

# KANT'S CATEGORICAL IMPERATIVE: A PANACEA FOR POLITICS OF ETHNICITY IN NIGERIA

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## Abstract

*Ethnicity is the root of all evil or problems that bedevil the Nigerian political system. Since independence, tribal loyalty has always replaced or overridden national interests. Nigerians think of their tribes first before the nation. Hence, Nigerian political leaders pursue ethnic goals and interests more than national goals and interests. Consequently, political parties were formed along ethnic lines and tribal considerations since pre-independent Nigeria to date. This has adversely affected the Nigerian political system so much that presently, Nigeria's democracy is dangerously threatened. This paper looks at the problems of ethnicity or tribalism in Nigeria political system with a view to finding the right and moral practical way to solve or allay the problems created by ethnicity in the Nigerian polity. The main objective of this paper is to show that the application of Immanuel Kant's Categorical Imperative, to the myriads of problems occasioned by ethnicism in the Nigerian political system, can bring about the much-desired peace, unity, national loyalty or patriotism, as well as detribalize the entire nation for a better and more progressive nation. This paper therefore, employs Kant's moral principle, the categorical imperative, both as explicatory and prescriptive tool to solving ethnic problems inherent in the Nigeria's political system.*

**Keywords:** Ethnicism, ethnicity, tribalism, categorical imperative, politics.

## Introduction

Morality is undoubtedly the bedrock and foundation of every human society on which man's growth and development depends. The knowledge of what is morally right and what is morally wrong helps to mold human conduct in such a way that we are enabled to live meaningfully, peacefully, and more progressively with one another in the society. Therefore, the lack of proper moral insight is the main explanation for the social and political upheavals and crisis that are prevalent in the Nigerian political system right from pre-independence Nigeria to date. This is so because moral living has been undermined and totally ignored, in our society. Unfortunately, this has had tragic effects or consequences such as ethnicity or tribalism, on the political life and welfare of Nigeria as a nation.

Ethnicity, therefore, has become a fundamental problem that requires and demands urgent attention and solution, if the Nigerian nation is to remain united, peaceful, and progressive. Ethnicity has created a big gulf or chasm in the polity of the Nigerian nation which till this moment seems unbridgeable. A typical Igbo man, for instance, sees himself first as an Igbo man from an Igbo tribe, before seeing himself as a Nigerian. He thinks in Igbo, dreams in and as Igbo; eats and drinks as an Igbo, plays as an Igbo, mourns and rejoices as an Igbo; all his being is centered on his being an Igbo person, nothing more, nothing less; his

tribe comes first, in everything he does. For this reason, Nigeria as a nation becomes secondary to him and can be related to, only when the need arises. The scenario described above is not peculiar with the Igbo man alone. Every tribe in Nigeria is guilty of the same offence – tribalism or ethnicity. Adewole (1987) had earlier pointed this out when he writes: “Almost anyone is first and foremost, an Hausa, an [Ibo], Yoruba or Gwari, Urobo or whatever, before being considered a Nigerian.”<sup>1</sup>

Thus, since everybody sees himself in the context of his tribe and is equally seen and considered or recognized by others as such, ethnic feelings of solidarity outweighed or overshadowed national patriotism. This very fact led to the founding of tribal associations or parties to consolidate the political, economic, as well as social fortunes or wellbeing of each ethnic group in Nigeria since independence. The result was that there is no Nigerian or no Nigeria as a nation so to speak. There was no one speaking, struggling, or fighting for Nigeria as an entity. Nigeria's existence was comparable to the function of a dictionary to some lazy students, which serves a purpose when needed, but as soon as the need is met, it is forgotten. Ethnicity or tribalism has dealt with the nation so much that no one cares if Nigeria is dragged in the mud or washed with oil. This led to indifference attitude of most Nigerians when they see or hear that some Nigerian citizens were caught involving themselves in crimes and other dirty businesses capable of denting or smearing the image of the nation. If Igbo men, no matter the number, are caught and imprisoned in the United States, for example, it is no body's business in Nigeria except of course the Igbos. That is why many Nigerians are being slaughtered in South Africa almost on daily bases, and the present government chose to say or do nothing because, most if not all those people being killed in South Africa are from the Southern Nigeria. Hence, nobody cares about the image of the nation, but once it concerns a particular tribe; then the tribe in question becomes alert and ready to deal with the issue.

