

NATIONALISM

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NATIONALISM

Introduction The topic, nationalism, obviously in a gathering such as this, is needless to say that it relates nationalism to Islam. And this is to say we see nationalism through the Muslim's perspectives. The choice of October 1st for this lecture means that the organizers want the topic to be discussed on what is called the "National Day", the day that what is called the Nigerian Nation is celebrating its 32years of "In-dependence". In this occasion we will have a chance to examine what nationalism is all about. Incidentally, for the past three weeks (in September 1992) I have been giving a pre-khutbah talk in the central Masjid (A.B.U Zaria) in Hausa language titled *Musulunci da yankasanci* meaning Islam and nationalism. (This lecture will, therefore, be more or less a summary of the sum total of these talks with due consideration to the differences in the audience).

The topic nationalism in itself is very wide. Doing justice to such a wide topic is beyond the scope of a lecture such as this. What I will try as much as possible to do is to first of all define the subject, then review some basic characteristics (of nationalism), its background and how it spread and show some of its weaknesses and perhaps some of the dangers of the concept and finally reach a conclusion by making comparison between nationalism and Islam. □□□□

The Meaning of Nationalism

By definition nationalism comes from the word nation, which comes from its Latin word *naita* or *naitas* (spelling mistake is from the transcribe) - meaning place of birth. That is to say when talking about nation one is talking about his homeland that is to say where he was born. Gradually, the word 'nation' came to be used as a concept in sociology and political science, but with a wider meaning. In politics, For example,, it denotes a people within a geographical area who share common history and culture. Sometimes it is regarded that a nation must not necessarily have to dwell in a particular geographical location but rather a nation refers to a people who have a common identity. An associated concept to nation is the state which refers to the territory or land that a nation may be linked to. A state, therefore, refers to a geographical area while nation refers to the people. For example,, Palestinians are a nation but without a state because their state has been usurped by the Jews with the subsequent creation of the illegal state of Israel. So Palestine remains a nation but not a state. Similarly members of a nation can migrate from their birthplace and live in different places. For example, the Jews themselves who, for many years before the foundation of Israel have been moving around the whole world, and still there are lots of Jews all over the world claiming Jewish nationality but not living in a Jewish State. However there is no nation without the feeling of attaching itself to a geographical location. When the Jews were roaming about in the world without a homeland, they were actually tracing their origin to a place which they after sometimes attacked and occupied and formed a state.

This two concepts, state and nation, became interwoven such that you hardly can refer to one without the other. We will consider this definition of a nation drawing many examples with Nigeria as a case study.

Nigeria is of course a state with geographical boundaries drawn on the map and imagined in the brain and some how also believed in the heart. Whether the people living within that geographical area called Nigeria can be considered as a nation is what perhaps we shall find out in the course of discussion about the meaning of the nation and its characteristics.

Nationalism is a strong urge, desire and identifying one's self with a nation. When somebody identifies one's self with a nation and feels he could devote all his life, even sacrificing his life and properties in the course of promoting that nation, then that act he is engaging in is what is called nationalism. Thus, nationalism is actually a sort of ideology or so to say a worldview. It is an idea holding a group of people emotionally and also running their own lives. A government of a nation may be operating what is called nationalism and the same concept may be the ideology or religion that is being

taught to the citizens. The activities of the media, electronic and print, as well as the educational system may also be all centred on stamping this idea of nationalism in the hearts of members of the nation-state.

The Origin of Nationalism

Where did this idea of nationalism originate? Was it naturally part of human beings or has it started somewhere? However some aspects of nationalism as an ideology could be considered as natural because it is a sort of instinct in human being. Here the word “patriotism” may be better word to use than nationalism but both look similar and in most cases are being confused, though they mean slightly two different things.

Patriotism can be considered to be love for one’s own country, town or village on account of his familiarity with that place. For example,, if you are born in a hot area, in a semi desert or even desert area with little or no rain but burning sun, growing up in such a geographical environment will make you preoccupied with cattle rearing which is the main job of people in that area and also hunting of desert animals. After long period of time living in this area you will become used to the area to the extent that when next you travel to a cold area where snow falls you will be inclined to automatically attack the area as it is by saying it is too harsh and extremely cold. You will say for instance, “I don’t want this area”; “home is better where there is warmth, a lot of sunshine and very beautiful people to speak with”; and so on.

The same story can be said of someone that is been born in a cold environment if he goes to a hot place, he will be inclined naturally to feel that cold area is better and the new area is hot and he cannot tolerate it. It is, therefore, a natural urge within man to love his own area and this is not only true for human beings but also true of animals. For example,, cats love their own house very much and become so much attached to it to the extent that even if they are taken away from it to a far place, when released they will find their way back to the same house. Cows also in villages graze around freely and still return home at the end, likewise goats.

There is a case of somebody who accepted Islam on the day of Khaibar, called Aswad ur Ra’i, who came back with goats from grazing (employed to rear goats for the people of Khaibar) and when he saw the Prophet at the gate of the city, he inquired what was happening. He was informed that it was the Prophet of Islam that came with the

message of Islam, and then became interested in Islam and embraced Islam. He asked the Prophet what he should do with the goats entrusted in his hands. The Prophet replied that “goats know the house of their owner, release them, they will go into the city and to their owner’s house”.

