

Nationalism and Nationalist Agitation in Africa: the Nigerian Trajectory

Olusola Olasupo¹  · Isaac Olayide Oladeji² · E. O. C. Ijeoma¹

Published online: 4 November 2017

© The Author(s) 2017. This article is an open access publication

Abstract The need to reclaim African territory – economically, socially, and politically – from imperialism and colonialism united Africans, especially after the Second World War, in pressing for the independence of African nations from colonialism is imperative. This period marked the emergence of *Nationalism* or Nationalist Movements in Africa. Nationalism presupposes African unity against European domination and rule in Africa or the creation in Africa united ‘nation-states’ as well as their economic and political transformation. Using the Nigerian case as analytical compass, this paper interrogates the concepts of *Nationalism* and *Nationalist* Agitations in Africa, especially during the colonial and the postcolonial periods. The paper employs historical and descriptive approaches and relies solely on secondary sources of data. The paper notes that, while all the ethnic-nationalities in Nigeria united against colonial rule and fought for its independence, sooner after independence in October 1960, the country began to divide against itself along ethno-religious-cultural cleavages. This division culminated in the Civil War fought between 1967 and 1970 and the continuous agitations by various ethnic-nationalities that make up the country either for more relevance within the larger Nigerian State or for outright abrogation of the State and creation of ‘our own state’. These agitations are captured by the concept of *Self Determination*. The paper therefore concludes that there has been serious transformation in the meaning of *Nationalism* from what it used to mean under colonialism and presently under postcolonial state. The paper notes that this transformation is due in part to the colonial origin of the state itself and the insincerity of the postcolonial African leaders to make the state

✉ Olusola Olasupo
201601448@ufh.ac.za

Isaac Olayide Oladeji
ooladeji@hotmail.com

¹ Department of Public Administration, Faculty of Management and Commerce, University of Fort Hare, Bhisho 5601, South Africa

² Department of Political Science, Faculty of the Social Sciences, Ekiti State University, P.M.B. 5363, Ado Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria

a ‘nation-state’. To reawaken the Nigerianness nay Africanness nationalism, the paper recommends a political structure, which allows each ethnic-nationality some latitude of self-rule/governance in the likes of genuine federalism. Also there is need for spirited efforts at engendering good, transparent and fair governance, which will rapidly take many Africans out of the mouldy pond of poverty. This, we hope, will not only results in development of the states, but also transfer loyalties of the critical mass of the populace away from their micro ethnic-nationalities back to the state and strengthens the state against centrifugal forces.

Keywords Nationalism · Nationalist movements · Ethnic-nationalities · Colonialism · Federalism · Nigeria

Introduction

Most states as presently constituted in Africa are created through colonial diktat. What started as trade in slaves, when many young Africans were either forcefully carted away or sold into slavery, gradually developed into a ‘civilising/modernising mission’, the need to save the ‘dark continent’ from ‘barbarism’ and cause it to ‘modernise’ through Christian evangelism, eventually crystallised into forceful annexation and political domination of African territory and its inhabitants by Europeans through colonial rule. But, prior to colonialism, Africans had organized themselves into political communities (Kingdoms/Empire States) and had well-developed politico-administrative institutions. In fact, these political communities put up organised resistance against colonialism. What could be gleaned from the foregoing is that contrary to the dominant tendency in Western scholarship to suggest that nationalism developed in Africa with colonialism, African nationalism actually predated colonialism as it has always been there from time immemorial. In fact, it was Africans’ sense of shared historical heritage and identity that informed their resistance against European intruders who wanted to undermine their socio-cultural and political heritage. To be sure, there were widespread resistances against colonial rule, which include the ‘Abd al-Qadir led resistance against the French in Algeria, the Asante King (Prempeh I) led revolt against British colonialists in Ghana, the Maji Maji revolt in Tanganyika, the Ndebele rebellions in Rhodasia, the Ijebu Kingdom and the Opopo resistances in Nigeria, the Zulu resistance in South Africa, etc. (Africana Age 2011; Khapoya 2012; World History 2015).

Indeed, in responding to the British offer of protection – a genteelism for colonial domination – the Prempeh I of Asante Kingdom said:

his kingdom wished to remain on friendly terms with all white people, and to do business with them, but he saw no reason why the Asante kingdom should ever commit itself to a policy of protection from British government (Khapoya 2012: 151).

With the same token, the Mossi people’s king in the present day Burkina Faso told a French colonial captain:

I know the whites wish to kill me in order to take my country, yet you claim that they will help me to organize my country. But I find my country good just as it is. I have no need of them. I know what is necessary for me and what I want. I have my own merchants ... consider yourself fortunate that I do not order your head to be cut off (*Ibid*).

Furthermore, Samory Touré of Mandika Empire in West Africa put up a pragmatic resistance against the French aggression between 1860s and 1890s. However, while Touré's army was eventually defeated by the French military, just like several other African traditional kingdoms, Ethiopian 'empire state' under Emperor Menelik II successfully defended itself against the invading Italian army and remained the only African society free of direct European political domination (Africana Age 2011). The point therefore is that embedded in such African resistances and the sentiments expressed by the kings are nothing but a strong sense of national identity and determination to uphold territorial integrity.

Such strong feelings of African brotherhood would later inform the Nationalist Movements to reclaim African territory – economically, socially, and politically – from imperialism and colonialism by pressing for the independence of African nations from European domination and rule. Such movement ironically started outside Africa, specifically in the United States of America and the Caribbean, in the early 1900 as *Pan-Africanism* championed by the trio of Henry Sylvester-Williams, W.E.D. DuBois, and Marcus Garvey. Pan-Africanism presupposes a socio-cultural-political ideology aimed at uniting *people of colour* across the world to protect the common heritage of African people and mobilise them to work for the interests and welfare of one another everywhere. It also involves ensuring united 'nation-states' as well as their economic and political transformations in Africa. But despite the widespread *Pan-Africanist* spirit among the Africans against foreign rule and racial discrimination against Africans, they were still divided along their primordial ethno-cultural-political leanings. To be sure, most states in Africa are conglomeration of divergent ethno-cultural nationalities with diverse traditions, lingua franca, story of sources and socio-cultural developments hemmed together through colonial fait without recourse to the peoples concern or their peculiar histories.

Given the anomaly inherent in their creations and the colonial and post-colonial state policies, African states, instead of nurturing national harmony and sameness, keep experiencing sub-nationalist agitations along ethno-cultural fault lines. As we shall argue later, these sub-nationalist agitations are inherent in African's love of its distinctive identities and abhorrence of domination in whatever form. To be sure, contrary to the dominant view in Western scholarship to see the crises of state in Africa as that of weak state syndrome or state failure/collapse (Clapham 2001; Herbst 2004; Jackson and Rosberg 1982), most of the agitations are not meant to pull down the state, but to dismantle the colonial heritage inherent in them and reconstruct them within the negotiated terms of the indigenous people, which will make the state legitimate, inclusive and functional (Omotoso and Oladeji 2017). Indeed, the agitations are well captured by the concept of *Self Determination*, which seeks to guarantee various ethnic-nationalities that make up the African states more relevance within the larger State than outright abrogation of the present State and creation of 'our own state' out of this artificial state.

Thus, using the Nigerian case as its analytical compass, this paper interrogates the concepts of *Nationalism* and *Nationalist Agitations* in Africa, especially during the colonial and the postcolonial states. Nigeria is purposively selected one because it is the most populous black nation in the world. Two, Nigeria is the oldest federation in the continent; it effectively became a federation under the Macpherson constitution of 1954. Three, Nigeria is one of the most culturally, ethnically and religiously plural states not only in Africa but in the world. Four, despite the longstanding federal experience, Nigeria remains one of the most politically unstable states in Africa usually because of inter/intra ethnic and religious rivalries. Six, Nigeria is one of the most endowed with both human and material resources, but also one of the least developed in the continent. In terms of methodological orientation; the paper is strongly influenced by the interpretivist research methodologies. Thus, the paper is wholly qualitative in approach and basically relies on secondary sources of data, namely books, newspaper articles, journal articles, conference papers, internet publications, among others, all considered relevant in understanding the issues of nationalism and nationalist agitations in Nigeria, nay Africa. In analysing the data, the descriptive, interpretive qualitative approach was employed with emphasis on longitudinal study of nationalism in Africa. The rest of the paper is therefore arranged into six sections, namely: conceptual analysis, theoretical analysis, colonialism and nationalism in Africa; state policies and crises of micro-nationalism in Nigeria, self-determination or citizenship questions in Nigeria, and concluding remarks.

