Premier of the Eastern region was on the night of the Coup 15th January, 1966, hosting a State dinner for a visiting Head of State, Archbishop Macarius of Cyprus and perhaps the coup plotters thought it would have been highly imprudent to attack Enugu State House that night. In the morning of January 16th, Dr. M.I. Okpara was arrested at the Enugu Airport where he went to see off his host (p.26). By then, the coup had been successfully foiled. If he had the knowledge of the coup, should he have risked his life coming out of the government house?

Furthermore, since the January 15th, 1966 Coup, there have been five successful and five reported attempted Coups in Nigeria yet none of these Coups has been linked to the ethnic origin of the Coup plotters in order to annihilate their people even when they were obviously ethnic based. The coup plotters themselves

made their aims known according to Uwechue (1969) when they stated that “our enemies are the political profiteers, the swindlers, men in high and low places that seek bribes, those that seek to keep the country divided permanently so that they can remain in office as ministers or VIPs at least, the tribalists, the nepotists, those that make those that have corrupted our society and put the Nigerian political calendar back by their words and deeds” (p.25). In as much as the author does not intend to defend any section of Nigeria or sound sadistic about those who lost their political figures in that avoidable crisis, it is high time Nigerians put the records straight for the benefit of the younger generation and for the peaceful co-existence of all citizens.

***Ethnicism breeds tribal warlords who rise to challenge national sovereignty:*** Many ethnic groups such as OPC, EGBESU BOYS, COALITION OF AREWA YOUTHS, MOSSOP, MEND, MASSOB, IPOB and others usually rise to challenge national sovereignty. They do this by articulating and presenting their symbols of autonomy. They are at best armed militias charged for the defence of their ethnic territories. Ethnicism with its overt and covert tensions has contributed in no small measure to the emergence of military coups in Nigeria. Ethnicism was one of the chief deaths that killed the first Republic thus frustrated the Nigerian opportunity of commanding an economic power.

***Ethnicism helps in producing Leaders that are Unaccountable:*** Mainasasa (1982) in his apologetics accounts reluctantly submits that the political leaders prior to the coup were inept (p.23). The problem of Nigeria has remained a leadership yet the people’s resolve and determination to address this menace has evaporated because of ethnicism. The divisive nature of ethnicism does not allow Nigerians to call their past leaders especially presidents to give account of their stewardships. Many of the leaders have not done well and no one dares to question them. Ethnicism contributed in making them untouchables. Some of them go about freely and even make inflammatory and divisive statements. If any of them is arrested and detained for questioning, his ethnic group will be up in arms. For instance, Mansur (2019) points out that some residents of Epe in Lagos attacked officials of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) outside the residence of Akinwunmi Ambode, a former governor of the state for coming to probe him (p.2). There seems to be a tradition in Nigeria that forbids citizens from exposing or prosecuting fellow tribesmen for corrupt practices.

Most Nigerians cannot come together to form a meaningful and objective opposition against poor leadership. Ideally, constructive opposition is necessary

in a democratic system because it puts the ruling party on its feet. Where there is no constructive or weak opposition, the ruling party is not challenged to initiate programs and ideas that are beneficial to the masses. When objective and constructive opinions are oozing out from people of other zones about the non-performance of political office holders, the zone of those in power will rush to the defence of their own with some uncanny threats. With all these, many rational and intellectual driven minds have rather maintained silence. Thus, corrupt tendencies are exhibited and laws violated yet such individuals invoke ethnic sentiment to get away from prosecution.

Conclusively, Iwe (1987) adroitly captures this problem when he notes that tribalism and ethnic myopia have made nonsense of the idea of one Nigeria and of the country's one common citizenship. In some of our institutions, fellow Nigerians suffer various forms of discrimination in violation of their civic and constitutional rights. Nigerians in some parts of the country or away from their home states are practically treated as foreigners in their own land. Under such devices as "state of origin", "other states", "indigenes of the state, sons of the soil and daughters of the soil" heinous forms of tribal discriminations and prejudices have been practiced to the detriment of nation building and Nigerian unity. Tribalism in the ordinary man arouses pity among the highly placed in the society. It is criminal and perversion of justice and in the learned, it is the most startling degradation of learning and human dignity (p.22).

In the same vein, Uchenyi (n.d) identified ethnicism as a problem of Nigeria which has changed from sore to ulcer and currently assuming cancerous dimension. He went on to accuse the government of polarizing ethnicity in Nigeria through her public policies. He concluded that under-development in Nigeria today is the sick-bay of ethnicism (p.27). Earlier, Bako (1997) has posited that in the first Republic, tribalism was the problem of Nigeria but from the second Republic upward, religion became the bone of contention (p.284). Ethnicism is no doubt an unrivalled dangerous social movement in the country which is bred and nurtured around the structure and ideology of discriminations, prejudices, violence and hatred against other people. Just as divisive ethnicism bred hatred which gave birth to genocide like the wicked Hitler's herrenvolke myth where about six million Jews, Salvs, Cypies and other groups considered impure were massacred, many innocent Nigerians have lost their lives and fortunes to the prejudices of divisive ethnicism.