The love of one’s own homeland, hometown or village, his own house or been familiar with his own family or the love of his own family can be considered as natural in all human beings. This is reported in a *hadith* of the Prophet (S) of someone that migrated to Madina after the Prophet. The Prophet asked him “how did you leave Makkah?” He started to narrate how the atmosphere was beautiful as of the time he left Makkah, the eyes of the Prophet were seen to be changing and dropped some amount of tears for the love of Makkah. I don’t know whether this is a

hadith

, which says “

hubbul watan minal iman

” (the love of homeland is part of iman) because a lot of people say it does not look like any of the characteristics of

iman

because even non-believers share it with believers. Even animals have it. And for anything to be a characteristic of

iman

it must distinguishes a Muslim from a non-Muslim; a

Mu’umin

from a

non-mu’umin

but “

hubbul watan

” is for everybody, so how can it be a sign of

iman

if everybody has it? Somebody has said he does not believe that this is a

hadith

since it is natural; everybody has it.

But this sort of love can not be confused with the ideology of nationalism because ideology of nationalism builds upon this natural urge an entirely new ideology and worldview to which man should base his thinking. That is to say he views everything from the point of view of his own nation.

We might understand this better if we trace the origin of this idea. It all started in Europe during the last century of the Christian era when Christianity as an ideology

holding European people together died down as a living ideology and became what you might consider as a dead ideology. Christianity became unable to sustain human society and run it; it blocked all his avenues of thought; it lacked the ability to stimulate him to action. Christianity, even though it continued to exist, became a sort of memorial club just like all memorial clubs like schools' old boys or old girls associations engaging in activities such as conductance of meetings on scheduled times and dates, remembrances of dead fellows and so on. After such gatherings the members normally enjoy themselves and disperse only to meet again on another appointed day.

So Christianity more or less became like that and the Church services on Sundays became a memorial service to commemorate the death of Christianity about three hundred years ago. As if to say they gather and say to themselves "once upon a time there was a religion known as Christianity holding people together, stimulating them to action to the extent that it created a civilization but now it is no longer doing that so let us pray". Thus they commemorate Christianity and disperse. Furthermore, Christianity was not only dead to be found only in the annals of history but became a standing block to all spheres of human endeavours particularly scientific and educational. The Church would pronounce judgment on anybody who would do anything considered against the church or against the persons of those people running the Church.

When a scientist discovered the movement of the stars explaining issues regarding the moon, he was ordered to be put to death. So also was someone who suggested that there might be other worlds apart from the one we live in was sentenced to be put to death without a single drop of his blood meaning that he was supposed to be burnt alive, for saying there were so many planets.

Whereas in Islam everyday in our *salat* we say "Praise be to Allah the lord of the worlds" indicating that there exist a lot of planets but for saying so somebody was put to death. Now, it became clear that people had to revolt against the Church. I am not saying that the action of the Church has agreed with the message of Christ (upon whom is peace) because if it were to be so it would have been the same with Islamic faith, but it was something else that they discovered, or invented which they named Christianity.

Europe had to liberate itself from the clutches of the Church and having revolted against the church and invented the division between the state and the Church, it became also necessary to invent an ideology to sustain the society and move it into action. Hence the birth of nationalism, which became sort of fill-in-the-vacuum created by the death of Christianity. Instead of Christianity nation became the moving factor for

someone's thoughts and actions. Then the exponents of the idea of nationalism started to say that after all it was not the Church that was supposed to govern as after all this man, Christ, was a Palestinian Jew and not a European. The French would say "we French have the best culture that is better than that of the Palestinians Jews".

In Germany where there was this saying that Jews were hated most, those that wanted to maintain Christianity had to canvass by saying, "well after all Christ himself was a German" because they would not follow a Palestinian Jew as they considered the Arian blood superior to that of all.

We might say this idea started with the French revolution and spread all over Europe. I don't have enough time to give you much of history but in short after the death of Christianity as an ideology, the vacuum created was filled by the exponents of nationalism to extol their own nation, race and tribe above all others stressing that they were the greatest in the world and their own civilization was better than all other civilizations and their way of living the best and ideal for all human beings.

The Germans said similar story, so also the English, the Portuguese, and the Italian and so on all stressing the same claim. Thus, within no time each of these states had its own ideologues of the idea of its own nationalism and claiming superiority to all others.

Bases of Nationalism

Another basis of nationalism is territory and country. This may even be considered first of all before the people living in the territory. This great urge to show love and emotional feelings towards ones own place of birth and country (territory demarcated geographically either as a result of war or otherwise) makes the French to consider France as their basis for nationalism; Germans, Germany; Italians, Italy and so on. One will not only extol his own people but even his own geographical area by saying, For example,, that his climate is the best in the world, the agricultural products found there is the best in the world, and even the animals found there were the best found in the

world, likewise the grasses, the natural phenomena and features found within the geographical area such as rocks and so on. That may even be considered the beginning of civilization and the call for all human being to return back to its origin.

