Ethnicity in Nigeria:Reflections on Achieving Unity in Diversity

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Abstract

Ethnicity is an important factor of interactions in a multi-ethnic societies like Nigeria. This explains its centrality in the nature and character of Nigerian state within the context of inter-group relations. The complexity of ethnicity has adversely affected inter-group relations in Nigeria. Thus, the influence of ethnic consciousness on the politics of Nigeria cannot be ignored. Rather than becoming more unified and cohesive, Nigeria remains deeply divided as ever before. This paper argues that no matter the centrality of conflict in inter-group relations, social interactions are usually dynamic and the pervasiveness of conflict also depends on the strategies in which group relations are managed. The paper seeks to demonstrate on one hand the historical exploration of ethnicity and ethnic politics in contemporary Nigeria and on the other hand, the need to use ethnicity as a national integration project. Thus, it is pertinent to evolve a state-wide national identity from the many ethno-cultural groupings with which they are presently constituted in Nigeria. This is important because unity in diversity can be a tool for socio-economic development in Nigeria.

Keywords: Ethnicity , Diversity , Unity , Nigeria .

Introduction

It has been observed by political theorists that ethnicity has been one of the potential obstacles to democracy and political stability in multi-ethnic societies [19] , [15]. The issue of ethnicity and ethnic diversity has continuously constituted an important aspect of African political activities both in the colonial and post-independence era. For Nigeria, this problem seriously hampers efforts at national integration as it applies to the building of a nation-state out of the disparate ethnic, geographic, social, economic and religious elements in the country. Thus, ethnicity is one of the challenges stymying nation-building efforts in Nigeria. Although other primordial factors (region, religion and even race) are not without some weight in Nigerian politics, it is ethnicity that has counted the foremost in terms of the individual's identity in a variety of settings [17].

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Consequently, ethnic demands are currently the most important sources of violent political conflicts in Nigeria, ranging from secessionist revolt, cry for marginalization, greater political participation, end to economic and social discriminations, and the clamouring for self-determination. Whether ethnic diversity threatens Nigeria's political stability depends very much on how it is structured and managed. To address the challenges posed by identity-based politics, this chapter interrogates the dynamics of ethnicity in relation to crisis of political culture in Nigeria. The chapter places more emphasis on how unity in ethnic diversity can be a source of national integration for Nigeria.

Conceptual Analysis of Ethnicity

In Nigeria, ethnicity constitutes the fundamental basis for identity and diversity. For us to understand ethnicity as a concept, we must first of all examine the concept of ethnic identity. Ethnic identity according to [35] can best be understood through an examination of its etymological origins. The term *ethnic* had Latin and Greek origins – *ethnicus* and *ethnicas* both meaning nation. In the same vein, identity is formed from *idem* meaning same. Therefore, in combining the definitions and interpretations of identity and ethnicity it can be concluded that they mean, or at minimum imply, the sameness of a band or nation of people who share common customs, traditions, historical experiences, and in some instances geographical residence [35]. Going by [31] definition, ethnic identity is a dynamic, multidimensional construct that refers to one's identity, or sense of self as a member of an ethnic group.

What then is ethnicity? Ethnicity according to Bell (1975:174), "is a means for disadvantaged groups to claim a set of rights and privileges which the existing power structures have denied them". While Despres (1975), defined ethnicity as largely a subjective process of status identification. Hence ethnic groups are formed to the extent that the actors use ethnic identities to categorize themselves and others for the purpose of interaction. For [26] ethnicity refers to a social formation resting upon culturally specific practice and a unique set of symbols and cosmology. This implies that ethnicity denotes a group of individuals who consider themselves, or are considered by others, to share common characteristics which differentiate them from other collectivities within a society. While [24] argued that ethnicity emerges when the members of an ethnic group become characterized by a common consciousness of their identity in relation to other groups with in-group and out-group differences becoming marked with time. The clear meaning of ethnicity is provided by [18] when they conceived it as an interaction or relationship that exists among people of different ethnic groups who decides to base their relationship on the difference, which normally brings about competition on issues like power and wealth.

