



## **ETHNICITY, ETHNIC IDENTITY AND THE CRISIS OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA**

**Okpan Samuel O**

Department of Sociology and Anthropology,,  
Evangel University, Akaeze,  
Ebonyi State, Nigeria  
sokpan@evangeluniversity.edu.ng, +2348039304978

**Otega Okinono**

Department of Sociology and Psychology  
Delta State University. Abraka, Nigeria  
otegaokinono@gmail.com

### **Abstract**

Nigeria as a nation is still categorized among the least developed societies or underdeveloped nation, a nomenclature it should have overcome considering its abundance natural and human resources. One of the identifiable cog on the wheel of Nigerian development trajectory is ethnicity identity crisis. Ethnicity has literally defined the pathways of the structures, ideologies and philosophies of the actions of the players of politics, military or civilian administrations alike. This paper examined the primordial and Instrumental concepts to explain the concept of ethnicity. While the primordial ethnic process emphasizes kin connection with emphasis on geographic enclave; the instrumental ethnic identity emphasis secular ethnic interest which sustains development unfortunately the Nigerian society has consistently relied on primordial ethnic consideration. The paper argues that political and economic deprivation occasioned by leadership incapacity had promoted primordial ethnic identity crisis in Nigeria. This paper contends that primordial ethnic identity had created malicious ethnic structures initially created by colonialism which has brought about underdevelopment through consistent contending ethnic strife in the Nigerian state to date. The paper sums up with conclusion and policy recommendations for viable democratic project in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

**Key words:** Ethnicity, Ethnic Identity, National Development,

### **Introduction**

In a strict sense, Nigeria is not a nation. It is an aggregation of several nationalities. Awolowo made this very important observation many decades ago that Nigeria is a mere geographical expression. There are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense as there are 'English', 'Welsh' or 'French'. The word "Nigeria" is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish



those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not. Prior to amalgamation the various nationalities enjoyed harmonious coexistence, and a chain of socioeconomic interrelationship amongst the people prevailed. However, amalgamation brought together nationalities that are ethnically, religiously, culturally and idiosyncratically different, couple with the fact that structurally the emergent nation was of unequal sizes and unequal population, which created an antagonistic centrifugal forces to the disadvantage of the people. This antagonistic centrifugal forces heralded and entrenched monsters that have always tended to consume Nigerians and their collective desires for unity and development as manifested in the form of ethnicity, politics of prebendalism. elitism, greed, corruption, civil strives etc (Uwa, 2013). This antagonism tends to have heightened in the present administration in the country. Indeed, Nigeria has never been so divided what with escalating incidences of violence, insurgency, and horrendous killings of innocent citizens allegedly by faceless individuals in what looks like ethnic vendetta. The point being made here is that ethnicity and ethnic identity have been elevated to unprecedented prominence in Nigeria. They control how the people think and talk. They are promoted unfortunately by the political elites, embraced by the young and the old, and affect socioeconomic development of the nation.

A pertinent question however is why is it that multiculturalism and ethnic diversity never constituted barriers to nation building in other countries in Europe, Asia, Canada, USA, Brazil and South Africa? These countries are as diverse as Nigeria but are not as obsessed with their diversities. Again, what stopped subsequent generations of Nigerians from building a viable nation state, one in which everyone could regardless of ethnic origin, proudly identify with instead of the dysfunctional pariah of a nation that we currently have?

Different perspectives have been deployed in the study of ethnicity in Nigeria. One perspective which is dominant in literature contends that the state and critical elites play important roles in ethnic mobilization. On the other hand, many scholars in Nigeria have paid more attention to inter-ethnic conflicts as well as ethnic accommodation and co-operation. However, I argue in this paper that a systematic understanding of horizontal



inequalities, that is inequalities that arise from the different access members of different ethnic groups have to lucrative political, economic and social resources, will provide greater insights into the often neglected popular basis of ethnic crisis in Nigeria. According to (Uwa, 2013) less than 0.001% Nigerians own or have access to more than 90% of the nation's wealth-with most of the ownership and access acquired through corrupt means. The only commonality is that the crooks who amass the country's wealth come from all ethnic groups, just as poverty in the country can be found in every extended family, village, town, and city and in all the states of the country and in Abuja.

