

Nigeria on the Brink: Imperatives of Managing Diversity in a Multi-Ethnic Society

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Abstract

The phenomenon of ethnic and religious inequality has continued to be experienced in most societies of the world. In Nigeria, the problem seemed to have increased over the past years, thereby creating a complex matrix that produced negative effects. This has brought a lot of untold hardships and other social consequences upon the state. The present conflicts and violence that have destroyed a lot of lives and property in Nigeria is a product of social inequality. This has retarded growth and development of the state. To understand and provide possible solutions to this phenomenon, theoretical and empirical approaches were used to gather data needed for this work. Findings of the study revealed that groups are more loyal and sympathetic to their identity and interest rather than any state goal. This may be as a result of government and groups not playing their roles well. They sometimes use machinery of state to enhance themselves and their group interests. The paper concludes that politicians favor some ethnic and religious groups in their policy decisions, power sharing, distribution of resources and equity. This has brought inequality and dissatisfaction among groups and citizens. These and other external forces bring inequality which often results in crisis. Part of the solution is to evolve consensus building mechanism that will put in place a state ideology. There should be a framework upon which group interests and actions will be harmonized to meet collective good.

Introduction

Nigeria is a multi-national state, which is a state made up of distinct peoples with varying historical, social and cultural backgrounds, sharing a common territory and imbued with the aspiration of promoting common interest (Obasanjo, 1994; Salawu & Hassan, 2011; Twar, 2011; Walker, 2011). Before the British came, this area was occupied by a large number of distinct social formations existing at various stages of socio-economic and political development. At the beginning of the 20th century, the British forcefully brought together over four hundred of these distinct groups into a territory of about 900,000sq km to constitute Nigeria. Since the British intention was mainly to establish a market and produce raw materials for her industries back home, no effort was made

to create a feeling of oneness and unity amongst these diverse elements. Rather, colonial racism contended that only hostility characterized inter-ethnic or inter-tribal relations in Africa. In order to facilitate the process of colonial economic exploitation, the British adopted a divide and rule strategy, the indirect rule system, through which pre-colonial political institutions were preserved, modified and used to rule the natives. This system together with the bitter scrambles for the crumbs from colonial economic production generated intense inter-source of ethnic competitions, which soon created bitter inter-ethnic relations throughout the system.

Nigeria is therefore not only multi-national but also beset by ethnicity, the concept which (Elaiwu, 1994; Walker, 2011; Olayiwola, 2016) defines as “Ethnic consciousness transformed into a weapon of offence or defense in a competitive process in relation with other groups over desired scarce resources”. Ethnicity frequently leads to political mobilization of ethnic bed-fellows into inter-ethnic struggles in order to maximize gain at the expense of the “out-group”. Given the Nigeria situation in which the competing groups differ remarkably not only in sizes but also in the distribution of power, influence and resources, aggressive ethnic nationalism has become the consequences like the Biafra War of 1967–1970.

Politicians and political scientists seeking to deal with the problem of multi-nationalism in nation building have tended to oscillate between two opposing conceptual positions. At one end is the concept of homogenization and the other end is that of accommodation. The homogenization thesis manifests itself in the idealized model of the polis in which fellow citizens share a common descent, language and culture. This is a dream, which governments throughout history have pursued, often with drastic consequences, as was the case with Nazi Germany. It is the dream, which informed the concept of a “race blind” constitution for the United States of America. It is same model that influenced African leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana and Sekou Toure of Guinea to pursue policies of ethnic homogenization in their countries. As Enoch and Enchil (1976, p. 21) have stated:

When Kwame Nkrumah in Ghana and Sekou Toure in Guinea eschewed federalism, undermined the authority of the chiefs, created a one-party state and by other means sought political mobilization, they were not only motivated by a desire for governmental effectiveness but also by the hope that they would thereby substantially reduce the salience of ethnic distinction or even obliterate the societal divisions. They envisaged the political system serving as a melting pot and promoting and overarching sense of national identity.

This attempt at achieving homogenization did not work, so that Busia who took over from Nkrumah in Ghana reversed the system. Other countries have pursued homogenization through variety of ways ranging from the mass expulsion of aliens or by genocide (the German style). In other areas, minorities have been coerced to assimilate into the dominant culture, forced to adopt the language, religion and customs of the majority, or treated as resident aliens, subjected to physical segregation, economic discrimination and denial of political rights.

Homogenization certainly has very serious adverse consequences for minority groups; several efforts made to regulate inter-ethnic relations under this system with a view to reduce ethnic violence by means of bilateral multi-lateral treaties, such as that between Germany and Poland

proved inadequate. Some thinking emerged in the post-war era that the emphasis on universal human rights would reduce the ethnic minority problem by guaranteeing basic civic and political rights to all in individuals regardless of group membership, rights such as freedom of speech, association, conscience, worship and freedom to life and property. These are all proclaimed and proclaimed worldwide, but unfortunately, not justifiable.

Individual rights have therefore not been able to deal with the problem of ethnic violence and so the conceptual pendulum swung to the other end of the continuum to consider the case of accommodation. The homogenization practitioners contend that ethnic and religious identities are things which people should be free to express in their private lives but which should not be concern of the state. They point out that in Europe, several countries were being torn apart about which of the religions, catholic or protestant, should rule the land. These conflicts came to an end only when the church and the state became separated. The church was then prevented from forcing people to worship. This state should therefore not oppose people's freedom to express their particular cultural attachment, not nurture such expression. On all such matters, the state should in the world of Glazza (1983) maintain "being neglect". It is not the place of public agencies to attach legal identities or disabilities to ethnic identity; there must be separation of state and religion, state and ethnicity. The state must not accord any legal recognition of ethnic or religious groups or use any of these as criteria for the distribution of rights, duties or resources.

