

## **Nationalism in Nigeria: A Case for Patriotic Citizenship**

**Isaiah Negedu, Ph.D**

Faculty of Arts  
Federal University Lafia  
P.M.B. 146, Nasarawa State  
Nigeria

**Augustine Atabor**

Department of Philosophy  
University of Nigeria Nsukka, Enugu State  
Nigeria

### **Abstract**

*Nationalism as a concept has been misconstrued to fit into our mental category and because the idea of Nationhood is debased, we lose the meaning of patriotism in its proper sense. But the concept is not completely independent of patriotism. The possibility of a holistic guiding principle that unifies nationalism and patriotism for a constructive practical action has been problematic. Analytically looking at these issues in the light of some topical Nigerian socio-political problems, we aver that we do not acquire national development all in an immobile present but through gradual congenital reorientation.*

**Keywords:** Nationalism, Sub-Nationalism, Patriotism, Citizenship

### **1. Introduction**

The history of nationalism in Nigeria and most post-colonial African states has been more of negative reports and complaints about civil strife resulting from difficulties in inter-ethnic relations than of a growth of the spirit of unity which appeared to have characterized the Nigerian/African nationalist struggles (Odimegwu,2006:203). This is not surprising as Duruji (2010:1) avers that before the intrusion of the British into what is now known as Nigeria, the various ethnic and cultural groups that make up the country existed as autonomous political entities. These entities had their own political systems, social and religious values distinct from one another. The aim of the colonialists in bringing these entities together was purely for exploitation of capital. To facilitate this, they employed divide and rule tactics so as to consolidate and preserve British foothold with little interest in the social, economic or political development of the country, or its people. Consequently, Uzoigwe as cited by Duruji avers that British colonial policies, were not tailored to foster unity among the disparate groups that constitute Nigeria, rather it was intended to exploit the varied differences, create distrusts, suspicions and cleavages among them.(1)

Ultimately, these unsavory developments according to Odimegwu (2006:203) have led to factionalization of loyalties along ethnic lines in many of the states. This brings about the excommunication of loyalty and commitment of the citizens to the state (i.e. lack of patriotism). Thus, the multi-cultural status of Nigeria makes it very difficult for a clear conceptual presentation of such concepts as nationalism and patriotism as it pertains to the framework that allows for unified front on some socio-political concerns. The concern of this paper is to do a conceptual and theoretical analysis of such concepts as nationalism, patriotism and citizenship. This will help us make a case for patriotic citizenship

### **2. Nationalism**

The term nationalism is as controversial as its etymological and historical roots: nationalism is a theory, an ideology, a movement, a consciousness and a creed; but it is also a disease, an expression of mania. Its meaning in each of these categories is not less diverse nor is the categories explicitly defined. (204). Nationalism is the sense of political togetherness that makes people feel patriotic about a country, connected to a 'we-group', and distinct from 'they-group'. As an Ideology, nationalism holds that the nation should be the primary political identity of individuals.

Furthermore, nationalist ideology maintains that the paramount political loyalty of individuals should be patriotically extended to the nation-state, the political vehicle of the nation's self-governance. Most people have more than one political vehicle of the nation's self-governance, some have more than one political identity, and nationalism almost always is their primary political orientation. For example, President Lyndon B. Johnson once said, "I am an American, a Texan, and a Democrat- in that order." Like Johnson, we emotionally rank our identities; while some of us put our country first, some see themselves first on a religious basis and so on. Thus, you probably see yourself first and foremost politically as a citizen of the United States or some other country. You might even be willing to fight and die for your country. (Eeete,2013:5)

However, nationalistic fanaticism leaves us with a perjured idea that leaves more to be desired in the era of organicism and homogenization that drives the global politics. Nationalism in this form beclouds the moral sense and the rational judgment of the nationalist. At its worst, it is a possession with the absolute worth of my nation and the absolute worthlessness of any other beside it. Proponents of this form of ideology pay less attention to cosmopolitanism, since it argues that it is possible to be a citizen of the world in general. This diseased version of reality finds expression in some of the innocuous distinction made popular from nation to nation. For instance, the Igbo describes the Hausa as 'not intelligent', or the Yoruba describes the Igbo as greedy or money-conscious; or the Hausa describes the Yoruba as cowardly and noisy, and other such ethnic categorization; these statements according to Odimegwu are mostly not mere objective description of facts, but prejudicial declaration of nationalistic positions and orientations(2006:204).