There is no gainsaying the fact that every nation has its own peculiar ethnic issues. The difference is the mechanism by which the challenges are managed or ameliorated. Ethnic conundrum remains a major obstacle to Nigeria's existence as nation state. The consequence is socioeconomic underdevelopment of the country. Nigerians are robbed of meritocracy, excellence and unity and are daily battling with the monsters of nepotism, favouritism, federal character, quota system, zoning formula catchment area principle which stifle and seriously undermine socioeconomic development in the country. The objective of this paper therefore is to analyze the nexus between ethnicity, ethnic identity and national development in Nigeria to chart a positive course to ameliorate the persistent ethnic crisis which adversely have affected national redevelopment in Nigeria.

## Conceptual Clarifications

The following concepts used in this are hereby clarified to wet the grounds for a proper understanding of the paper:

### **Ethnicity**

Two theoretical strands of **Primordialism** and **Instrumentalism** are adopted to explain the concept of ethnicity in this paper.: According to (Green, 2006), primordialists see ethnicity as immediate contiguity and kin connection and also being born into a particular community, language and sharing the same social practice. Perhaps this is the reason why Pharo and Laitin (2000) see ethnic identity from the point of ancestry rules of group membership typified by cultural traits and common historical mythologist. The community is believed to be individuals united



through common ancestry and faith. Seol, (2008) believes primordialism regards ethnicity as a principle of social structuring, powerful and immutable characteristics of the human condition evincing meanings which transcend the immediate social context. Primordialist identity is made of up of what one is born with or acquired and considered significantly different from other identity which are considered secondary. Primordialism appeals to emotional and instinctive constraints as ultimate distinctive explanation for group mobilization.

One question that rightly come to mind here is why people still follow ethnic leaders whose interests seems to serve the interest of the elites and not the masses. The fact is that the essence of ethnicity is its promotion of unity and solidarity which undeniably supports the primordial community. It is this unity and solidarity that make the people support their leaders. For example, when the Igbos say:” nkea bu nke anyi”or “O bu onye nke anyi” (he is our son) we must support him” - is a primordialist statement showing that it does not matter what the person does as long as he or she is part of us, we will support, resulting in activation of solidarity even when the (community) is being deprived of its socio-political goods. One significant criticism of primordialism is the fact that it makes ethnic group/individuals passive and captive to primordial sentiments, it makes them emotionally caged, so they are unable to respond proactively to socio-political challenges confronting them either internal or external.

On the other hand, **instrumentalism** sees ethnicity as a dependable variable, controlled according to its strategic utility for achieving more secular goods (Conversie, 2006). It hinges on the affiliations of individuals to the community which are economically and politically beneficial to them. That is to say they are based on rational awareness and not closeness as in the case of primordialism, but the need for socio-political and economic protection or common interest. Considering this, one can state that the ultimate objective of ethnicity to the instrumentalist is driven by the interest of the groups which maybe political or economic.



The instrumentalist approach can be regarded as a rational reaction to the demands of a situation or to the social pressure within the community or from another community. According to King (2002) ethnicity is a social construct. Thus, ethnicity can undergo changes which explains why ethnic community may not be static. They change from time to time and are defined and structured to meet their community socio-political and economic interests, hence, the description of ethnicity as a strategic instrument of a particular community for enforcing its goal and interest (Bacova, 1998). Though the theory of instrumentalism emphasizes the group/individual struggle for economic and political value, the instrumentalist has been criticized from their narrow definition of ethnic interest as emphasizing socio-political and economic values. The assumption therefore is that ethnic group, in as much as they are still internally stratified, will struggle over their socio-political status within such communities.