Since the late 1950s, when oil was discovered in the Niger-Delta region, several discordant and intolerable behaviors, especially amongst the political class representing major or minor ethnic nationalities have been displayed. In the same vein, ethnic factors have largely become parameters for assessment of group representation in government, allocation of sumptuous political affairs, federal character principles, indigenship and residency rights; ethno-religious. These are few factors out of the very many others that have determined the making and unmaking of the Nigeria's political space. Scholars of Nigeria's political system have argued that the ensuing contribution of ethnic question, which of course, is a problem of the Nigerian politics, is contingent on the way and manner in which the colonial government created the entity called Nigeria (Okpaga, 2011; Salawu & Hassan, 2011; Twar, 2011). According to them, in particular the way ethnic communities were arbitrarily merged to form administrative entities. People with different ethnic, religious, socio-cultural, political and economic backgrounds were merged together under the guise of creating a country with expected national identity... some of these exercises which were done during the period of colonial consolidation never encouraged communal relationship between the people.

The contradictions arising from the above include those generated by imperialism, among the three dominant ethnic groups (Igbo, Hausa and Yoruba), and the continuous struggle for the control of the federal center; contradiction of smaller minority groups in the control of resources and/or development of acceptable revenue formulae as well as other emerging trends (including inter-religious and intersectional rivalries, among others). All of these syntheses constitute a major clog in wheel of progress of the Nigeria state. To Ikime (1986), the over-emphasis on the ethnic question constitutes major discourses on the subject of national question. The duo therefore is mutually reinforcing. In the words of Salawu and Hassan (2011, p. 31), opines that:

One of the main causes of ethnic problem in Nigeria is ethnic nationalism... first and foremost Nigeria's see themselves as members of an ethnic group rather than members of a nation. This tendency has been show in some ways and particularly in the allegiance people pay to their ethnic group rather than with the nation or even state.... This shows that Nigerian still exhibit a strong allegiance to ethnic group and this has consequently encouraged primordial sentiments among Nigerian people (2011, p. 31).

There is mutual suspiciousness and mistrust among the different sections of the nation. This is manifested in the fierce manner that positions in the country are contested for, and in the way elections are fought out among groups as no section wants to shift grounds due to this suspicion. Minority problems have continued to plague this nation from independence till date. This is as a result of the perceived domination of one section of the country over another. Between 1960 and 1964, political disaffection among the Tiv people in the Middle Belt area resulted in bloody disturbances and in early 1966, the opportunity for some little secessionist bid by the Igbo of the Eastern Region in 1967 was as a result of this perceived imbalance in the allocation of political power and resources. Also, secessionist bid was organized by the leadership of Isaac Adaka Boro for the creation of Delta People's Republic (Ajagun, 2004, p. 6).

Nigeria continues to battle with the differences and conflict among groups. The state is suffering under the forces of ethno-religious inequality that are militating against her collective peace, equality, harmony and progress. There is discrimination and identity crisis among groups in Nigeria. The state is also characterized by factionalized indigenous bourgeoisie on one side and the proletariats on the other hand (Osaghae, 1994). This situation has made the maintenance of social security, order and stability impossible. The friction by groups and interests has made the ideals of statehood and task of corporate governance difficult. There is today a growing concern among citizens to get to the root of the matter and to find solutions to the problems. This study therefore sets out to interrogate the dynamics of ethnicity and ethnic politics in Nigeria as well as the possibilities of these factors to impugn on Nigeria's quest for national integration. The study also examines the correlates between sectional politics and the dire implications it has on emerging transformation agenda of government. It is the interest of this paper to adopt appropriate empirical theories geared towards reforming the Nigerian state in line with international best practices over and above sectional interests.

Objectives of the Study

Specifically, the study seeks:

- i) To interrogate the dynamics of ethnicity and ethnic politics in Nigeria by identifying the factors that impact on Nigeria's quest for national integration.
- ii) The study also seeks to examine the correlates between sectional politics and its implications on the transformation agenda of government as well as;
- iii) Recommend ways of reforming the Nigeria state in line with international best practices.

Nexus of Ethnicity and Governance in Nigeria

The nature and character of the people and culture of the Nigerian state in history during and after colonialism largely defines what the nation state system was going to face in its future political life. Thus, the Nigerian system is heterogeneous in nature, meaning that the entity comprises diverse and very distinct ethnic nationalities and community of nations within (Apam, 2011). The nature of the Nigerian state depicts that of a fragmented society. Apparently, the degree of fragmentation was the handiworks of the imperialist ideology aimed at entrenching administrative convenience during the era of colonization. Nigeria as a state-nation before independence was manipulated by the agents of capital under an intense, fierce and increasing domination (Twar, 2011; Uwakwe, 2011; Erunke, 2011) in a bid to harmonize divergent interests. Therefore, a nation state with over 320 ethnic nationalities was made to merge together in 1914 by way of amalgamation by the British government. For whatever reason this action/inaction was consummated, Nigeria as well as its people and the modus of governance was summarily sentenced to a nunnery. Of particular interest in this discourse is the constitution factor that followed. Thus, the several constitutional arrangements that followed from the 1922 Clifford, Richards Constitution of 1945, Macpherson Constitution of 1951 and that of Littleton in 1954 were rather too stale in their approach to determine the political fortunes and future of the Nigerian people. Of particular interest is the Richards Constitution of 1945. Sir Richards, one of the colonial governors introduced a kangaroo regional platform in Nigeria. This system was a ploy to acquiesce the major entities further under the vestiges of colonialism. At the same time, it was a practice that was evolved to further deepen the existing gap between and amongst contending ethnic forces in Nigeria. It is instructive to note that the Igbos of the East, Hausa/Fulani of the North and the Yorubas of the western Nigeria were, and are still the most dominant ethnic conglomerations in Nigeria. Apart from that, other sub-ethnic nationalities though in the minority sects, do exist including the Ogojas, Kanuri, Itsekiris, Alagos, Eggons, Nupe, to mention but a few. The almost total neglect of the minor ethnic forces in favour of the major ones has ultimately brought the Nigerian state to its knees in recent times in terms of the very many minority agitations and counter agitations. As noted earlier, the changes brought about by major constitutional trappings by the colonial government are the direct consequence of ethnic fracas and fragmentation in Nigeria. As noted by Salawu & Hassan (2011, p. 11).