Meanwhile, it is not a crime for one to identify with his or her ethnic group or tribe. It is also not a crime that one prefers his ethnic group or feels that his ethnic group is superior, better or more progressive than the other tribes are. Thus, ethnocentrism is not a crime; after all, from the level of the individual, through national to international level, ethnocentrism seems to have become a natural phenomenon. It is a natural feeling which arises from group affiliations and family hood. From time to time, we hear people challenge others due to their claim of superiority or the ability to do this or that or even for the common reason of being better placed than others. Does Japan or China accept that America is greater than they are? Does America see Germany as equals? Have the Pentecostals dropped the idea that they are better Christians than the Catholics? Do we (Nigerians) not see our country as the 'giant of Africa'? The problem is therefore, not with ethnocentrism, but with ethnicity or tribalism, whose negative input outweighs its positive outcome. Ethnicity encourages undue and unnecessary rivalries that eventually lead to hatred, which also ends in conflict. Ethnicity excludes others that happen to be outside the circle of the 'anointed' tribe. Although ethnicity may not be entirely evil, yet, from experience and by its very definition, it portends trouble for the unity and co-existence of other tribes in one nation. Ethnicity usually works only for the interests and goals of the ethnic group, and may even work against and towards the domination, subjugation, marginalization, and even annihilation of other tribes. It is for this very reason that we seek to examine, in this paper, the problems of ethnicity and proffer a lasting solution.

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morally wrong helps to mold human conduct in such a way that we are enabled to live meaningfully, peacefully, and more progressively with one another in the society. Therefore, the lack of proper moral insight is the main explanation for the social and political upheavals and crisis that are prevalent in the Nigerian political system right from pre-independence Nigeria to date. This is so since moral living has been undermined, and totally ignored in the Nigerian society these days. Unfortunately, this has had tragic effects or consequences on the political life and welfare of Nigeria as a nation. It is on this note that we turn to Kant's ethics for solution to Nigeria's political problems; as we believe that lack of morality is the root cause of ethnicity or tribalism in Nigeria.

### **Definition of Concepts**

Like many other terms or concepts in the social sciences, ethnicity or tribalism attracts various and different definitions. For this reason, there is need for a conceptual clarification or definition of the term ethnicity and ethnic group in order to forestall ambiguity and double meaning.

### **Ethnicity**

Nnoli (1978) describes ethnicity as a “social phenomenon associated with (communal) competition among members of different ethnic groups”.<sup>2</sup> However, Eteng (2004) is of the opinion that an ethnic group is not necessarily linguistically or culturally homogeneous, in so far as it often subsumes sub-cultural, linguistic, dialectic, occupational and class differences, depending on the prevailing level of socio-economic development and cultural differentiation.<sup>3</sup> Hence, Azeez (2004) sees ethnicity as a sense of people hood that has its foundation in the combined remembrance of past experience and common aspiration.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore evidenced, as Eteng observed, that ethnicity is a derivative of the ethnic group, which forms the basis of its articulation and activation. That is, it is the existence of the group that makes ethnicity possible. However, ethnicity does not exist outside the unit or group that embodies it. This is because ethnicity is looked upon as unreal, an artificial basis of identification and collective organization, conjured up by outsiders looking for an efficient instrument of political and economic control. It is therefore considered a strategic weapon chosen by a disadvantaged group as a new mode of seeking political redress, or by a privileged group in order to protect and secure its advantages. Cox (1970) on the other hand, sees ethnicity generally as “a socio-cultural entity, while inhabiting the same state, country or economic area, consider themselves biologically, culturally, linguistically, or socially distinct from each other and most often view their relation in actual or potentially antagonistic terms.”<sup>5</sup> For Chinua Achebe (1997), ethnicity is described as “discrimination against a citizen because of his/her place of birth.”<sup>6</sup> Achebe's definition is not quite clear because 'place of birth' here may mean either that one is an Igbo by origin but is born in the North of Nigeria, as is the case with many Nigerians, or that the person is an Igbo by birth and by ancestral and parental origin. In the Nigerian political setting, one may be denied political participation even when he is born in that particular region but from another region by origin. Presently, no Igbo man will be allowed to contest for the post of governorship in Lagos state (a Yoruba state) whether he is born in Lagos or not, and vice-versa. I think Achebe's definition is and should be understood as discrimination directed against a citizen because he happens to be from another tribe and not from that particular tribe in question.

In our context, ethnicity means relating to or having a common race or cultural tradition, seen from the point of view of race, rather than nationality.<sup>1</sup> In other words an ethnic group consists of a people who share the same culture, and of course, culture comprises the whole range of what the people do. For this reason, tribe or tribalism and ethnicity are interwoven, and in this paper, therefore, the two terms will be used to express the same idea.