The third basis of nationalism is language. Apart from the territory where the people live, common languages spoken is a unifying attribute that brings them together and they would consider their language as the best in the whole world.

The fourth basis of nationalism is common history and culture as well as civilization. That is to say they would proclaim after all they all share the same history, either they were all born there or migrated at a point in time and moved to that place or had a long history of being under the same umbrella for many centuries. This makes them a nation sharing same history and culture. This will also become a basis upon which they make nationalistic urges and appeals.

Accompanying the history is the culture that is to say the habit of the people in form of dress, food, music, dances and so on. Also their arts and literature are extolled by their nationalists as being superior to others in the world. This was the case with France after colonizing some parts of Africa. They felt they should *Françoise* Africans as French people. So they invented the concept of assimilation where some western educated elites among the black skinned Africans were given the status of French men, dressing like French, drinking coffee and whiskey every morning like the French people do. Thus they felt they have “promoted” them to the status of French citizens. This idea of feeling that ours is the best way of life also moved the French to annex Algeria and made it part of France.

The fifth basis of nationalism is race. Race can be considered as an advanced form of tribe, after all one can say the whole of Europe is one race, but having French, German, British, Portuguese and so on which cannot be considered as races. After all what is a race? Race is a people sharing common ancestor; coming from one descendant (one man); or all of them originate from one powerful king who did this and that or they all originated from one tribe and expanded claiming common ancestry. The idea of considering one's own race to be superior to all others in fact moved them to be condemning other races. For example, the Greeks and the Romans, at the height of their civilizations called all others barbarians. The Greeks considered the world as containing the Greeks and the barbarians. Likewise the Romans at the height of their civilization divided the world into three, the Romans, their allies (second status) and the barbarians.

The sixth basis of nationalism is political and economic organization. They consider themselves having one political entity and practicing one political system as a basis of their nationality. The system and forms of these associations would be considered the best by the exponents of their form of nationalism. □

Characteristics of Nationalism

Now we will like to have a look at some basic characteristics of nationalism, which of course distinguishes it from other ideologies like Islam, communism, capitalism and so on. though, the last two isms are interwoven with nationalism as well, unlike Islam which we shall soon see.

Belief and defence for ones territory became widely accepted. You are expected as a citizen to usher your strong belief and commitment towards your own country considering it supreme above everything and its interest above every other thing, and its citizen's superior to all. Likewise you consider your own main concern to be your nation, and all others who do not belong to your nation are considered aliens, foreigners and of course also enemies. You should even consume your own local products and consider those coming from elsewhere to be something to be hated (opposed to your own), having an urge to hate anything foreign and love anything national.

Coupled with this is another characteristic: the revival of the tradition of the area. You have a strong urge to revive your ancient tradition and customs in the name of nationalism. For example, the Egyptians take pride in the Pharaohs. The same pharaoh who was condemned in the Quran is considered a hero in Egyptian nationalism. Likewise in the Iranian nationalism Islam is considered as alien religion and *Zoroastrian* religion national and something to be proud of. Nationalism gives rise to the urge to revive ancient tradition however bad it may be.

Coupled with this is another characteristic: the distortion of history. When you have the desire to extol your own nation and say it is above all other nations (of course obviously you are only telling lies as you very well know that your nation is not above all other nations and your civilization is not the best of all civilizations, likewise your

language is not the best, and your heroes are not the best of heroes) you will necessarily be inclined to tell more and more lies. Sometimes they are forced to distort history by saying actually man originated from their area. And that it was later that people dispersed to other places. Or they may claim that all other nations are the bastards of their nation who were expelled because they committed crimes and consequently went and form other nations from this origin of man. That might not be true but nationalisms always urge one to think he has to claim superiority of himself and the inferiority of others, and then he will of course be inclined to destruction.

Another characteristic is the respect of the emblem of the state, which one will have to respect (in a way like religion) like the national flag, national anthem, and coat of arm and so on. There is also the strong urge to respect and even worship these state emblems.

This obviously leads to another characteristic of nationalism, which is a single religion, where there are some sorts of rituals and national ceremonies, which are always observed, which distinct a nation from other nations.

Of course one has to say naturally because it is one of the bases of nationalism it becomes natural that one of the characteristics of nationalism is that you have one form of advanced tribalism.

In Nigerian context, this is known very well and it is considered as one of the ills of the Nigerian nation. The moment you mention the word “tribalism” one would say it is one of the ills to do away with. Of course nationalism is one form of advanced tribalism, Tribalism may be crude and raw form of nationalism, but nationalism is an advanced form of tribalism. There is always this urge for one to consider the criteria for judging what is good or bad to be ones own nation. In this case your co-national or compatriot is considered to be right even if he is wrong. And your compatriot is considered to be virtuous, righteous, and what ever he does is good and foreigners inconsiderate of their achievement are considered bad. One is supposed to support his co-national even if he is wrong or guilty; since he is part of you (your own nation) must be considered as right.

Even your own criminals, committing crimes out of your own nation are considered as your nationals, and therefore must not be imprisoned or punished in a foreign country.

While a person from a foreign country no matter his righteousness, virtues, intelligence even if he is a genius is considered as a bad man, an enemy and not wanted because he is a foreigner. You consider your tribe as good and all others bad; your nation good, and all others bad.

