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# Nationalist movement's trends in contemporary Nigerian government and politics

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## Abstract

This study seeks to understand the contemporary issues in Nigerian Government and Politics through an assessment of the nationalist movement and its persistent and recurrent trends in the contemporary Nigeria, and how these trends continue to affect the present socio-political issues in the country. This is carried out through mobilization of certain variables of political development theory despite its inability to explain the position of indigenous African people in the alien Western political institutions. Based on this, it is revealed that everything went well until that time the ground was made for power politics in which indigenous African people became players.

**Keywords:** Nationalism, Political development, Political organization

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## **1. Introduction**

Sporogenous analysis of the modern states is often based on the popular say that is "life is to be understood backward and live forward". These trends of analysis and studies of the modern states have found its way into the schematic explanations through which current and recurrent issues are justifiable for example; Ake (1996:23) traces both socio-economic crises of the post-colonial African states to the open exploitation suffered by those colonial states in the hands of their colonial masters. This essay retains this paradigmatic sampling by examining, assessing and reconsidering the contemporary Nigerian state against the parameters of the nationalist movement activities and its characters. This will help us to provide an institutional assessment of the contemporary Nigerian state. However, it is to be noted that many scientific and historical studies of the nationalist movement and leadership have been carried out from the historical perspectives. Some authors have taken their time to study resistance of indigenous people against the colonial conquest. Also there are scholars who have dedicated their times to provide comprehensive studies of the nationalist political parties, and while some go as far as examine their economic policies. However, there are issues like character of political parties, population consciousness in terms of political participation, role of mass media, policy direction, etc in contemporary Nigeria which may not be new to the students of Nigerian political history. The emphasis here is that at what point did we start expressing institution dysfunctionality as a nation? Political Organizations that later became war machines, mass media that later became parochial, labour union that later became weak, and indigenous Nigerian people that later became tribalistic, they had once stood up with one voice to fight against the colonial domination.

## **2. Nationalist movement and its recurrent trends: A theoretical insight**

The purpose of this paper is to assess the current political scenario in the contemporary Nigeria against the activities of the nationalist movement through a theoretical basis, this because theory provides a guiding map through which issues are routed to a satisfactory intellectual destination. Nationalist movement would have appeared to be an outdated political topic, but then every nation in terms of policies and issues is haunted by its past, and a more grasp of the contemporary issues may require both practical and theoretical sailing into the historical political events of a nation, it will be therefore profitable to create a link between the political anal of Nigeria and the contemporary issues. Beyond the historical documentation of political events, it will be of advantage to reveal how the past influences the present. This may be achieved by avoiding intellectual arbitrariness by adopting of a theoretical periscope from which necessary variables of assessment may be achieved. The suitable and more convenient among the theories is political development theory. This may help despite the fact it is often adopted as a means of staging a comparative exploration between developing and developed nations in the field of comparative politics even as it appears that discipline has outgrown it. The theory appears fascinating because of its ability to provide variables from which assessment and comparison could be explored. Again its theoretical suitability also provides an advantage to highlight certain indices from which one historical epoch of a country could be assessed against another epoch. This paper seeks to mobilize certain variables from the components of divergent political

development theories; this is because there are no universally acceptable indices of the theories of political development and this does not also suggest that there are no common variables to the theories of political development as developed by different exponents. Some exponents emphasize cultural diffusion, adaptation, and adjustment of old pattern of life to new demands, here, and the emphasis is on the evolution of nation-states. Some exponents identify rational polices of emergent nation-state, its organization and effectiveness of the society (Hoftman, 1982:195). Meanwhile, scholars like Pye identify such ingredients like assessment of the population in terms of political consciousness, assessment of government and systematic performance, and assessment of the organization of the public. Others also capitalize on the stage which society moved towards development or force which accelerated or hindered the development (Varma, 1975:336). It therefore becomes a profitable, no matter how arbitrary it is, to select some indices from the theories of political development as a yardstick to assess the present Nigerian state against the nature and character of the nationalist movement. It is assumed that nationalism, from African perspective is all about attainment of self-government and nation-building. This study therefore chooses to study the nationalist movement as a basis of assessing the present Nigerian state, from the indices of institution, systemic performance of government and the organization of the public ie population's consciousness. The limitation of these studies in terms of theoretical assessment is based on the weakness of political development theory which ignores possible political behavior of indigenous African people in control of western alien political institutions. This is comprehensively captured in the work of Professor Wiarda Howard of the Massachusetts University titled "Rethinking Political development: A Look Backward Over Thirty Years, and A Look Ahead". Wiarda (1990) writes that political development theory does not only undermine but destroy indigenous institutions within the third world countries which would have helped these nations bridge and cement the transition to modern political institutions of their own. This is the ethnocentric aspect of the political development theory that promotes the supremacy of western values. This however, will not prevent us from still relying on the variables of the political development theory, because none of our nationalist leaders struggled to promote Alafinate, caliphate or acephalous Eastern political system.