Diversity of Ethnic Groups in Nigeria

Nigeria is one of the most culturally diverse nations in the world. It is thus, a multi-cultural nation with diverse socio-cultural system deeply rooted in ethnic segmentation. The cultural variability in the country is represented through ethnic categorization which collectively forms ethnic plurality, culture multiplicity and ethno-linguistic groupings [25]. The ethnic composition of Nigeria is usually summarized in terms of groups being majority and minority. This is a useful categorization, but it becomes more useful when balanced with an analysis of the more intricate categories, like those of *sub-groups*, into which most groups are divided, *fringe* or border groups, "*enclave*" groups, or groups that exist in host communities, especially in urban areas, and *dispersed* groups, that is, groups that may have a core territory (or homeland), but are found in other localities, states, or regions in the country [28].

The exact number of ethnic groupings in Nigeria remains unknown. Some sources put it at 370 [29] while [5] estimated its composition to over 370 ethnic groups. However, the population percentages of the majority of these groups are small when compared with the seven largest ethnic groups constituting about 88% of the country's population. These are Hausa and Fulani (29%), Yoruba (21%), Igbo (18%), Ijaw (10%), Kanuri (4%), Ibibio (3.5%), and Tiv (2.5%) [11].

Basically, the ethnic groups in Nigeria may, for convenience, be looked at from the perspective of the four old regions, although today, the country is divided into six geopolitical zone (not yet entrenched in the constitution). The old Northern Region as it was, represented the largest of the four regions (Northern Region, Western Region, Midwestern Region and Eastern Region) both in terms of population and land mass. It is pertinent to note that five of the ten largest linguistic groups in the country (Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, Tiv and Nupe) are in the Northern Region.

In the old Eastern Region, there are three major ethnic groups (Igbo, Ibibio and Ijaw) and other smaller groups such as the Efik, Anang, Leyigha, Yako, Ogoni, Andoni, etc. The Yoruba are the dominant ethnic group in the old Western Region of Nigeria. However, there are several sub-ethnicities in the group with somewhat different dialects of Yoruba language. These include the Egba, Ijebu, Oyo, Ijesha and Ekiti among others. In the old Midwestern Region, the Edo (Bini) and Esan emerge as major ethic groups, with the Urhobo, further south, as well as the Itsekiti. The Midwestern Region, a real mosaic, also comprises significant populations of Ijaw, Yoruba and Igbo extract, among others [23].

More importantly, when the Hausa-Fulani, the Yoruba and the Igbo form the majority, the rest of the ethnic groups are flited into the minority classification which in itself possesses different degrees of status relative to their size and political influence [30] In the same vein, most people in Nigeria prefer to identify with less dominant classifications depending on the reason for ethnic appropriation. It is common to see individuals describe him/herself as Mbaise rather than Igbo, while an Ekiti man or woman described themselves as Ekiti rather than Yoruba [25]. In this context, Nigeria is characterized by ethnic pluralism.

Problems of Ethnic Divisions and Ethnic Violence in Nigeria

In the pre-independence period, colonialism played an active role in Nigeria's inter-group relations. [3] noted that colonialism changed the trends of events in the historical process of ethnic groups in Nigeria. This is because colonialism led to a radical departure from original and traditional setting to distorted cultural and political values of Nigerian people. The colonial regime created the Nigerian state, but decided to hold on to the country through a policy of divide and rule. In the process, it encouraged the separate development of the constituent ethnic units that make up Nigeria without encouraging the "Nigerianess" of the whole [20] Thus, the ethnic tripod to which the colonial powers granted independence is central to the persistent questions of ethnicity, sense of belonging and crises of citizenship [5]. The situation was further complicated by the construction of a tri-regional colonial federalism in which each regional unit contained one dominant ethnic group and multiple minority ethnic components.

The North was dominated by Hausa-Fulani, the West by Yoruba and the East by Igbo. The structure also encouraged the emergence of regional political parties – the Northern People's Congress (NPC) in the North, the Action Group (AG) in the West, and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) in the East. The entire arrangement resulted in the political marginalization, economic deprivation and social oppression of the minority ethnic groups and their consequent and agitation for autonomy [20].