Meanwhile, as Nnoli (2008) rightly noted, what is peculiar to ethnicity is that it involves demands by one group on another competing group(s).<sup>7</sup> These demands are usually against the wish, will or wellbeing of the other competing group(s). For instance, when the Hausa/Fulani tribe demands that the rulership or leadership of Nigeria should be given to them as their birthright; this demand, as you can see, is quite against the will or wellbeing of other tribes in Nigeria. Unfortunately, this has always been the case in Nigeria, and the root cause is nothing but ethnicity.

### **Ethnic Group**

An Ethnic group is understood as one which ascribes to itself the common blood or common ancestry. The group may be numerically or geographically big or small. But the common feature shared by all ethnic groups is the claim to a common ancestor whether imaginary or real. The psychological feeling that accompanies the awareness of this common origin engenders togetherness and solidarity among the members. It is not only the awareness of the biological relationship that makes members of an ethnic group to be united. A number of other factors are also significant. They include geographical location, culture, religion, tradition, morality, language etc. Hence, ethnic identity is defined as “a feeling of belonging and continuity in being (staying as the same person (s) through time), resulting from an act of self-ascription and/or ascription by others to a group of people who claim both common ancestry and a common cultural tradition”.<sup>8</sup>

By and for itself, ethnic group does not pose any threat to any entity; the real problem associated with ethnic group only starts when it comes into contact with other ethnic groups. As soon as this contact is established, the desire to dominate or the fear of being dominated by other ethnic groups becomes apparent. In most cases, this may lead to outright declaration of hostilities, resulting inexorably in loss of lives and properties as the case may be. Nigeria, for instance, was engulfed in almost three years civil war as a result of ethnic tension that was left unchecked for a long period of time. Although the war was fought, won and lost, yet, the ethnic suspicions and hatred arising from the war still remained unabated till date. Equally, the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 was also caused by ethnic rivalry between the Hutus and the Tutsis. More than 800,000 people lost their lives in the conflict.

### ***Overview of Nigerian Political History***

At first, there was nothing like Nigeria or the Federal Republic of Nigeria. What is today known and called Nigeria is the creation of the British colonizers, following the amalgamation of the North and the South by Sir Fredrick Lord Lugard, as one geographical, political entity under the protectorate of Her Majesty, the Queen of England, on January 1, 1914. Prior to this, over 250 ethnic groups had existed peacefully as autonomous entities independent of one another. The 1914 amalgamation brought into existence only three autonomous regions out of the 250 ethnic groups. The three regions, namely, the Northern Region, the Eastern Region, and the Western Region were created without considering the nature and composition of the ethnic groups that constitute these regions. Thus, each of these

autonomous regions was dominated by three major ethnic groups or tribes at the expense of the rest of over 250 ethnic groups. The Northern region was dominated by the Hausa/Fulanis in the North; the Eastern region was dominated by the Igbos in the East, while the Western region was dominated by the Yorubas in the West.

As would be expected, these three major ethnic groups ended up dominating the political landscape of the country from that period till date; a process that has pushed the minority ethnic groups into occupying, without any choice, the backbench position on the political platform of the nation called Nigeria. This arrangement was not made in the interests of the whole ethnic groups; in fact, it was lopsidedly arranged such that only the three major tribes would always be at the helm of affairs dictating who should get what. Before long, there were glaring disparities in the nation's political structure, creation of states and local governments; disparity in revenue allocation, disproportionate power sharing and imbalance in national development. At that time, and as it is still now, the national political equation was everything but equity. There was monopoly of power as well as marginalization by the three major tribes such that rather than fusion, there was diffusion instead. It was these diffusion and disparities in the Nigerian political system that led Chief Awolowo to remark sadly thus:

If the minority ethnic groups are backward or too weak, vis-à-vis the majority ethnic groups, their hostility may be dormant or suppressed. But as soon as they become enlightened, and politically conscious or courageous leadership emerges among them and where they are kept at the receiving end for too long, bitterness and hostility come into open and remain sustained with all possible venom and rancor until home rule is achieved.<sup>9</sup>

Awolowo was quite right; for not long afterwards, the ruling class and the Nigerian public witnessed civil unrest, arson, destruction of lives and properties, economic plunders and acts of vandalism by militant youths among some minority and even some majority ethnic groups who felt left-out, as a fight-back to forestall further economic exploitation of their areas as well as underdevelopment, marginalization and annihilation. That was the beginning of the on-going problems in the Nigeria's political life.