### **3. Conceptual clarification**

Apart from Shedding light to the predominant concepts in this essay, conceptual clarification will also help to demarcate and highlight the tiny variables useful and central to this work. From the introductory segment, the study has adopted some variables important for the assessment the Nigeria state against the nationalist movement, whose qualification in terms of analysis may be difficult, however, with the help of clarification, its qualitative description can be attainable. The prominent among those concepts is nationalism which has divergent explanations; these include cultural, economic, psychological/personality and political explanation. However, nationalism as a concept was invented in Europe at the beginning of the nineteenth century. European nations conceived it as a doctrine "to supply criterion for the determination of unit of population proper to enjoy a government exclusively its own, for the legitimate exercise of power in the state and for the right organization of a society" (Smith, nd: 17). The nationalism to Europeans is just a mere ideology to reorganize their societies in a way on ordinary person on the street could enjoy self-government.

From African point of views, it was a justification of the phenomena in terms of the policies and actions that produce the grievance (Coleman; 1960:5). Nationalism is a kind of sentiment consciousness on the part of African people to struggle against the foreign power to assert their rights to self-government in which their political economic and social interest would be preserved. Nationalism is therefore, a variety of manifestation movements, thoughts, events, and activities such as armed conflicts, resistance, use of newspaper, formation of political organizations, mass rallies, demonstration, and delegation in some cases carried out to prosecute their anti-colonial nationalist objectives (Eluwa et al., 1996:205). This descriptive conceptualization of nationalist movement provides a basis for our selected indices of political development as it claims possession of important variables and analytical indices of political development indices such as population of the colonial society revealing their consciousness through the intensive rallies, protests carried out, inclusion of organization and its effectiveness as part of struggles for self-government is an important factor because of its ability to metamorphose into great political machine in the nationalist struggle. Those above mentioned variables provide not only a theoretical foundation to assess and study the change and continuity in the characters of the Nigerian states but also provide indices for studying recurrent political decimals in Nigeria's government and politics.

#### **4. Early resistance**

Nationalist movement had its roots firmly in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its exponents in their period were both indigenous rulers and individuals generally referred to as traditional nationalists, who had refused to give up their territories. The essence of this is to establish the consciousness of the traditional Nigerian people at that material point in time. Thus early resistance was all about struggling for the autonomy of their society and the opposition to the foreign conquest. The nature of resistance, upon their effective subjugation still reveals the level of their consciousness, and their determination to preserve their territory. The factors that influenced their consciousness which led to intensification of their resistance were sometimes, economical and sometimes religious.

Bello (2011:75) records that the colonial invaders faced the toughest resistance from the caliphs despite the fact that the caliphs were later pre-occupied with fight. Boaham (1989:50) corroborates this assertion while trying to justify the reason behind the militant resistance in the northern Nigeria. He points to the reference and the statement made by the sultan to Lugard in May 1902. That there was no dealing between the caliphate and European people as there was no dealing between Muslims and unbelievers. Based on this, all the rulers of the Emirates referred, despite their deference to submit to the colonial rulers.

In contemporary northern Nigeria, despite the fact that many Marxian analysts have linked most of the violence in the regions to the economic deprivations, the religious factor still remains the most discernible factor responsible for the majority of the violence in the region ranging from maitasine crisis, shariah crises, electoral violence and Boko Haram insurgency. Violence in Northern Nigeria has flared up periodically over the last 30 years mainly in the form of urban riots. It has pitted Muslims against Christians and has been confrontation between different Islamic sects (African Report No 168, 2010).

Boahen (1989:50) reports further that some few Yoruba states also opted for militant confrontation; the popular among these was Ijebu. These the British launched a carefully prepared expedition of about 1,000 men armed with the latest weapon such as rifles, machine guns and a maximum gun against the Ijebus in 1892. The Ijebu raised an army of between 7,000 and 10,000 against the British force, but despite their numerical supremacy they were routed. Crowder (1978: 182) establishes the consciousness of the Ijebu through which they struggled against the colonial power to maintain their economic independence. The colonial power demanded from the Ijebu to permit a free passage through their country to all passengers whether native or European from the interior to the lagoon and vice versa and in fact to open all the road and water way passing through their country to legitimate commerce. The Ijebus, Egba and their allies insisted on the closure of the road, and the implication of their insistence caused an almost immediate rise in the price of palm oil in England.