It has also been seen as the movement to defend the identity and interests of a nation with the aim of primarily securing her political independence. According to Beswick (2008:25), this: "may comprise the actions of members to secure or maintain the right to self-determination, as well as their desire to be perceived as a nation." The conceptual content of nationalism remains the attribute that members of a nation have when they care about their national identity and the actions that the members of a nation take when seeking to achieve or sustain some form of political sovereignty ("Nationalism" 2013 [www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/nationalism.html](http://www.plato.stanford.edu/entries/nationalism.html)). Although nationalism is a political, economic, and sociological phenomenon, it becomes a socio-psychological phenomenon to the extent that individuals develop attitudes about their own and other nations. Such attitudes reflect the feelings that persons have toward these objects and their sense of loyalty to them. These feelings of attachment according to Druckman (1994:43), are at the heart of nationalism. It is then pertinent at this point to ask; what is a nation? A Nation has a very close affinity with a state as often times, states or countries are referred to as nation-states. The most important distinctive ingredient of a nation is to be found in its cultural and sometimes ancestral affinities. Accordingly, Rourke as cited by Eteete (2013:5) opines that a nation is a people who (a) share demographic and cultural similarities, (b) possess a feeling of community (mutually identify as a group distinct from other groups), and (c) want to control themselves politically. As such, a nation is intangible; it exists because its members think it does. A nation exists primarily because there are people who are alive and willing to assert their uniqueness; it is therefore a living person. Consequently, many theories of state have been enunciated. The numerous theories may be grouped into two derivations: the school of cultural identity, which locates the central defining element of a nation in common geography, history, race, ethnicity, culture, ancestry, religion, language, etc. Secondly, the school of popular consent, which argues that political legitimacy is derived from the consent of people resident in the particular region. Odimegwu (205) opines that the question of defining element of a nation has led to the development of various forms of nationalism such as civic, racial, ethnic, religious, cultural and state nationalism.

### **3. Patriotism**

The term patriotism derives from the Latin noun *pater* – father. It refers to a deep feeling of love for one's fatherland, a fundamental disposition for the common good. According to the Advanced English Learner's Dictionary "patriotism or nationalism is love of country and willingness to sacrifice for it". Patriotism is an emotional journey of loyalty, allegiance, impartial love and total obedience to one's country or one's chosen country other than one's country of birth, which bestows all the rights and privileges accorded to him/her by the constitution. Patriotism conveys a less localized and temporalized sense of particularist effect as it is conceptually more related to people's feelings and acts as consociates regardless of the type of political configuration (e.g. be it the city-state, the nation-state, a region, etc). Thus, although it may at times coincide with nationalist concerns, it does not always overlap with nationalism as it signifies a more broadly conceived allegiance than the allegiance towards a nation-state.

Patriotism according to Papastephanou (2013:5) is not the specific allegiance to a nation-state, as we may reserve this for nationalism. But patriotism may concern attachment to an ethnos regardless of whether the latter has the status of the nation-state, or belongs to a multi-national state or (in more historical applications) to city-states. On this same point, Kateb (2006:10) says patriotism could be a form of jealous and exclusive loyalty or love of one's own locality without a professed corresponding antagonism towards others (McCleary, 2009:132)

That patriotism is conceptually distinct from nationalism does not mean that it is not practically conflated with the latter. This often results in patriotism being blamed for pathologies usually associated with nationalist excesses. Within much philosophy of late modernity and post-modernity, and within the broader social milieu, any attachment to a nation or to a nation-state is rendered suspect, and this suspicion is then expanded to any attachment to a particular collectivity felt as patria. (Papastephanou, 2013:5)

From the various understandings of nationalism, an element that remains constant is the idea of guarding a nation against foreign domination. This can mainly be achieved when there is a driving force that gives sentiment/passion to this endeavour. It is patriotism, which is love for one's country, which requires giving attendant special considerations that guarantees it. But patriotism and nationalism are not mutually exclusive because there can be nationalism without patriotism and vice versa. However, truly patriotic concerns should be nationalistic. Nationalism therefore akin more to geographical concerns, while patriotism appeals to humanitarian feelings. As Agassi (2005:188) noted: "Patriotism need not be hostile to foreigners, yet nationalism, being group egoism, too often is. As nationalism is often used to incite to war, it is then not patriotic, since the love of country should lead to the love of peace." By implication therefore, patriotism is more likely to harmonize with the siblinghood of humanity. This is because defending the democratic order could be a propelling force on individuals to make remarkable sacrifice. Tan (2004:138) says that this is attainable where: "citizens have a strong sense of fellow feeling for each other."

