

## Social Contract Theory: A Model for Nation Building in Nigeria

Yahaya I. Ibrahim<sup>1\*</sup> & Sikiru Lanre Nurudeen<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Political Science and Public Administration,  
Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria

<sup>2</sup> Department of Political Science and Public Administration,  
Al-Hikmah University, Ilorin-Nigeria

Corresponding Author: [yahayaibro15@gmail.com](mailto:yahayaibro15@gmail.com)

---

### Abstract

*Social Contract Theory holds its origin to the three ancient philosophers, namely Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679 AD), John Locke (1632-1682 AD), and Jean –Jacque Rousseau (1712-1778 AD) who philosophized on state of nature and social contract. Although each of them had different notions of the concepts, they all agreed that it was the consent of the people to be organized into society for collective security. It also entails surrendering some or part of their personal liberties to a ‘commonwealth’. The commonwealth represents the modern day government. By implication, when individuals surrender their personal liberties to a commonwealth, the commonwealth is obligated to enforce laws that protect the individual. Perhaps it is in this context that social contract is regarded as one of the major explanations for the emergence of state system in the contemporary world. Nigeria is a nation-state with diverse elements wedged together by colonization and whose distaste for one another has not ceased in spite of efforts of successive governments. Unfortunately the founding of Nigeria was not based on a pact as suggested by the social contract theory. Again the colonial administrative system created some fundamental problems of integration which lingers on till date. This paper, using documentary research method examines the Nigerian state from colonial period and discovers that social contract theory is not appropriate to analyse the founding of the Nigerian state. It recommends that to build a nation out of Nigeria there is need to re-examine the process of integration of the different people that currently form it as well as its rule of engagement.*

**Keywords:** *Social Contract Theory; Integration; Nation-Building; Nigeria; Nation*

---

### INTRODUCTION

Received: 10 January 2022

Accepted: 21 March 2022

Published: 30 June 2022

Social Contract Theory is as old as philosophy. Its major concern was how state began. Other theories that have given explanations to the origin of state include: the Divine Right of Kings to Rule, Patriarchal theory, Matriarchal theory and Evolutionary Theories. However, there is the Marxist perception of how state come to being. Plato is reported to have commenced discussion on the theory of social contract, but the theory has been popularized and improved upon by the writings of three prominent enlightenment –age Philosophers, namely; Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and J. J Rousseau. The three of them see state as emerging from an imaginary state of nature where agreement was said to have been reached to establish a state. The three of them and other ‘contractarian’ theorists agreed that the state is the product of a contract, a covenant, an agreement or a compact (Alubabari; 2012).

Like most Societies in the world, Nigeria is a federal state that emerged through colonial configuration. Like other African countries, Nigeria also experienced colonization beginning with the annexation of Lagos in 1861 and the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914, thus creating Nigeria as a British territory in Africa. In principle, the amalgamation of the protectorates of Northern and Southern Nigeria with the colony of Lagos was to pave way for a mega federalism that would establish a united Nigeria. Unfortunately the administrative system adopted by the colonial power planted a seed of discord within the people of Nigeria. This is because they were administered separately and this affected their levels of development. It was on the basis of this division that struggle for independence was embarked on. Thus the journey to nationhood took a regional and ethnic colouration.

Unfortunately, in spite of efforts of successive governments to integrate these different people and build a nation-state, the political elites capitalized on religion and ethnic divide to create artificial division among the people and use this to further their domination/control of the people and prevent them from cordially relating with one another. The issue that agitates this work is, why has Nigeria remained a country with multiple nations if the consequence of the social contract is to establish a state or society based on the consent of the people as reflected in the opening chapters of the Nigerian constitutions since independence?

## **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

Nigeria was created by British colonial authorities despite the diversity of the people. The basis of the merger of these diverse people into one state is best known to the British authority. It is unclear what theoretical explanation can be given for the founding of the Nigerian state. Scholars are of the view that modern states are products of covenant or agreement, but it is unlikely that this explanation holds for founding of the Nigerian state. After more six decades of existence as nation state and several measures adopted to unite the diverse elements in Nigeria, what divided the people are more pronounced than what unit them. This requires attention with a view to identifying the reason (s) for the disunity in the polity. It is pertinent at this point to examine the appropriateness of applying social contract theory to explain the founding and functioning of the Nigerian state. Even if Nigeria was not founded on the basis of peoples' consent, why has it been difficult for these people to create a bond among

themselves given the advantage inherent in unity in diversity. Most federal states in the world today are heterogeneous, yet they co-exist and jointly work for the progress of the state.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The major objective of this study is to identify the appropriateness of the social contract theory as a theoretical explanation for the founding of the Nigerian state. Other Specific objectives of the study are to:

