

## MANY VOICES, ONE NIGERIA: A CRITIQUE OF NATIONALISM AND NATIONISM

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### **Abstract**

It is an undisputable fact that language is an indispensable tool for national development, stability and unity, Language is viewed as the pivot around which all human activities revolve, Such activities as cultural and traditional expressions leading to inculcation of ideologies, establishing interaction amongst people, dissemination of information, advancing education, commerce and industries are the major roles language plays in human and national development. Language is the tool for the integration of diversified cultures, However, with the current ugly trend of events in the political space in Nigeria where inter-group relationship is characterized by rivalry Instead of healthy competition and inclusiveness, dominance instead of cooperation, exploitation instead of collaboration, centralization and dictatorship instead of decentralization and democracy, the problem remains whether one can comfortably say "many voices one Nigeria," With this in mind, this paper attempts a critique of the notions of "Nationalism" and "Nationism" in Nigeria and concludes that the bane of national development in Nigeria is the dominance of nationism.

### **Introduction**

Language is the social network which fosters unity and integration in a diverse and multi-ethnic nation, it permeates all facets of human life. Language as a tool for social network makes possible the assessment of the feelings of the people in the environment. The major problem of this paper is to determine if the language divide or dichotomy in a multi-ethnic and multi-lingual country like Nigeria is the reason for underdevelopment and crises, Language is the embodiment of a people's culture, heritage, customs, traditions and identity, It also informs the ideologies of the people. According to Uguru (2008) the identity of language is entrenched in the ideology of nationality or a nation, That is to say that every nation is known by its language,

In Nigeria for instance, according to Makinde and Onyin lola (2010), there are about 400 ethnic nations, each with its own language, Indigenes of these ethnic groups live their lives and carry on their activities first with reference to the promotion of their different ethnic nations, As such, the reference to Nigeria as their country is secondary. This is nationism. Ordinarily, every citizen of any country is supposed to work and live with reference first and foremost to the country in pursuit of national development. However, this is now lacking in the Nigerian context. This is the problem of "nation ism" versus "nationalism."

The goals of language are social identity, communication and interaction as well as the expression of thought, all aimed at achieving national development However, at present, Nigeria as a country is still witnessing series of negative events and crises that have gravely impeded her development It is in the light of all these that this paper attempts to query national consciousness in Nigeria in the context of so many ethnic and linguistic nations.

### **A critique of nationalism and nationism in Nigeria**

Nationalism and nationism are the twin goals of language, Nationalism is related to the sentiment that binds the people of a country together. These sentiments include: the national flag, the national anthems, the national language, culture and religion. It is the practical effort and services geared towards running and maintaining a nation, in this case, a country, According to Okonkwo (1994) nationalism and nationism are conflicting programmes of most developing countries. Okonkwo (1994: p. 122) further observes that nationalism is a type of credo which advocates that the interest of the state or nation is more important than that of any person or group of persons.

Nationalism is the assertion of identity which is above ethnic inclination and or even ethnic loyalties. It is always associated with programmes or policies that aim at the elimination of local tribal, religious, cultural et cetera loyalties (1994). Nationalism is a solidarity that has a macro level influence. At this level, loyalty, solidarity,

integration and identity could be expressed through visible Signs and symbols like anthems, flags, languages, products (that is trade marks).

In the Nigerian context, nationalism - would mean a feeling or policy programme of any type that will first make Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo and other hundreds of ethnic groups in Nigeria Nigerians first before identification with their ethnic loyalties et cetera. According to Okonkwo (2016) Nigeria as a nation remains in consistent need of policies that would urge the peoples of this geography to feel Nigerian first and foremost Nigerians before the feelings of Igbohood, Hausa-hood, Yoruba-hood etc. In the words of Uzoigwe (2012), nationalism is the generic feeling or sense of oneness as belonging to nation.

On the other hand, under nationism one is faced with the concrete opposite of nationalism. As a matter of fact nations consist of technically different groups and societies with different beliefs and orientations. What actually connects the groups to live as one is in the general sense of belonging to a working and effective bonding factor. This factor constitutes the national identity which may be in form of language, Culture, religion. Indonesia for instance, is a multi-cultural and multi-ethnic society but they are bonded together by the doctrines and sense of belonging to a common religion-Islam. America is also an example of multi-cultural society bonded by the concept of freedom. This is therefore the distinguishing progression of a nation as against being a mere country. Any country without a common binding factor will continue to develop internal issues.

### **Many voices, one Nigeria**

Nigeria is a multilingual and multiethnic nation. The varied ethnic nationalities have languages that inform who they are. Language is crucial for these ethnic states. Most Nigerians view Nigeria's linguistic map with dismay and make language a ready scapegoat for Nigerians lack of Internal unity and cohesion (Elugbe, 1990). Everyone clamours for a national language for Nigeria, but which of the 529 identified languages in Nigeria will occupy this privileged position. The languages of the three largest ethnic groups - Igbo Hausa, and Yoruba are competing for power amongst themselves and at the same time threatening to dominate the languages of the other minority ethnic groups. This is against the principles of linguistic justice which states that in terms of functions and use, every language is equal. The question is how can the motto of "many voices one Nigeria" be sustained when all the tribes in Nigeria do not agree?