### **Attempts At Checkmating The Sword Of Ethnicism**

Nigeria seems to be conscious of the impacts and divisiveness of ethnicism in a complex society and then adopted the concept of quota system and federal character policy. The quota system came into being prior to Nigeria's independence in 1960, the federal character principle became officially recognized in the 1979 constitution. These policies were aimed at addressing the concerns of ethnic representation in the Nigerian public sector to avoid the dominance of one ethnic group and suppression of others. The implications of these are that issues of admission into public schools, recruitments, promotions and appointments should highlight these principles. But the underlying politics of these policies seems to have given rise to the breeding of mediocre in the running of government.

Aniagolu (1993) observes that in the members of the Constituent Assembly for the 1989 Constitution, some progressive members wanted to add merit to the federal character clause in the constitution and this was put to vote. It was defeated by 81 to 18615 votes. The ethnic groups that were lagging behind educationally canvassed for its defeat. There was the fear that the question of merit would put them in disadvantaged position in the sharing of the so called federal cake (p.162). Ibrahim (2017) argues that the same federal character politics in the country has been used to discriminate against millions of citizens labelled as settlers in most parts of the country. Violence has repeatedly been the outcome of conflicts between "settlers" and "indigenes" in various parts of the country and because these policies have been serially abused and that could be why many people are clamoring for them to be scrapped.

It can be summed up that the two attempts at checkmating the destructive force of ethnicism have created more problems for the country.

### **Why Functional Religiosity Should Checkmate Ethnic Driven Militancy**

Religion is a unique phenomenon in the Nigerian society and it is one of the few factors that have succeeded in bringing sizeable numbers of Nigerians under one umbrella, irrespective of their ethnic considerations. The large crowds of people that participate in religious celebrations and gatherings such as crusades, revival programs, weddings, burial ceremonies, birthday celebrations and public lectures prove how seriously Nigerians take religion. Majority of the business premises, vehicles, offices, houses and roads are adorned with various religious symbols, stickers, banners, signposts and so on. Most of the Nigerian campuses have been turned into religious supermarkets and Nigerian education has gone sectarian. Religious meetings are now conducted virtually everywhere in the schools, libraries, lecture halls and even laboratories. A good number of lecturers

and teachers have abandoned or combined teaching and research with evangelistic vocations. It has got to a point where most educated Nigerians are intellectually inclined to religion or even blind to religious faith. Others have a pathological aversion to critical thinking and free inquiry as far as religion is concerned.

The modern dynamics of Nigerian religious configurations should not be overlooked in both southern and northern parts of the country. There is a considerable population of Muslims in the Southern parts of Nigeria especially in the Southwest and a sizeable number amongst the Benin in Edo State. Even in the Southeast, there seem to be a rising number of Muslims, hence the governors of some Igbo-speaking states have introduced state programmes for Muslims. The same goes for Christians in the North, where the considerable number of Christians cannot be disregarded in any analysis of religious groupings in Nigeria.

With the above assertions, functional religion builds brotherhood, love, tolerance, forgiveness and solidarity among people irrespective of status, tribes and tongues. This is because in the mosques and churches Hausa/Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba, Efik, Anan, Nupe, Berom, Agatu, Idoma and their likes sit together to worship, relate with one another and most times eat together. Most importantly, functional religion has encouraged sizable number of inter-tribal marriages among many Nigerians. Marriage is an undisputable social binding factor. *Ceteris paribus*, a man who marries from a particular clan will find it difficult to order the bombing of the community of his wife. Considering the sense of communality in African culture, it will be suicidal for a woman married into a particular clan to divert the budgetary allocations of her husband's people. Therefore, functional religiosity is the veritable instrument for checkmating ethnicism and its militancy.

### **Conclusion**

The idea of ethnicism does not entirely portray destructiveness because nature admits the conscious of one's place of origin. However, the aqueous slippery challenge is the understanding, appreciation and management of the thin line between the sense of unity and division it carries. In the aspect of unity, ethnicism can help in building cohesion among their folks but from another angle, the discrimination it metes out against others has been associated with crises. In the case of Nigeria, these crises have not only led to the untimely death of many Nigerians but have also spurred the disturbing agitations for self-determination. Ethnicism is indeed one of the major sources of social, economic

and political instabilities in Nigeria. Ethnic-motivated violence has brought about wastage of enormous human and material resources and offensively increased the gaps in social cohesion among ethnic nationalities. It is no doubt an albatross and a cog in the wheel of progress. The level of ethnic rivalries in Nigeria has contributed to why the country is yet to produce the right leaders who could live above boards, who exude impeccable and predictable character and those who are ready to spend themselves for the development of the nation. At each election, the emphasis has always been on the ethnic origin of the candidates rather than on the competences of candidates. This explains why the Nigerian system is replete with many people who are in the system not for the interest of the country but for their own interests. Ethnicism got married and gave birth to nepotism and the marriage became blessed with the first child who they named, militancy. As a child, it began to nourish, flourish and produce the meal of division, disunity, impunity, corruption, sub-judice, hatred, injustice and gang-up. Majority of the Nigerian elites who inherited the colonial state seem to have conceptualized development to mean the transfer of public resources for primordial reasons. The ethnic diversity of Nigeria that ought to be a source of strength has become more of a threat rather than a platform of national pride and development. Ethnicism poses a threat to national cohesion and unity. Therefore, functional religiosity can help an individual or group exchange hatred, divisions and intolerance with love, friendship, tolerance and understanding which are the antidotes to the destructive mission of these ethnic militants in Nigeria.

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