- a) Examine the Social Contract theory and its tenets,
- b) Examine the theoretical underpinning of the Nigerian nationhood;
- c) Identify the problem of nation-building in Nigeria within the precinct of the founding theory,
- d) Drecommend measures towards building a nation out of her diverse elements

### **Research Questions**

Towards achieving these objectives, the study attempts answers to the following questions which arose from the objectives of the study thus:

- a) What is social contract theory and its tenets?
- b) What theoretical explanation can be advanced for founding of the Nigerian State?
- c) What problems confront nation-building efforts in Nigeria?
- d) What measures can be adopted to build a Nigerian nation?

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Several studies have been conducted on the Subject, Social Contract and Nigeria Nation. In Their Study Titled Social Contract Theory And The Nigerian State: An Elusive Synthesis, Felix & Obina (2020) opines that the unification of Nigeria in 1914 was not done in consultation of the people, hence we cannot talk of the Social Contract as the basis for the founding of Nigeria. Rather Nigeria was a brainchild of British overlords who were mainly interested in the colony for their economic benefits and administrative convenience. They created the entity without consideration for their

diverse ethnic, cultural and historical background. It was therefore not with the consent of the people.

Looking at Social Contract Theories from Philosophical point of view, Muyiwa & Anthony (2016) in their study titled : Social Contract Theories and Governance in Contemporary Nigeria, argue that colonial authorities that created Nigeria consciously prepared the new state for perpetual conflict and instability. This they argued was to satisfy their crave for the control of the people's mind and resources. The post-colonial era in Nigeria has not feared better. Muyiwa & Anthony (op cit: 9) add that in addition to their contractarian values, social contract theories are demonstration of the rational capacity of the people to develop a political destiny that will guarantee freedom to the people. They also assist to build institutions that ensure man's collective efforts towards achieving good ends. Unfortunately, what obtains in Nigeria is continuous disharmony among the diverse elements in the state. This is contrary to the view expressed above about the potency of social contract to bringing about harmonious co-habitation of people from different background. A look at governance process in the post colonial era reveals that Nigerian ruling elite use ethnic and religious cleavages to feather their selfish interests.

Keneth & Joseph (2019) in their work titled: The Nigerian State and Hobbes' Social Contract Theory: An Albatross around the Collective Will of the the People, opine that governance in Nigeria is contrary to Hobbesian prescription of the Social Contract theory. They posit that the Nigerian state in collaboration with its actors in power failed to adhere to the tenets of Social Contract theory as espoused by its proponents. This none adherence is responsible for the failure of the efforts to build a nation in Nigeria. From the reviews above, we come to the conclusion that the founding and functioning of the contemporary Nigeria state is contrary to the tenets of the Social Contract theories.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

### **Social Contract Theory**

Several theories have been used to explain the origin of state. Social Contract Theory is one of them. Other theories in this regard are the Divine Right of Kings to Rule, Matriacal theory, Patriarcal theory and The Evolutionary theory. Plato is reported

139

to have commenced discussion on Social Contract theory, but further studies have been carried out that have led to improvement on the theory. The writings of three prominent enlightenment–age Philosophers, namely Thomas Hobbes, John Locke and J J Rousseau modern conceptions of the theory after Plato. The three of them see state as emerging from an imaginary state of nature where agreement was said to have been reached to establish a state. (<http://thenationonlineng.net/social-contract-way.nigeria/>) However, each of them had a different notion of the state of nature. In ‘Leviathan’, Hobbes described the state of nature as ‘solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short’. (Appadorai 1975). To him man is naturally selfish and in attempt to satisfy his lust he comes in conflict with other men. He also posits that man’s most prized value is his life and self-preservation. In the light of this he argued that for man to escape from this uncertainty, he chooses to give up some of his natural rights to some superior authorities who will ensure there was peace in the society.