The ethnic minority question is another problem confronting Nigeria in nation building. Despite the existence of multiple bases of minority identities in the country, minorities are defined almost exclusively. Even at that, minorities are not defined in absolute numbers but generally in reference to the dominant ethnic-nationalities of Hausa, Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba. The implication is that the three dominant ethnic groups (Hausa- Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo are referred to as majority ethnic groups, while the remaining ethnic groups are lumped together as minorities. As [2] observe, it is even more baffling that some groups such as the Kanuri, the Tiv and the Ijaw with relatively high population figures are all lumped together as minorities with groups whose members consist of only a few hundred thousand people. In this sense, to

attain political power in Nigeria, the overwhelming of about 297 tribes are minor, while the three dominant ethnic groups are major. It is generally acknowledged that the Fulani in Nigeria are numerically at par with many of the groups categorizes minorities, yet the Fulani are not counted among the minorities. They are not viewed as a minority group because of the general belief that they do not suffer socio-economic disadvantages despite their relatively smaller population. Thus, the seeming political advantages which the Fulani are said to possess have elevated them from the ethnic minority status to which their population would have consigned them. In the general sense in which ethnic minorities are understood in the country, the Fulani are not a minority ethnic group. Also, the popular impression in Nigeria is that the Hausa and Fulani, through a supposed politico-cultural alchemy, have become "so fused and assimilated" as to now constitute one ethnic group- the Hausa-Fulani [2].

Understandably the adoption of a Federal Constitution originated from Nigeria's search for a common bond that will unite its divise ethnic groups. The whole idea was to establish a union without necessarily losing the identities of the various ethnic components. As the country was advancing towards independence, there were patent fears of political and economic domination. These fears and concerns took a multi-dimensional form. On the other hand, the minority ethnic groups entertained fear of domination by the larger ethnic groups. On the other hand, there was a mutual suspicion between the North and the South. The Northerners feared that the southerners, by virtue of their earlier start and advancement in western education, would remain the dominant group in a fully integrated system, while the latter, on their part, expressed concern over northern domination because of their numerical strength. As a direct response to these fears, Nigeria opted for a federal system to allay these fears and reflect the country's diverse social, political, cultural and economic interests [20]. As a design for the management of ethnic diversity and conflict, the Nigerian experiment in federalism according to [32] has produced mixed results, leading to sharply contradictory assessments of the efficacy and quality of the country's federal governance.

In the First Republic, the federal constitutional arrangement did not bring about the unity of Nigeria. Rather, fundamental structural flaws in the design of the federal system contributed heavily to the collapse of Nigeria's first post-independence democratic republic (1960-66) and to bloody ethno-military infighting, including the outbreak of civil war in 1967 [32] The ensuring civil war resulted in the victory of federal forces over the Eastern Region and defeat was not made any sweeter by the war caption of "No

Victor, No Vanquished". The Civil War according to [9] completed the conquest of the East and the West by the North which also sustained near-mortal injuries.

Furthermore, buildup to the civil war further complicated the picture as the original three regions which became four regions in 1963, were split into 12 states in 1967. To mitigate and minimize this destructive inter-ethnic rivalry, the ruling coalition in Nigeria has embarked on multiplying centres of political competition through state and local government creation. Since this 1967 state creation exercise, the number of states has further multiplied to 19 in 1976, 21 in 1987 and 36 in 1996. Each state creation exercise was rationalized as a mechanism for allaying minorities' fears of domination and thereby providing for more integration. However, these political divisions have not doused tensions and agitations; rather the process compounds the issues as these new divisions exposes hidden heterogeneity that replicates ethnic politics at that level, making the situation uncontrollable [16] , [20] offers a more detailed explanation on this scenario:

> The decision to divide Nigeria into six geopolitical zones to ensure a fairly well-spread distribution of federal positions and the creations of more local administrative units throughout the country are measures designed to correct the above injustices. Unfortunately, these measures at creating a more ethnically balanced federal structure have not only led to stiff competition between the main ethnic groups in the country, it has also led to the tearing apart of different communities within the same ethnic groups in the desperate struggle to corner amenities to their respective sides.

Since the end of the civil war in 1970, fierce political competition between various ethnic groups led to violent cleavages and communal crisis, such like the Kafanchan uprising that spread to other parts of Kaduna state in 1987; the conflict in Wukari and Takun in Taraba state between the Tiv and Jukun which began in 1990; the mass killing in Tafawa Balewa local government of Bauchi state between the Semayi and the Hausa community; the 1992 Zagon-Kataf clashes between the indigenous Katab and the Hausa-Fulani migrant ommunity, the Andoni-Ogoni bloodshed of 1993; the Aguleri-Umuleri feud and the Ife-Modakeke clashes that is rather intra-ethnic. In the same vein, the new forms of this manifestation include the intermittent Warri crisis between the Ijaw, Itsekiri, and Urhobo, the clashes between the Hausa and Yoruba in Sagamu, Lagos, Ilorin and Ibadan, the ethno-religious riots in Kano and Kaduna states

stemming from the Sharia legal controversy, the Nasarawa crisis involving the Tiv and other ethnic groups in the state; the Yelwa-Shendam and Jos clashes in Plateau state, among others [16].