The Nigerian Constitutional changes all along the colonial rule encouraged factionalism, which later resulted into ethnic nationalism... many still prefers to identify primarily with their ethnic groups rather than with the state. This ethnic group encourages primordial sentiments among Nigerian people. Thus economic and political development of their own group and not the nation as a whole.

From the above, it is clear that Nigeria has grown and lived with the frenzy of ethnicity, and this tendency, which is as history itself, finds a pride of place in party politics way back in the 1920s. To Salawu & Hassan (2011), the evolution of party formations began in Lagos with the emergence of the erstwhile Nigerian National Democratic Party (NNDP) in 1923. The first two parties, namely, the NNDP and the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) were predominantly national in outlook. The reason being that the elective principle introduced by the Clifford Constitution in 1922 was a limited one that restricted representation to only Lagos and Calabar.

Thus, the NNDP, which was basically a Lagos affair, was founded by Herbert Macaulay in response to the introduction of elective principle. The NYM came later in 1934. The first political party that showed a semblance of nationalistic structure was the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (which later was exercised and given a new nomenclature... as the National Council of Nigerian Citizens). As “nationalistic” as the NCNC was though, the party was later found to have some degree of ethnic coloration, more so that its leadership structure was manned by an Igbo man, Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe. Drawing from the foregoing, it is clear that the pace for ethnicity along party lines was earmarked in Nigerian politics. However, in response to the perceived threat of Igbo domination, the Yoruba group founded a political party named the Action Group (AG). Salawu & Hassan (2011) further argued that “The Action Group (AG) soon disclosed its ethnic identity because of the close association between its birth and establishment of a Pan-Yoruba cultural association, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa” (2011, p. 30).

It is clear from the above that the Hausa/Fulani group was also going to come up with its own political formula. Therefore, for the same fear of ethnic domination, the Hausa/ Fulani emirates of the North floated the Northern People’s Congress (NPC). It has been argued that the NPC was built upon a triple cultural support, which includes: the fear shared by all classes of southern and especially Igbo domination, the linked role of religious elements and with the emirate system as protectors of faith, and social discipline enforceable through the authoritative hierarchy of the emirates. Consequently, the fear shown by all the three ethnic groups produced the three parties, which were mainly ethnic in their composition, cosmology and interest, respectively. However, ethnicity as a major socio-political feature manifested itself in subsequent party structures, at least from the Nigerian First, Second and even Fourth Republics that is on-going. Nonetheless, the Babangida regime decided to diffuse this arrangement when he literally formed the erstwhile Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC) in 1992. However, it became doubtful whether the party was Northern or Western in orientation when the 1993 presidential election believed to had been won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola of the SDP who hails from the Western part of Nigeria), was aborted by the same Babaginda regime in a clear conflagration of all legitimate aspirations. It is indisputable fact that the brazen manifestation of ethnicity still looms large in the political atmosphere of the Nigerian state to date. This scenario is a wild representation of a nation which import in nation-building spells doom going by the level of contradictions posed by persons or groups in the helm of affairs of the nation. The suffocation arising from this admixture constitutes a threat to national pride, interest and the inability... of the Nigerian government to forge a way forward in the 21st century socio-political and economic development strides.

Ethnicity and Consolidation of Democracy in Nigeria

Nigeria, in her post-jubilee years, precisely over half a century since her political independence, still gropes in the dark in search of viable political re-engineering. The successive governments encouraged and used ethno-religious inequality as a platform to divide and rule the State. Political

leaders and governments smartly deployed the ungodly injustice and immoral policies to favor some ethnic and religious groups, some politicians in power consistently carry out unjust decisions and enforced with the backing of security agents (Onyeacholem, 2013). Some particular ethnic and religious groups seemed favored, supported and their members appointed into top and sensitive political offices than others (Eruke, 2011). The above position has been further corroborated amongst scholars of the Nigerian political system, who have increasingly argued that sectional nationalism and the quest for group identity as is currently (of course it has always been) practiced, portends grave dangers for Nigeria's nascent democracy, national integration and democratic consolidation.

The pervasiveness of ethnic politics in the country is taken to be symptomatic of aggravated crisis of legitimacy that has engulfed the state, and is explained in terms of the proven efficacy of the ethnic strategy, the weakness of alternative identities and political unities, the prevailing milieu of lawlessness that has enveloped the country's political landscape, and the inability of the state to act as effective agency of distributive justice (Osaghae, 2011).

To be sure, it is instructive to affirm that the management of primordial identities and politics remain critical to determining the context of Nigerian politics and even Nigeria's future. Ihonvbere as cited in Aaron and Egwu (1995) has maintained that this trend has generated very many contradictions not only in terms of mutual suspicion and contradictions between ethnic, religious and regional interests, but also within each primordial constituency. Thus, the tendency has been to focus so much on the contraction between the majority Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa ethnic groups, and until recently, minority groups (Ejembi, 1983 & Nkom, 1994) whose aspirations are to gain a pride of place in the socio-political spheres of the Nigerian state.