One of the basic differences between instrumentalism and primordialism is the basis of individual or group attachment to their community. The instrumentalist it is on account of what, how and when the attachment on their community/ethnic group is beneficial to them or brings them practical advantage which maybe political, social or economic. In a nut shell, individuals understand the closeness to their community/ethnic group as an instrument of achieving their goals. Whereas to the primordialist, even though there maybe element of gain or loss, their relationship to the community, the fact is, they are psychologically and emotionally attached to their community. As explained earlier, the political and economic benefit may be perpetually beneficial to the political class. The primordialist still believe so much in their sociobiological attachment to their community. Therefore, both primordial and instrumental approaches are examples of unnecessary polarization of inherently complementary aspects of the human life (Bacova, 1998). Ethnicity no doubt is a consequence of the mobilization and politicization of ethnic group identity (Egwu, 2007).



## **Ethnic Identity**

To fully understand the concept of ethnic identity there is need to first clarify the concept of the ethnic group. Cohen (cited in Salawu and Hassan, 2011) sees ethnic group as an informal interest group whose members are distinct from the members of other ethnic groups within the larger society because they share kingship, religious and linguistics ties. Yinger, on the other hand defines the ethnic group as a segment of a larger society whose members are thought, by themselves and/or others, to have a common origin and to share important segments of a common origin and culture and who in addition participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients (cited in Lee et al. 2002). In a shift from the above Hale (2004) sees ethnic group as a set of people who perceive that they have things (social, political and economy) in common and that their similarities are captured by a label; the ethnic group name, as in Zulu and Xhosa in South Africa, Igbos, Ishekiri, and Ijaws in Nigeria. These definitions presuppose one major concept which is differentiation either by linguistic differences, environmental enclaves, social, cultural, economic and political patterns. An ethnic group is usually separated from others through the combination of or separately by any of this identifiable feature. This is why Elebeke (2010) defined identity as a process located in the core of the individual and also the core of his communal culture. Your identity is who you are. Who you are is defined by your language, habitat or environment, socio-cultural life pattern, political and economic features. The three major ethnic identities in Nigeria are mostly defined in consideration to their distinctive environmental enclaves therefore those within the North are classified as Hausa – Fulani; the West Yoruba’s and the East Igbo’s. However, due to perceived economic cum political marginalization other ethnic identities have metamorphosed within the Nigerian state mostly adopting their ethnic identity through linguistic differentials. Thus, today Nigeria is said to comprise of more than 500 ethnic identities (Osuntokun, 2017). Ethnic identity is therefore a conscious awareness within an individual or group of distinctive features which separates then from other groups within a pluralistic society. It is mostly manifested in agitations for the restructuring of existing status - quo perceived to be unjust mostly in areas such as resource control, equity and political inclusiveness.



## **National Development**

The concept of development has wide range of meaning and applicability. However, in social discuss it generally implies human (cultural, social, economic and political) positive progress or advancement towards the most generally acceptable values. Development means the process by which people become better off. It can also be defined as the process of improving the quality of all human lives (Samson, 1999). One of the three important elements often emphasized in the consideration of the concept of development and which is relevant to us in this paper is the creation of conditions conducive to the growth of people's self-esteem through the establishment of social, political and economic systems and institutions. The term national development is very comprehensive, it includes all aspects of the life of an individual and the nation. It includes full growth and expansion of industries, agriculture, education, social, religious and cultural institutions. Development has been defined as the widely participatory process of social and material advancement (including greater equality, freedom, and other values) for the majority of the people through gaining greater control of their environment (Rogers; 1976; Rodney; 1974) cited in Samson (1999). However, in a multi ethnic society which asserts its self as nation or national entity, its development while encompassing all the above mentioned features must be holistic in policy formulation and implementation given equitable consideration to all the federating units without marginalizing any ethnic group majority or minority. National development therefore implies considering the nation first before ethnic cleavages in all actions of the state, its development of a nation as a whole. National integration is therefore an important prerequisite for national development in a diverse and multi ethnic n society such as Nigeria.