Thus, Egbunu (2009:82-83) notes some remarkable difference between nationalism and patriotism. Patriotism is closely linked to political virtues of individuals. It is not necessarily a corporate affair. The meeting point between both concepts is commitment to the common good. However, this commitment could either be all-encompassing or take an exclusively limited approach based on issues of applicability at any point in time.

#### **4. Citizenship**

Citizenship as defined by Eteete (2013:5) is the connecting rod that appropriates or attaches a particular person to a defined sovereign political entity called a country or state. Citizenship may also be described as the identity of a person in accordance with his belonging to a sovereign state. In other words, citizenship may be used interchangeably with the concept of nationality. In this regard, it refers to a condition of being a full member of a defined community, country or group. Thus, a person is a citizen of a community or country if he is identified as a national of such a country, community or society.

#### **5. Sub-Nationalism And Ethnic Militia: The Bane of Socio-Political Development**

The Governor General of Nigeria (1920 – 1931), Sir Hugh Clifford, described Nigeria as "a collection of independent Native States, separated from one another by great distances, by differences of history and traditions and by ethnological, racial, tribal, political, social and religious barriers." (Anuforo, 2013: para 1&2) "This multiplicity of content has perpetually posed a problem for the nation-state called Nigeria; the infrastructure on which Nigeria stands can't hold a superstructure because of its shaky nature. When a foundation is shaky; it will be absurd to put on its top an imposing superstructure. There is fundamental problem that must be tackled before Nigeria can stand on its feet." (para 2) To discuss how sub-nationalism and ethnic militia militate against socio-political development, we proffer a working definition. *Sub-nationalism*; is the movement of people to exit or pursue independent statehood or regional autonomy within a multi-ethnic, multi-religious state. We also refer to sub-nationalism as a movement or revolt of peoples against the unitary nature of state, reinforced by indigenous rights and contention of power. Sub-nationalism leans to mobilization and ethnocentrism for political and economic advantage of one ethnic group against another. *Ethnic Militia*; are organised violence-oriented groups populated by diverse elements, cutting across different age strata, but drawing membership exclusively from an ethnic group and established to promote and protect the interests of an ethnic group. Duruji (14-15) opines that ethnic militia is an extreme form of ethnic agitation for self-determination and occurs when an ethnic group assumes militant posture.

They serve as a social pressure group designed to influence the structure of power to the advantage of, and call attention to the deteriorating material condition or political deprivation and perceived marginalization of their group or social environment.

From the above, we posit that the insurgence of sub-nationalist tendencies which eventually culminates to ethnic militia is a flow-out of the tension that has always been between civic and ethnic nationalism. According to Odimegwu (207), these conflicts of ethnic and civic nationalisms in Nigeria constitute for the average Nigerian citizen, a conflict and dislocation of loyalties between the Nigerian state and the various ethnic nationalities in the state. When this conflict and dislocation manifest in the political class, the matter is further complicated for the result is no longer a case of feeling of personal loyalty, but of the practical privatisation, ethnicization, and misappropriation of state resources. This is of course viewed from the perspective of civic nationalism as the ethnic nationalist could tend to see this action as just and patriotic.

Wilmot as cited by Odimegwu(210-211), traces the challenge of ethnic nationalism to the earlier days of Nigerian state. He opines that when the leaders of Nigerian nationalist struggles graduated into the leaders of post-independence Nigerian government, they seemed also to have transformed instantaneously from Nigerian nationalist freedom fighters to ethnic nationalist leaders. And so in the first republic Nigerian political experience, the leaders of the three major ethnic groups – NnamdiAzikiwe (Igbo), Ahmadu Bello (Hausa) and Obafemi Awolowo (Yoruba) showed themselves, in moment of personal crisis to be more of ethnic champions than nationalist leaders. While Awolowo and Bello were more open and direct, the vacillation of Azikiwe did not help the Nigerian people or the Igbo people.