The above factors further reinforce the weak and tenuous character of the Nigerian state vis-à-vis its leadership and the inability of the latter to steer a visible road-map for overall transformation of the Nigerian people. The vortex of this argument reifies itself in the chequered system which is hinged on elite idiosyncrasies to the detriment of the average Nigerian who is lost in the foray of ethnic strife and contestation for resource control of Nigeria's commonwealth. Literatures on Nigerian politics speak volume of the ever increasing fabric of the Nigerian elite who hardly find any constructive meaning to nation-building. This trait has been largely transferred down the elite profile in Nigeria from the better part of 1960s to the present democratic space. Thus, the character, organization, discipline, world view against the backdrop of international capital and politics of the Nigerian elite negates possibilities for democracy and corporate governance. As a renter state, the Nigerian politics is rife with elite competition and ethnic chauvinism. Against the backdrop of the first military interregnum in January 15, 1966 and the subsequent counter coups, ethnic strife holds sway in the scheme of things. And beyond the orgies of the Obasanjo civilian administration from 1999 to 2007, the woes of ethnicity have manifested itself and has almost reduced the giant of Africa into the most unbelievable posture. Chief Obasanjo who himself, was of Yoruba decent on the one hand, and a former military lord on the other, rigmarole in the murky waters of immense contradictions for the better part of his eight-year term in office.

This administration, no doubt was the worst hit in terms of minority and even majority agitations for resource control, revenue sharing formulae, ethno-religious crises and several campaigns of calumny to return political powers to the North in 2007 (Aljazeera, 2007). This struggle ushered in a breadth of fresh air and the corresponding transposition of power to the late Umar Yar Adua who later died in active service as Nigeria's democratically elected president. However, events following this political epoch have largely spelt doom for the Nigerian state more so that the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria bestows presidential powers on the vice president in the event of death of the substantive president. Thus, the coming of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan raises the many fundamental, but critical questions of who owns the land. Who is a valid representation of the hallowed office of the Nigerian seat of power, the Aso Rock Villa? Is Nigeria ready for a step forward in the 21st century when the world system looks forward to socio-economic recovery, and beyond primordial politics? What is the possibility of evolving a viable economic recovery in the midst of ethnic question? etc. These are questions that beg for answers and the political space which is already over-heating with wanton killings of villagers who are at rest in the height of their quiet nights, attacks on security outfits, threat to peace and open calls on the destabilization of the unity of the Nigerian state, internal aggression, scapegoatism, kidnapping, name-calling, open assault on persons and groups, protests; conspiracy of either security officers or unscrupulous elements to let loose those suspected to be machinations of mayhem in the Nigerian society, and the like. These are indications that politics in Nigeria now runs at the highest temperature and it can only take a truly nationalistic, collective aspirations to nip the phenomena in the bud. Of particular importance is the period under which the events are unfolding ever since the assumption of office by Jonathan. These are events that are strange and the level of insecurity now is unprecedented, and hardly have we witnessed this type of unrest since the history of the Nigerian state. It is instructive therefore to state here that the Nigerian state might be heading for a disaster if urgent steps are not taken to address critical issues of ethnicity and sectionalism in the affairs of the Nigerian state. This tendency if allowed to flourish may stop Nigeria's attempt at building a virile democracy. It can also deepen the agenda of ethnicity further. And what that means is that the Nigerian state will be enormously canvassing for ill-oriented leadership to man the affairs of state since he/she is rated based on which ethnic groupings he/she belongs. This is a sure way to tinkering with the collective will of the Nigerian people and these steps are plausible avenues characterizing the Nigeria state into the brackets of a failed state in the 21st century.

Theoretical Issues

The rationality or centrality of social conflict as an underpinning presupposes the desire of groups or persons to compete with other persons or groups for space and the acquisition of available scarce resources (if only the so-called resources are scarce at all). Yakubu (2010), Aaron and Egwu (2003), Nnolis (1978) agree that individual values, cultures, norms and the entire psychological gamut differ. In the light of this, several interests are brought to play out. The differences in value system

therefore constitutes a major force in the determination of power play, resource control and ultimately the determination of which group or persons get what, when and how. The antithesis arising from this level of agitation breeds emerging contradictions and the plausible ways of making it thrive is to garnish the same with ethnic coloration (Ogundiya, 2010; Okpanga, 2011). Ethnicity therefore is used as a tool for the determination of power shifts, public official responsibility, agitations and counter agitations, blackmail, executive propaganda, terrorism, religious uprising, resource allocation, award of contracts, appointment of persons into political offices (whether one is qualified for the job or not). These, among others are variables that have shaped the direction and locus of the Nigerian politics to date. Ethnicity is nonetheless modeled along the lines of elite competition, and hence, a veritable factor that engenders conflict. This scenario is a creation of the elites, who draw upon, distort and sometimes fabricate materials from cultures of the group they wish to represent in order to protect their well-being or existence gain political and economic advantage for their groups as well as for themselves. Okpanga (2011) argued that the process invariably involves competition and conflict for political power, economic benefit and social status between the political elite, class and leadership groups within and among different ethnic categories.

Methodology

In every research work, methodology is the heart. It is a blue print for any scientific discovery. This is unavoidable in the considerations of this paper. The qualitative nature of the study informed the choice of using secondary sources of data collection to achieve the objectives of the study. This documentary method of data collection is particularly useful when the task is to gather, interpret and extract valuable information so as to draw inference from the available evidence to reach a conclusion. The study collected data from books, journals, magazines newspapers and other documents relevant to the subject under investigation. The qualitative-descriptive method was adopted as a method of data analysis. This method involves analyzing the contents from secondary sources and drawing logical inference.

Responses of Managing Diversity in Nigeria

The Ethnic Accommodation Thesis

This position recognizes cultural pluralism as a universal and permanent feature of contemporary society, which when politicized, has the capacity to destabilize or even destroy political systems and civil society. Efforts to eradicate or eliminate cultural heterogeneity have of course proved abortive. Yet ethnicity and ethnic conflicts can neither be wished away nor be left alone because of their often devastating effects on the political body. What needs to be done is to devise effective methods and strategies for managing the conflicts is the matter of who controls or distributes state power and the scarce resources in society. As Kukah (1999) has pointed out, people want to be comfortable, they want to enjoy the good things of life, to be in charge of their own affairs and participate in decisions concerning them; to take control of the available resources; in short,

they want democracy. They consider democracy as the best option for social civilization, and this in part explains the current euphoria about democratization in Africa.