Nationalism and nationalist agitation: a conceptual clarification

Nationalism is one of the most disputed and controversial concepts in social sciences. This is due to the fact that the concept is heavily laden with ideological, religious, ethnic, racial and socio-economic emotional undercurrents. Indeed, nationalism has become a very powerful force in modern history. It could be described as a double-edged sword; it represents two ideological divides – domination and struggle for freedom. That is, nationalism arouses strong feelings – for some, it is tantamount to racism, but for others nationalist sentiment creates solidarity and stability, which are preconditions for freedom (Hoffman and Graham 2009: 264). These two opposing notions of nationalism are informed by history, and as we shall show later, while it is central to the nationalist struggles to free Nigeria from the shackles of colonialism and attempt to galvanise all its ethnic groups together to form a coherent state, it is also the basis for the current nationalist agitations trying to tear the state apart. Thus, what is believed to be moral justification to maintain the sanctity of the state by a group could be termed as an act of domination by their others who strive to forcefully regain their freedom.

In the main, nationalism is derivative of nation, which means ‘a group of people who feel themselves to be a community bound together by ties of history, culture and common ancestry’ (Kellas 1998: 3). Thus, nationalism is the sense of political togetherness that invokes spirit of patriotism and ‘we feeling’ in people towards their country and one another and which distinguishes a group from other groups. As an ideology, nationalism holds that the nation should be the primary political identity of individuals (Negedu and Atabor 2015: 74). This is in line with Ernest Geller’s position that

‘nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political and the national unit should be congruent’ (Mclean and Mcmillan 2009:357). Thus, Geller defines nationalism as:

a theory of political legitimacy, which requires that ethnic boundaries should not cut across political ones, and in particular, that ethnic boundaries within a given state ... should not separate the power holders from the rest (Gellner 1983: 1).

To Montserrat Guibernau, nationalism connotes:

the sentiment of belonging to a community whose members identify with a set of symbols, beliefs and ways of life and have the will to decide upon their common political destiny (Guibernau 1996: 47).

From the above definitions, the term ‘nation’ means some kind of entity, while ‘nationalism’ appears to be a body of doctrine, theory or beliefs about the nation, its historical significance and moral importance (Hoffman and Graham 2009: 268). The definitions also show that nationalism homogenises the state. That is, it turns a state to ‘nation-state’ by blurring its ethno-cultural cleavages and develops among its population a strong attachment to the ‘state’ rather than their various ethnic nationalities. This is exactly what Anthony Smith had in mind when he defined nationalism as:

An ideological movement for attaining and maintaining autonomy, unity and identity on behalf of a population deemed by some of its members to constitute an actual or potential nation (Smith 1991: 173).

To Smith, nationalism does not mean that all members of a nation should be alike, just that there should be among them an intense bond of solidarity to the nation and other members of their nation. That is, members of a state could exhibit strong national sentiments and common citizenship despite the state being ethnically or religiously heterogeneous. For instance in Tanzania, superseding national identity is more salient than ethnicity and/or religion identity (Miguel 2004). The Tanzanian success could be attributed to the efforts of the former one-party state to construct common citizenship and national identity and because it has no dominant ethnic group, with its largest group comprising only 12% of the population (Campbell 1999; Robinson 2009). Thus, the tendency here is the possibility of distinguishing between a ‘civic nation’ created around an overarching political identity and ‘ethnic nation’ based on individual’s primordial givens. Civic nationalism is based on rational choice rather than inheritance and is defined as ‘a community of equal, rights-bearing citizens, united in patriotic attachment to a shared set of political practices and values’ (Ignatieff 1993: 7). On the other hand, ethnic nationalism, as argued by Smith, is the organization of ethnic groups by using language, ethno-history, religion, traditions and customs. Hence, Smith claimed that via the reawakening of an ethnic past, national identity could arouse ethnic groups to demand their rights as nations (Isiksal 2002:9).

But what happens where the line between the state and the nation is not congruent as Ernest Geller will make us believe? That is, what form of

nationalism prevails in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious state? Or what motivates nationalism or nationalist movements/agitations to emerge? Anthony Smith's view on nationalism will be helpful in answering these questions. Smith argues that nationalism and national communities have an *ethnie* at their core (Mclean and Mcmillan 2009:358). Therefore, Smith advocates that there is continuity among pre-modern ethnics and modern nations because these latter are commonly formed by pre-modern ethnics' 'cultural basis' (Olayode 2010: 3). While Smith, like most political theorists, believes that nationalism is a modern phenomenon, he insists that nations have pre-modern origins. He insists that any explanation of how and what informs nationalism must begin from ethnic ties and identities formed from the same cultural basis. From Smith's analysis, it is arguable to maintain that, and as we shall show later, any attempt to forcefully suppress sub-group or ethnic identity will be counterproductive and resulted in nationalist agitations to reclaim separate ethnic identity of the suppressed group. This is well captured today by the doctrine/principle of self-determination.

Thus, core to ethnic nationalism is the fact that each ethnic group has right to self-determination. While this right varies, it is usually expressed in two forms (Olayode 2010: 4) and mostly elite induced. At the controllable level, ethnic nationalist agitation may involve a call to restructure a state in such ways that more power and resources are redistributed downward to sub-national politico-administrative units, which may or may not coincide with dominant ethnic boundaries. This is clearly typified by the current demands from several ethnic/regional groups in Nigeria – vigorously being championed by the southern part of the country – for the restructuring of its federal system in a way to strip of the national government of some powers and investing same in the component states and local government. For instance, a former Vice-President, Atiku Abubakar, argues that

any restructuring exercise must include devolution of power to the states, reduction in federal government exclusive list (87) in favour of concurrent list (15), developing our own model of fiscal federalism, reduction in number of federating units, administrative restructuring, leaner bureaucracy, local government autonomy (state control), federal ownership of interstate roads, resource sharing (*This Day* 2017).

At the other extreme, ethnic nationalism will involve calls for the secession of a group from a state to form own sovereign state. It could even results to outright dissolution of the state and the formation of new states from the debris of the defunct state. The example of the former could be seen in the secession of Eritrea from Ethiopia or that of South Sudan from Sudan, while the latter is typified by the collapsed Yugoslavia or USSR. Religion and ethnicity are also ascribed as very important factors that fuel these conflicts. However, central to the principle of self-determination is that of the right of a people to choose their political status and determine own socio-cultural and economic development. The way the right is expressed may have varied outcomes and how governments react to the claims by a people or nation. Thus, while claims to cultural autonomy may be more readily recognized by states, claims to independence are more likely to be rejected by them (Olayode 2010: 4).

The character of the state and (sub) nationalism in Africa: a theoretical analysis

A Theory provides a base for normative and speculative thinking. To this extent, a theoretical construct is relevant to assist in organizing thoughts in any field of study (Kolawole 1997). Thus, the preferred theoretical framework of analysis in this study is the neo-Marxist theory of the postcolonial state or what some fancied calling African Political Economy. This theory found its footings in the works of some *third world* radical Marxist scholars – Ake (1981, 1985); Myrdal (1968); Alavi (1973), Saul (1974) *inter alia*. The central thesis in the works of these scholars is that the crises bedevilling the third world postcolonial states could be traced to their colonial origin. The neo-Marxist scholars argue that the problem of sub-nationalist agitations in Africa, for instance, could be unravelled through the examination of the nature, history, composition and character of the African State. They contend that the analysis of these issues is germane in teasing out the dynamics of political and socio-economic developments and processes within the state. Thus, in understanding the nature of the postcolonial state, we are informed mostly by the structuralist concept of the state in which the state is seen as being derived from the metropolitan centre, especially being a product of colonialism (Kabir and Arowosegbe 2002). The African State, therefore, was not just an imposition on the local communities by the British colonial power not minding their peculiar differences and history of empire/state formation, it also, at independence, in the context of this thinking, was perceived as having inherited a state apparatus that was not only overdeveloped during the colonial period, but which was also lacking the necessary institutional mechanism to engender national coherence (Ake 1981; Mutfwang 1989). The state is believed also to have ensured the transfer of ownership and control of resources from the people to the central state with political and economic developments wrought only through national politics, which promotes primordial political patronages (Ake 1981, 1985). Thus, the postcolonial state acquires a centrality whose importance is reflected in the positions of those who occupy the state apparatus (Mutfwang 1989: 42, cited in Kabir and Arowosegbe 2002) and who use such positions for *primitive private aggrandizements/accumulations* along primordial ethno-cultural-religious cleavages.