Another characteristic of nationalism is secularism. Secularism, of course, is not synonymous with nationalism but there can hardly be secularism without nationalism. The two concepts always go together. This is because religion comes as an obstacle on the way of nationalism. After all, the birth of nationalism in Europe was a reaction against Christianity. So nationalists either nationalized Christianity (that is to say they made Christianity part of their national culture) or they rejected Christianity all together. This was the case with two categorized people of Germany; some said it was a foreign religion while others said no Christ himself was a German, so that they could practice Christianity as their own culture. So in most cases they ended up nationalizing Christianity. Europeans to a large extent remained at least Christians in name and nationalists at the same time. What they did was to make sure that their brand of Christianity agreed with the principles of nationalism. Or to put it simply: they nationalized Christianity.

The English revolted against the Roman Church simply because it came from Rome and created their own national church, the Church of England (Anglican Church or Protestant Church), with an Archbishop of Canterbury as opposed to Church of Rome (Catholic) with a Pope. It is possible for a Christian nation to become secular because after all secularism is in itself a Christian concept which have been traced back to the Bible (whether true or not they justified it). They traced it to the saying of Jesus "give unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's." They interpreted it to mean a separation of the state and religion. For Caesar is the state and for God is the religion. But the fact that Christianity was nationalized and at the same time separated from the state gave birth to confusion of some sort. In England, For example, the king or queen of England is at the same time the head of the Church in England. The crown is, therefore, head of state and religion at the same time and yet the religion and state are separated! (I don't know how separated but the two are said to be separated here!)

It is possible to have secularism going along with Christianity because the nationalists in Europe had actually defined what Christianity should be instead of allowing Christianity to define itself. This cannot be possible with Islam, which has got all its needs explained in the Holy book.

A natural consequence of all the urges we have enumerated is the desire to colonize other people. This is because when you consider your own to be superior and all others inferior as in Greece you are Greek and other barbarians, there arises the need to *Greek nize*

the “barbarians” or at least give them a measure of Greek civilization so that you can accept them as second class Greeks. It is on this basis they justify colonizing Africa and Asia. For example,, the French considered their own way of life to be superior to all therefore all human being must be under the French domination. There arose the urge to move around and assimilate others. The Germans felt the same need as they considered the Arian blood superior to all and all others must be subservient to the Arians. So also the Jews as a nation (they indeed depicted the worst form of nationalism if one studies it). They consider Jews as chosen people of God and others are like asses (donkeys) to them created in order to serve the Jew! Because of this belief (that is to say feeling of superiority over others) they do not see anything wrong in all the atrocities being committed by them in Africa and Asia during the days of colonization, trying to establish their superiority over them.

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Case for and against Nationalism

I have spent much time defining and giving characteristics of nationalism; I may not have enough time to compare it with Islam. Nationalism as an ideology has a lot of shortcomings and dangers. One of it of course has to do with its logical thinking. That is its consideration of land (territory) and blood as criteria for what is good or bad. How on earth can God use this as a criterion? Some of the basis of this thinking I have enumerated earlier only exposes this (territory and blood as criteria for judging everything). The territory itself is not even precisely defined as such as it cannot be permanently defined because it keeps on changing. We are living witnesses to what used to be the Soviet Union that no longer exists today. Two years ago the map of the world reflected a nation, a large one for that matter, known and called the USSR. Now the map has changed as the USSR was dissolved and instead we now have the Russian Federation and a number of Balkan and South-East Asian nations. So also Yugoslavia is now broken into six nations (Croatia, Serbia, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Macedonia et al).

Therefore, the territory cannot be used as a foundation for an ideology since it goes on changing. Sometimes what may be part of a country today may not be tomorrow or what is not today may become part of the country tomorrow. In which case when new people are being brought in they find it very difficult to adjust into the new nation. Likewise one of the reason why nationalism was preferred to religion or any other thing was the fact that, they thought nationalism will bring in people living within a

geographical area if they identify themselves with their own nation, they will forget all other differences like religious, linguistic and cultural differences.

However, it has always been true of all the nations that they have never solved the problem of the so-called minority. The minorities in these nations end up being considered as second-class citizens of the nation, with their grievances well documented. Nigeria is a typical example, this can be read in the daily newspapers. There is, for instance, this question that “must the presidency be the birth right of some people” (they are right in this case if truly you are one nation, you shouldn’t monopolize presidency since all nationals are one and equal. Are some people more equal than others?). Instead of unifying people it ended up disuniting and creating hatred among members of the same nation. There exist small packages of other nations raising up as the case of Zangon Katab in Nigeria, where the Katabs consider themselves a nation within a larger nation. In fact one of the staunch Katab nationalists refused to speak in Hausa language while testifying in a panel because of the belief of his smaller nation. In short nationalism always creates itself packages of other nations within it. Thus there will be counter nationalists within a nation and some small packages of nationalists also creating their own brand of nationalism with the same view that is being preached for the nation will also be preached to the sub nation.