## **Ethnic Identity and National Integration in Nigeria**

By the time Nigeria gained independence from Britain in 1960, her artificial origin, coupled with other factors, had bequeathed it a number of fundamental problems, one of which is the challenge of integrating, into a cohesive socio – political whole, the various entities and strange bed fellows that were lumped together by the colonialist. With



independence, the British paternalistic moderation influence in the country was removed. But the socio-economic and political inequalities among and between different ethnic groups which British rule had created remained (Emerson 1960) cited in (Osuntokun, Ukaogo, and Odoemene, 2016). At independence, therefore, one can say that these was a mal integration of the diverse ethnic groups within the new state. What was needed to reduce the scale of existing ethnicity which has risen from group aspiration as well as the feeling of deprivation and marginalization from the views point of Brubaker (2004) was to design social and economic policies that would reduce inequalities. The new government, however, did not improve the situation its political and economic policies further divided the ethnic groups.

Thus, at independence, the people making up the country were not effectively integrated toward the end of evolving a true sense of national identity and commitment to the survival and development of the nation. Under this dichotomy, national integration continued to be imperiled. Ethnic loyalty took precedence over national identity. The nation's people identified themselves primarily as Hausa – Fulani, Igbo or Yoruba, for example. Their identity as Nigerians lay in the shadow of their tribal and parochial allegiance (Osuntokun, Ukaogo, and Odoemene, 2016). Events surrounding her independence give credence to the claim that the pursuit of self-government lessens the likelihood of achieving cultural and political unity, or national integration. Ethnic-nationalists succeeded in wresting independence from the colonial master but failed woefully in integrating the country. The relevant questions to ask are: Why did the colonial nationalist in Nigeria fail to integrate the different nationalities living within the territory of the country into a cohesive national community? Why did the foremost Nigerian nationalist elites choose to sow the seeds of discord, and not unity in the country, with their choice of ethnic nationalism? Is there any hope of harmonious multi-ethnic integration today? (Adebola Ekanola 2006).

Considering the problem of ethnicity in the context of the Nigerian civil service, it is important to emphasis the fact that in Nigeria some ethnic groups are more educationally and economically advanced than others. This disparity in the socio- economic development of Nigeria's ethnic groups creates a social structure that inhibits



relationships of confidence and mutual trust among the groups. The form of social interactions which results from this situation arose suspicious hostile rivalries, envy and fear of domination of one group by another. This no doubt, constitutes a serious impediment to national integration in the country (Davis and Kalu-Nwiyu, 2001). Although it is logical to expect recruitment into the civil service to emphasize education such emphasis many believe should take cognizance of the ethnic composition of the country by allocating positions in the service in proportion to the population of each ethnic group in Nigeria (Tijani, 2005). The view has been translated into a game variously known as “ethnic balancing”, the “quota system” and federal character”. Playing the game of ethnic balancing, successive governments in Nigeria have had to cause the service to modify its rules of appointment and advancement to allow for the participation of a sizeable numbers of people of the less developed areas, particularly northerners. The modification, an apparent distortion of the merit system, has been justified on the grounds that it makes for unity, peace and political stability in Nigeria. And so this paper is today asking if the current administration has reflected this principle in its appointment of security chiefs? Could there be a relationship between ethnic insecurity, heightened ethnic agitation for secession and nature of security appointments within the nation?

Taking a critical look at the nations quest to achieve national integration and political stability Babangida Aliyu (former governor of Niger State) posited that political ideology of Late Azikiwe will be handy in this direction. According to him, the present leadership of the country has lessons to learn from the great “Zik”, who was known as a bridge builder in Nigerian politics during the first and second republics as great statesman and nationalist per excellence. He opined that the nation’s quest for national integration will only be successful if artificial boundaries created as a result of political exigencies are jettisoned to pave way for restoration of selfless service, accommodation, dialogue and cosmopolitanism (Nnaji, 2009). Nigeria’s failure to achieve integration cannot be blamed, of course, solely on ethnicity, nor can ethnicity be dismissed as a vital means to the necessary ends of national integration. After all several other highly ethicized nations in Asia and Latin America has been able to integrate purposefully. Therefore, rather than



dwelling on ethnicity as a barrier to attaining nationhood, new nations such as Nigeria must better understand and practice how ethnicity can be properly managed to achieve national integration.