In his own version of the theory, John Locke sees state of nature as the beginning of an organized human society. However, unlike Hobbes, life in the state of nature is recognizably social, hence he described it as a state of ‘liberty not license’. (McClelland, 1996). By this, Locke means that man in the state of nature is aware of natural law and so he is capable of recognizing and respecting the natural rights of other men. He sees the state here as been moral and social in character because men have rights and acknowledged duties. Man is also guided by reason which makes him to believe that to preserve himself, he needs to protect and promote the life and properties of others. This realization is a guide to man’s sense of judgment. In his version of the state of nature, he identified the absence of a settled life, laws, judges that are upright and an executive power to enforce just decisions. The absence of these essential institutions made the state of nature intolerable and necessitated the contract among the people. This contract is to form government that holds the power of the people who created it in trust. The government act as a judge and it must act to preserve its citizens. This is a contract which people entered into within themselves and not with government. The purpose of the contract is to establish a political society to which all agreed to submit parts of their natural rights in the state of nature. A government formed from this contract is bestowed with power to act for certain ends which is the good of the people.

According to Rousseau (1712-1778), state of nature is the beginning of human society. Rousseau differs from both Thomas Hobbes and John Locke is his view of state

of Nature. In his own postulation, state of nature does not depict a barbaric state as painted by Thomas Hobbes, though, it is also not as optimistic as portrayed by John Locke. Rather, Rousseau sees it as a state where man is contented, easily satisfied and had little needs they craved. At the initial stage man was contented with what he had. He also cooperates with others for common good. It was the emergence of private ownership of properties, i.e capitalism that distorted the system and brought about crisis. (Enemuo, 1999). To move out of the conflictual situation, it was reasoned that an organ, (government/state) should be established to regulate the behaviours of men in the society and protect them from each other and from common enemies. This, according to Rousseau culminated into social contract under which the individual scarifies his natural liberty and an unlimited right to gains civil liberty and property rights. This is what gave credence to the doctrine of popular sovereignty. (<http://thenationonlineng.net/social-contract-way-nigeria/>). Thus, it is the collective resolve of the people that empowers the state to administer the people. Immanuel Kant is credited to have popularized modern social contract theory. However, it is John Rawls who incorporated some key elements into the theory which make the theory adaptable to contemporary usage. (Alubabari 2012: 268). In the contemporary conception of the theory, it argues that the legitimacy of the state/or the principles of sound justice is derived from a societal agreement or social contract. Brook Noel Moore and Kenneth Bruder (1990) cited in Alubabari (2012).

In summary whether classical/medieval or contemporary connotation of the social contract theory, the totality of their submission is that modern states/societies emerged from agreement or covenant entered into by people so that they will co-exist to ensure justice, law, order and general good governance on the basis of equality and social justice. However, Social Contract Theory has been criticized for lacking in historical and chronological development of human lives. Scholars criticized ‘the man’s life in the State of Nature’ as idealistic and unrealistic. Another criticism of the theory is on its opinion which states that state emanates from agreement or the WILL of the people. It is been argued that this assertion does not apply to all human societies. (Gaubu, 2002) Despite these criticisms, the theory has offered an explanation for the beginning of human society or state.

### **Foundation of Nigeria and Social Contract Theory**

The Nigerian 1963 Republican Constitution and the subsequent constitutions opens with the statement of agreement that the people resolved to live together in unity

and with the desire to promote African and global unity. It also contains statements that shows that the people and their representatives agreed on the terms of the constitution and determination to make it work (Nigeria 1999 Constitution).

The above indicates that Nigerians realized the benefits of co-existence and its strength and therefore agreed to enter into ‘social contract’ with a view to ‘attaining the goals of the social contract theory which include liberty, equality and justice. On the other hand one can argue that the decision to come together which necessitates the word, ‘We the People of Nigeria’ in the preamble to these constitutions arose from the turbulent relationship that took place among the diverse people in the colonial era and the march towards independence and their desire to put an end to it. Whichever position one takes the important point to note is that colonialism bequeathed on Nigeria a country with a potential for conflict and instability due to the wicked balkanization of the territory without regard for their established traditional social organizational structures. Since independence Nigeria has been bedeviled by crisis arising from claims and counter claims of injustice, marginalization of the minority ethnic group by their majority counterpart, oppression, unfair and unjust treatments and oppression. What then is responsible for the crisis of identity of Nigerians? The answer that readily comes to mind is that given the manner by which the state was created, it is inherently conflict-prone and so crisis of this nature is inevitable. For more than a century of been together as a nation-state and there is no bonding spirit among the people, there is also no feeling of belongingness among them clearly suggest that social contract theory may not be an appropriate theory to explain the founding of the Nigerian state.