As a result there will always be conflict within it, at the end there wouldn’t be unity within a nation. Even within one language there exist different dialects, and if you have strong urge to say, your own language is best, some would say (even within the same language) that their own dialect is the original and then you end up having conflict. Similarly, when you say culture, some can say the origin of the culture in this country of ours, others will say particularly in our own state, therefore you may end up having problems and conflict within the nation.

This is true because nationalism lacks objectives. People found themselves wondering, without anything to sustain their society, and man being what he is has to be sustained with an ideology so a baseless ideology was founded to at least sustain them, but it ended in defeating itself.

Another argument for nationalism is that it moves people into action. That is to say if people are urged to promote their own nation above others they will work hard and produce more. For example, farmers will work hard in order to feed the nation; engineers will work hard in the construction industry and so on. You may be asked is it always true? If it is true for a whole nation then it will also be true for a sub-nation.

When you are developing an area and making it very beautiful with roads, electricity and so on some will, of course, say even though it is within or a part of the nation, why is my village neglected? Then you will begin to have sub-citizenship and sub-nationalism. Actually it hardly moves people to action. Nigeria is a typical example on this matter.

Some of the dangers of nationalism also are ego-centrism, superiority complex, tribal prejudice and fanaticism. Ego-centrism means making yourself the focus of everything good and others the focus of everything bad. Superiority complex makes you consider yourself superior to all others. You automatically become fanatical not only as a nationalist but also as a sub-nationalist or neo-nationalist promoting nations within a nation (which is the worst form of fanaticism). Likewise, it narrows mental horizon, that is to say making man to narrow himself to one area as if to say the whole world should be narrowed into one pocket while all other parts are ignored. All outsiders are considered aliens, foreigners and sometimes even enemies.□

Is Nigeria a Nation?

Let me ask some questions with regards to the claim of Nigeria being a nation. Is Nigeria really a nation? Are Nigerians members of one nation? Is there anything in the hearts of Nigerians, which is burning within their hearts with a strong feeling and commitment in their own hearts that they are Nigerians? Does Nigeria have a common territory (geographical area)? Yes! Created by whom? Of course by the enemies of Nigeria, for their own good and for the bad of the indigenes. It was created against the wish of the people in favour of others. Not minding who demarcated Nigeria with a line in Berlin. Hasn't it changed the shape in such a way that it excluded people who naturally should have been part of it and included people who have been some part of other areas? For example, if it is common history that is considered as one of the basis that we share, have not the people living in this part of Nigeria at one time shared common history with the people in what is called Niger today?

Haven't the people of south western Nigeria shared same common history with people of southern Benin republic? Or haven't the people of Adamawa, Taraba and Borno shared common history with the people of northern Cameroon? This is to say the territories were artificially demarcated and therefore can never serve as a foundation of a nation in the Nigerian case.

However this can be valid in Europe because territories were demarcated along the lines of language differences, cultural affiliations and similar barriers. Thus if there is strong instinct or urge of nationalism in a French man, there is every reason for that. But I don't know how similar urge can be stimulated and kept in the heart and mind of somebody who is called a Nigerian.

Using language as basic characteristics of a nation, one can ask, does Nigeria have a common language? Then how comes a nation called Nigeria was formed? However they gave Nigeria a common language, that is to say English. Can Nigerians say English is their national language and be proud of it? And what is more, are Nigerians English people? Because there is every reason for an Englishman to be proud of English as his national language, but for us it serves as a second language, however much you speak it the English man would shake his head and smile... you can tell the rest of the story!

Since common language is a common basis of a nation, would you say that it is also the basis of the Nigerian nation? Would Nigerian people have that strong urge because they have a common language? If the answer is yes, it is just fantasy, fallacy, hypocrisy and self-deception because the force of a gun has imposed it, and I don't think you will be proud of it.

What about history? One of the arguments for a nation is that they share a common history, what is common to Nigeria as common history? Was it not that Nigeria was so unfortunate to have been colonized by the British? That is the only thing we share together, being colonized at one at the same time and by the same colonialists. They formed southern and northern protectorates, only to be amalgamated in 1914. I don't know what and who they were protecting; certainly not the people but their own interests. If they protected the people, the British protected the people against the French and it doesn't matter to you and me whether the invader is a Frenchman or an Englishman. In fact we see them as one and the same thing.

So the only thing Nigerians share as a common history is the misfortune of being colonized and ruled by the British at one and the same time with the queen of England as their monarch, ruled from Britain and latter been given the so called "independence" which I would rather call "in dependence" that is to say being in dependence for over 32 years now.

All nations share common history that make them proud of. It is something that all nationalists are always proud of. But I don't think Nigeria has that common history to be proud of. The only common thing upheld by the Nigerian nationalists is Lord Lugard who amalgamated Nigeria and Lugard Hall where laws were made for Nigerians (or rather against them) not minding how many people he (Mr Fredrick Lugard) has killed or how much wealth he has stolen.

What about the common culture serving as a basis for the nation? Just like the language that is so many (in a single state there can be up to as much as 100 languages), Nigeria has a number of different cultures. Language, therefore, has never served as a rallying point for its unity. So also is the case with culture. What normally happens is the normal national rituals in which they always invite people only to be entertained with cultural dances, and what is considered as a Nigerian culture will only be a culture of sub-nations within Nigeria. Call any musician to do the Nigerian music; he will end up doing the music of his own area and therefore not representing people from different cultural backgrounds.