This again calls for a deep reflection on the present Nigerian Agricultural policies, this is because a tiny segment of the colonial communities with their simple agricultural tools and implements could make an impact on the economy of the Great Britain to the extent that the British power was desperate to crush the indigenous people so that there would be a solution to the rise of palm oil price. In recent time, it was reported that Nigeria still depends on palm oil importation to the extent that that waiver denies Nigerian government a minimum of N2 billion per month. Thus is because from January 2012 to May 2012, the government has granted a sum of 89 billion waiver for importation of palm oil compared to 2011 in which palm oil waiver was amounted into N150 billion (Hassan,2012).

However, the people from this various country of Yoruba state later played a good role in the post world war nationalist movement as we shall see.

## **5. Political organizations and nationalist movement**

This aspect concentrates more on the materiality of issues rather than unnecessary details. Many studies, Ikime (1999), Coleman (1986), Eleazu (1964, 1988) and Dudley (1968) have all established the links between the subsequent constitutions and the nature of political parties. The constitutions to large extent influenced not only party behaviours but party activities for example the Clifford constitution of 1922 provided for an elective principle which influenced the formation and activities of Nigerian National Democratic Party [NNDP]. Despite the fact that the activities of the party was restricted to Lagos based on the limited franchise, the party and its leadership as symbolized in the personality of Herbert Macaulay, articulated the general hope and aspiration of the Nigerian Society ( Cole,1975:110 ). Upon this, Macaulay was bitterly accused by African colonial stooges that he was exploiting the House of Dosumu for his own personal advantage and all his activities were nothing but a mass bribery which was an appeal to cupidity (Cole, 1975:113). The Nigerian Youth Movement [NYM] also transformed from pressure group to political party, and restricted at initial stage to Lagos, until it was joined by Azikwe and Davies, before it became a powerful national movement with a national outlook. Decline of NYM was also seen and caused by the clash

of personalities. Azikwe left the party on the ground of tribalism based on the outcome of election in which Ikoli was chosen instead of Samuel Akinsaya, his preferred candidate (Wilmot, 1979: 10).

Because of this internal dissension, there was no effective organization to champion the cause of the people. Based on this, Nigerian Union of Students organized rallies and series of meeting in which many organizations were involved, it was this that led to the formation of National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroon [NCNC], later changed to National Council for Nigerian Citizen when the Southern Cameroon was detached from Nigeria 1984. Azikwe provided the NCNC with the required status (Ikime, 1980:562). Azikwe was recognized by Nigerian of all sub nationalities, religious affiliation and occupational groups as an African nationalist (Wilmot, 1979:11). At this stage, NCNC was argued not to be a political party in the strict sense of the word, but a conglomeration of various bodies whose general aim was to provide a medium of expression in order to secure political freedom (Ikime, 1980:567). NCNC under the leadership of Azikwe spearheaded the opposition against the Richard Constitution (Ikime, 1980:562).

Earlier before the regionalist nationalism, Yaqub (1999,) documents Saadu Zungur's grievance about the affairs of NCNC that Azikwe gallantly refused to grant northerners scholarship to study abroad even when they were largely qualified. This together with other reasons remained the reason why the majority of northern followers left the NCNC. Wilmot (1979:9) records the failure of NCNC before the introduction of NCNC as a result of Azikwe being identical with Igbo-nationalism which he carried over into the action of the NCNC, limiting its effectiveness as a nationalist party. Azikwe therefore failed to provide the NCNC with a coherent theory of national development. Wilmot (1979:10) substantiates his argument that Azikwe left the NYM on the ground of tribalism.

Macpherson Constitution of 1951 generated the formation of political parties by granting semi-responsible government, and this marked an era of party organization in Nigeria. The two new parties that emerged, the Action Group (AG) and the Northern People Congress (NPC), were regional, not national parties and with the emphasis of the new constitution on regionalism, active regional nationalism, and regional division of Nigerian politics became pronounced (Ikime, 1980:565). The earliest analysis of these political parties considers their ethnic jingoisms as revealed in their mottos to justify and label them as ethnically based political parties. Basedau and Strech (2012::21) opine that ties between voters and parties work through geographical proximity which allows leaders to exploit personal network in their regions rather than the ideal of shared ethnic identity. Based on this, it becomes convenient to see the struggle for power beyond ethnic explanation. Bamisoye (1988:36) records that each nationalist leader competed for the position of power to afford him the opportunity of favouring the people of his geographical environment. This is based on the fact that the resources available to the nationalist leader was limited and political power become a quick source of wealth and influence, the political parties were thus converted into forum and avenue for competing for one limited resources available. The removal of the relative autonomy and hegemony enjoyed by the colonial state exposed the fragile bases of the post-colonial state.