Nigeria is not the only multi-ethnic society that experienced colonial rule and remains multi-ethnic nation state till day. Most countries of the World are heterogeneous in character, yet they are not as divided as Nigeria. Gorge, (2014) posits that “the birth of European states included annexation and fusion of pluralities in ethnic and language terms. It is from this experience that empires and the notion of conquered territories for economic and political conveniences emerged and the history of colonial conquest connected with the partition of Africa finds expression. With this in mind we need to look beyond colonization and its effects for the failure of Nigeria to create a united entity from the diverse nations that constitute it after more than century of being together. It is necessary to ask this question: What factors are responsible for the inability of Nigeria to exploit the advantage of the diversity of the people for the development of the country? The political elite in Nigeria and their approach to

governance leaves much to be desired and adds to reasons for political and economic retardation of Nigeria.

## **Ethnic Diversity and Nation Building in Nigeria**

Nigeria is a heterogeneous state along religion and ethnic cleavages. There is clear division among the people along these cleavages to the extent that one group sees itself not having anything to do with any other religion or ethnic group. In Nigeria, ethnic diversity is synonymous with a strong belief in a cultural and linguistic diversity of the country. This is why in national discourse the country is sometimes referred to as a mere geographical expression (Tunji, 2018) or nations within a country just to justify the heterogeneous character of the country. As earlier asserted, it was colonial administration that brought these people together under one administration through subjugation. Unfortunately, it was the same colonial administration that bequeathed to the succeeding native administration at independence, not only an unbalanced federation, but a regionalized federation with citizens harboring mutual suspicious and acrimony along ethnic divide. The land and native rights ordinance of 1910 is seen as one of the important seeds of discord which the colonial administration planted in Nigeria. The ordinance formally proclaimed all the lands in the north to belonging to the government (Nnoli, 1978, <https://isochukwu.com/>). This law simply assisted the colonial administration to control the immigration of southerners to prevent latter from undermining the traditional authority of the emirs. Thus the policy discouraged free intermingling of Nigerians.

Ideologically, colonial policy looked at Nigerians as myopic individuals who could not aspire to relate beyond his/her ethnic cocoon. Nigerians were therefore looked down-upon and were treated as of little intelligence. This was a ploy to continually dominate and control affairs of the colony for as long as the people remain receptive of the colonial policies. In the field of education, the colonial administration also demonstrated desire to keep Nigerians divided. Only as much education as was sufficient to run the various colonial enterprises was given. Colonial education policy was mainly the promotion of reading, writing and arithmetic. The wide spread of Arabic education in the north, which appears to satisfy the parochial interest of the colonial administration helped to widen the western education gap between the north and the south.

Politically, colonialism did a lot to segregate Nigerians. Apart from adopting different policies for each of the southern and northern protectorates, they were never allowed to do anything together which may have facilitated their sharing their experiences which would have enabled them have a common stand on issues. Elections were conducted using different approaches in different part of the country. With these various activities the colonial authority succeeded in creating discord, particularly among political elites in the north and the south. Nigeria became independent at a time when the north and the south were not in agreement on so many sensitive and fundamental issues, including their readiness for independence. Bad still, the succeeding civil administrations, including the current fourth republic have not been able to effect any meaningful change to address the unfortunate scenario. In the opinion of Ekweremadu (2018), Nigeria appears to be far less united politically than ever before and the specter of disintegration continue to haunt the country with dire consequences for its development. Earlier, Genyi (2014:2) has asserted that the journey to nationhood took regional and ethnic colouration by the dominant ethnic groups in each of the four regions.

Politics during the Nigeria's first republic was basically ethnocentric with little or no consideration for the feelings of the minority ethnic groups in each of the four unbalanced regions (Ojo, 2017). The republic also did not consider it necessary to put in place, a mechanism that would ensure a balanced federation that could allay the fears of minority ethnic groups in each of these regions. The political parties of the era played zero-sum game with political offices by alienating the minority ethnic groups from access to political power and economic resource. This politics of exclusion polarized the country along ethnic cleavages and generated bad blood between the minority and the majority ethnic groups in the country (Adeleke & Charles, 2015). The majority ethnic groups did not only use their numerical strengths to suppress the minority ethnic groups, they did not put in place any genuine mechanism to extend their membership outside of their area of dominance which corresponded to their ethnic groups, i.e., the Northern People Congress (NPC) was the dominant party in the North, the Action Group (AG) was the dominant party in the West, and the National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) was dominant in the East. The majority ethnic groups, i.e., Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Ibo respectively dominated political and the economic spheres in each of these regions respectively. This was the scenario at independence. But the crisis that erupted not only led to putting an abrupt end to the first republic, the crisis nosedived into the Nigerian civil war which marked a milestone event in the Nigerian

history. The Nigerian Civil, 1967-1970 marked a significant turning point in the annals of Nigeria political history.