A cursory look at the way and manner regions were created during the embryonic stage of political development, and later states creation gives the Northern part of Nigeria an unfair advantage. This structural imbalance, Ojo (2002) maintains generated fear of domination among other ethnic groups in Nigeria, especially the so called minorities.

Another problematic area which is worth examining is the twin problem of domination and marginalization of some ethnic groups by the others. The Nigerian federation is best described as sitting on a time bomb due to the unending accusations and counter-accusations which have marred the relationships between and among the disparate component units of the federation. The south for instance is aggrieved by what it called political domination by the north. The table 1 below shows that, in terms of political power at the centre, the North has been more favored. Out of 15 presidents that have so far ruled Nigeria, 10 were from the North while 5 were from the south.

Table 1.

S/no.	Date	Name	State	Zone
1	1/10/1960-14/01/66	T. Balewa	Bauchi	North-East
2	15/01/66-29/07/66	J.T.U Ironsi	Abia	South-East
3	30/07/66-28/07/75	Y. Gowon	Plateau	North-Central
4	29/07/75-13/02/76	M. Muhammed	Kano	North-West
5	14/02/76-30/09/79	O. Obasanjo	Ogun	South-West
6	01/10/79-31/12/83	S. Shagari	Sokoto	North-West
7	31/12/83-25/08/85	M. Buhari	Katsina	North-West
8	27/08/85-26/08/93	I.B. Babangida	Niger	North-Central
9	27/08/93-17/11/93	E. Shonekan	Ogun	South-West
10	18/11/93-08/06/98	S. Abacha	Kano	North-West
11	09/06/98-28/05/1999	A. Abubakar	Niger	North-Central
12	29/05/99-29/05/2007	O. Obasanjo	Ogun	South-West
13	29/05/2007-05/05/2010	U.M. Yar Adua'a	Katsina	North-West
14	06/05/2010-29/05/2015	G. Jonathan	Bayelsa	South-South
15	29/05/2015-till Date	M. Buhari	Kastina	North-West

Source: Ojo (2009, p. 55), Egwemi (2008, p. 32) und updated by the Author.

Devises for Ethnic Accommodation

The Richard's Constitution of 1946 central theme was to provide for Nigeria a political system that would ensure "Unity in diversity". The colonial administration at that time tended to recognize only the majority ethnic groups in Nigeria, namely the Hausa/Fulani, the Yoruba and the Igbo. The British had all along aided those major groups to develop their self-identities, develop their traditional political institutions and develop their economic bases. Being agrarian societies, the British, in this separate development policy, encouraged the production of palm produce for the Igbo in Eastern Nigeria, cocoa and tuber for the Yoruba in the West, and cotton, groundnuts and animal products for the North. No effort was made to integrate these economic systems rather efforts were made to separate the groups socially and politically.

In order to unify Nigeria, Governor Richard in 1946 created the national assembly made up of the House of Representatives and the Senate. He also established regional assemblies made up of the House of Chiefs and House of Assembly in both North and West while bicameral legislature was established in the East. While the regional assemblies provided platforms for each of the major groups to deliberate and carry out their own affairs, the cultural legislature provided an institutional arrangement aimed at bringing Nigeria together to discuss and execute plans for matters affecting the whole country.

Historically, sources have sought to trace this mode of polarization in ethnic relations to the Zik-Ikoli controversy and the Richard's constitution, which illegally introduced regionalism into the Nigerian politics. What has almost been forgotten is that regionalism which finds its most current expression in "federal character", is a deliberate instrument of colonial policy to enclave economy and the privileges of the ruling class by weakening the governing class considerably. Barely, politicians quickly bought the idea not necessarily because they were keen on being subservience to colonial interests but because the idea serviced their own socio-economic ambitions. It is against the background of profit motive arising from the so-called comparative stain of modern political and economic structure that we must understand and learn to resist utterances by politicians, to the effect that ethnic cleavage is a conscious instrument of Nigerian politics (Kylika, 1989). Other political leaders have at least, one of such utterances to their individual credits. One of the pioneer nationalist movements in Nigeria, Nnamdi Azikwe, in 1948 claimed that "the God of Africa has created the Igbo nation at all stages of human history which enable them not only to conquer others, but also to adopt them to the role of preserver (...) the Igbo nation cannot shirk its responsibility from its manifest destiny" (Elaigwu, 1994).

The chauvinist vituperations credited to Ahmadu Bello when he suggested that his political party composed entirely of the federal class ensconced on the seat of power in colonial northern Nigeria would rule the southern sea willy-nilly. Political events which attended these and similar utterances are now history. Ethnic leaders mobilized their ethnic supporters and consolidated in their respective regions. The Hausa/Fulani politicians cordoned off the north from the rest of the country. The first major test of this balkanization occurred in 1953 after Chief Anthony Enahoro's motion in the House of Representatives for self-government in Nigeria by 1956.

Sir Ahmadu Bello amended the motion substituting 1956 with “as soon as practicable” when the southern politicians rebuked their northern counterparts for postponing freedom, Sir Ahmadu Bello merely retorted that the mistake of 1914 has come to height and should not be allowed to go further. The tension which these exchanges generated culminated in the Kano riots which claimed 227 casualties (Kamal and Bello, 2014; Kuka, 1994). This in a nutshell was a fundamental problem of leadership in Nigeria.