In the main, it is arguable to maintain that the increasing nationalist agitations in Africa can be explained as having a lot to do with the nature and character of the State, that is, its overdeveloped political superstructures, its low level of productive forces (that is, its underdeveloped material-economic base), as well as the resolute but mistaken approach directed towards developing the state and its economy only from the perspectives of national politics (Ake 1981; Suberu 1998). By giving the central state a preeminent role in the use of resources and in the dispensation of patronage, these factors also elevate distributive considerations, rather than ideological or programmatic contestation, into the primary impulse for political competition (Suberu 1998). Consequently, in the absence of the necessary needed productive requirements, which are indispensable for sustaining the state, most African states are experiencing stiff competition among their various ethnic constituencies for access to state power and resources/benefits which its acquisition cbrings. This vying for resources and power, by what Lustick (2002) describes as “political élites as entrepreneurs ... [investing in] alternative identities attuned to changing circumstances”, has brought the concept of

indigeneity and an attendant concern about place (and its rightful inhabitants) to the centre of postcolonial politics in Africa (Andreasson 2010).

Thus, the state, as the major source of patronage and resources, together with other economic institutions, must be manipulated to divert the flow of finance, jobs and other largesse to the homelands (Oladeji 2017). The élites thus become the homelands agents in these manipulating games of nationalist agitations. They are active players in the cultural affairs, government and development of their homelands, which they define, confine and seek to represent in often *essentialist* and *instrumentalist* terms. Their survival within the *politics of belonging* often depends on doing just that. They thus become, in the words of Goheen (1992), “mediators between local and national arenas, interpreters as well as architects of the intersections between national law and customary law, which they often treat as unproblematic and consensual.” They identify with their ethnic group or cultural community on the one hand (*ethnic or cultural citizenship*) and with the nation-state on the other (*civic citizenship*). The theoretical conclusion, therefore, is that the bifurcation of most African states into indigene/settler groups, especially sub-nationalist crisis, is not a result of ‘natural’ division between ethnic and cultural entities (Egwu 2004). It is rather a ‘social construct’ by elites of the various ethno-cultural-religious groups who deliberately mobilized and politicized difference as instrument of exclusion/inclusion.

State formation and nationalism in Africa

The emergence of post Westphalia States in Africa did not follow the same historical path as did in Europe. Historically in Europe, the modern sovereign state emerged out of the debris of the collapsed feudal state and the accompanying absolute monarchies. Progressively, the European state changed from absolutist-mercantilist state to the liberal-democratic state to the social-welfare state. These changes shaped and were in turn simultaneously shaped by the wider political and socioeconomic changes wrought by capitalism, namely, the decline of the aristocracy, the rise of the urban bourgeoisie and the expansion of the industrial working class (Mozaffar 1987:14). Thus, in Europe, the modern state and the civil society evolved interdependently. But in Africa, the historical processes of state formation and socioeconomic development in society were disconnected (Omotoso and Oladeji 2017). The African state did not emerge through ‘a gradual process of aggregation or expansion of indigenous societies’ (Animashaun 2009:53). That is, unlike its European counterpart, African state did not evolve naturally from the African traditional society; it was externally determined and imposed on the society through the instrumentality of colonialism.

Indeed, African international boundaries were drawn at the Berlin Conference of 1884/1885 on the basis of claims of spheres of influence and effective occupation tendered by the scrambling European imperial powers (Omotoso and Oladeji 2017). The partitioning of Africa was done wholly by the colonial powers without recourse to the African people and their peculiarities. But before colonialism, there were already developed politico-administrative ‘states’ in Africa with political institutions exercising authorities over definite territories. Indeed, there existed in the ‘traditional states’ nationalist bond and distinguishing attributes between the people and their political communities. However, and as we shall elaborate upon later, political boundaries in

Africa prior to colonialism were fluid and permissible. That is, in traditional African societies, it was not impossible for an ‘outsider’ to become an ‘insider’ through the process of acculturation and immersion in the culture of the new society (Ojong and Sithole 2007; Lentz 2000; Adesoji and Alao 2009). Colonialism stopped this process and in its place instituted *thick* boundaries and alienating properties by turning hitherto ‘homogenous’ communities with unique histories and socio-cultural and political growths into diverse ones.

The implication of the foregoing analysis is that international boundaries are artificial with peoples of divergent customs, languages, myths of origin and social cultural developments hemmed into each state (Omotoso and Oladeji 2017). More seriously, “the boundaries were responsible for dividing single communities such as the Yoruba between Benin Republic and Nigeria, the Maasai and Kuria between Kenya and Tanganyika (Tanganyika and Zanzibar later became Tanzania), the Somali among Kenya, Somalia, Djibouti and Ethiopia, the Luo, also among Kenya, Uganda, Sudan and Tanzania, and the Teso and the Samia between Kenya and Uganda” (Ndege 2009: 3). Also, failure to correctly insert or modify the ‘migrated state structures’ (Ekeh 1983) to the colonies, created a disjunctive duality between the state and civil society with the state suspended above society like a balloon (Hyden 1980). Thus, inability to weave these diverse communities into coherent nation-states has led to the characterisation of African state as a ‘medley of peoples who mix but do not combine’ (Furnivall 1948), or a ‘mere geographical expression’ (Awolowo 1947).

There could be no place in Africa that the above assertions of Awolowo and Furnivall truer than in Nigeria where, since its independence in October 1960, it has been difficult to pull together into a coherent whole its ‘over 374 ethnic groups, 400 distinct languages as against dialects, and at least three groups of belief-systems’ (Tamuno 1998: 22). While all the ethno-cultural-religious nationalities that were clobbered together by the British colonialists were united against colonialism, they differed on how the structure of the and how its powers and resources be managed or shared. Indeed, nationalism under colonialism in Nigeria was not based on any sense of a common Nigerian; it was rather to ensure increased participation in the colonial governance for the elites of the various ethnic nationalities (Bamisoye 1988; Onuoha 2012; Shittu 2013). That is early nationalists rather than seeing Nigeria as the focus of their agitations, the common denominator then was based on ethnic consciousness and personal aggrandisement. This point was well elaborated by Peter Ekeh in his theory of the ‘two publics’ (Ekeh 1975). According to Ekeh (1975:96), colonialism was not just about imposition of colonial structures, but it also involved hegemonic contests between the colonising elite and the emerging colonised elite. While the former used colonialism to justify colonial domination and admission of African natives into modernity, the latter sought to justify the overthrow of the colonial order and legitimise their hold on the levers of state power in the postcolonial era. A critical element in the colonised elite’s strategy was the exploitation of colonially created ethnic groups and its instrumentalization as a group for obtaining power on behalf of their ethnic constituencies (Onuoha 2012: 33).

According to Onuoha (2012: 33), these tendencies began to emerge with the division that happened inside the ranks of the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in 1941, because of the Ikoli-Akinsanya clash. The core issues were based on disagreements about the leadership of the movement but it elicited mutual suspicions, deepened ethno-

nationalist inclinations and eroded the platform for articulating a coherent nationalist agenda in colonial Nigeria (Olusanya 1980 in Onuoha 2012). The period of 1948 and 1952 were therefore marked by the controversial awareness of ethno-nationalist identities in Nigeria, leading to the advent of three ethno-regional socio-cultural organisations – Egbe Omo Oduduwa (EOO) in the Yoruba west; Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa (JMA) in the Hausa-Fulani north; and the Igbo State Union (ISU) in the Igbo east – and the emergence of exclusively regional political parties as bearers of ethno-nationalism and ethno-regional divisions in colonial Nigeria (*Ibid*: 568). To be sure, political parties that emerged during this period were sharply drawn on the basis of ethnicity and regionalism with Northern People's Congress (NPC) drawing most of its supporters among the Hausa/Fulani, the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) was mostly backed by the Igbos, and Action Group had most of its followers among the Yorubas.

From the forgoing analysis it is arguable to maintain that the emergence of ethnicism or sub-nationalism problematic cannot be delinked from the historical emergence of modern state in Nigeria nay Africa as a colonial creation and how the state was administered by both colonial and postcolonial administrators. Indeed, the literature on colonialism in Africa has rightly implicated the British colonial *Centralization of Resources, Divide and Rule* and *Indirect Rule Policies* as the major sources of politically charged ethnic categories in Nigeria (Coleman 1958; Diamond 1988; Ekeh 1975, 1983; Graff 1988; Mamdani 1996, 2002, 2004, 2007; Lentz 2000; Ofosu 2008). For instance, in the bid to advance their interests, the colonial authorities embarked on a string of policies such as fiscal centralization, state ownership of critical economic resources, particularly land and minerals, and 'divide and rule' that proved to be devastating to the cause of national unity in the years to come. Prominent in this regard was the failure to properly integrate the northern and southern sections of Nigeria. The British colonial policy promoted the Hausa-Fulani/Islamist identity in the north by implementing a policy of 'separate development' for the region and regionalised almost everything in order to enhance jointly exclusive identities (Diamond 1988:28). While under the Richards Constitution of 1946 the whole country was 'unified' under a central government, the constitution nevertheless split the country into three ethnically dominated administrative and political units, which coincided with the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria – Hausa/Fulani in the north, Igbo in the east and Yoruba in the west. This exercise, in the words of Olusanya (1980 in Onuoha 2012), set in motion the regionalisation of the nationalist movement into three mutually antagonistic camps with obvious consequences for post-independence politics.