Duruji(4) says that this trend historically prepared the grounds for the agitations that we experience these days in the name of ethnic loyalties that abound in different forms. This development has been observed across the country. For instance, the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) founded in 1999 is an Igbo dominated ethnic movement, the Oodua People's Congress (OPC) is predominant in the Yoruba area and predates the return to democracy in 1999, but became more visible thereafter in their quest for a repositioned Yoruba nation in the politics of Nigeria. In the Niger Delta, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP) founded in the 1990s, sparked the formation of loose armed groups that are based in that region such as the Niger Delta People's Volunteer Force (NDPVF) and the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND). These organizations are not only struggling to call attention to the despoliation of the environment of the delta due to oil exploration, but are also demanding that a good proportion of the resources exploited from their region be retained there, so as to right the wrongs of years of deprivation.

In the North, the story remains the same, as various ethnic movements were established; among these organizations in the North are the Arewa People's Congress (APC) which emerged to counter the OPC, the 'hambada' and 'hisbah' to enforce sharia compliance in northern states (4). In recent years, there has been renewed rush to join in the race through the militant Islamic body (boko haram) that pervades the area and these developments stem from the perception of marginalization and non-accommodation of pure Islamic principles/way of life by the Nigerian political system.

The reason for these acts perpetrated by different sub-groups to gain recognition is essentially because Nigerian political workers/office holders have made little remarkable difference compared with the struggles, which our foremost nationalists undertook to make Nigeria a reality. This dialectical reversal paves way for people to vent anger on the government. Those who on many occasions dare to take positive steps are daunted by the political elites, which make them enemies of the government. Paradoxically, the government by her actions, has overtime projects itself as an enemy of democracy. According to Berns (2001:77), patriotism is possible under any form of government, but it is only under democratic governance that it is felt "because only there is it possible for citizens to identify themselves with the whole community." Since democracy has not been built, there is no opportunity for continuity, as we can only properly conceive the idea of continuity on existing structures. Love of country can therefore not be futuristic under such conditions, as leaders of tomorrow may not but build on some of the foundations of yesteryears. Berns' approach is worth noting at this point:

It is not young people who degenerate, they are ruined only when grown men have already been corrupted...Today's young will corrupt tomorrow's, even as they were corrupted by yesterday's. And where in this chain of generations will virtue be found? (77-78)

In an era of enlightenment, it is very clear that behind the various agitations for ethnic liberation/emancipation, are political elites who primarily start with the quest for national liberation and constantly limit their struggle to smaller groups when there is perceived freedom from former captors; the more the limitation of the quest, the higher the chances of national disintegration. Thus, patriotism which traditionally begins as a love for country because it is one's country, culminates in love for a person simply because they share the same ethnic affinity. But because the history of Nigerian politics is that of plunder, leaders are basically interested in making fellow citizens better tools for their own advantage. We dare to say that the various struggles for recognition at the close of the second half of the twentieth century down through the twenty-first century are conceived ideologies by politicians to lure various groups toward violent agitations all for the good of the political elite, yet with little or no benefit to the greater majority who are the victims of dejection.

What we refer to as nationalism is but a projection of the will of a few unto the whole; subsuming the masses to the extent that they have no individuality of their own; yet "constitutional democracy exists in order to give people a chance to be individuals" Kateb(21). The purpose of the nationalism we seek is not the consciousness against external domination that leads to fundamental rights of the human person. We seek freedom not because we feel deprived as a result of domination, but because of our selfish quest to put fellow nationals in bondage. Thus, the various struggles we engage ourselves shrouded in the spirit of nationalism, are but wars that ironically prepares us for our own bondage. Nigeria is therefore a country because of its territorial distinctiveness, a nation because of its capability of having an independent mind of her own, yet a nation in disguise, because what is presented as national ideologies/practices is not an extension of the general will of the people.