Today like never before, virtually every issue is interpreted along ethnic, linguistic, and religious contours and this have had far reaching implications for the practice of federalism in Nigeria. The recent appointments by President Muhammadu Buhari were explained from the perspective of ethnicity. Political commentators as well as members of the opposition parties view the appointments as being in favor of the North. Also, the recurrent ethno-religious crises in some parts of Plateau, Kaduna and others states of the federation have been given ethnic and religious colorations. This is in addition to the violent confrontations between Fulani-herdsmen and crops farmers in states like Plateau, Nassarawa, Taraba, Benue, Kogi among others, which have been dubbed “ethnic cleansing”. This conclusion was reached by most of the aggrieved ethnic groups, simply because the perpetrators of these mindless killings and the president share the same ethnic nationality, and also because of his administration’s slow posture and response to these crises. Although the present writer (author) do not subscribe to this view point, he however believes that allowing pains and hardships to be unleashed on some ethnic groups by another without prescribing relatively permanent solutions, is bound to be miss-interpreted, and this portends danger for the continued federation of the federating units.

Since the return to civil rule in 1999, and the enthronement of constitutional democracy that guarantees freedom of speech, politicians have often resorted to using these faulty lines of ethnic and religious divisions as narratives that sometimes pan into hate speech. Ezeibe and Ikeanyibe (2017) argued that Nigerian politicians constantly deploy these ethnic, religious, regional and geopolitically induced hate speeches to ferry and curry favour for their own political gains and advantage. Over the years, some of these hate speeches by Nigerian state actors could be classified as political/ideology, racial /ethnic, religious, class and gender. In most cases, these hate speeches are characterized by symbols of threats; incitement, violence, sexism, disparaging, fighting, killing, battling, demeaning and condescending statements targeted at individual(s), group(s) and other related perceived opponents and enemies. The table 2 below shows recent cases of hate speech prevalence in Nigeria’s political and public space among state actors.

If Nigeria can have good leadership and good governance at the three tiers of government, there is the tendency that Nigerians will regard themselves as one family irrespective of their differences and the number of ethnic and communal crises might reduce drastically.

Table 2. Hate Speeches by Nigerian Political/State Actors in Recent Times

No	Political/ State Actor	Position of Authority Held	Date	Hate Speech	Modifier/ Hate Related Word(s)	Type of Hate Speech	Implications
1	Olusegun Obasanjo	President	1/12/2007	This election is a do or die affair for PDP	Do or die	Political	Violent, inciting, threatening
2	Muhammadu Buhari	Presidential Candidate	14/5/2012	The dog and baboon will all be soaked in blood	Dog and baboon; blood	Political	Violent, inciting, threatening
3	Muhammadu Buhari	President	22/7/2015	Constituencies that gave me 97% in all honesty cannot be treated equally, on some issues, with constituencies that gave me 5%	97%; 5%	Ethnic	divisive, condescending, threatening
4	Muhammadu Buhari	President	13/10/2016	My wife belongs to the kitchen and my living room and the other room	Kitchen; living room; the other room	Gender	sexism, domineering, demeaning, condescending
5	David Umahi	Governor	22/4/2020	If you think you have the pen, we have the Koboko	Koboko	Political	threatening, inciting
6	Nyesome Wike	Governor	22/6/2020	They must respect human beings and not behave like tax collectors	Tax collectors	Class	condescending, demeaning, and disparaging
7	Oluremi Tinubu	Senator	9/3/2019	You Igbos, we don't trust you anymore	Igbos; we don't trust you	Ethnic	Disparaging
8	Yahaha Bello	Governor	6/10/2020	If you don't want him as governor, them go hear am ta ta ta ta ta ta ta	Ta ta ta ta ta ta ta	Political	violent, inciting, threatening, gun-trotting

Source: Ezeibe, and Ikeanyibe (2017) and updated by the Author.

The Ethnic Minority Question

As independence approached ethnic conciseness became intensified. Inter-ethnic hostilities and tensions increased as the Nigerian political elite decided to stage this struggle for political power on the platform of ethnicity. There was fierce competition for the political and civil service positions vacated by the British.

In a country with very few opportunities for the citizens to engage in independent economic activities to generate wealth, the burden of providing the necessities of life fell on the government. It is the government that provides the roads, hospitals, schools, pipe borne water, electricity and so on. It is the government that creates industrial and commercial establishments, employment opportunities, contracts to businessmen and loans to farmers. Under such conditions, it became easy to see why everybody wanted to be in the government. Besides, the colonial ideology of “tribalism” had firmly implanted in the minds of most Nigerians; the idea that unless they themselves or their tribal person were in power, resources would not be adequately allocated to them and/or their areas. Inter-ethnic struggles for resources become intense and widespread. By 1953 the conflict got to a point where the colonial governor Sir John Macpherson, had reason that “recent events have clearly but painfully revealed that what is holding Nigeria today is the British presence and influence” (Apam, 2011). As negotiation for independence progressed, four separate states sprang up from all the regions. Northern ethnic groups demanded for a Middle Belt State, those in the East are for the Cross River State, while those in the West wanted the West State.

So serious were these demands that the colonial government set up the Wilkins Commission to study them and make recommendations. The minorities expressed their concern about the undemocratic and intolerant behavior of those in authority over their demands in the existing regions. But the commission felt that separation was not the answer to the problem. With so many ethnic groups in Nigeria, it was considered that no matter how many states to be created, there would still be minorities living side by side with majorities. Rather than creating more states the commission recommended the entrenchment of fundamental human rights in the constitution, in the belief that their observance would ensure equality and equitable distribution of resources in society thereby eliminating minority fears. When therefore more states were created in 1967, it was really a war strategy designed to deflate Ojukwu cessation bid. Frequent demands for creation of more states and Local Government Areas in Nigeria are the real reasons for the continued creation of more states and became doubtful since the reasons given for were either invalid or meaningless. As states and local governments became instruments for socio-economic development, ethnic groups, major or minor, began to seriously demand for more and more of LGA's. In a recent attempt to create additional LGA's in some States, for instance, numerous communities indicated their interest to have their own LGA created out of the existing ones. These were always justified on bases such as alleged marginalization, domination, discrimination etc. at the sub-ethnic level. The creation of national political units as a strategy for ethnic accommodation has more proved to be elusive.