There are two kinds of nationhood from a linguistic point of view. The first is monolingual and monocultural nation where only one language and one culture exist. Example of such nations is Great Britain and Germany. In Great Britain, only English is used as first language (L1), mother tongue (MT), National language (NL), and Official language (OL) with the capacity of expressing only one Culture. Although there are other variants of the English language such as Irish, Cockney RVS and others, but the country remains monolingual and monocultural. France and America are also shining examples. By this linguistic situation, people are kept together for national development. Most of these nations are technologically and educationally advanced with all elements of modernization attached to it. The gist of this argument is that there is evidence to show that monolingual nations have the advantage of national development and national cohesion over mono-cultural nations (Makinde and Oyinlola, 2010).

The second kind of nation is the bilingual, trilingual and multilingual nations (BTN Nations). Nigeria belongs to BTN nations with more than 400 languages. There was a political effort by Nigerian colonial government in 1918 to foster national cohesion through the amalgamation policy. Attached to the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Protectorates are amalgamated languages, and cultures Which include religion. Up till today, the amalgamation is still difficult to manage. Often religious crisis, political crisis and economic crisis pose a serious challenge to national development and national consciousness. The crisis of national consciousness which has been plaguing Nigeria since the colonial era has constituted one of the key issues that have drawn the attention of the various governments of Nigeria. In reaction, they have on several occasions launched programmes aimed at promoting national consciousness, and at other times turned round to paralyse the programmes through acts of commission or omission.

In the primary school curriculum in Nigeria, provision is made for the teaching of national anthem, the national pledge, and national symbols. We may categorically state that no one can go through a primary school in Nigeria

without being exposed to them. In fact, pupils are expected to recite the national anthem and the pledge every morning before the commencement of the classroom work. It is one thing to recite the national anthem or the pledge, or to recognize national symbols like the coat of arms and the flag, but another thing for these to have functional meaning in the lives of the people.

The national anthem

The word, 'anthem' Simply refers to musical composition. The national anthem is 'a song of the nation' (Okoye, 1991). The song belongs to the nation as a corporate body and aptly articulates the feelings and aspirations of the people as members of that nation. Consequently, no nation is expected to have more than one national anthem. The national anthem should be a common binding factor. Nigeria as an independent country should have its own national anthem, and that such anthem, should properly reflect the feelings and aspirations of the people. In the history of the country, Nigeria has had two different national anthems. The first stanza of the former one goes like this:

Nigeria, we hail thee,  
Our own dear native land,  
Though tribe and tongue may differ  
In brotherhood we stand,  
Nigerians all are proud to serve  
Our Sovereign Motherland.

This first national anthem of Nigeria, as is evident here, contains the following elements: praise to Nigeria, a loved nation unity of its diverse people; willingness of the people to serve the nation in all Circumstances; reign of truth and justice in the affairs of the people: desire to bequeath an enviable legacy to the younger generation, and belief in God and the ultimate source of the grace through which the aspirations of the anthem would be achieved. .

As we have noted earlier, the first national anthem of Nigeria which became effective on October 1, 1960, was replaced with a new national anthem by the Obasanjo regime. The new national anthem and pledge became effective in 1976. To determine whether the composition of new national anthem was truly necessary for the promotion of national consciousness in Nigeria, it is not out of place to state here the first stanza of the new national anthem thus:

Arise, O compatriots, Nigeria's call obey  
To serve our fatherland,  
With love and strength and faith  
The labour of our heroes past, shall never be in vain,  
To serve with heart and might,  
One nation bound in freedom, peace and unity.

In addition, there is also a national pledge composed in the spirit of the national anthem which goes like this:

I pledge to Nigeria my country  
To be faithful loyal and honest,  
To serve Nigeria with all my strength,  
To defend her unity and uphold her honour and glory  
So help me God.

The national pledge; as its title underlines, is a vow of unalloyed commitment to the nation. It has become traditional in Nigeria, at least in the primary and secondary schools that the pledge is made immediately after the recitation of the national anthem during the morning and other assemblies. The electronic media also end day's programme with the national anthem, followed by the pledge. In this way, the pledge serves as a reinforce to the national anthem in the cultivation and promotion of national consciousness in Nigeria. The two widely known national symbols are the flag and the coat of arms.

Generally, the national flag is one of the simple and very familiar national symbols. The national flag is hoisted in several public buildings, especially buildings accommodating government departments. On October 1st every year, during which Nigeria celebrates its independence, the national flag is used by school children and other organizations in parade. While national flag is commonly shared by Nigerians as a symbol of unity, the Nigerian Coat of Arms attempts to present the Nigerian nation as a nation that is worth loving and trusting.

In spite of these finely worded songs of national consciousness, Nigeria has still not been able to achieve the unity and cohesiveness that could drive national development. Intra-ethnic nationality consciousness is still stronger than national allegiance. One would agree here that while ethnic consciousness is built on the power of language, national consciousness is still weak because it lacks the instrument and power of language. As such, it is still a task to realize the motto of "many voices, one Nigeria."

### **Conclusion**

The national anthem and the pledge should represent a strong binding force for any people. The anthem, however, would make more meaning to a people if its content reflects the realities of the people's social life. The leadership of the country is called upon here to pay more attention to the problems of the society. Against this background, one may observe that one of the hindrances in the use of the national anthem to promote national consciousness is that some of the themes do not appear to be true of the people's existential experiences. In Nigeria, the problem is the attitude not any language. Nigerians do not dwell on the things that promote national consciousness; there is not enough respect to the things that represent their common binding factors such as: national anthem, pledge and national symbols which includes, national flag and coat of arms. Therefore, for Nigeria to truly strive for national development, the citizens must be keen to: accepting one another, understanding one another, respecting one another, and work for good governance and selfless leaders.

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