### **Dialectics of Ethnic Identity in Nigeria**

The sociological human approach to diversity requires an understanding of the affinity that exists between individuals and values of a common descent. A sense of identity enables individuals to maintain a sense of coherent self-unity over time and space despite the physical, social and psychological changes they experience (Rosanwo, 2012). Ethnic identity in itself is thus not a curse but the way it is managed. However, ethnic identity in Nigeria is dialectically linked to her multi-ethnic characteristics that cannot be separated from her socio-economic development, political and social stability. In the first place, there tends to be an imbalance between ethnic and national consciousness. As Nigeria's fortune has progressively waned, most Nigerians have recoiled back to focusing mainly on the interests of their ancestral origins while neglecting the overall interests of the country as a whole. This is the same idea that encourages official corruption with each government official seizing the opportunity of his/her position for personal and family benefits first and foremost and next the interests of those who share his/her ethnic origins. For instance, the guarantee of employment or award of contract is a function of one's tribal person in position of authority. The phrase "It is our turn" was coined from this practice. Merit and excellence are sacrificed on the altar of primordial thinking (Itodo, 2018).

The inability to fight corruption in Nigeria is because there seems to be a tradition in the country which forbids citizens from exposing fellow tribesmen for corrupt practices. Corrupt tendencies are exhibited and laws violated, yet such individuals invoke ethnic sentiments to get away from, or prevent prosecution. For example, the heinous killings by Fulani herdsmen in Benue, Taraba, Nassarawa, and other states which the government is pretending to be unable to handle is an ugly case of national identity contradiction (Itodo, 2018). The overall encompassing Nigerian national interests are often relegated to the backwaters. In other words, we fail to see and address those interests which are



common to all Nigerians in many important times. Also, Nigeria has been robbed of meritocracy, excellence and unity. We are still battling favouritism, federal character or quota, zoning, catchment areas, state of origin in a world that has become a small village through globalization. The Nigerian leadership is yet to produce authentic system of governance and functional blueprint that can exploit our differences, everybody accuses the other of marginalization.

Furthermore, there tend to be overemphasis of ethnic origins to the detriment of national identity in Nigeria. It is one thing to be proud of one's ethnic origin, home town and family; it is another thing entirely when such pride becomes so overwhelming that one begins to think that his or her ethnic group is better than all others based on either some important historical or contemporary achievements. More so, ethnic politics has created a deep-rooted structural inequality in the distribution of education, employment and sharing of power. This has resulted in what we may describe as individual, tribal and regional, religious and at times gender ethnocentrism. There is on the individual level a colossal dearth of fair and equal participation in national life. Educational inequality is at three levels, the first being the historical fact that the Northern Muslim leaders for fear of converting their faithful to Christianity were initially reluctant to allow western Christian missionaries to introduce western education and have today come to be legally recognized as educationally disadvantage area which is used as criteria for admission in all government own educational institutions (Onyibo 2016). The other being that while some southern Nigeria ethnic groups or regions have free education programs for their member's others do not. Hence in those regions without free education only those families who are wealthy can afford to pay for the education of their members. From the above one can see that there is a total absence of equality of opportunity in Nigeria right from the start. The same inequality of opportunity rules in the realm of employment with the entrenchment of federal character which sacrifices merit at altar of mediocrity. Merit is replaced by family, ethnic, or religious members or what Anadi (1982) called bribing power and friendship. Even in official government circle, the government that proclaims its fidelity to the secular character of the state is seen to be patronizing the Islamic



religion at the expense of other religions. These hinder the emergence of national identity and development of Nigeria multiethnic diversity.