In the main, there is a sense in the argument that colonialism, for many reasons, was preoccupied with ethnic and cultural diversity between African population that it continue to make cultural disparity the centrepiece of colonial government policy (Mamdani 2002). According to Oladeji (2017), the colonial native authority policy has implications for emergence and reification of sub-nationalism or indigene/settler crisis in Nigeria. These implications according to Oladeji (*Ibid*) include the following: One, the policy gave vent to what could be described as *false consciousness* between the 'indigenous groups' inside localities who see themselves as the legal *heirs* to not only the traditional stool of their communities, but also the political control of Local Councils as part and/or extension of their inherited customary rights to the exclusion of those described as non-indigenes (Oladeji 2012:12). Two, it resulted in the

politicization of towns' histories since the colonial state built local administration on traditional power holders who were able to claim authority through recourse to history. This politicization of histories by the state meant that it became potentially powerful tools reflecting the ambitions of (royal) individuals and their supporters (Nolte 2013) to claim indigeneity either to justify administrative rule over a territory or to gain administrative autonomy from a Native Authority (Oladeji 2017).

Three, it also resulted in what has been described as “colonialism within colonialism” (Ochonu 2008) among the ‘pagan’ groups of the Middle Belt of Nigeria where the colonial powers not only imposed alien administrative system, but also sought to or imposed the leadership of Hausa/Fulani chiefs, whose origins and traditions were clearly different from those of the ‘indigenous groups’. Similar problems were encountered among the Igbos where the colonial powers had to result to the invention of what was called ‘Warrant Chiefs’ due to lack of pre-colonial traditional structure amenable to native authority rule. Four and a corollary to three, it bred fears of cultural assimilation or domination in situation where more than two ethnic groups were ‘bring together’ in a single local administration. Thus, the colonial imposition of the supreme ruler of a group as enduring local authority despite no pre-colonial history of dependent relations stimulated local autonomist agitations (Oladeji 2017). If the goal of local government was to govern the native through his own culture, the activists for individual local administrations wondered why the colonial officers whose ‘Intelligence Reports’ had sometimes documented stark cultural and physical dissimilarities among them and the other group choose to put them under the leadership of a different traditional authority (Ukiwo 2007: 4).

Little wonder, Peter Ekeh (Ekeh 1975:19) contends that ‘the colonial experiences in Africa resulted in a unique historical configuration of modern post-colonial Africa’. However, if this negative history continues to condition post-colonial public spaces and politics in Africa, it is due largely to the character of conservative/mainstream nationalism (Mamdani 2005:9). Mamdani argues that while mainstream and radical nationalists are united in their efforts to deracialise the state and civic rights, mainstream nationalists are however bent on reproducing the customary as the authentic African tradition by ethnicising the customary sphere. The consequence of this is that mainstream nationalists apart from guaranteeing civic rights for all citizens, those seeing as ‘indigenous citizens’ were given a bonus – customary rights (Mamdani 2005:9). How the forgoing has resulted in the emergence and/or reification of dichotomised citizenship and micro-nationalism/self-determination agitations in Nigeria shall be the focus of our attention in the next section of the paper.

State policies and sub-nationalism and citizenship in Nigeria

In order to foster ‘unity in diversity’ or create a ‘nation state’, post-colonial Nigerian leaders put in place several centralising and ethnic-balancing consociational policies to weld into a coherent whole Nigerians diverse peoples. Some of these policies include over centralization of the state’s resources, ethnofederalism (which divides the Nigerian state such that constituent units and local governments coincide with ethnic boundaries) quota system, and more notably the federal character law. These policies have however had *boomerang effects* in that they exacerbate (and at times create new ones) the

problems they were meant to resolve (Oladeji 2012). The policies, instead of fostering national sameness and harmony, racially define and differentiate Nigerians into opposing groups of those who claim to be indigenous to a state/locality and their ‘others’ believed to be settlers (Oladeji 2017). But arguably, most crises of sub-nationalism bedeviling the Nigerian state today have their roots in its colonial origin. That is, contrary to those who view colonialism as episodic, while the actual colonial situation must have ended about half a century ago, its legacies live on and continues to haunt the post-independence Nigerian, nay African, state (cf. Ekeh 1983).

Colonial legacy is the sum total of the political structure, culture and general policy handed over to post-independence leaders or that which was left behind by colonial administrators, “neo-colonial” nationalist leadership, which affected post-independence Nigeria and still has an impact on contemporary Nigerian state and politics (Alemazung 2010: 64). One of such enduring legacies is the over-centralized state apparatus inherited from colonialism and retained by the post-independence African political class. At independence, according to Mamdani (2005: 273), “the colonial inheritance was appropriated with little or no attempt at recasting its fundamental principles”. Indeed, just like the colonial administrators, Africa’s new state managers adopted the statist model of development, which gave the centralised state a leading role in social and economic development (Animashaun 2009: 55). The centralist post-independence state thus appropriated most, if not all, states resources to the central government. In most cases, the centralised resources are not meant for effective and efficient delivery of public goods but the satisfaction of primitive accumulation tendencies of the ruling class (Omotoso and Oladeji 2017). For instance, the resource control agitations/militancy in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria could be explained by the centralization policy of the state. Indeed, decades of oil exploitation, environmental degradation and state neglect has created an impoverished, marginalized and exploited citizenry which after more than two decades produced a resistance of which the youth has been a vanguard (Ikelegbe 2005: 208). Little wonder that Niger Delta is today a theatre of hostilities, violent confrontations and criminal violence despite the state’s attempt to bribe its people with the *Amnesty Programme*. As will be demonstrated later, this problem could be resolve with devolution of power and resources downward to sub-national constituent states and local government. This will not only improve service delivery capacity of these levels of government, but will also improve participatory governance through the involvement of local people/community in the formulation and implementation of policies that have direct bearings on their lives.

Also, the centralization of state’s resources readily turns the state into a ‘political kingdom’ worth struggling to capture and rule, since getting it, all other things – power, security, wealth, good life – shall be added. No wonder, political contestations – that is, elections – soon assumed inter-group and/or inter-ethnic confrontations/wars, because any racial group or alliance of racial groups that control the state also control so much more. Indeed, the post-independence state has become a hegemonic vehicle for contending ethnic groups (Omotoso and Oladeji 2017). Flowing on from this, the processes of the post-independence state are defined by the struggle for ethnic appropriation, consolidation and hegemonic control of the state (Araoye 2012: 12).

Furthermore, as we argued before, as part of its strategies of control wrought through policies of assimilation and divide-and-rule, the colonial state racially divided the colony into hierarchies of superior and inferior races. The colonial state did not only

make distinctions between colonised *natives* and colonising Europeans, but also between *native citizens* and *native settlers* among ethnic communities within the same colony (Oladeji 2012). To be sure, a person is a Nigerian by birth “either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents belongs or belonged to a community indigenous to Nigeria or by naturalisation if “he is ... acceptable to the local community in which he is to live permanently, and has been assimilated into the way of life of Nigerians in that part of the Federation” (Sections 25(1a) and 27(1d) respectively, 1999 Nigeria Constitution, as amended).

The implication of the forgoing constitutional provisions for citizenship and sub-nationalism is that a person only becomes a Nigerian citizen if s/he has ancestral link with or is accepted by a community indigenous to Nigeria. The administrative acceptance/certification of persons as indigenes is left with local government since the upper levels of government – i.e. the state and federal – lack sufficient local knowledge to determine who is indigenous to a community (Nigeria Research Network 2014:2). Thus, irrespective of the weak independence and authority of the local government as a level of administration, it serves as a vehicle for the promotion of indigeneity, exclusivity, and citizenship problematic, especially for the intention of creating and advancing the federal character principle (Oladeji 2017). To be sure, the word *indigene* was connected with federal character in the part of the constitution authorising the president to select ministers:

“Any [ministerial] appointment...shall be in conformity with...section 14(3) ... provided that...the President shall appoint at least one Minister from each State, who shall be an indigene of such State” (Section 147(3) 1999 Nigeria Constitution, as amended, emphasis added).