What of civilization? Is there anything, which can be considered to be the Nigerian civilization? Of course when you go beyond the colonial time and take pride in former civilization that existed before Nigeria, definitely you are only talking about a different nation entirely, not this very one. Once you say "Danfodio" you are not talking of Nigeria because Danfodio is not a hero of Nigeria, as Danfodio came into being 100 years before the foundation of Nigeria.

So there was a different nation established which was destroyed and replaced by Nigeria. Once you mention Danfodio, you will find a lot of people who will exclude themselves from identifying with Danfodio. And in fact during the regime of Shagari there was a paper in the south-eastern part of Nigeria (I happen to be imprisoned in Enugu then) which attacked the personality of Danfodio with worst abuses you can think of (in the name of sub-nationalism). That is to say once you talk about Danfodio some (Nigerians) will not be happy because they do not have a feeling of belonging as they are not a party to it, despite the fact that people in the present day Niger, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Ghana and so on will emotionally identify themselves with Danfodio, whilst they are part of different nations today, not Nigeria.

In other words there is hardly any relic of history before the formation of Nigeria that is accepted by all Nigerians. Edifice, artefacts and so on are all considered to be coming from certain group of people that are not shared by all Nigerians. If there is anything

that has been considered as Nigerian, it might be things like kick-backs, corruption, 419 (obtaining through false pretence or breach of trust) which might be considered as civilization of Nigeria! Even foreigners were corrupted by Nigerian officials. For example, a Nigerian official can say (to a feigner) “my government wants a certain good to be produced for the country. How much will it cost per one for a total of 1 million units?” If, for instance, one unit costs \$10 the total will be \$10,000,000. The official will at the end of the day request for the production of cheaper one at that same cost with some percentage of the differences lodged into his personal account. In this instance a quality of five million dollars will be made for the ten million while the difference will be shared between him and the manufactures.

What about race? Are we one race? If we are by the colour of our skins by being blacks are the people of Niger, Benin, and Cameroon and so on not blacks also? If we narrow the horizon, can Nigerians say they descended from the same man, or that their ancestors came from east, south, north, Atlantic and so on? The answer is just no! There is just nothing that can be called Nigerian race. That is to say it doesn't exist and there is just no way you can create it. Thus you can't be proud of having a Nigerian race. Others can be proud of their races and form the basis of their nationalism on their race but Nigerians cannot.

Nigerians can claims to have a political culture. But when we look at it closely, is there anything that you can call Nigerian political culture? When the British came they didn't give Nigerians their own type of polity, but instead they created a different political system which they felt suited the people they considered “natives”. In Nigeria there was indirect rule in the north and direct rule in the south. They incorporated the sharia which is the legal system they found in system in the north and incorporated customary laws in the legal system of the south. Thus there was nothing like political culture of Nigeria, and this is one of the reasons why when about fifty minus one “wise” men (they were fifty initially but one of them declined latter) invited to write a constitution for Nigeria, they simply went and copy (carbon-copy) American constitution and called it the new Nigerian constitution!□□□□

Islam and Nationalism

I have for so long discussed nationalism as it is, without making reference to Islam. To discuss Islam and nationalism, will be an entire topic of its own, but I may go briefly through some bases and characteristics of nationalism and compare them with Islam. Islam like nationalism is also an ideology, having its basis in the belief in the almighty

Allah (SWT) and the message He Has sent through the Messenger of Allah, Muhammad (S). Unlike nationalism, however, the two have entirely different basis. Of all the bases of nationalism Islam shares almost nothing in common with it. Nationalism bases itself on land and blood, Islam destroys the idea of land and blood. Islam says of land, “someone created the whole of the earth and that someone who created it is the owner of the earth, and it is He, who sent this message that is to say Islam, and this message is directed to the people who live on this earth”. The whole earth can be considered as one single territory. Allah (AWT) said in the Qur’an “huwal lazi ja’ala lakumul arda zhalulan fam shuu fi manakibiha wa kulu min rizqih”. From the Islamic point of view the earth belongs to Allah not the people, or do you think when Allah created the earth He said “this area is Nigeria, so protect it?”

He created the whole earth without any demarcations and placed man on it. He also sent a messenger with a message for the people living on the earth. As he said “if it were to be the angels living comfortably on the earth we would have sent an angel to be a messenger among them”, but it is human beings, so human beings were sent to human beings, then all the human beings living on the earth are considered to be one nation.

The Prophet of Islam was quoted to have cautioned somebody who was proud of his language, Arabic, and he said to him “*the language of Arabic is neither of your father nor your mother*” — meaning neither the language of Adam nor Eve, and all of you are children of Adam and Eve.

The idea of narrowing man to his own narrow territory actually destroys him. Islam views the whole earth as one country, created by Allah and man is being placed on it.