### ***Ethnicity in Nigeria's Political System***

In Nigeria today, tribalism has been elevated to dominate national discourse, controls how people think and talk, and determines what they oppose or support. It is promoted by the political elites, embraced by the young and the old, passed on from generation to generation, and even has a base in the constitution. This explains the assumption that conflicts in Nigeria is motivated by ethnic competition. The struggle for Nigeria's independence from Britain led to the founding of several nationalists' political parties. Unfortunately, these parties were formed along ethnic line and tribal considerations. They lacked national outlook, composition and ideology. In fact, none of these parties had the interests of the nation in its agenda. They were parties solely formed and structured for the purpose of securing and protecting the interests of the various tribes they represented. In the Eastern region, the representing party is the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC), led or headed by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, an Igbo. In the North, the party was the Northern People's

Congress (NPC), led by Sir Ahmadu Bello, a Hausa/Fulani and the Sardauna of Sokoto; while in the West, the party was the Action Group (AG), led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, A Yoruba and a descendant of Oduduwa.

In order to protect their interests, the minority ethnic groups or tribes founded their own political parties in line with their peculiar historical and political circumstances. Professor Eyo Ita, who was dethroned from the NCNC, formed the United National Independent Party (UNIP); while Joseph Tarka, from Tiv tribe, founded the United Middle Belt Congress (UMBC). The goal was to champion the interests of the minority ethnic groups in the larger society. Unfortunately, the leaders of these minority groups, together with their tribes, could not make serious significant impact on the overall political setup of the nation, as they were continuously marginalized by the three major ethnic groups. Not before long, these minority ethnic groups were reduced to mere ethnic pressure groups that could not rise above and beyond their immediate tribal boundaries.

Having set the table for injustice and inequality in the political arrangements of Nigeria's government, ethnic prejudices and stereotypes became the major distinguishing features of the Nigerian political system. Tribal loyalty replaced national interests and patriotism such that a Nigerian outside his state of origin is seen as a total stranger who has little or no business with the political affairs of his host state. In 1951, for instance, the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC) led by Dr. Azikiwe, an Igbo, won the Western Regional election. Zik was to become the leader of Government Business in the Western House of Assembly. Unfortunately, the Yoruba's did not allow this to happen. A day to his (Zik) being sworn in to office, some Yoruba NCNC members decamped to Action Group (AG) the dominant party in Yoruba land, and turned the tide against Zik and NCNC such that Action Group (AG) got the majority number needed to snatch the leadership of the Western House of Assembly from Zik. This tribal scheming and betrayal saw Chief Obafemi Awolowo become the leader of Government Business in the Western Regional House of Assembly instead of Zik, who for the Yorubas cannot and should not be allowed to occupy the highest political office in Yoruba land, being himself an Igbo man.

The questionable 1962, 1963 and 1973 national headcount or census conducted by the Northern People's Congress (NPC) were rejected by other majority ethnic groups on the ground that they were purely conducted and rigged for the purpose of giving the Northern region – the Hausa/Fulani, upper hand and dominance in the affairs of the nation. This was made clear when the North used the same questionable census as a basis to create more states and local governments to the North's advantage as a means to siphoning resources to the disadvantages of the other regions. In fact, the Northern military rulers who created states made sure that the North always had more states and local governments than the South. That was how the North alone got six states out of the twelve states created by the then Northern military ruler. Also, in 1980, when the Federation Account was introduced, the take home of each region in percentage of the total accrued revenue showed the same ethnic domination and monopolization towards the Northern region. The North got 54% of the whole accrued national revenue allocation; the East 22%, the West 18%; while the Midwest got only 6%. Unfortunately, this trend has been going on unchallenged till date such that at present, the North still has the highest number of states and local governments in the country. The implication is that, as unproductive as their region is, the Northern region still gets more than half the national revenue allocation to the detriment of the regions that produce these resources. For some time now, the Federal character enshrined in the Nigerian constitution is

no longer implemented or respected. All the sensitive and key Federal appointments have been hijacked by the Hausa/Fulani. If this trend continues the way it is now, it won't be a surprise if in the nearest future, no other tribe except the Hausa/Fulani would be allowed to get any Federal appointment or position in the country. This would surely bring disaster to the nation if nothing is done quickly to address the issue.

Over the years, there have been cases of ethnic violence resulting from allegiance to one's ethnic group and this has not worked well for the development of the country. As it were, whatever is done in Nigeria always has an ethnic undertone, be it politics, employment and provision of social amenities. Tribal affiliations are always very strong and visible. It is very common in Nigeria for a "Yoruba landlord" to turn down a would-be tenant simply because he is "omo Igbo" (Igbo man), and vice-versa. The problem the former president Goodluck Jonathan faced within and outside his party during his regime is still ethnicity otherwise known as zoning. Northern elites had times without number declared that it was the time for the north to govern the affairs of the country; and they worked hard at all costs, until they achieved their ethnic goal in the 2015 general election.