While the 1999 Constitution fails to define the word *indigene* or what makes a person indigenous, the Federal Character Commission (FCC) has been empowered through the FCC Establishment, Etc. Act 1996 to supply laws which among other things – define ‘an indigene’. Thus, FCC in Part II of its *Guiding Principles* provides as follows:

1. An indigene of a local government means a person-
 - a. either of whose parents or any of whose grandparents was or is an indigene of the local government concerned; or
 - b. who is accepted as an indigene by the local government (FCC 1996).

According to Oladeji (2017), the implications of the foregoing for sub-nationalist agitations, citizenship and rights in Nigeria are many and include – one, a person is a Nigerian in the true sense of the word only if s/he has ancestral link with a locality as an indigene. Put differently, Nigeria has hierarchical citizenship structure namely Local, State and National Citizenships. But, Local citizenship is superior since other levels of citizenship is derived from or depend on it. Two, it makes access to the state, its institutions/agencies, and resources lopsided and tilted in favour of those on citizenship by indigeneity. For instance, from Section 147(3) of 1999 Constitution quoted above, those on citizenship by registration and naturalization can never be appointed Minister in Nigeria (Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999).

Three, it is counterproductive as it discourages interstate or inter-locality marriages because according to the Federal Character Commission ‘a married woman belongs to her natal local government, and not that of her husband’ (Section 3, FCC *Guiding Principles*). Ordinarily, marriage, as usually the case that a woman will drop her maiden name for her husband’s surname, ought to politically unite a married woman and her husband such that she has every political rights as her husband in the husband’s local government of origin. But with the FCC laws, while a woman is socio-culturally married to a man, she is nonetheless separates from him politically if both of them are not from the same local government of origin. That is, women who married outside their local government/state of origins cannot benefit politically from their husbands’ local governments/states of origin. In fact, such women are mostly victims of double jeopardy as they are often treated with suspicion in their so called local governments or states of origin. For instance, in October 2011 the Abia State government sacked some women from neighbouring Ebonyi State on the grounds of their non-indigeneous, though the women were Igbos and many of them married to Abia men. Four, it closes the boundary between indigene and non-indigene as there is no way a non-indigene could ever become indigene in the same community. This runs counter to the pre-colonial arrangement when an individual could easily migrate to an area and get acculturated and immersed into the cultures of the new area and thus acquired indigene status of the new place (Oladeji 2017). Five, is that the lesser ethnic groups continue to demand for the establishment of their own local governments with the opinion that this will ensure their own ‘slice of the national cake’, and grant them right to oversee their own local territories, their ‘heritage’ (*Ibid*). But this has come at a cost “of the country’s disaggregation into hundreds of tiny principalities run on the basis of indigene sovereignty” (Oladeji 2012:51).

However, Lake and Rothchild (1996) assert that the pursuit of particularistic objectives often becomes embodied in competing visions of just, legitimate, and appropriate political orders. This encompasses such demands as greater autonomy and decentralization, resource control, and restructuring of state power, fair power division and group rights (Ajayi, 2006; Ogunrotifa, 2014; Osaghae 2004). This is usually typified by the agitations of the ethnic minorities in the Niger Delta and the demand of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). These demands could be justified as they are often for equitable distribution of state’s resources and/or accommodation of dissenting voices/opinions within the existing state. For instance, the current agitations/calls for restructuring in Nigeria could be seen as agitations for equity and sense of belonging rather than a call for dissolution of the state. However, if not properly handled, the demands/agitations could be hijacked by greedy and/or opportunistic élite, rebels or warlords and thus turned to separatist agitations, which are sometimes regarded as the most dangerous threats to the state. A very good example is the ‘oil wars’ in the Niger Delta region, where ethno-nationalist militants and warlords highjack the longstanding grievances and redress-seeking agitations over environmental degradation and resource injustices. Indeed, after the 2015 general elections that ushered in President Muhamadu Buhari (a northerner) to power, there have been renewed hostilities in the region. A leading group of the new hostilities is the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA) who has been attacking oil installations and even threatened to secede from Nigeria. A similar agitation of secession is that of IPOB whose leader Nnamdi Kanu has been in prison for treasonable felony offences for the threat to lead Biafran people (the Igbos) out of

Nigeria. To the extent that the possibility of any of these movements gaining independence is very slim, it is therefore safe to argue that they are redress-seeking struggles for state deconstruction and restructuring that should lessen after favourable responses are exacted (Osaghae 2014).

What can be gleaned from the forgoing analysis is that most of the nationalist agitations/crises are attributable to the nature of the Nigerian state, which does not give room for independent behaviour. For instance, the imposition of the same local administrative structure throughout Nigeria does not allow for local initiatives to respond to peculiar localised issues. To be sure, it may be impossible for the same local administrative structure to work in Maiduguri that is mostly arid land and Bayelsa that is mostly waterlogged. This problem is mostly due to the colonially induced concentration of power in the hands of the central state. Thus, what Nigeria nay Africa needs is a new negotiated form of statehood that requires deconstructing and dismantling the colonial state and rebuilding and reconstructing the state in self-determined ways (Hagmann and Peclard 2011). The *false decolonisation* on which the differentiation between the state in the colonial period and the post-independence period is hinged did little to change the entrenched colonial state because it was essentially about the transfer of power (Hargreaves 1988). Indeed, it amounts to a change of guards, rather than a change in the character of the state; a “transfer of public authority without an accompanying institutional transformation” (Gifford and Louis 1988: xi). This pitiful situation has led to a paradigm shift in the call of African scholars for the second decolonization (also called second liberation) of the state in Africa to entrench democratization and state-rebuilding (Osaghae 2014). In line with this thinking, we seek to propose federalism as a strategy for dismantling and deconstructing the colonial legacies in Africa and as a conflict de-escalation or mitigation model, which recasts the state as an agent of, or a vehicle for, democratization and socioeconomic and political development Africa.

Self-determination, federalism and the future of nationalism in Africa

Over the immediate post independent period, the new African leaders were divided sharply as to the best state structure between Federalism and Unitarism that suited the African situation. During this period, some leaders opted for the federal option and carried out some federal reforms within and between their countries. Thus, such countries as Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda, and DRC opted for the federal structures within their states, while there were federal relations between the French Cameroun and British Southern Cameroons, Ethiopia and Eritrea, Senegal and the French Soudan, Tanganyika and Zanzibar, and a mooted proposal for a quasi-federal arrangement between Ghana, Mali and Guinea (Omotoso and Oladeji 2017). However, before long, the federal arrangement proved unsuccessful. The failure was, however, not unconnected with the colonial legacy of centralist tendencies of the African ruling class who refused to succumb to the limits on their powers through federal constitutions (Ibrahim 2003). Also, under the pretext of championing the cause of unity and building a nation-state out of the divergent communities making the state, African leaders, held federalism in contempt as system that would foster tribalism and encourage secessionist claims. Indeed, they did not only view the federal arrangements as a divide and rule strategy of the colonialists (Dersso 2008), but also perceived it as a crisis escalator rather than a crisis damper (Elaiwu 1994).

Little wonder that the unitary system became the only game in town among many post-independence African leaders as it was perceived as a system capable of fostering the unity of diverse societies and balanced national development. Some of them even considered decentralisation within unitary states as a grave political risk. In this context, they perceived the establishment of unitary systems of government as an effective means of maintaining national identity in African plural societies, comprising various ethnic groups, which were expected to give up their identity for the sake of national unity. However, the unitary systems also failed as it could not bring about the assumed advantages including accommodating ethnic diversity and economic prosperity due to African's nature, which cherishes its freedom and abhors domination of any guise. Thus, before long, many states went up in flames as a result of confrontations over who or which ethnic group controlled the state and its resources. As such, many of these states became theatres of military coups and counter coups, which were underpinned by ethnic colourations (Agbu 2004; Ibrahim 2003).

Thus, given the failure of unitary governments to achieve bring together diverse groups to form a nation-state or achieve the flaunted economic prosperity, federalism re-emerged, especially within the context of democratising and decentralising the many one-party totalitarian central states, as the political arrangement best suited to the African situation (Agbu 2004; Ibrahim 2003; Jinadu 2007; Osaghae 2014; Selassie 2003). Indeed, it is a prevalent assumption today that the federal system of government has several advantages for the African state because of the need to constrain limitless political power, accommodate diversity, recognize and protect group and individual rights, protect some groups from oppression through local self-government and local autonomy, allow such groups to preserve their identity, provide the desired economic benefits through efficient service delivery, equitable development and poverty reduction, and legitimize the state by giving various groups a sense of belonging among others (Ibrahim 2003; Kimenyi, 1998; Osaghae 2014; Thomas-Wooley and Keller, 1994). These are thematically considered in some details in what follows.