Successive military regimes after the civil war also did little to address the problems (Muritala, 2014). They were more cosmetic in their approach to issue of national integration. Worse still, the civilian administrations that governed the state from second republic in 1979 and the birth of the current fourth republic have been lackadaisical in their treatment of marginalization and politics of exclusion of the minority ethnic group. They seem contented with the status quo, and this is the reason for continued agitation against marginalization and politics of exclusion by the minority ethnic groups. Ethnicity and religious differences are the major denominators of diversity among Nigerians.

### **Efforts towards Integration and Nation-Building Since 1975**

The crisis that led to the Nigerian Civil War (1967-1970) cannot be divorced from problem of ethnicity. This much was realized by the military regime that took over the administration of the country in the immediate post civil-war Nigeria. As a first step, the Gowon-led military regime declared a 'no winner no vanquished' posture in order to heal the wounds inflicted by the civil war. (Akinboye & Anifowose, 1996) Pursuant to this proclamation, the regime introduced and pursued with vigor policies and programmes aimed at uniting the country and would create sense of national consciousness among Nigerians. The policy of the administration was tagged '3Rs' which means, Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction. The component parts of this policy included

- i. The reorganization of the armed forces,
- ii. The preparation and implementation of the Second National Development Plan (1970-1974),
- iii. The eradication of corruption in the country's national life,
- iv. The creation of more states,
- v. The preparation of a new constitution,
- vi. The introduction of new revenue sharing formula,
- vii. The conduct of national census,
- viii. The organization of genuine national political parties,

- ix. Organization of elections and subsequent installation of democratically elected governments at both the state and federal levels. (Eluwa et al: 1988:273)

The creation of states was one of the major steps taken by this, and successive military regimes in Nigeria to address ethnicity problem. In the first instance, twelve states were created from existing four regions. The states were created to correct imbalance /agitations of minority ethnic groups in the former regions. Apart from state creation, other integrative mechanisms put in place by successive governments in Nigeria from 1975 till date include proclamation of a unified constitution for the entire country in place of the regional constitution bequeathed to the nation at independence, a new revenue sharing formula and encouragement to politicians to form political parties with national outlook in terms of membership etc., establishment of National Youth Corps, Federal Character Policy, rotation of top political offices, the quota system and various campaigns mounted on radio and national televisions to sensitize Nigerians to believe in the notion of Nigeria being a nation.

The major objective of the establishment of the Youth Corps scheme, i.e., (NYSC) is to bring together Nigerian youths through inter tribal marriage. The programme involves Nigerian graduates of tertiary institutions who are less than thirty years of age at graduation. They are expected to go, stay and work in states other than their state of origin for one year. This is to encourage them to learn, appreciate, and understand the way of life of other people. The policy also encourages intertribal relations among these youths. This is a laudable programme, but unfortunately experience in the recent time has revealed that not much in terms of integration has been achieved by this policy. The federal character is another policy initiated by the military regime. It was first introduced by the military regime of late General Muritala Mohammed in 1975. It was designed by the government to ensure representation of all diverse elements in the governance of the country at the local, state and federal institutions and agencies. The intention is to prevent ethnic conflict and competition over resources, privileges and appointments. It is also intended to stem widespread complain of marginalization, deprivation and imbalances in Nigeria through a fair distribution of national resources at all levels of governance in the state.

As laudable as the policy is, people have identified some loopholes in its implementation. It has been bedeviled with poor implementation such that instead of enhancing unity and integration. Government officers have been alleged to manipulate

the policy to the advantage of their regional, political, tribal or other parochial interests. It has resulted to under representation of the powerless groups in terms of their appointments into offices (Azeez: 2009). The idea behind the policy was to devise an institutional arrangement that would ensure proper ethnic and sectional representation in government. Unfortunately, the intention of this policy has been defeated by a number of factors. According to Genyi; ( 2014) due to large scale population mobility and the apparently effective residential and social understanding of the concept of ‘settlers’, ‘indigenes’ and ‘strangers’ dichotomy in resource allocation, the federal character policy appears to encourage divisive tendencies among Nigerians. Some other scholars have even argued that the policy, rather than being an integrative one has been seen as a policy which encourages discrimination among citizens. This class of people cites the example that citizens of a state cannot easily be given employment or awarded contract in other states of the federation. What seems obvious is that the application of the principle may have legitimize the dominance of the exploiting class in the society as much as it prevents mass mobilization of the people for development.