Similarly, the phenomena of ethnicity and religious intolerance have led to incessant recurrence of ethno-religious conflicts, which have given birth to many ethnic militias like the Odua People's Congress (OPC); the Bakassi Beys; the Egbesu Boys; the Ijaw Youth Congress (IYC); and the Igbo People's Congress (IPC). Others include the Arewa People's Congress (APC), the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB); and the Ohanaeze Ndigbo. While we may consider this conclusion erroneous given that Ohanaeze Ndigbo, Arewa People's Congress, Igbo People's Congress and Ijaw Youth Congress are not ethnic militias, we cannot but accept that some crises have purely exhibited ethnic and religious characters devoid of any identified ulterior motive [36]. To be sure, ethnic identity formation and violence associated with it is a manifestation of who is included or excluded from power sharing formular and decision- making process in Nigeria. Also, the emergence of Boko Haram as an ethno-religious militant group has strengthened the argument that exclusion from power drives categories groups into violent solution [16].

Extent and Consequences of Inter-Ethnic Crises in Nigeria

Inter-ethnic crises have posed serious challenge to the survival and peaceful co-existence of Nigeria. In the same vein, series of ethnic crises has resulted in the destruction of lives and property. Apart from loss of lives and properties and the emotional trauma that accompany these, the persistent of ethnic tension and conflicts has resulted in declining national cohesion and identity, undermining of legitimacy of the state and considerable loss of confidence on the machinery of government. Vital issues of citizenship persistently contradict, and conflict with, notions of "indigeneship", which are based on ethnic and communal identities. As a result, the debate on the National Question has remained as relevant and impassioned as ever in the history of Nigeria, of course with dire results [21].

The period 1999 to 2019 witnessed a lot of instabilities. The prevalence of one ethnic conflict or another been the mainstay of Nigeria was not only pronounced, but exacerbated. Apart from the alarming and astounding increase in both number and magnitude of loss, destruction and wanton human carnage, ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, championed by militias and private armies alike since the era of the nascent democracy has become fused into the political agitation strategies of groups. While conflicts and crises may have become more rapid and heightened, the nature has undergone considerable change. The change

has been in the fact that ethnic violence mitigated by ethnic militias, even, while bloody, are now channeled towards garnering more political benefits and economic gains for the groups concerned within the context of the new democratic dispensation (Femi, 2005).

Another consequence of inter-ethnic crises is the retardation of growth and development. Ethnic violence, regardless of its nature tends to slow down development; because development can only take place under a peaceful atmosphere. In other words, no amount of national unity and social integration can be achieved under any kind of unstable atmosphere. Also, the growing nature of ethnic conflicts in Nigeria discouraged direct foreign investment. No foreign investor will like to invest funds in a country or an area that is divided by communal or ethno-religious conflicts. There are fears at two levels. Firstly, the basic aim of foreign investment is to make profit, which is not possible in an environment of crisis. Secondly, the resources invested already will definitely go down the drain. Foreigners will not want to live in a country where there is no guarantee of lives and property (Onwumah, 2014). In the same vein, [12] affirmed that the consequences of inter-ethnic conflicts in Nigeria can be looked at from both domestic and external dimensions. The domestic consequences involve certain internal negative characteristics that incessant conflicts generate in Nigeria. On the other hand, external impacts have to do with issues of how conflicts affect the way other countries around the world perceive or relate with Nigeria.

More importantly, the consequences of inter-ethnic crisis on democracy in Nigeria has to do with displacement of persons and surge in inter-state migration. Those who flee the scenes of violent conflict eventually become refugees in other places. This has serious impacts on socio-economic activities of the people concerned. For instance, several people have recently fled from states such as Borno, Yobe, Plateau and other crisis-prone areas as a result of series of attacks on innocent individuals. In addition, during the heighten tension of ethnic youth militias attacks on oil companies and oil workers in the Niger Delta, quite a number of companies were either closed down due to stoppage of operations or relocated to different places [12]. This affects not only the quality of life of the people, but also bring distrust among every ethnic nationalities in Nigeria.