Federal traditional heritage The federal arrangement is best suited to the African situation because it has a rich historical link with many African pre-colonial political systems and administrations (Atanda 1973; Eisenstadt 1959; Lloyd 1965). Lloyd (1965) delineates African territories into three stages of political government, namely, the urban area, the minor units and the area of authority, which are different from one another in a way as not only to diffuse political power, but also to make people subordinate to several level and stages of administration. Also, Eisenstadt (1959) distinguishes between the *centralized monarchy*, exemplified by the Zulu, Ngoni, Swazi and Tswana, and the *federative monarchy*, exemplified by the Bemba, Ashanti, Pondo, Khoisa, and Yoruba. According to Eisenstadt (1959: 211), the difference between the two kinds of kingdoms lies in:

...the degree to which (a) the major groups regulate their own affairs in various spheres, and (b) the extent to which the major political offices are vested in various ascriptive groups or, conversely, the extent to which the political sphere is organised on a level different from that of local kin and economic sphere.

For instance, the old Oyo traditional empire-state was organised into federating town-governments. Each town, governed by a council of *Oloyes* (chiefs) headed by an *Oba* (a monarch), was a self-governing city-state and was territorially bifurcated into provincial villages also self-governed by a council of *Olori Ebi* (family heads) led by a *Baale* (village head). The towns were in turn linked together to form a loose federation with the capital city based in Oyo town under the headship of *Alaafin* (the supreme monarch) wrought through federalist principles of power sharing, segmental autonomy and accommodation of difference for purposes of common defence and economic consolidation (Atanda 1973; cf. Osaghae 2014). Worth of note also is the fact that the system of government was highly democratic with the decision of *Alaafin* subjected to the approval of the constituents and his reign prone to summary end, as he could be easily compelled to abdicate power for demonstrating dictatorial tendencies (Omotoso and Oladeji 2017).

But, colonialism condemned everything in Africa that was not exotic and depicted it as bad, with the African traditional mode of governance underpinned by religious beliefs and practices as the principal culprit, except where it served the extractive and domineering tendencies of the colonialists. However, despite the disruption and destruction of this system by the centralist colonial state, Africans that by nature detest domination and have continued to agitate for federalist principles, which many believe will guarantee their freedom and development under self-governing constituent or local governments. (cf. Osaghae 2014). Indeed, the federative monarchy as typified by the Yoruba traditional system of government, with its emphasis on decentralization and power sharing mechanisms or institutions, provides a model from which constitutional and political engineering in the post-conflict, post-transition African state can draw (Jinadu 2007).

Constraint on dictatorial tendencies As we have argued earlier, at the heart of the many inter-ethnic crisis and sub-nationalist agitations ravaging Africa is the colonially entrenched neopatriarchal rent-seeking centralist state, which is characterised by an executive-dominated central government with dominant roles in security, political and socioeconomic activities and development through majoritarian tyranny, fiscal centralisation and weak institutions of democracy, oversight and accountability (Osaghae 2014). In fact, the imposition of a centralist state and one-man rule is a form of violence on the psyche of African peoples (Olowu 1994). Federalism works to defuse this violence through the mechanisms of decentralisation and power sharing, which ensure democratic redistribution of power and resources downward from the central government to the constituent units and local governments, thus facilitating bottom-up democratisation, development and accountability in governance. To be sure, decentralization, especially devolution which ensures legislative and fiscal autonomy to sub-national units, is viewed as a policy of high priority and as an instrument for overcoming the indifference of government bureaucrats to satisfying the needs of the public, improving the responsiveness of governments to public concerns, increasing the quality of services provided, as well as people empowerment (Omotoso and Oladeji 2016).

Also, a properly structured and instituted power-sharing arrangement is capable of defusing the tendency for the dominant ethnic group or a coalition of ethnic groups to seize the state and dominate other minority groups, thus ensuring proportional

representation of all the ethnic communities in the state. That is, if federalism is taken not to be an end in itself but a means to an end, the end being amelioration or reduction of fears of domination or loss of identity through openness, fairness, equity, justice and full participatory rights for individuals and ethnic groups that constitute a political community, then federalism's power-sharing mechanism is optimally suited to achieve this, as it gives every group a sense of belonging and sustained belief in the state project (*Ibid*). But, the idea of power distribution or some sort of consociationalism has been subject of criticisms (Agbu 2004). For instance, it has been argued that power distribution is inequitable and obstructive of choice. It is further maintained that it is not an assurance for political stability, and that it is a procedure for power distribution at the elitist level, leaving the desires of the citizens at the bottom of the society unattended to (Akinola 1996).

But, as argued by Agbu (2004), we must shift from the reality to the ultimate. We must demonstrate the essential guts to formulate political systems that conform to the mandates and ethnological composition of the particular society. To this extent, power distribution still provides representation to ignored parts of the society at the strategic and highest levels of decision making. Indeed, the use of ethnic groups as the independent units for the national diffusion of political power from the central to local levels of government and for power division, especially at the federal level, can debatably be justified with the provisions of the *African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights*. Articles 20(1) and 22(1) of the charter recognize and provide, among other things, that:

All peoples shall have the right to existence. They shall have the unquestionable and inalienable right to self-determination. They shall freely determine their political status and shall pursue their economic and social development according to the policy they have freely chosen. It also stipulates that all peoples shall have the right to their economic, social and cultural development with due regard to their freedom and identity and in the equal enjoyment of the common heritage of mankind (African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights 1986).

The elements inherent in the above quotation address the supposed problems of democratic stability in multi-ethnic polities and have strengthened federal solutions in Nigeria and South Africa by helping to deconstruct the over-centralised and authoritarian foundations of the state (Osaghae 1999).

Defusing ownership and citizenship crisis Another advantage of the federal arrangement in Africa is its capacity to decimate the ownership and citizenship crisis bedevilling the state as a result of its colonial origin. Given the neo-patrimonial extractive tendency of the colonial and post-independence state in Africa, the state is thus assumed to be nobody's property and/or a no-man's-land that can and must be plundered for self and ethnic group aggrandizements (Omotoso and Oladeji 2017). The appropriateness of the federalist mechanisms articulated above come into bold relief here. To be sure, through decentralisation and power-sharing mechanisms, the diverse peoples and groups that find themselves in a state would be able to lay claim to

segments and socioeconomic, cultural and political spaces of it, which they can refer to as their own, regenerate their productive capacities, and hold the state managers accountable for equitable development (Osaghae 2014). That is, federalism provides for the promotion of a sense of belonging for individuals and groups and for equality of rights, access and opportunities, as well as recognition of the right to self-determination.

While federalism promotes a sense of ownership and belonging, federal scholars are divided on the desirability of creating ethnic federalism, which decentralises the state along ethnic lines because of the danger that this could freeze historical inequalities and aggravate the problems of discrimination and exclusion. For Instance, Elazar (1993) argues that a multi-ethnic federal state would be successful if its constituent units are not based on ethnic cleavages/lines. In fact, the preference is to have ethnically mixed sub-national units, which in practice will help to create inter-units mix and competition among political actors rather than seeing issues as purely ethnic competitions (Horowitz 2007). For instance in Nigeria, although the states serve as ethnic homelands, none is really homogeneous. States composed by ethnic minority groups, especially, are mixed, and this has worked to balance the centrifugal and centripetal forces at the level of the state which operate as little federations (Osaghae 2014). Also, it is our belief that citizenship contestations would reduce when considerations for indigeneship become less important for enjoyment of citizenship rights and privileges. This is high on the negotiation agenda of state deconstruction and reconstruction and its success lies in the extent to which the state is able to provide public and social goods and serve as an agent of distributive justice and equitable development (Omotoso and Oladeji 2017).

Assurance of efficient service delivery and human security The failure of the state in Africa is best exemplified by its inability to have meaningful impacts on the lives of the people. The state as agent of development, through several ‘Washington Consensus’ sanctioned neo-liberal market economic policies, sought to provide an effective framework for combating poverty and generating rapid economic growth. But it has turned the economy upside down and produced a tiny class of ‘mega billionaires’ who convert the state’s patrimony in core sectors of the economy to private wealth as rapacious entrepreneurs in control of the government and big-business for top government officials, thus exacerbating hopelessness and poverty, which the state has responsibility to curtail in the first place (Oladeji 2017). The relevant federal solutions here are directed at increasing citizen participation and oversight in the development process and include decentralisation, subsidiarity, local resource mobilisation and revenue generation, competition, complementarity and equity-promoting resource redistribution (Osaghae 2014). The South African model represents a typical case of provincial, municipal and local governments instituted from the outset as agents of social service delivery with adequate fiscal capacities. Under the system, people are involved in the design, execution and evaluation of development projects, including their impact assessments. Conversely, in Nigeria, long years of military rule robbed state and local governments of the capacity to undertake meaningful development interventions through gradual re-centralisation of resources in the federal government. However, since the return to democratic order in 1999, there have been sustained struggles to restore fiscal capacity to the states wrought through such articulations as restructuring, fiscal federalism, true federalism and resource control. This has even recently come to the front burner in Nigeria given the inability of most states to pay workers’ salaries.