The 1951 election under the Macpherson constitution, each party took advantage of the geographical proximity of the region – Awolowo came to power in the west with his party forming government – the leaders of NPC, the Sardauna of Sokoto, won in the North, and Azikwe's party also won the election in the

Eastern region, but he was elected into western House of Assembly. It should be noted that the regional assembly was the Electoral College for the central legislature; this led to his obscurity and ineffectiveness in the regional legislature. Based on this arrangement, Azikiwe had to resign in the western House and move to the East to lead his party. The return of Azikiwe to the East as premier completed the tripartite bases of the leadership (Eleazu, 1977:142).

The emphasis, here, is not the outlook of the parties but the manner in which the subsequent elections were contested based on the conception of the political power by the nationalist leaders. It should be noted that as no party came out with a clear majority in the 1954 elections, the parties had to settle on a coalition between NCNC and NPC with AG on opposition (Eleazu, 1977:149). The conception of the electoral competition by the nationalist leaders became descendible in the 1964 election. The election was characterized with intimidation of opposition, use of local police against the opposition, and hiding of the electoral materials from the opposition. Dare (1939:116) reports that in the 1964 election, political opponents were not allowed to campaign freely and were subjected to personal assault and intimidation. Imam (1985:115) substantiates this by saying that the 1964 elections were regarded as unfree and unfair and it subsequently led to the widespread rioting between October 1965 and January 1966.

Despite the fact that the 1979 constitution was historically influenced to require that a party would only be registered by having ideology, leadership and membership reflecting a national outlook, the conception of electoral competition as “do or die” affairs still persisting. Nnadozie (2004:118) argues that it is this conception of electoral competition by the nationalist leaders that placed the country on the brick of disintegration. There is no departure even in the recent time, from this conception of electoral competition. For example, the former National Security Adviser Andrew Azazi blamed the rise of insurgency in the country on the conduct of the political parties in the country, especially on the notion of anointing candidates and the “do or die” attitude of the political parties ([www.channelstv.com](http://www.channelstv.com)).

## **6. Nationalist movement and print media**

Effectiveness of the print media in the nationalist struggle was attributed to the Sierra-Leonean returnees to Egbaland who infuse civic awareness into their fellow black men as well as being the defenders of the native interests against the ravages of colonialism. For example, the Eagle and Lagos Critic which was one of the earliest newspapers, was critical of both the British government and the inability of African people to bury their difference and join to fight white people. In the same vein, the “Lagos weekly record”, which was established in 1890 by John. Payne Jackson was virulently critical of the British government and through its journalistic effort. It succeeded in removing cases of injustice and putting many wrong rights. The “Daily service” which was an organ of NYM also played a vital role in enlightening the people about the need to achieve a self rule (Eleazu, 1977:188).

The West African Pilot whose motto was “show the light and people find the way” was established in 1937 by Azikiwe. The paper carried out the crusade for the mental emancipation of Africa, and it set to achieve social justice and better Nigeria (Azikiwe, 1970:290). Eleazu (1977:138) reveals that its pages were full of

editorial bombardment of imperialism, not only this, but also all the Zik group of papers. Yaqub (1999:49) points to how few enlightened Northerners like Saadu Zungur took advantage of the West African Pilot to air their hatred of the colonialism by pointing that Saadu Zungur caused a major consternation in the official circles when he published a scathing article in the pilot excoriating what he called UK imperialist misrule in Bauchi demonstrating acute awareness of the exploitative essence of the British rule. This period can be termed as the golden age of journalism in the history of the country.

Depression in the journalistic essence was witnessed in the era of the NYM crisis, Azikwe was said to have taken advantage of his pilot to attack and denigrate the Yoruba leadership of the organization. This also influenced the NYM to convert its weekly service to Daily service to respond to Azikwe's pilot (Wilmot, 1979:10). Later on, Daily services and Nigeria Tribune became unofficial organs of AG, and the Daily telegraph, established by Mbadiwe, was also an organ to fight NCNC in 1958 (Eleazu, 1977:188).