Also, the entry of the military after the military coup of January 15, 1966 which brought Major General Aguiyi Ironsi as the new Head of States was believed to be ethnically inspired. The July 1966 coup was generally perceived as an attempt to wipe out the Igbos resident in the Northern region. These two coups apparently led to the civil war in 1967 in which millions of Igbo (Biafrans) lost their lives, as well as unquantifiable amount of properties. The Second Republic also, was not free from ethnicity, though the military tried to douse the perceived ethnic tensions, but failed to suppress ethnic consciousness among the populace.

Another significant event which portrayed the ugly presence of ethnicity in Nigeria was the annulment of the 1993 general elections by General Ibrahim Babangida, which was widely believed to have been won by Chief Abiola, a Yoruba man. This annulment was widely interpreted as a calculated attempt to sideline or remove the Yoruba or the Southerners from the corridor of power in Nigeria by the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group. This was greeted by a widespread rage and civil unrest in the Southeast and led to the transfer of power to the interim government of Chief Ernest Shonekan, a Yoruba.

Furthermore, competition for scarce resources has been the recurrent common bases of ethnic consciousness and tensions in Nigeria, such as land, boundary, natural resources and also political power and control. In relation to political development, especially in areas like elections, formation of political parties, voting in elections and support for candidates, the impact of ethnicity looms large. Politicians seeking mass support found out that the only platform on which they can win the votes of the masses or appeal to the interest of the populace is to appeal to communal cries and sentiments rather than universalistic appeal and ideology, as happened between Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the leader of Action Group (AG) and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the leader of the National Council for Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC). The Action Group (AG) leaders for instance were quick to find out that they could best get Yoruba backing, only by focusing on anti Igbo images. The idea was that if the Yoruba people were not ready or comfortable with the domination by strangers (Igbos), then they should give their support to AG; and this was exactly what they did when Yoruba members of NCNC decamped to AG, thereby forestalling any chance of strangers (Igbos) taking the mantle of leadership in Yoruba land.

It is no longer news to hear that Nigeria is a failed state. A number of factors including but not limited to cultural and value decadence, fragile political structure, poor leadership and frequent ethno-religious crisis are proofs that Nigeria as a nation has failed; thanks to ethnicity or tribalism. Conflicts in Nigeria are most often linked with ethnicity and later robed in religion as an attempt to gain more supporters within and outside the region. No doubt, ethnicity in Nigeria has flourished because the Nigerian elites, who inherited the colonial state, refused and equally failed to conceptualize development in terms of transferring resources from primordial public to civil public, or as a holistic phenomenon having far-reaching effects to all. Nigerians had hoped and expected that the elites or the political actors then would have utilized that period positively to laying a solid foundation for a peaceful and united Nigeria. Sadly enough, this never happened; instead the so-called political actors or father founders considered it paramount to play tribal politics that not only stunted the growth of the nation, but also led the nation into a deep, dark tunnel without hope for light. Today, Nigeria is basically in a mess because golden opportunities that would have promoted national development were destroyed at the early days of her life as an independent nation.

A good number of politicians in the pre-independence and post-independent Nigeria did not see or consider Nigeria a reality, let alone, work for her unity. This showed itself clearly without doubt in their unfortunate utterances then. People like Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Yakubu Gowon, to mention a few, did not see any reason in championing the course of a united Nigeria. Ahmadu Bello, the Sarduna of Sokoto and a tribalist par excellence, did not hide his tribal preferences when he remarked that “Nigeria is so large and the people so varied that no person with any real intellectual integrity would be so foolish as to pretend that he speaks for the county as a whole.”<sup>10</sup> Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, the first prime minister, was not left out in this lack of vision and interests for a united Nigeria as he said “since the amalgamation of the southern and northern provinces in 1914, Nigeria has existed as one country on paper”<sup>11</sup> Chief Obafemi Awolowo, became quite popular then, for his ignoble statement regarding the unity and future of Nigeria, when he said that “Nigeria is a mere geographical expression”<sup>12</sup>. From the above, it is clear that the Yorubas, represented by their flag-bearer, Chief Awolowo, and the Hausa/Fulanis, represented by their fire-brand tribal war-lords, Sir Ahmadu Belo, and Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa were never in support of one Nigeria from the start. From their utterances, one would see that the unity of Nigeria was for them, an illusion or an utopian dream. Thus, without falling into the same problem we are trying to solve in this paper – ethnicity or tribalism, we could say the obvious that, the Yorubas and the Hausa/Fulanis are the architects of the political woes that befall Nigeria since independence. Their actions and utterances are clear indications that what they wanted was tribal or ethnic nationalism and not the unity of Nigeria as one nation. It is quite ironical that the same people who fought against the unity of Nigeria as a nation, are the one now fighting at all cost, to maintain the unity of Nigeria, even when it is obvious that the continued existence of Nigeria as one nation, without first addressing the issues of ethnicity, would never bring about the desired unity and peace.