Narrowing people to a particular blood is also negated by Islam, in the sense that all human beings are seen to be members of one race. If the argument of racialists and tribalists is that they descended from one person, why not use wider component and say all humans share common father, Adam? □ □

Tribalism is a narrow form of racism, and it is from tribalism you move to racisms. As you move higher the genealogy you will find out that you came from one root. That is to say if you are members of a tribe that descended from a big king and your race and others share bigger ancestors, as you go ahead if you are actually a racialist, at the end,

you end up being descendants of one man. So why not see the universality of all human races and say that you are all members of one nation based on blood? On blood basis Islam takes us as one race, and there is little or no time for me to be quoting Quran and *ahadith*

to stress my point. It suffices to say if it is blood, then all of us are said to be one community, if it is territory, the whole earth is said to be one country.

What about language? Language can never be a foundation of a nation because one man can speak different languages. And language does not serve as a barrier. The Arabs of the *jahiliyya* days consider themselves people with a language and all others “*ajam*

” meaning dumb, that is to say others cannot speak, only an Arab man that can speak.

But here is the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) saying “

there is no difference between an Arab and a non Arab; there is no superiority of an Arab over a non-Arab, or a non-Arab over an Arab; and all of you are from Adam and Adam is from a dust

”

Can culture be universal? Human beings have so many cultures, and therefore it is not possible to have a universal culture. Islam considers culture to be a foundation of peoples’ identity, because the message of Islam is universal, for every culture and race, based on believe and conviction.

When you consider nationalism being compared with a religion, you will find it actually as a sort of religion in the sense that it has an object of worship, that is to say the state or country that is idolized, and has its prophets in the form of national heroes. It also has its book of guidance in form of constitution, and even its jurisprudence, fiqh, and mazhab, but these are limited to a narrow territory and blood group. Here the object of worship is Allah (SWT) who created the earth and man and placed man to live on it, and the national heroes of Islam are the Messenger sent by Allah and those who believed in him and worked for the same message. Based on believe there is *Darul kufur* and *Darul Islam*

, if you surely need to divide a territory, then that is the criteria for its division. And if you want to divide human beings they are either Muslims or kuffar.

Are you a Muslim by birth? No! You are a Muslim by conviction. People of all tribes, cultures, and countries can accept Islam because it is a universal message and a living ideology not a dead one. It can still stir man to action. One might say what you have

said of all races seems to be what is true of Islam, like some of the weakness you have said. For example, it breeds fanaticism, some people are born Muslims, there are barriers set up between Muslims and non-Muslims; there is Islamic culture and history and so on. We can say agreed, but the fact remains that this culture is not confined to a geographical location or a people. It is open unlike nationalism which is close. Anybody outside the boundaries of a state cannot enter it and if he does he is considered alien, foreigner, and sometimes even enemy. Is Islam like that? It is open to all races, tribes and cultures and can cut across the so-called national boundaries.

And that is why nationalism sees Islam as a threat and the nationalists made Islam their main target of attack. I don't have to expantiate on this due to lack of time. But I have discussed at length in the Pre-khutab in the Friday mosque, where actually it became clear that when Islam came at the time of the Prophet, it were the nationalists who attacked it. The main threat to Islam at that time was nationalism, and when nationalists were established in the Muslim countries (some thing which I have not got time to speak here also, that is to say how nationalism was brought into Islam, but there in the *masjid* last Friday I have spoken of how nationalism was imported into the Muslim nation).

When nationalism was imported into the Muslim nation and became established it considered Islam also the main threat, and even now, the heroes of the Nigerian nation and those that run the Nigerian nation considers Islam as their number one enemy. They consider Islam as number one enemy for the continuous existence of Nigeria as a state and for the continuation of the system that runs it. That is why always their attack is on Islam. Sometimes they just say religion, religion, but we know whom they are speaking of. Certainly Christianity agrees with nationalism and secularism. They have in fact nationalized Christianity in Nigeria. Typical example is the national funeral conducted some two weeks ago (in Abuja after the death on plane crush of a number of army officers at Lagos). It was nothing short of Christian funeral- similar to wake keeping and other rites.

I will have to hurry up and make conclusions, not because I feel I have treated the topic very well but, because some how I will have to stop. Though, if you are interested, some of the issues I have raised in the central masjid in the last three Fridays where I have discussed this same topic, nationalism, there I have given details of some areas discussed here.

The question to raise here is since these two ideologies (that is to say Islam and

nationalism if you want to call them so) are at variance with one another can a Muslim be a nationalist at the same time? They are actually two opposing ideologies. For a Muslim to be a nationalist at one and the same time is similar to entering two ships that are travelling in different directions; travelling in both at one at the same time! Is it possible? Anybody that says he can combine the two is actually deceiving himself. If you combine Islam and nationalism, then one of the two has to take place. It is either you are a nationalist or a Muslim. And we can examine which one are you. If you are a Muslim and a nationalist, then you are combining two incompatible ideologies!

These ideologies are two living ideologies, so you have to choose one, in order to make one alive. If we find out that your urge, desire and commitment is to the nation and building the nation and you can sacrifice your life and properties for the nation, then you are a nationalist. Your Islamic ideology has died down, and you can only go to the mosque to commemorate its death. But if you have the urge to give your life and properties for the sake of Islam and Islamic unity and Islamic nation then you are not a nationalist. These two are not compatible, if you try to balance, you will end up being a hypocrite.