In Nigeria today, the heads of the executive, legislature and judiciary are all from the north and, the distribution of heads of ministries, agencies, and security chiefs from 2015 to date has been lopsided. It is unimaginable that out of the over fifteen heads of security agencies in Nigeria, thirteen are from the north and from a particular religious faith and only two from the south.

The Table 3 below explains the current situation of appointment of security agencies in Nigeria.

Table 3.

Name	Agency/Dept	Region	Religion
Major-General Lucky Irabor	Chief of Defense Staff	South-East	Christian
Major-General Farouk Yahaya wey	Chief of Army Staff	North-West	Muslim
Rear-Admiral A.Z Gambo	Chief of Naval Staff	North-West	Muslim
Air Vice Marshall I.O Amao	Chief of Air Staff	South-West	Muslim
Air Vice Marshall Mohammed S. Usman	Chief of Defense Intelligence	North-East	Muslim
Major-General Babagana Monguno (rtd.)	National Security Adviser	North-East	Muslim
Mohammed Babandede	Nigerian Immigration Service	North-West	Muslim
Abdullahi Gana Mohammadu	National Security & Civil Defense Corp	North-East	Muslim
Col. Hameed Ali (rtd).	Nigerian Custom Service	North-East	Muslim
Lima Alhaji Ibrahim	Nigerian Fire Service	North-West	Muslim
Yusuf Magaji Bichi	State Security Service	North-West	Muslim
Mohammed Abubakar Adamu	Nigerian Police Force	North-Central	Muslim

Source: Abdulyakeen (2021).

The implication of this is that, other ethnic groups, regions and religious groups have been made subservient to other privileged groups. The classical idea of a federal system lies in the equality of the federating coordinates in the federal arrangement. Anything shot of this is a parody and mockery of the spirit of federalism. This has been the situation in Nigeria since independence.

It has been established that Nigeria has never been a federal state when compared against the backdrop of a federal system, as espoused by Wheare. Resource control, fiscal federalism, independence and autonomy of the federating units in a federation to administer their own affairs without overbearing interference from the federal government at the center, state police, devolution of power and governance, among others, are a few of the distinctive attributes of a federal state that sets it apart from others. None of the aforementioned federalist ideals and practices is respected or practiced in Nigeria. Since independence, for instance, the issue of resource control has been one of the major parodies of federalism in Nigeria. No region or state had ever been allowed to control its resources (Abdulyakeen, 2021).

The Federal Character Principle

One of the latest devices for accommodating ethno-regional diversity in Nigeria is the federal character principle. The idea originated from the debates of the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) set up by the Murtala/Obasanjo regime to draft the 1979 constitution. During the debates, the matter of ethnic and regional representation in the government and other public institutions at all levels arose. There was a general agreement that the idea of such representation was laudable, but opinions differed widely about how representation should be done. As the debates progressed, there emerged three main schools of thought. The first school, according to Ayoade (1998), accepted the idea of fair representation of states and various provisions about fundamental human rights and freedom entrenched in the constitution were adequate to ensure individual freedoms and equal opportunities. They warned against the possibility that excessive emphasis on ethnic representation might generate ethnic sentiments, which might hamper the process of national integration. They insisted that as long as all the component states and all ethnic groups are accorded fair and equitable treatment it would become impossible for a combination of a few states to control or dominate the federal government to the exclusion of others. To them, it would be enough for the constitution to state simply that the composition of the federal government and conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such manner as to ensure fair and equitable treatment for all the component states and ethnic groups in the country.

The second school of thought felt that the stand of the first group was not adequate to guarantee security and maintain stability in Nigeria. They insisted that there must be a provision for equity in the composition of government or the appointment or selection of persons to high offices of the state. Such provision must apply with equal force of all tiers of government owned companies. The second school of thought therefore insisted that there must be constitutional clause stating that, the predominance in the federal government or any of its agencies of persons from some states, ethnic or other sectional groups or the monopoly of the office of the president by persons from one state or ethnic group shall be avoided. The affairs of every government in the federation shall be conducted so as to ensure a fair and just treatment for all ethnic groups within the area of authority of such government.

The third school took a position close to the homogenization theory; it stated categorically that national unity is not a product of citizens, ethnic or linguistic affiliation. It stressed the point that primordial groupings should not be the primary definition of a citizen's quality as a human being. They urged that the Nigerian constitution should render the state or ethnic origin of a person irrelevant in determining his suitability for an office or any other right or privilege. This group therefore proposed a very simple clause for inclusion in the constitution in respect of ethnic accommodation. The clause went like this: The composition of every government in the federation and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such manner as to recognize the need for national integration and the promotion of national unity.

At the end of the day, therefore, the CDC accepted the idea of reflecting the diversity of the polity in the governance of the country, stating, the composition of the federal government or any of its agencies and the conduct of their affairs shall be carried out in such a manner

as to recognize the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and command national loyalty. Accordingly, the predominance in that government or in its agencies of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups shall be avoided. The composition of a government other than the federal government or any of the agencies of such government and the conduct of their affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to recognize the nature and character of the people within their area of authority and the need to promote a sense of belonging and loyalty among such people.

The CDC referred to this diversity as the federal character of Nigeria which it defines as the distinctive desire of the peoples of Nigeria to promote national unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation notwithstanding the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language or religion which may exist and which it is their desire to nourish, harness to the enrichment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

The above conception is clearly vague, stating as it does that federal character is merely a desire by Nigerians to promote national unity. The federal character principle is therefore not likely to bring lasting solutions to the problems of ethnic, religious and regional representation in the Nigerian political system. For example, the issues of ministerial appointment, access to scholarship, admission into higher institution, job application among other factor are subject to ‘indigenship’ at the expense of citizenship in Nigeria. In effect, these mechanisms higher competition within the local level which in turned exacerbated into ethnic and religion tension in various part of the federation.