### **The Impact of Ethnicity in Nigeria**

The impacts of ethnicity in the political life of Nigeria are quite numerous. The following are some of the impacts of ethnicity, as they affect the overall development and unity of Nigeria as a nation:

### 1. *Social Injustice*

Ethnicity or tribalism creates social injustice. Series of injustices have been perpetrated in Nigeria, as a result of our narrow-minded comprehension of the term ethnic or tribe. Because of their ethnic group or tribe, some Nigerians can never rise to or occupy the position of permanent secretaries in their various ministries; some can never become the inspector general of police, defense and agriculture ministers, as is the case in Nigeria presently. Besides, it has become a taboo to site certain industries or factories in certain places or regions. Even when they are put in place, a substandard firm would be assigned to handle it. Again, the issue of federal character, which was an attempt made to pacify the ethnic groups, and to ensure greater unity of the country, made matters worse for the development of Nigeria as a nation. Thus, instead of employing capable hands by merit, representation of all the states of the federation, regardless of merit was adopted till date. All these things have greatly dragged Nigeria's development further down the cliff.

### 2. *Promotion of Cultural Underdevelopment*

The existence of many tribes in Nigeria would have given Nigeria the opportunity and the capacity of producing varieties of cultures that will eventually add more beauty to the national life. Every tribe in Nigeria, alongside its languages and cultures, has different and certain positive qualities to offer for the integration and development of the nation. Openness to other cultures allows for growth and integration, but when people are too attached to their tribes as well as cultures to the exclusion of others, as is the case with Nigeria since independence, the cultures will hardly experience any growth. This is the reason why the various cultures in Nigeria have remained dormant and underdeveloped.

### 3. *Enthronement of Mediocrity*

Tribalism accepts mediocrity as excellence. Mediocrity occurs when tribe of origin is placed over and beyond merit and competence, such that the unqualified or inexperienced becomes the qualified and the experienced. In the awards of contracts and in employment and promotions, tribalism muddles the whole scenario thereby encouraging mediocrity. Stories abound of contractors campaigning and competing for a particular contract, only for the less qualified "contractor" to win the job because he is of the "right" tribe while the one with better qualifications is not and goes home a loser. This is no longer news in Nigeria and the nation is paying dearly for it, since as expected, the so-called contractor eventually makes a mockery of the whole contract and messes up the job. The same scenario plays itself up again in employments, as certificates no longer worth anything in Nigeria these days. You don't need to appear for interview or training, once you know somebody in a higher position, even when the job you applied for is not your area of specialization. That is why it never made news that late Bola Ige was appointed a minister to man a sensitive Power and Steel Ministry in Nigeria, despite the fact that his area of specialization is quite different from the job given to him. Even at present, a closer look at the ministerial and other governmental appointments would reveal several politicians who have no right, no qualification, no merit, no experience, no knowledge or idea of the job or position they are occupying in the government right now. So, since merit meant nothing any more, mediocrity now seats unchallenged on the throne of Nigeria's political realm, sustained by bad leadership, and occasioned by ethnicity or

tribalism.

#### 4. *Disunity and Disintegration*

Disunity comes in when people are attached to their tribes, and when ethnicity or tribalism is allowed to permeate the fabrics of a nation, the end-result is usually and always ugly experiences such as uneven distribution of available resources, denial of equal opportunities, double standard, born-to-rule mentality, and neglect of persons from other tribes. Obviously, some people would feel marginalized and threatened. When this happens, the marginalized group will seek to defend themselves probably by asserting their autonomy and work towards secession thereby tearing apart whatever it is that holds the country together. This is exactly what is happening in Nigeria presently - disintegration.

#### 5. *Inability to Fight Corruption*

There is an ugly tradition in Nigeria that forbids citizens from exposing or prosecuting fellow tribesmen for corrupt practices. Corrupt tendencies are exhibited and laws violated, yet such individuals invoke ethnic sentiment to get away from, or prevent prosecution. For example, recently, Ganduje, the governor of Kano State was caught red handed receiving bribe worth millions of naira, yet, not only did the presidency do nothing about it, but helped in securing his second tenure. Also, not quite long ago, a private jet belonging to the president of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) – Bishop Ayo Oritsajafor, was held in South Africa over possession of \$9.3 million allegedly meant for purchasing arms. Before the South African government could conclude investigation, his ethnic region and kinsmen were already in the media defending and exonerating him, and declaring war if anything happens to him. All these do not allow for justice, growth and development of the nation.