Quota system is another policy that have been designed and implemented by various administrations in the country. The policy just like the federal character aims at ensuring representations of all diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria in the allocation of resources through employment opportunity. Here, government intends to ensure that as much as possible, all government offices engage the service of Nigerians proportionately. In implementing this policy in tertiary institutions, there is a policy called catchment area. This is to ensure that for employment purposes; priority will be given to applicants from the catchment areas before others from another area are considered. This policy intends to protect the interest of those who merit criteria may not favour for employment. Similarly, this policy of catchment areas also applies to admission of students into unity schools. The introduction of unity schools and exchange programme are also government policies which are aimed at national integration. The policy aims at giving all children the opportunity to explore their potentials for intellectual development. The admission into these schools is also based on quota system. However, the implementation of this policy too, has been criticized for been only for the benefit of the privileged few. Admission is not strictly based on merit or quota, but also on ‘who you know’. Secondly, the policy of quota system has affected national development and even national integration because merit has been compromised (Yahaya, 2016).

In addition to the above discussed issues, other means by which different governments in Nigeria have been addressing the problem of ethnicity, national integration and nation-building include naming of national monuments and structures after prominent Nigerians of different ethnic groups, inscribing images of these nationalists on national currency of various denominations as well as campaigns and jiggles on national radio and television to create national consciousness in the people. However, it is observed that though these policies and programmes are beneficial, their implementation has left much to be desired. They have not been able to address problems they were intended to address. Allegiance of Nigerians is first and foremost to their ethnic, regional or other selfish interest than to the Nigeria nation. The elites are also found culpable. Commenting on an issue, a former chairman of the economics and financial crimes commission, MallamNuhuRibadu told the correspondent of the Hausa service of the BBC that

*I have the hope that we will build a party that will salvage our people and I am just focused on ensuring that we will build it to achieve that purpose, especially in Adamawa, North East, the north in general and Nigeria as a whole.*

This demonstrates the extent to which Nigerians are more at home with their ethnic or regional consciousness than Nigerian consciousness.

### **Problem of Ethnicity in Nigeria**

From discussion above, the ethnicity is a problem in Nigeria which has remained insurmountable. The more effort made to arrest it the more hydra-headed it becomes. The implication of this problem on national integration and nation-building cannot be overemphasized. Suberu (1996) identified ethnicity as one of the major impediments to national integration. To him, ethnicity results in many problems whose effects include, excessive power in the hand of few political elites, non recognition of the problem associated ethnic diversity in the Nigerian federation, the absence of a fair mechanism for sharing national resources equitably, the weakness of institutions, including democratic institutions. One major effect of this problem is lack of genuine sense of belonging to the country by all. There can be no growth or development in a country with divided loyalty.

Struggle for political power by each ethnic group in Nigeria is a common feature in the Nigerian politics. This is one of the reasons why Nigerian political parties accepted in principle, the policy of rotational presidency. But this is at the expense of merit. If Nigerians feel a common sense of belonging, there is no reason why political office-holders would not be elected strictly on merit. Ethnicity problem in Nigeria has been aggravated by the issues of resource endowment and its control in the peculiar Nigerian federal system. The resource endowment and its control is such that with the discovery of oil in commercial quantity in the minority ethnic regions, there arose a new line of argument on how best to distribute resources in this country. The argument now is that people that own the resources should now have absolute right to use them. This has remained a burning issue in the country and the controversy is still on-going. If the country has been seen as one entity before now, issue of resources would not have created any problem. The consequences are legion, varied complex and in-excusable. However it suffices to submit that ethnicity has grossly affected national integration and nation building efforts of successive administrations in the country to the extent that it is considered an insurmountable problem.