Thus most of nationalists in Nigeria are nothing but hypocrites. In fact all of them are hypocrites to either the nation or Islam, or both. And in fact those that try to do some balance end up becoming hypocritically Nigerian nationalists. They are hypocrites to the Nigerian nation because when they come here they say things like we Nigerians; Nigerians must have to endure; thank you for the sacrifice; this SAP (Structural Adjustment Policy of the IMF imposed by the Babangida regime) must have to continue and you must have to be ready to sacrifice more. But you will see the announcer with fat cheeks, and living comfortably but asking you to suffer! Is he not a hypocrite to the country?

And when he says we Nigerians he still have some feelings that he is a Muslim, and still making comments like Nigerians should regard themselves as one in-respective of their religion, though those that even say these words, still see Nigerians as this or that, not as Nigerians, ending up being a hypocrite to your religion and your nation. Whereas if you are to be sincere what you ought to do is choose one and denounce the other. You can choose the Nigerian nation and denounce Islam, change your name and don't go to our mosque. When you call for sacrifice for the nation, you should sacrifice more, because if suffering should hit the masses it should also hit you. Or you can say you are a Muslim, then the nation will mean nothing to you, and you can call towards the establishment of the Islamic system of life, seeing all Muslims as your brothers and the non-Muslim should be invited to Islam, then truly you are a Muslim.

In short one has to make a choice between the two, if one wants to be sincere to one of them or else he turns out to be hypocrite to both. And I think majority of Nigerians prefer to be hypocrites, and this is why the nation has never been truly a nation because those who run it are hypocrites to their nation.

We on our part see that we can't join this hypocrisy. Therefore we come out clearly and say we are Muslims and we don't care if Nigeria goes to hell! If Islam shall be established at the expense of dissolution of Nigeria, let it be dissolved! Because Allah has not created us and said "thou shall keep my Nigeria". If anybody has given that commandment, it is the British who created and are the beneficiaries of Nigeria. As long as Nigeria survives, it is surviving in the interest of those who created it (the former colonialists now neo-colonialists imperialists or neo-imperialists).

One of those who lead Nigeria, in fact it is Obasanjo, wrote and I quote "the British created Nigeria and certainly she has an interest in seeing it being continued". As long as Nigeria exists, it is for the good of those that created it. And Allah (SWT) created me and I am here to live up to the expectation of my Lord and not up to the expectation of the British crown or the white house. I must have to live as a Muslim. Those who think they can combine the two are actually deceiving themselves and I would like to end up by warning them!

Be ware of Islamic Nationalism

We should be very careful also less we create what is called Islamic nationalism. There is the tendency to have such, because nationalism like I said earlier on is a sort of natural urge, where you have love towards your own area, your own people and country, even if it is your home town. And those who created Nigeria and placed those to run it on their behalf know this very well. Thus, they always employ the idea of divide and rule. They can, for example, say if you don't have an urge for Nigeria as a nation let us give you the urge for a state or region within it. If you can't have such urge for a state, let us give you the urge for local government. If not, the urge of being a Hausa man, if you don't have the urge let us tell that man he is Kataf, and only to descend at you, we will give him gun to do so.

Islamic nationalism is another evil just like nationalism generally; whereby the Muslims will choose to call for the territory (we see them as a territorial group and also as a tribe). For example they have been identifying Hausa with Islam, as if Hausa and Islam are synonymous, (or Hausa, Islam and the North), and even some Muslims have the tendency and urge to confuse these three.

Hausa to us is nothing more than a language and anybody who so wishes can speak it. If you speak it fluently, whether you are a Muslim, Christian or a pagan you are a Hausa man. Islam is another thing entirely.

Similarly, the North is a territorial area and in fact exists much more only in the imagination of the people and belief in their own hearts. But the reality is that you can hardly demarcate the North. However much you want to demarcate the North some will say no this part is not Northern because they are not Muslims.

So let us not conceive the message of Islam, which was sent to all mankind through the view of Islamic nationalism. We are not saying “we Muslims”, rather we are saying Islam. When you say we Muslims then you are including even those nationalist Muslims and part-Muslims among you, considering them right and every other person wrong. For example, about one year ago when there was an attempted coup de tat that gave an opportunity to candle the fire of Muslim nationalism, with issues like, ‘look it’s a Christian that wants to overthrow a Muslim president’. Not minding that this Muslim president is a hypocrite to both Islam and the nation. He wanted to at one time to be a hero of the Muslims such that the Muslims would say ‘oh! They want to overthrow our president, we Muslims!’

No!!! Islam is an ideology not a geographical area or a cultural group. If it is (the issue) of a geographical area, he belongs to you, that is to say your own geographical area, if it is a cultural group, he belongs to your own cultural group, but once you say Islam, you will find that he is at variance with Islam. Therefore we should be careful not to promote Muslim nationalism in the name of Islamic ideology.

Wassalamu alaikum wa rahmatullahi Ta’la wa barakatuh.

NB: This lecture was originally transcribed by Muhammad M. Ahmad but later edited with minor changes to fit reading format by the lecturer himself.