Again in Nigeria, geo-ethnicity is used to determine one's citizenship. For instance, a child whose parents come from Anambra state which is in southeastern part of Nigeria dominated by Igbo ethnic group, but was born and brought up in Lagos southwestern Nigeria dominated by Yoruba ethnic group cannot be considered as an indigene for any benefit in Lagos even though his/her parent lived and paid their tax to Lagos state government, because he/she is first considered to be an Anambrian. If he/she is not careful he/she may lose his/her rights and privileges in Anambra because the child lacks, contact there. Where this happens, the child may be thrown into a very hopeless dilemma which can bring about identity crisis in his/her entire life. While, of course this may contribute to the development of state identity, it could be considered to be detrimental to national identity.

Similarly, the issue of leadership in Nigeria and the orientation and behavior of elite and politicians present a serious challenge to national integration. The Nigerian state has had ill luck of parading and recycling selfish and inept leaders who operate along ethnic lines and sectional loyalties. While in office, they concentrate the allocation of national wealth on those from their ethnic region thereby discarding Nigerian nationalism and the inculcation of national identity and integration – political victimization. They show a high level of insensitivity to the yearnings and aspiration of the citizens. Because of government's unresponsiveness to the issues of citizens' welfare, the people begin to look for other avenues to survive (Onyibo, 2016). These other avenues could be dysfunctional to national progress and inimical to national identity and integration. The political elites have persistently covertly awakened ethnic sentiments and consciousness amongst the citizenry to advance their parochial political ambitions contrary to their assertions "advancing the livelihood of our ethnic group" rather their intentions are motivated by exploitative ethnic sentiments.

Thus Dudley (1973) asserts that the elite became the chief proponents and purveyors of parochialism and particularistic values. Odeyemi (2014) observed the above trend when



he states that the elites keep themselves in political office by playing and preying on the ignorance and the fears of the poverty stricken majority of their people. Thus, the elite use the ethnic factor to retain themselves in office as political leaders, directors or managers of national corporations and parastatals by making false claims of representing their ethnic groups. Even when they do not perform well in political office, they deceive the people by whipping up ethnic sentiments; raising fears and tensions of the threat that would be posed to their ethnic group if other groups should gain political ascendancy.” The resultant effect is indifference toward national concerns. National identity and integration under this condition cannot be attained.

### **Ethnic identity and National Development in Nigeria**

Onyibo (2016) strongly maintained that Nigeria as a country is richly endowed with both natural and human resources to propel her to higher economic, social and political heights. What prevented and is still preventing this take off has been spotted by many analysts to be Nigerian’s weak national identity and lack of social integration. Ethnicity no doubt is a consequence of the mobilization and politicization of ethnic group identity (Egwu, 2007). Ethnicity, no doubt, is more pronounced in competitive situations where available socio-political and economic resources are scarce in relation to the interests which grow around them, argued Nnoli (cited in Egwu, 2007). It is the frustration that nothing is working and nobody is trying to find solutions to pressing problems that is making people to go back to their ethnic comfort zones. The question of equity and inclusive development amongst the ethnic groups has remained unanswered; overtime Nigeria has grown powerful individual personalities who are stronger than state institutions that could have paved the way for inclusive national development. The result has been a continues scramble for resources by these powerful elites, they elites fan the embers of ethnicity amongst the citizenry for their personal self-interest.

This inclusive development cannot be discussed solitarily without first looking at political and economic institutions through which the notion of inclusive development is explained. Institutions are seen as durable systems of established social rules and conventions that structure repeated human interaction through which a society (state)



undertakes certain functions which may be political, economic or social (Hoggson, 2001, North, 1989). In essence, an institution is a regulatory agent that specifies and motivates how groups and individuals in a society (state) perform certain or specific socio-political and economic functions. In a multi-ethnic state, institutions no doubt would have a profound influence (negative or positive) on the pattern of socio-political and economic performance. Political and economic institutions are two variables that significantly rely on each other, giving us an insight into the fact that economic development may best be promoted by political institutions and vice versa.