## **FINDINGS OF THE STUDY**

The broad objective of this study is to examine the appropriateness of applying the Social Contract theory as postulated and modernized by the medieval and modern philosophers in explaining the founding and operation of Nigeria. It also involve identifying what has hindered Nigeria's ability to exploit her diversity to build a nation out of her diverse compnents. The following are the findins of this study:

- 1) Social Contract is not an appropriate theory that can explaining the founding of the Nigeria state. The country is a creation of the colonial powers who is accused of planting seed of discord among the people for selfish colonial interests;
- 2) The post colonial rulers too, military and civilians, did little to genuinely unit the people. The policies put in place were either deliberately sabotaged or abandoned midway;
- 3) Ethnicity and regional politics have combined to strangulate the political and economic development of the country. Despite measures taken to ameliorate the

problem, the cleavages keep deepening such that craving for cessation and restructuring is deafning in Nigeria today than before.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

All challenges/ problems do come with their remedies. In the same way, Nigeria's ethnic problem, though seems intractable, is not insurmountable. Among others, the restructuring of the country in a way that justice and equity are seen to prevail in the country's political economy will substantially douse tension and suppress agitations. Nigeria should restructure her federation to accommodate her peculiar needs. A Federal system of government is a form of government made up of component parts who willingly come together to federate to take advantage of large size, but who are autonomous in the use of their resources. It is a form of government where the component units and the centre source their existence from a constitution which is supreme and rigid (Tanumo, 1998). No doubt, this is the best form of government which can best serve the need and satisfy the aspirations of the diverse ethnic groups in the country. The system will allow each ethnic group to handle her cultural needs without affecting the feelings of other component parts of the federation. It should also serve as a security and protection for weaker component of the federation.

The problem with the Nigeria's federal system is overbearing influence of the federal authority over the component parts of the federation. It is more of unitary system than a federal system. There is therefore the need to redefine the type of federation and reduce the overbearing power and influence of the federal authority over the component parts. In doing this this study recommends the restructuring of the country along the line of the geo-political zones which the country has been dividved. This is in line with part of the recommendations of the 2014 Constitutional conference whose report have not been considered but is in public domain. If adopted clamour for autonomy and complain of marginalization would be reduced. It will also take care of problem of financial or economic viability of the component parts. The geo-political zones as presently constituted will resolve issue of marginalization.

In similar vein the contentious issue of resource control requires surgical therapy because it has become a major source of conflict in the country. As presently obtained in Nigeria, the centre controls resources and this is contrary to basic principles of fiscal

federalism that reserves resource control in the component parts of a federation. The component units should control their resources and determine their contribution to the federation. It is because the centre controls the resources in Nigeria that it has become too powerful and too attractive to politicians who now see government as do-or-die affairs. The concentration of resources in the centre has also made other parts of the country leave their resources untapped. The way out is to devolve more powers to the component parts with corresponding increase in resource generation. The process of complete resources control by the component states should be gradual so as not to truncate the system. If Nigeria reverts to true fiscal federalism instantaneously, it may lead to unpredictable consequence.

Another antidote to Nigeria's integration and nation-building problems is the issue of the rule of law. Nigerians do not obey laws. Law is normally made for man, but in Nigeria, particularly the elites and those that hold public offices see themselves as been above the law. If the rule of law is upheld, crime rates will reduce and those evils that have kept the country perpetually under-developed would have been wiped out. Ethnicity problem has no doubt affected Nigeria's development in all ramifications. It is also true that some of these problems are traceable to colonial domination. However, it is equally not correct to hip all these on colonialism because, a century of living together by different people is long enough for them to understand one another, leave happily together. Unfortunately, as we can see from our discussion above, most of the policies put in place were not sincerely meant to solve the problem or that there is no political will to marshal necessary efforts to solve the problems. Nigeria however stands better chance of been a prosperous nation where every Nigerian will feel a sense of belonging if necessary steps are taken as recommended above. The human and natural resource endowment spread across the nation is additional impetus for Nigeria's greatness if properly harnessed and used judiciously.

## ***References***

Adebayo O. & Osita A. (1996). "*The Deepening Crisis of Nigeria's federalism*" in Adebayo Olukoshi and LiissaLaakso (eds) *Challenges to the Nations States in Africa*; Uppsala: NordiskaAfrikainstutent.