The media have maintained these unprincipled practices to the level that is detrimental to the survival of the Nigerian state. Punch newspaper in its twitter page (<http://1100.p.me/p2/tyoo-cyy>) documents an article written by Adeye (2012) titled "stop attacking the media". The article reveals indirectly the unprincipled practice of the present Nigerian media. Adeye (2012) writes that:

*.... if Nigeria renewal is to become a reality the media have to resolve to help the process. Therefore, Nigerian journalists must be able to look in the mirror and not to be afraid of their press invitation cards to Otta or any political Shrine in the country will be revoked if they stand up and Say I want to be free, fair, strong, and prosper.....*

This was part of the weakness of the nationalist movement, because all the machines, especially the media used to fight colonial leaders, were later used against one another. For example in 1952, Awolowo sued the Zik Enterprises Limited for alleged libel which appeared in the west African pilot of June 10, 1952 headed "Action Group (AG) threatens crisis to win over the government, secret behind the plan disclosed" (Azikwe, 1970:325).

## **7. labour/trade union and nationalist movement**

There are a lot of cases in the history of the nationalist movement that symbolize the level of consciousness of the Nigerian people, I become sympathetic with some cases even by disregarding the chronological orders of the events, and conceptual issues. The reason for this, is the issue of coordination or incoordination, organization or disorganization which is central to the conceptualization of the trade union, affects the selection of Eastern Nigerian uprising of 1929, and its chronological fixture under this subhead. However, it will be profitable as a means of measuring the consciousness of the colonial Nigerian people.

Following the introduction of taxation by the British, the uncoordinated women at the Olobo village of Umuahia embarked on rioting which started as uncoordinated and later became a more organised and concerted resistance against the colonial policies. The movement was characterized by widespread



grassroots mobilization that employed feminine ideology, ritual symbol and formal organizational structure based on the leadership provided by women. During the revolt, thousand of women marched upon the district headquarters to protest against the introduction of taxes and perceived extension of tax imposed on men the previous year to women in addition to other colonial measures. The women obstructed road in several parts of the region and destroyed or damaged several native court houses as well as the houses of the native court personnel and warrants chiefs. European factories at Imo River, Aba, Amata were looted. The women attacked prisons and released prisoners (Perry and Kolapo, 2007:115-16). In the Same Vein, in 1949, women and miners also protested against the refusal to pay their arrears which were due for payment, the fear that Zikists would take advantage of the protest led to ordering police to fire upon the crowd of the protesters (Coleman, 1986:299).

Again, Imoudu's leadership also ejected militancy into the Nigerian Trade Unionism. It therefore became fearless, selfless, and brave enough by taking the colonial government of such critical moment. Imoudu forged the link with the nationalist politicians which did not affect the operation of the union. Based on the qualities of the leadership of the trade union, the trade union became freedom fighters and strugglers against the imperialist exploitation (Odey, 2005:157).

In recent time, Labour/Trade Unions Movements were formed as intermediate stratum of the society with allegiance to family, friends, leaders or ethnic groups. The present Nigerian Labour Union hardly see themselves as class. Beside this debacle, it is not uncommon to hear union officials are either winning or dining with the state executives or they are in pay roll of employers (Odey, 2005:162). However, the current dimension of "occupy Nigeria" can be used to justify the level of consciousness of the Nigerian populace this is because the struggle transcended beyond the ethnic and religious sympathy. In some instance Christian protesters protected praying Muslims in what is now a standard for public consciousness. Jacob (2012) documents that Nigerians have never been so united in years as demonstrated in the unofficially renamed liberation square in Kano, where Christians were seen guarding the space where their Muslims; co protesters Prayed; and in return, Muslims were also seen guarding churches as their Christians; co protesters were praying inside.

## **8. Summary and conclusion**

Nationalist movement that mobilized all its resources for the attainment of self-rule, despite its effectiveness at the earliest era of the struggle, became depreciated in terms of values and focus. The consequences of these have been inadequate national integration and ineffectiveness due to their conception of power as a means to control an all powerful political machines of the state. The character and nature of the nationalist movement still to large extent persists and haunts the nature of the Nigerian State. Despite the adoption of presidential system of government and the demand for all inclusive political parties with the national outlook the conception of the electoral politics as a "do or die" affair is still there today. The colonial and nationalist leaders' policy of agriculture had been referred to as nothing but a success, the modern Nigerian policy of agriculture remains nothing to reckon with in terms of output and its inability to feed its populace. The

polarization of the trade union is not a new phenomenon, but in an objective comparison between the era of the nationalist movement and the present labour union, the latter is nothing but an embodiment of underachievement because of its romantic relationship with reigning governments. The current mass media in the country have gone beyond identifying themselves with parochial Interest to the level heighten tension in the polity. The simple solution to all these is total reconsideration of the electoral politics as a mere competition not as a conflict or war, and political offices to be seen as places to render selfless services not a place for primitive accumulation.

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