Diamond (2012) observes that while economic institutions are critical for determining the prosperity of a state, it is the politics and political institutions that determine what economic institution a country has. By political institution we mean an organization which creates, enforces and applies laws that mediate/manage conflict, make policies on the economy and the social (regulatory and welfare agencies) system. Examples of political institutions include political parties, the courts etc. The term may also refer to the recognized rules and principles within which the above organizations operate including such concepts as the right to vote and to be voted for (Diamond, 2012). Political institutions affect economic institutions by providing the political framework that creates rules that either facilitate or militate against the growth of the economic institutions. Thus, inclusive political institutions will lead to progressive economic institutions. Political inclusivity is essential to the growth and well-being of the state, particularly multi-ethnic states. On the other hand, economic institutions can be viewed as those institutions that perform economic functions in relation to establishing and protecting the economic rights of groups and individuals and as well permit cooperation in a state. Inclusive economic institutions are those that allow and encourage the participation of groups and individuals in economic activities and allow individuals to make the choices they wish, observes Diamond (2012). Inclusive economic institutions arise from political institutions that share political power, particularly in a multi-ethnic state instead of allowing power to be vested in individuals. In other words, political power rests on the broad participation of citizens in the decision making process. This would deprive the political class of their exclusive control of socio-political and economic power.



Significantly, economic growth can be promoted by political institutions, the reason why Flachaire (2011) assert that political institutions are a deep cause of development. The above shows that good and workable political and economic institutions are unequivocally needed for the sustainability of a political system. In the words of Diamond (2012), “good institutions” refers to laws and practices that serve as a motivational factor for citizens (groups and individuals) to work hard, and become economically productive, and thereby enrich themselves as well as the state. Hence, good economic and political institutions will likely increase the possibility of resolving re-distributional conflicts in a state.

A close observation of the above submission shows that for political and economic institutions to function in a multi-ethnic state there has to be an inclusive development that will serve as an antidote to social-political exclusion, ethnic inequality and the hegemonic dominance of the political class. Inclusive development refers to the perception that every individual and group in a state (multi-ethnic) has equal socio-political and economic rights to be part of the society which invariably enhances governance and promotes effective institutions, sound socio-economic policies, and respect for values of every ethnic group. It is imperative for multi-ethnic states to involve every ethnic group in decision making process for political sustainability as well as effective national development.

Socio-political exclusion impacts negatively on culturally/ethnically defined groups while inclusiveness promotes socio-political integration. Inclusive socio-political policies give room for productive political resources. They create an enabling environment for every ethnic group to participate in governance; it is also a positive development towards recognizing the socio-political rights of every ethnic group. The end product of this is development and stability. Thus, stability and sustainability of the political system in Nigeria, requires input from every ethnic group. The recognition of every ethnic group via their input to the political system will bring about healthy socio-political integration and a healthy political system. Ethnicity can be harmonious and cooperative. Often it is the unacknowledged dimension of ethnicity that produces the key to its management (Osaghae, 2007). It is important to state here that the recognition of the position of each



ethnic group in Nigeria is very significant. This is because the knowledge based on the position of one ethnic group is unfinished, therefore the only and the best way to know and acknowledge the position of others is through an inclusive system which brings out the truth about the stand of every ethnic group in the polity. The notion of ethnicity has long been used to indicate various axes of ethnic differentiation that eventually contribute to socio-political and economic inequality in multi-ethnic states. What this translates to is a political project that involves the search for a cohesive system of every ethnic group leading to national integration and development. This will eventually produce positive results and an inevitable socio-political transformation. Individuals and groups that are excluded from the mainstream of national life appear as victims of poor socio-political and economic policies.