- Adeleke, A. S & Charles, I. N. U. (2015). Ethnicity and Ethics in Politics: An Impediment to Political Development in Nigeria. *Public Administration Research*, Vol.4, No 1.
- Akinboye, S. O & Anifowose, R. (1996). *Nigeria Government and Politics in (ed) Anifowose & Enemuo Element of Politics*.
- Alubabari, D. N. (2012). The Social Contract Theory: A model for Reconstructing a True Nigerian Nation-State, *International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol.2 No15 August.
- Azeez, L. (2009). Federal Character and National Integration: Mechanism for Sustainable Development in Nigeria, paper presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> National Conference on Contemporary Issues titled: *Nigeria Socio-Economic and Political Directions: Issues and prospects for National growth and Development*. Organized by the Institute of General Studies, Kwara State Polytechnic, Ilorin : Monday, 28<sup>th</sup> September-Wednesday, 30<sup>th</sup> September.
- Elemuo, F. C. (1999). "Political Ideas and Ideologies" in Anifowose, R. & Enemou, F. (eds) *Element of Politics*. Lagos, Malthouse Press Limited.
- Eluwa, G.I.C Et. (1988). *A history of Nigeria for Schools and Colleges*: Ibadan, African FEP, Publishers Ltd.
- Felix, C. A & Nnamchi, C. O. (2020). Social Contract and the Nigerian State: An Elusive Synthesis. *South East Journal of Political Science (SEJPS)* July-Dec. 6(2) 53-67.
- Genyi, G.A. (2014). *Integrating Nigeria's Ethnic Plurality since 1914: The Challenges*. Paper prepared and presented at the SPSP Annual Conference and General Assembly, Ilorin Date: 24<sup>th</sup> – 26<sup>th</sup> March, 2014.
- Guaba, O.P. (2002). *An Introduction to Political Theory*. New Delhi, Macmillan Limited.
- Joseph, E. (2018). *Nigeria now More Divided than Ever Before-Says Ekweremadu*, Vanguard, June, 16.
- Kenneth, N. & Joseph O. N. (2019). The Nigerian State and Hobbes' Social Contract Theory: An Albatross around the Collective Will of the People. *European Journal of Scientific Research*, Vol. 152, No3, April. Pp304-321.
- Kunle, A & Georges H. (1996). *On the Notion of Political Restructuring in Nigeria, Ibadan*. Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Mettam, G. R., & Adams, L. B. (1994). How to Prepare an Electronic Version of your Article. In B. S. Jones, & R. Z. Smith (Eds.), *Introduction to the electronic age* (pp. 281-304). New York: E-Publishing Inc. Microsoft Encarta Premium, 2009.

- Muhammed, D.S & Benjamin, M. (2021). History of Divisive Ethnic Identities Shows it's Time Nigeria Admit its Role in Enforcing Them. *The Conversation*, February 24.
- Muritala, M. (2014). *Issues in Nigeria Peoples and Culture*. In Ahmed, B, Muriala, M, Yusuf, I, Muritala, A. R (eds) *Military and Politics in Nigeria*, Zaria, Ahmadu Bello University Press.
- Muyiwa, F. A & Anthony, O. (2016). *Social Contract Theories and Governance in Contemporary Nigeria* in Olatunji, O & Frances, O.(eds) *Ethics, Governance and Social Order in Africa*. Zenith, Brookhouse Limited.
- Nnoli, O. (1978). *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*. Nsukka 4<sup>th</sup> Dimension Publishers.
- Ojo, E.O. (2017) *Minority Groups: Bridgeheads in Nigerian Politics, 1950s-1966*. In Usuanlete, U; Ibhawoh, B; (eds) *Minority Rights and National Question in Nigeria. African Histories and Modernities*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham.[https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-506302\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-506302_4).
- Rotimi T.S (1996) *Ethnic Minority, Conflicts and Governance in Nigeria*, Ibadan, Spectrum Books Ltd.
- Strunk, W., Jr., & White, E. B. (1979). *The Elements of Style*. (3rd ed.).New York: Macmillan, (Chapter 4).
- Usman, Y.B. (1994). The Formation of the Nigerian Economy and Policy ECPER, *Journal for Political and Economic Studies*, volume 11 NO.1.
- Van der Geer, J., Hanraads, J. A. J., & Lupton R. A. (2000). The Art of Writing a Scientific Article. *Journal of Scientific Communications*, 163, 51 - 59.
- Yahaya, I. I. (2016). *Ethnic Diversity and National Integration in Contemporary Nigeria: An Assessment of Nigeria Experience in Nation-Building in Terhamba*. W & Victor, E. (eds), *The 1914 Amalgamation and A Century of Nigeria Nationhood*. Lagos, Bahiti & Dalila.

### ***Acknowledgements***

Thank you to the Department and University that supported us in publishing this article

### ***Funding***

This paper is self funded

***Author contributions***

The first author is the main author. The corresponding author handles the manuscript and correspondence during the publication process and other members contribute as co-author in this article

***Conflict of interest***

Not applicable