*Meanwhile, how do we address the issues of ethnicity or solve the problems created by ethnicity or tribalism in Nigeria?* Aware of the negative effects of ethnic rivalry in Nigeria some suggestions have been made on how to defuse it in order to make room for development and peaceful co-existence. *Several methods have been recommended in the past such as:*

1. To build a virile state, the ruling elites should encourage national discourse to enable the various groups' air their grievances and fears.
2. Removal of column showing ethnic backgrounds or state of origin in forms like bank account opening or loans forms, scholarship forms, employment forms, job application forms, school admission forms etc in a bid to unify Nigerians not using ethnic background as criteria for qualification.
3. Nigeria should discard the belief and notion of three (3) main ethnic groups officially recognized (Hausa, Igbo & Yoruba) in order to give the numerous ethnic groups identity.
4. Federal character commission should be scrapped and employment and appointment should be made on the basis of merit not ethnic background.
5. Constitutional amendment is needed to adequately address clauses that abrogate powers to ethnic or regional structures. For example, the constitutional provision (Section 147, subsection 3 of the 1999 constitution) mandates the appointment of at least a minister per state. This has unleashed mini tribal wars in many states.

There are still many other recommendations towards solving the problems created by ethnicity in Nigeria, unfortunately, none of these recommendations can bring lasting solution

to the myriads of problems created by ethnicity in the Nigerian political system. It is for this reason – lack of appropriate method or solution to Nigeria's political problems that we turn to Immanuel Kant's moral principle – the Categorical Imperative as the most logical and practical solution to Nigeria's ethnic problems inherent in her political system; as we believe that lack of morality is the root cause of ethnicity or tribalism in Nigeria.

### *Kant's Categorical Imperative*

Immanuel Kant's ethics rests on the argument that morality is the function of reason. For him, to be fully human is to be a rational being capable of exercising both reason and free will in making decisions and choosing actions. The Categorical Imperative, according to Kant, is an unconditional imperative which immediately commands a certain conduct without having as its condition, any other purpose to be attained by it.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the Categorical Imperative commands actions as good in themselves and not as means to other ends. Kant gave three different formulations of the Categorical Imperative. He formulates the first Categorical Imperative as follows: “Act as if the maxim of your action were to become through your will, a universal law of nature.”<sup>14</sup> Maxim for Kant, is the subjective principle of action. In the other words, maxim means a rule of action a man follows as part of his own policy of life, whatever rules of living other men may have. The first formulation of the Categorical Imperative means that, in formulating a principle of conduct, a rational being is constrained to postulate an ideal, and in postulating such an ideal, and himself as part of it, the agent sees himself in relation to other rational beings as one among many, of equal importance with them, deserving and giving respect on the basis of reason alone, and not on the basis of those empirical conditions which create distinctions between men.<sup>15</sup> The basic formulation of this imperative is the test of universalizability, which states that you must act so that the rule or principle guiding your action can be willed to be a universal law. That is, could I take this action in all similar circumstances without being logically inconsistent? For example, telling a lie violates this maxim because you could not logically will that people be free to lie whenever they wanted without rendering the concept of truth useless.

The second formulation of the Categorical Imperative is thus: “Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always and at the same time as an end and never simply as a means.”<sup>16</sup> What this means is that, a rational being is constrained by reason, not to use his fellow human beings simply or merely as means to achieve his own purposes; not to enslave, abuse or exploit them, but always to recognize that they contain within themselves the justification of their own existence, and a right to their autonomy. The second formulation of the Categorical Imperative forbids such things as murder, rape, theft, dishonesty, and fraud, etc. Consequently, a universal duty to respect the rights of others is imposed on us by this principle.

The third formulation is: “Always so to act that the will could at the same time regard itself as giving in its maxims universal laws.”<sup>17</sup> This third formulation is quite similar to the first formulation. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, we shall limit our discourse to the first and second formulations of the Categorical Imperative. Meanwhile, the first and second formulations demand from us the duty to help others and the duty to refrain from false promises. The Categorical Imperative requires practical judgment for its application in every situation. The rule of judgment is therefore, that in any action one wants to perform, ask

yourself whether, if the act you have in mind were to take place in accordance with a law of nature, of which you yourself were a part; you could regard it as possible through your will.<sup>18</sup>

For Kant, the Categorical Imperative is the fundamental principle that determines which possible principles can be objectively valid for the decision of our will. It is a law, which neither depends on our desires or feelings, nor prescribes any particular action. It rather imposes an abidingness to law for its own sake. Thus, it speaks about the conformity of one's action to the universal law. Therefore, for Kant, a morally good man is he who seeks to obey a law valid for all men and follow an objective standard not determined by his desires.