### **Forward looking**

There is nothing wrong in being patriotic and embracing one's ethnicity but not to the extent of hating and denigrating fellow countrymen and women. It is this paper's considered opinion that it is the dwindling opportunities for employment that is fueling the ethnic fissiparous tendencies in the country. It is idle hands that the devil finds work for. The question is where are the Nigerians and how do we build a country we can all call our own? Karl Marx is right when he said economics is at the basis of all relationship. You are a good father when you can provide for your family. A country is worth dying for when that country can provide for you and for your descendants. We all want to live and provide for ourselves in a country which has a future for our families. In the absence of this, we look for alternatives. The lack of opportunities and the level of poverty in the land is driving us to the edge of the precipice (Osuntokun, 2017).

The uneven distribution of resources among the component units making up the federal especially the utter neglect of the minority group across the country have brought about the national question. Some political analyst feels that for the continuous peaceful co-existence of Nigeria as a geographical entity, there is the need to re-examine the poor managerial skill of the state over the relations between the different nationalities brought under the same political order and the Nigeria state as a whole (Ogwuazor-Momah 2002).



Such a question would also help in solving the hostility arising between competing states over the allocation of scarce resources and ensure the stability of the country as a whole. This would be made possible by ascertaining the loyalty of the individual citizen to the country without sharing it with the regions since the center would guarantee justice, equality and fair play to all irrespective of tribe or ethnic background.

The national question in summary deals with what becomes the fate of the minority groups as well as the powerless majority over their own fair share of the nation's resources (i.e. political and economic resources), (Albert 2001). This is the question and the earlier a solution is found to this the better for the country.

It must be noted that it is not just the merger of the different national communities with a political system that constitute the problems rather than the ordering of the relationship between these component units (Onyeoziri, 2002). Other countries of the world having similar background history are the United States of America (USA) as reported by (Skinenner, 1986) and even Great Britain (Garvin 1986). In all of these countries, the concept of ethnicity and tribe never appeared in their political dictionary and this has helped built a virile national economy for these states. They were able to operate whatever system of government since they enjoyed the full loyalty of their people to the center unlike Nigeria where allegiance is more to the component units. What we need to do is re-engineering of the country to make it workable. The center is too strong. We must devolve power to the regions whatever the number of them we collectively agree to have. We must free the resources of this country from over-administration and channel them to physical development and industrialization so as to create jobs for our people. We must embrace the principle and practice of fiscal and cooperative federalism. If people have jobs and they can fully realize their potentialities, it will not matter to them who is president or prime minister. In any case, the arena of politics should be shifted to the regions while the center will simply manage affairs collectively assigned to it. We spend too much time on politics and little time for development. It is not so in serious countries like Japan, Germany and Canada to mention a few.



## **Conclusion**

Considering the relationship between socio-political and economic development which are dependable variables, political stability is a catalyst to the sustainability of other variables. Because ethnicity can be abused, through the ages ethnic elites have been using ethnic symbolism to attain and retain political power. No doubt, the challenges of ethnicity are unprecedented, considering its negative effect on groups that have long been excluded or marginalized. This raises the question of what the developmental needs of the people are that constitute each ethnic group, in an attempt to ensure the prevalence of national cohesion over ethnic affiliation. The socio-political and economic inclusion of every group in governance which will eventually translate to the socio-political and economic development of each group seems to be the answer. Ethnicity no doubt is a complex socio-political phenomenon, therefore socio-political and economic exclusion is not only ethically dangerous to socio-political development but also economically unproductive. It deprives groups and individuals of the opportunity of necessary development that can benefit the society. Therefore, it is necessary to develop an integrative socio-political framework that will explicitly recognize the participatory role of every ethnic group; a system that is not ethnocentric and exclusionary; a system that recognizes that differences are important to development and that will encompass notions of equity, and acknowledgement of differential socio-political and economic power of every ethnic group. The time for unity of purpose must be now, hence, socio-political inclusion should be seen as central to political stability and socio-economic sustainability.



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