Unity in Diversity in Nigeria: A Myth or Reality

[22] argued that ethnicity has become one type of political grouping within the framework of modern state. Such a grouping is called into being as a result of the keen struggle over new strategic positions within the structure of the new state. In Nigeria, ethnicity is a salient problem of uniting the various ethnic groups within the context of cultural diversity. However, national integration in Nigeria context has been

an attempt to forge "unity in diversity" seeking to wish away socio-cultural differences and imposing uniformity in spite of complex cultural diversity. To actualize the attainment of national integration, successive governments in Nigeria have taken steps to weld the peoples of Nigeria into a United States with a common destiny in spite of their sharp religious, ethnic, linguistic and or cultural differences [1].

As demonstrated in Nigeria today, to wish away socio-cultural differences and forged a culture of uniformity has been a complex issue. This has created more conflict, suspicion, hatred, and consequently hampered socio-economic development. Thus, some people argued that achieving a unity in diversity in Nigeria is a myth rather than reality. On the other hand, some people argued that unity in diversity is realistic in Nigeria if properly managed. According to [20] there is nothing wrong with the country's ethnic diversity. Nigerians should, therefore, not be apologetic about their country's ethnic pluralism. Rather, it is something they should be proud of because diversity enriches human relationship. Nigerians must find ways of harnessing the country's numerous ethnic fingers to construct a very strong national fist to maximise the country's full potential [20].

It is important to emphasize here that unity in diversity can be a source of national integration for Nigeria. The establishment of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) in 1972, Federal Character Commission and Unity Schools are all the efforts put in place by Nigerian government in ensuring national integration. However, for cultural diversity to be an opportunity and not a constraint as observed by [4], it must be strategically managed. This according to them involves its being acknowledged and incorporated in national planning. From all indications, the richness of the Nigerian culture is a manifestation of the socio-cultural differences of over the 250 ethnic groups that inhabit the land. These, coupled with the hospitality of the people, make Nigeria one of the richly endowed potential destinations of the world. The local economy stands to be boosted as many cultural artifacts would be on sale, and many employment opportunities would be created for the people. Wase Rock, Kura falls, ancient Jos museum in Plateau state, Argungu fishing festival in Kebbi state, Obudu cattle ranch in, Tinapa shopping complex, the ancient city of Benin in Edo state, Osun festival in Osogbo, Igbo yam festival, Yankari game reserve in Bauchi state, and Eyo festival in Lagos are some of tourist attractions in Nigeria [4] . In this context, unity in diversity can be a tool for socio-economic development of Nigeria.

Is Ethnic Loyalty a Threat to Nigeria's Unity?

In Nigeria, as in many post-colonial states in Africa, the issue of ethnic loyalty has been a

fundamental problem to political stability. Although, ethnic loyalty is not a new phenomenon in Nigerian body politics, but the restoration of civil rule in May 1999 seems to provide the fertile grounds for civil disturbance and the contestations for the broader issues of identity, participation, and citizenship. Many of Nigeria's constituent units are now regrouping under regional and/ or ethnic umbrella, and Nigeria is threatened by the possibility of dissolving into ethnic kingdoms [5]. As a matter of fact, inter-ethnic schism and the upgrading of ethno-regional and allied cleavages remains the dominant modes of group mobilization for political and social actions in Nigeria's Fourth Republic. The phenomenon of ethnic and regional regrouping is an indication that the stability of Nigeria as a nation is threatened. As part of this resurgence of ethnic mobilization and nationalism, a Yoruba group, the *Afenifere* is campaigning for the Yoruba nation in the South West; just as the *Arewa* Consultative Forum is doing the same for old North. There is also the *Ohaneze* for old Igbos in the South East; and the Middle Belt Forum is doing the same in the Central Region of Nigeria [5] Thus, this social movement within the context of ethnicity and identify politics is increasingly becoming a preferred mode of loyalty by Nigerians as opposed to loyalty to the Nigerian state. Others include the movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), which is clamouring for a secessionist movement of Igbo nation from Nigeria; and the Niger Delta Volunteer Force demanding control of the oil wealth. Like MASSOB, the Odua People's Congress (OPC) and the Ijaw People's Congress, (IPC) are financed by their various ethnic leaders.