### **The Categorical Imperative as a Panacea for Ethnicity in Nigerian Political System**

As earlier noted in this paper, the root cause of ethnicity or tribalism is lack of proper moral insight. This is because the knowledge of what is morally right and what is morally wrong would help us to avoid evils such as those occasioned by ethnicity or tribalism. A morally good man would obey the moral law, and the moral law being universal in nature, gives no room for some people to deny others their rights or treat them simply or merely as means to their own ends. A look at Nigeria's political history would reveal the glaring truth of lack of morality which consequently paved way or gave birth to ethnicity. All the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria had one thing in common – lack of proper moral insight, which is why they not only monopolize, dominate, and marginalize the other minor ethnic groups, but also treat everything that concerned Nigeria on ethnic line or basis. That is why political positions, ministerial appointments, job placements as well as admission into various institutions in Nigeria is no longer by merit but according to the tribe one belongs to. The only explanation to all these, is that proper moral insight or morality is absence or lacking in the lives of the various ethnic groups and their leaders.

How then can the Categorical Imperative be a solution to the problems of ethnicity in Nigeria? The Categorical Imperative can be a solution to the problems of ethnicity in Nigeria if all Nigerians, irrespective of position, rank, tribe or religion, abide by the principles of the Categorical Imperative. In other words, the Categorical Imperative can bring lasting solution to the problems of ethnicity in the Nigerian political system if all our leaders, including the followers see themselves in relation to other rational beings (other Nigerians) as one among many, of equal importance with them, deserving and giving respect on the basis of reason alone, and not on the basis of those empirical conditions such as tribe or ethnic groups, which create distinctions and division between Nigerians. If the Hausa/Fulani for example, should ask themselves the question: would it be fair and acceptable to us, if other tribes monopolize and dominate federal appointments and other key positions, and treat us as we treat them? If they are sincere, they would know that it is not fair and they would neither be comfortable nor accept the situation. The same thing applies to the rest of the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria who have been playing Lords to the rest of the tribes. So if the principles of the first and second formulations of the Categorical Imperative are strictly obeyed and applied in the lives of every Nigerian, especially the leaders, then, we would be able to overcome the problems brought about by ethnicity as well as root out inordinate and negative ethnic feelings in the Nigerian political system.

Again, the principle of the second formulation of the Categorical Imperative is equally a practical and powerful tool towards the solution to ethnicity in Nigeria. If all Nigerians could refrain from treating others merely as means to their ends, as the second

formulation of the Categorical Imperative demands, then tribalism or ethnicity would have no place in the Nigerian political system. The Hausa/Fulanis have dominated and marginalized the rest of the tribes for quite a long time. In this regard, they have used the rest of the tribes in Nigeria, especially the oil producing states, merely as means to their tribal or regional ends. The North had before now, planned how they could continue to use the oil producing states and of course, the whole of Nigeria merely as means to their regional ends. They perfected this when they rigged and inflated the figures of the 1962, 1963 and 1973 National Census. Having inflated the figures to swell their population over and above every other region in Nigeria, they laid the foundation on which they could use other Nigerians merely as means to their own ends. This is because, until date, the North has the highest number of states and local governments in the country. Consequently, they have the greatest share of the accrued revenue allocation in the nation, at the expense of the oil producing states from where these revenues are generated. The North is not an oil producing state, yet they get the greatest share of Federal allocation which amounts to using the rest of Nigerian states merely as means to their ends. The other major ethnic groups have also used other tribes merely as means to their ends too. So, the solution to these problems is the adoption and application of the two formulations of the Categorical Imperative in the Nigeria's political system as well as other areas of national interests.

### Conclusion

Several solutions and/or recommendations have been made in the past towards the solution of ethnicity in Nigeria's political system, but they all fall short of bringing the desired result because they all lacked one important things; which is the fact that they all failed to recognize that Nigeria's problem is fundamentally a moral problem. Moral problems should be treated with practical or workable moral principle. This is why we recommend Kant's Categorical Imperative – a practical and workable moral principle, as a solution or panacea for the problems of ethnicity in Nigeria's political system. We believe that if Nigeria adopts and applies Kant's Categorical Imperative in all her endeavours, not only would we co-exist and live peacefully, but also have a united and progressive ONE NIGERIA, where the interests and welfare of all Nigerians, irrespective of tribe or religion would be sincerely and faithfully sought for and protected.

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