Table 4. Federal Appointment based on Geopolitical Zones Representation

Geopolitical Zones	Total	Percentage
North-West	13	43
North-East	6	20
South-South	5	17
North-Central	3	10
South-West	3	10
South-East	0	0
Total	380	100

Source: Abdulyakeen (2021).

According to the table above, it shows that 25% of the appointments are from the south while the overwhelming 75% are from the north. Likewise, the North West geopolitical zone which happens to the president’s geopolitical zone has the largest portion of 43%, while the South East for instance has no single appointee. So far, all President Buhari’s discretionary appointments, especially the appointment of Service Chiefs of the Armed Forces, Heads of other Security agencies

and members of his kitchen cabinet are unconstitutionally lopsided. The Secretary to the government of the Federation, the Chief of Staff to the president, National Security Adviser, Chief of Air Staff, Director General of DSS, CG of Nigerian Customs, CG of Nigerian Security and Civil Defense Corps, CG Nigerian Immigration Service, CG Nigerian Prison Service, INEC Chairman, Chief of Defence intelligence, SSA Media to Mr. President, Accountant General of the Federation, MD Nigeria Ports Authority, EVC Nigerian Communication Commission, CEO Insurance Commission, MD AMCON, Director DPR, Acting Inspector General of Police, GMD NNPC, and so many others too numerous to mention are all from the North.

Appointments from the south are Chief of Army staff, chief of naval staff, EC FIRS, SA Media, SA Niger Delta, SSA, NASS (Senate) DG Budget office, Director MEMASSA, Director of Primary Health care services which is most recent appointments made by the President, only two are ceded to the Igbos of southeast of Nigeria. This lopsidedness in the appointments has generated a lot of antagonism and ethnic wrath across the nation, some belief that the President is the most regionally unbalanced President the country has ever had in the history of her federal appointment (Eme & Onuigbo, 2015). This corroborates the position of (Abutudu, 2011; Erunka, 2011; Salau & Hassan, 2011; Ifesinachi, 2018) that poor federal practices had engendered constant agitations for justice, consultation, opening of political space, re-negotiation of then Nigerian pacts and now restructuring.

Summary of Major Findings

The study discovered that the coming of participatory democracy did not eradicate social inequality in Nigeria. The various ethnic and religious groups seemed nurtured and mobilized to struggle and fight for their interests and goals. It is this issue which has produced the “we want our man” syndrome in Nigeria’s national politics; the ethno-religious divide was manipulated by those in power and became a determining factor that dictated policies and decisions. There are now elitist groups that found themselves in economic and political positions and are using the ethno-religious divide to advance their personal goals.

The study shows that ethnicity has a devastating effect on the Nigerian democratic space and this has practically affected Nigeria’s path to peace, progress and socio-economic stability. Ethnicity therefore constitutes dangerous structural implications for Nigeria’s quest for greatness.

The study found out most of the strategies for ethnic accommodation discussed above have not produced the desired results; this is so probably because these measures have not seriously addressed the fundamental issues involved in ethnic relations in Nigeria. The study stresses the point that inter-ethnic violence in Nigeria has its basis in the prevailing conditions of poverty, insecurity, injustice, domination suppression and denial of fundamental human rights.

The study shows that participation in decision-making as one of the ingredients for sustainable democratic governance has been paralyzed since the return of Nigeria into civil rule in 1999; this is done through marginalization and unequal representation.

Most problems that Nigeria is witnessing are tied to the issue of bad governance and inter-ethnic struggle for national ascendancy. This issue is so fundamental that it could be regarded

as the root cause of many problems, such as poverty, high incidence of disease, unemployment, military weakness, low level or lack of technological development, cultural deprivation, lack of industrialization, high debt profile.

Conclusion

The study underscores the ethnic questions in Nigeria and the consolidation of democracy. It realizes that ethnic heterogeneity is a universal, permanent phenomenon of contemporary human society. When this phenomenon is politicized and manipulated, it has a capacity to destabilize or even destroy political system and civil society. Federalism, the cornerstone of Nigeria's unity and foundation of Nigeria's politics was sacrificed on the altar of ethnicity. This is so precisely because ethnic factor or ethnic consideration clearly influenced the introduction and practice of a number of variables such as quota system, catchment area policy, federal character which are not only working at cross purposes viz-a-viz federalism but have also become a national big issue frustrating all efforts at state and nation building. Presently, there is agitation and or calling, by many groups to restructure and reshape the federal system. Thus, the tendency to control and continue to accumulate the resource base of the Nigerian state long after the whites have gone reinforces itself in ethnic strife and competition for scarce resources. The dire quest to acquire these resources manifests itself in ethnic agglomeration and nationalism which of course is available tool for manipulation of the collective will of the people by the leadership virtually at levels of Nigerian politics. Nonetheless, the wave of the ethnic strife orchestrated in Nigeria today is an indication of the level of depravity in the system which can no longer sustain itself in terms of national cohesion, relevance and national integration in all its ramifications.

Recommendations

Despite the diversities and ethno-religious inequalities existing in Nigeria, there is still hope for a brighter future for her people. The country has great potential of both human and material resources within her borders and if properly utilized can bring about transformation of the people.

A state ideology should be put in place to create a common aspiration among groups in Nigeria (northerners, southerners, westerners and easterners alike), the culture of mutual trust, cooperation, nationalism; liberation of the mind-set of persons and groups.. This will ensure consensus, peace building, integrity, stability and progress.

The leadership should be controlled by those who have the general interest of Nigeria at heart. Ethnic strife should be barred from the political space.

Good governance, social justice, equity and distributive justice should be encouraged to reduce tension, unrest and undue competition for space thereby building a befitting democracy now and beyond.

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