However, the point about the involvement of sub-national governments in the development process is not only about effective and efficient service delivery; it is more about the impetus it creates for diversification, complementarity, and healthy economic and governance quality competition, and the responsibility it gives sub-national units for their own development, which are antithetical to over-centralised economies (Osaghae 2014). When sub-national governments play important roles in the development process, then the tension and conflicts often generated by resource curse variables and redistribution schemes of the national government are diffused and reduced. People have to be involved in the choices and decisions that determine their development; federal economic arrangements go a long way in facilitating this (*Ibid*).

Concluding remarks

The paper examined nationalism and nationalist agitations in Africa through the Nigerian trajectory. The paper noted that nationalism in Africa and among Africans had been through tortuous phases ranging from solidarity and sameness during the pre-colonial period, Pan-Africanist movements against socio-cultural and political domination of the European colonialists to the segregative and exclusivity of sub-nationalism that marked post-independence African experience. The paper noted that colonialism, which planted the seeds of discords among Africans, succeeded in dismantling pre-colonial spirit of unity among Africans and in its place built thick ethnic and national boundaries. These boundaries brought about the ethnicize citizenship, which divided most African states among those seen as indigenous to a particular place and their others referred to as settlers. Apart from this, the colonial state appropriated and centralised all the state's resources in the hand of a central government. Instead of reversing this trend, the post-independence African leaders, because of personal aggrandisements, hide under the guise of building a virile and united 'nation-state' to maintain the centralist state, mostly dominated by ethnic majoritarian rule. Thus, the post-independence state soon imploded under the weight of inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic conflicts since the ethnic group that controls the state controls much more. As a panacea to this impasse, the paper argued for a genuine federal model because it is not only in tandem with African traditional politico-administrative system, but it also constrains limitless political power, accommodate diversity, recognize and protect group and individual rights, provide the desired economic benefits through efficient service delivery, and legitimize the state by giving various groups a sense of belonging among others.

Open Access This article is distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license, and indicate if changes were made.

References

Adesoji AO, Alao A. Indigeneship and Citizenship in Nigeria: Myth and Reality. *The Journal of Pan African Studies*. 2009;2(9):151–65.

- Africana Age. African resistance to colonial rule. 2011. <http://exhibitions.nypl.org/africanaage/essay-resistance.html>. Accessed 23 May 2017.
- Agbu, O. Re-inventing federalism in post-transition Nigeria: problems and prospects, *Africa Development*, Vol. XXIX, No. 2. 2004.
- Ake C. *Political Economy of Africa*. London: Longman; 1981.
- Ake C. *The Nigeria State: Antinomies of a Peripheral Formation*. In: Ake C, editor. *Political Economy of Nigeria*. Lagos: Longman; 1985.
- Akinola AA. *Rotational Presidency*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited; 1996.
- Alavi H. The state in postcolonial societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh. In: Gough K, Sharma HP, editors. *Imperialism and revolution in South Asia*. New York: Monthly Review Press; 1973.
- Alemazung JA. Post-colonial colonialism: an analysis of international factors and actors marring African socio-economic and political development. *J Pan Afr Stud*. 2010;3:10.
- Andreasson S. Confronting the Settler Legacy: Indigenisation and Transformation in South Africa and Zimbabwe. *Polit Geogr*. 2010;29(8):424–33.
- Animashaun MA. State failure, crisis of governance and disengagement from the State in Africa. *Afr Dev*. 2009;XXXIV(3 & 4):47–63.
- Araoye A. Hegemonic agendas, intermesticity and conflicts in the post-colonial State. *Afr J Confl Resolut*. 2012;12(1):9–32.
- Atanda JA. *The New Oyo Empire*. Bristol: Western Printing Services; 1973.
- Awolowo O. *Path to Nigerian Freedom*. London: Faber and Faber; 1947.
- Ajayi K. From the demand for sovereign national conference to national dialogue. *Dilemma Nigerian State Stud Tribes Tribalsoc*. 2006;4(2):123–30.
- Bamisoye O. *Political parties and National Integration in Nigeria 1960–1983* in Nigeria the first 25 years. Ibadan: Heinemann Education; 1988.
- Campbell J. Nationalism, Ethnicity and Religion: Fundamental Conflicts in Tanzania. *Nat National*. 1999;5(1): 105–22.
- Clapham C. Rethinking African States. *Afr Secur Rev*. 2001;10(3):6–16.
- Coleman J. *Nigeria: background to nationalism*. Los Angeles: University of California Press; 1958.
- Diamond L. *Class, Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria*. New York: Syracuse University Press; 1988.
- Dersso SA. *Post-Colonial Nation-Building and Ethnic Diversity in Africa*. In: Wachira GM, editor. *Ethnicity, Human Rights and Constitutionalism in Africa*. Nairobi: The Kenyan Section of the International Commission of Jurists; 2008.
- Egwu, S. *Ethnicity and citizenship in Urban Nigeria: the Jos Case, 1960–2000*, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, Department of Political Science, University of Jos, Jos, Plateau State, Nigeria. 2004.
- Eisenstadt SN. Primitive political systems: a preliminary comparative analysis. *Am Anthropol*. 1959;61(2): 200–20.
- Ekeh P. Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement. *Comp Stud Soc Hist*. 1975;17(1):91–112.
- Ekeh PP. *Colonialism and Social Structure in Africa: An Inaugural Lecture*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press; 1983.
- Elaigwu JI. Ethnicity and the Federal Option in Africa. *Niger J Fed*. 1994;1(1). June.
- Elazar DJ. International and comparative federalism. *Publius*. 1993;26(2):190–95.
- Federal Character Commission. Establishment Act No 34. 1996. available at http://www.fccnigeria.org/FCC_Act.htm. Accessed 15 Jan 2016.
- Federal Republic of Nigeria. *The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria*. Lagos: Federal Government Press; 1999.
- Furnivall JS. *Colonial Policy and Practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 1948.
- Gellner E. *Nations and Nationalism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell; 1983.
- Gifford P, Louis WMR. *Decolonisation and African Independence: The Transfer of Power, 1960–1980*. New Haven: Yale University Press; 1988.
- Goheen M. Chiefs, sub-chiefs and local control: negotiations over land, struggles over meaning. *Afr J Int Afr Inst*. 1992;62(3):389–412.
- Graff DW. *The Nigerian State: political economy, state and political system in the postcolonial era*. London: James Currey; 1988.
- Guibernau M. *Nationalism: The Nation-State and Nationalism in the Twentieth Century*. Cambridge: Polity Press; 1996.
- Hagmann T, Peclard D, editors. *Negotiating Statehood: Dynamics of Power and Domination in Africa*. West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell; 2011.
- Hargreaves JD. *Decolonisation of Africa*. London: Longman; 1988.