From the foregoing the ultimate victim is the Nigerian state, she suffers in virtually all perspective; ranging from service she should render to her citizens, she fails because she is incapacitated; from the perspective of the ethnic-nationalist who benefits, his loyalty is to his ethnicity and not to the Nigerian state; from the perspective of the ethnic-nationalist who is not gaining immediately; there are two possible attitudes; to claim to be a Nigerian nationalist and accuse others of ethnicism; or to accuse Nigeria of being a failed state and to call for dissolution of the Nigerian state. All these point to how we have nurtured the seed of discord that was sown by the colonial masters to their own advantage. The question remains: how can Nigeria be salvaged from this hotchpotch of ethnic, cultural, religious and political sentiments so as to build a Nigeria that is driven with a unified vision?

### ***6. A Conceptual Framework for Patriotic Citizenship***

Nigeria is not the only country in Africa that is peopled with persons from different multi-cultural ethnic origins and background, yet Nigerians seem to have displayed unpatriotic tendencies to a high degree among African nation-states. From the understanding of patriotism as a deep feeling of love for one's fatherland and a fundamental disposition of care for the common good, we hope to glean a conceptual understanding that could help revamp the falling and failing Nigerian state.

Patriotism is the force of unity that holds a people together within a particular nation-state. Thus, it is implied that though there may be varieties in language, culture, religion and ethnicity, the shared grounds of unity becomes the most cherished relational bond that runs through a people within a nation-state as Nigeria. Though we do not enjoy this common bond because of mutual distrust, it does not entail that the Nigerian state would/must end up in dissolution. According to Odimegwu, the father-son relationship offers us some insight in understanding patriotism. The father has duties and responsibilities to the son. The son also has duties and obligations to the father. And so the duty of one is the right of the other in this relationship of mutual responsibility. Odimegwu(208-209) pushes this analysis back to its origin to establish that the duties and responsibility of the father antedates those of the son. And so it would seem that nature has so ordained these relations that the son shall have rights before responsibilities, while the father shall have responsibilities before rights. However, we deviate a little from this idea taking a leave from the Lockean idea on the origin of state. The state according to Locke is created through the medium of a contract in which the individual agrees with every other to give up to the community the natural right of enforcing the law of reason in order that life and property might be protected. Thus the point of contract where the individuals surrender their individual rights is the emergence of the nation-state or government, which is in turn burdened with the responsibility of providing protection for life and property. The father therefore predates the son, which also makes it impossible for the son to exist without the assistance of the father as there can be no son without a father.

In the face of divided loyalties, the government is greatly incapacitated in carrying out her duties and functions to her citizens. As the various channels through which the government would have ordinarily reached her people are redirected for personal and selfish gains. Where the government has lost the trust of her people because it has failed, there is always disruption and agitations from different groups and this tends to make the country ungovernable.

Patriotism carries with it some sense of rational sentimental love and in the strict sense of the word, no one is born a nationalist, nor is anyone born a patriot; it is a constantly evolving phenomenon, hence it is nurtured. It is virtually impossible to speak of the nurturing of that sense of patrimonial feeling towards one's country during the late adulthood of a person. It has to be a virtue whose inculcation begins at man's early formational stage. Patriotic citizenship that bears a nationalistic outlook must take into cognizance the educational aspect of children at the early stage of childhood. The French revolutionist Mirabeau echoes this when he commented: "Begin with the infant in the cradle; let the first word he lisp be Washington" (Berns, 2001:67). Though we do not advocate a form of patriotic calling that subsumes the individual in the group, to the extent that he loses his individuality, we cannot however avoid the civic training of children both at home and in school, with relevant themes that have practical bearings on the problems we face, not themes drafted out of curriculum of mere political propaganda. They should be themes that "call home the minds of youth and fix them upon the interests of their own country..." (66)

## 7. Conclusion

The tension between ethnic and civic nationalism has gravely impacted Nigeria and led to the loss of nationhood. In the face of this, patriotism remains beclouded as it is impracticable to speak of patriotism to an idea of nationhood that is not anything better than just a figment of one's thought. Citizens should be taught to break off from weak and corrupt foundations/traditions and embrace continuity in the positive direction. The notion of patriotism as an offshoot of nationalism will be possible when values are deeply engrained in the minds of citizens from the scratch.

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