- Herbst J. Let them Fail: State Failure in Theory and Practice. In: Rotberg RI, editor. *When States Fail: Causes and Consequences*. Princeton: Princeton University Press; 2004.
- Hoffman J, Graham P. *Introduction to Political Theory*. London: Pearson Longman; 2009.
- Horowitz, D. The many uses of federalism. *Drake Law Rev.* 2007;55:953–66.
- Hyden G. *Beyond Ujamaa in Tanzania: Underdevelopment and an Uncaptured Peasantry*. Berkeley: University of California Press; 1980.
- Ibrahim J. Ethno-Religious Limits to the Construction of Federalism in Africa: Yugoslavia and Nigeria Compared. In: Gana AT, Egwu SG, editors. *Federalism in Africa: Framing the National Question*. Trenton: Africa World Press; 2003.
- Ignatieff M. *Blood and Belonging: Journeys into the New Nationalism*. London: BBC Books and Chatto & Windus; 1993.
- Ikelegbe A. The Economy of Conflict in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria. *Nordic Journal of African Studies.* 2005;14(2):208–34.
- Isiksal H. Two Perspectives on the Relationship of Ethnicity to Nationalism: Comparing Gellner and Smith. *Turkish Journal of International Relations.* 2002;1(1):9–10.
- Jackson RH, Rosberg CG. Why Africa's weak States persist: the empirical and the juridical in statehood. *World Polit.* 1982;35(1):1–24.
- Jinadu LA. Explaining & managing ethnic conflict in Africa: towards a cultural theory of democracy. Claude Ake Memorial Papers No. 1, Department of Peace and Conflict Research Uppsala University & Nordic Africa Institute Uppsala. 2007.
- Kabir IM, Arowosegbe JO. Ethnicity, democracy and identity question in Nigeria, occasional papers. Most Ethno-Net Africa Publishers; 2002.
- Khapoya VB. *The African Experience: An Introduction*. 4th ed. eBook: Peachpit Press; 2012.
- Kellas J. *The Politics of Nationalism and Ethnicity*. Basingstoke: Macmillan; 1998.
- Kimenyi MS. Harmonizing ethnic claims in Africa: a proposal for ethnic-based federalism. *Cato J.* 1998;18(1):43–63.
- Kolawole D. *Readings in political science*. Ibadan: Dekaal Publishers; 1997.
- Lake DA, Rothchild D. Containing fear: the origins and management of ethnic conflict. *Int Sec.* 1996;21(2):41–75.
- Lentz C. Colonial Constructions and African Initiatives: The History of Ethnicity in Northwestern Ghana. *Ethnos.* 2000;65(1):107–36.
- Lloyd PC. The Political Structure of African Kingdoms: an Exploratory Model. In: Banton MC, editor. *Political Systems and the Distribution of Power*. London: Tavistock; 1965.
- Lustick IS. Hegemony and the Riddle of Nationalism: the Dialectics of Nationalism and Religion in the Middle East. *Logos.* 2002;1:18–44.
- Mamdani M. Political Identity, citizenship and ethnicity in Post-Colonial Africa. Key note address at Arusha Conference on “New Frontiers of Social Policy” – December 12–15. 2005.
- Mamdani M. Political violence and state formation in postcolonial Africa, International Development Centre Working Paper Series, Paper No. 1; 2007. pp. 1–24.
- Mamdani M. Beyond settler and native as political identities: overcoming the political legacy of colonialism. Being text of Paper presented at the African Union's First Conference of Intellectuals from Africa and Diaspora, Dakar. 2004.
- Mamdani M. Citizenship and African States. *Int Aff.* 2002;78(2):493–506.
- Mamdani M. *Citizen and Subject: Contemporary Africa and the Legacy of Late Capitalism*. Cape Town: David Philip; 1996.
- Mclean I, Mcmillan A. *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 2009.
- Miguel E. Tribe or Nation? Nation-building and Public Goods in Kenya versus Tanzania. *World Politics.* 2004;56(3):327–62.
- Mozaffar S. The Crisis of the State in Africa. *Bridgewater Rev.* 1987;5(1):14–17.
- Mutfwang. Cited in Kabir, I.M. and Arowosegbe, J.O. (2002), op cit; 1989.
- Myrdal G. *Asain drama: an inquiry into the poverty of nations*. *Aust Q.* 1968;40(4):118–21.
- Ndege OP. Colonialism and its Legacies in Kenya. Lecture delivered during Fulbright – Hays Group project abroad program: July 5th to August 6th 2009 at the Moi University Main Campus. 2009.
- Negedu I, Atabor A. Nationalism in Nigeria: A Case for Patriotic Citizenship. *Am Int J Contemp Res.* 2015;5(3):74–9.
- Nigeria Research Network. Indigeneity, belonging, & religious freedom in Nigeria: citizens' views from the street. *NRN Policy Brief No. 5.* 2014.
- Nolte J. Colonial Politics and Precolonial History: Everyday Knowledge, Genre, and Truth in a Yoruba Town. *Hist Afr.* 2013;40(1):125–64.

- Ochonu M. Colonialism within Colonialism: The Hausa-Caliphate Imaginary and the British Colonial Administration of the Nigerian Middle Belt. *Afr Stud Q.* 2008;10(2&3) Fall. Available at <http://africa.ufl.edu/asq/v10/v10i2a5.htm>
- Ogunrotifa AB. Methodological and structural problems for sovereign national conference in Nigeria. *Stud Soc Sci Hum.* 2014;1(1):1–18.
- Ojong VB, Sithole MP. The Substance of Identity: Territoriality, Culture, Roots and the Politics of Belonging. *Afr Anthropol.* 2007;14(1&2):89–98.
- Oladeji IO. Locality, indigeneity and citizenship struggle in Nigeria: the case of Jos North local Government area. An unpolished Dissertation submitted to the Department of Political Science, University of Ibadan. 2012.
- Oladeji IO. Contested localities: indigeneity and citizenship dilemmas in Nigeria. A PhD Seminar paper presented at the Department of Political Science, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti State, Nigeria. 2017.
- Olayode K. Self-determination, ethno-nationalism and conflicts in Nigeria. 2010. http://www.ifra-nigeria.org/IMG/pdf/Kehinde_OLAYODE_-_Self-Determination_Ethno-Nationalism_and_Conflicts_in_Nigeria.pdf. Accessed 13 Jul 2016.
- Olowu D. The nature and character of the African State. Paper Presented for AAPAM 15th Roundtable at Banjul, Gambia, 24–29 January, 1994.
- Olusanya GO. Constitutional developments in Nigeria, 1861–1960. In: Ikime O, editor. *Groundwork of Nigerian history*. Ibadan: Heinemann (Historical Society of Nigeria); 1980.
- Omotoso F, Oladeji IO. Grassroots' Governance and Crisis of Autonomy: 1999-2014. In: Omotoso F, Kehinde M, editors. *Democratic Governance and Political Participation in Nigeria*. Denver: Spears Media Press; 2016. p. 1999–2014.
- Omotoso, F. and Oladeji, I.O. Ethnofederal policies, indigeneity and citizenship Dilemmas in Nigeria's fourth republic. A paper presented at 14th Annual Conference of the Centre for the Study of Citizenship between March 30 – April 1, 2017 at Wayne State University in Detroit, Michigan, USA. 2017.
- Onuoha G. Contemporary Igbo Nationalism and the Crisis of Self-Determination in Nigeria. *Afr Stud.* 2012;71(1):29–51.
- Osaghae EE. A state of our own: second independence, federalism and the decolonisation of the State in Africa. The Emeka Anyaoku visiting chair in commonwealth studies inaugural lecture delivered at the Chancellor Hall, Senate House, University of London on 9th April 2014.
- Osaghae EE. Federalism and the management of diversity in Africa. *Identity Cult Polit.* 2004;5(1 & 2):162–78.
- Osaghae EE. Democracy and National cohesion in multiethnic African States: Nigeria and South Africa Compared. *Nat National.* 1999;5(2):259–80.
- Ofori M. Citizens and Subjects: Democratisation and Ethnic Identity in Rural Ghana, Crise Working Paper No. 59 October; 2008. pp. 1–37.
- Robinson AL. National versus ethnic identity in Africa: State, group, and individual level correlates of national identification. Paper prepared for Working Group in African Political Economy, University of California, Berkeley, December 11. 2009.
- Saul JS. The state in postcolonial societies: Tanzania. In: Miliband R, Saville J, editors. *The socialist register*. London: The Merlin Press; 1974.
- Selassie AG. Ethnic federalism: its promise and pitfalls for Africa. Faculty Publications. 2003. Paper 88. Available at <http://scholarship.law.wm.edu/facpubs/88>. Accessed on 28/11/2014.
- Shittu M. Nationalist movement's trends in contemporary Nigerian government and Politics. *International Journal of Development and Sustainability.* 2013;2(2):850–60.
- Smith A. *National Identity*. London: Penguin; 1991.
- Suberu R. State's Creation and the Political Economy of Nigeria Federalism. In: Amuwo K, et al., editors. *Federalism and Political restructuring in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books; 1998.
- Tamuno TN. Nigerian Federalism in Historical Perspective. In: Amuwo K, et al., editors. *Federalism and Political restructuring in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books; 1998.
- This Day (2017), Restructuring Nigeria: A Critical Analysis, June 11. <https://www.thisdaylive.com/index.php/2017/06/11/restructuring-nigeria-a-critical-analysis/>. Accessed 28 Jul 2017.
- Thomas-Woolley B, Keller EJ. Majority rule and minority rights: American federalism and African experience. *J Mod Afr Stud.* 1994;32(3):411–27.
- Ukiwo U. Creation of local government areas and ethnic conflicts in Nigeria: The case of Warri, Delta State. Conference paper presented at the CRISE conference on Federalism, Decentralisation and Conflict, University of Oxford, October 2006. 2007
- World History. Resistance to Colonialism.2015. <http://www.worldhistory.biz/sundries/40864-resistance-to-colonialism.html>. Accessed 23 May 2017.