Following the campaign for ethnic and regional agenda it is obvious that Nigeria's national unity is not only problematic but also beginning to develop visible cracks. It is imperative to note that the emergence of militant youth in the present political dispensation portends different danger for the sustainability of democracy. Also, government finds it difficult to curb the excesses of these militant grouping who have taken it upon themselves to maintain law and order and also to serve the interest of their different groups for self actualization struggle within the confines of Nigeria [33] Thus, the unresolved national issues have come to be in tandem with ethnic mobilization. Onoge (1993:130) argued that the threats posed by multinationality have over the years been exacerbated by several factors, including the followings:

1. The eruption of violent religious conflicts especially in the northern parts of Nigeria;
2. The preference given to the three major ethnic groups in seeking to balance political, social, economic and cultural forces to the detriment of the minorities;
3. The weaknesses of the federal structure as, for example, in the inability of state and local governments to function as units of effective group autonomy and accommodation;

4. The critical roles played by the opportunistic political class in ethnic relations; and

5. The competition for scarce resources controlled by the state.

Consequently, the politicization of ethnic identity in Nigeria since the inception of the current democratic dispensation in 1999 has become worrisome and disturbing. The resurgence of ethnic regrouping are only interested in what they can get from the state. In the same way, they are not only a threat to the unity of Nigeria and democracy but had a preponderance overture of dislocating the sovereignty of the Nigerian state.

Challenges in Achieving Unity in Ethnically Diversified Nigeria

There exist a contentious interaction of politics and ethnicity in Nigeria. This has posed a lot of challenges in achieving unity in ethnic diversity in Nigeria. In the first instance, federalism involves organization of the state in such a manner as to promote unity while at the same time preserving existing diversities within an over throbbing national entity. This is one of the reasons while federalism represents a unique form of governmental arrangement. As a design for the management of ethnic diversity and conflict, the Nigerian experiment in federalism has produced mixed results, leading to sharply contradictory assessments of the efficacy and quality of the country's federal governance [32]. Thus, ethnic conflict does more harm to federalism and development than good.

Similarly, the failure of Nigerian leaders to establish good governance may have posed a challenge in achieving unity in ethnic diversity in Nigeria. The persistent ethnic chauvinism exhibited by Nigerian elites has grave effects on the psyche of the various ethnic nationalities to an extent that those groups that are even benefitting now lay claim to marginalization at every attempt to reverse the status quo. Even more pertinent is the fact that leadership in the context of Nigeria is characterized by sycophancy, greed, dishonesty, endemic corruption, political authoritarianism, primordial sentiments and political patronage. No national integration or nation building can take place in any country in which her leadership is characterized by the vices listed above [13].

Furthermore, perceived injustice – real and imagined and hate memories, with origin in the past and located in the limitation of the present social order, are exploding. People's fears, violence, and entrenched perceptions are surviving. Years of denial of significant autonomy to the federating units, the absence of governance based on the consent of the citizenry, and the exploitation of resources in the communities, and the lack of an enduring democratic culture and practices contribute in galvanizing various forces to

pose challenges to the state and the ruling elite. To be sure, the project of constructing a Pan-Nigerian identity based on equality of citizens, common political practice; operating the same law and having a citizenry with a cosmopolitan outlook rather than primordial ones still remains much elusive [34].

The imposition of colonial government policy is another challenge for the attainment of unity in ethnic diversity in Nigeria. Colonialism has through the imposition of indirect rule, among other strategies, brought discrete and smaller ethnic groups under the rulership of the dominant ones and thus created problems of identity, sense of belonging as well as participation in decision making. These smaller groups are dominated and marginalized in the scheme of things. Colonialism as observed by [5] "Nativised" citizenship such that rather than citizenship of the country, people were citizenship of the ethnic group. This has greatly affected national unity of the country.

More importantly, the political corruption and economic inefficiency inherent in Nigeria's distributive federalism nudges the federation toward economic stagnation and chaos, which intensifies inter-group contention and conflict. From a middle-income status at the peak of the oil-export boom in the early 1980s, Nigeria declined to one of the poorest country by 2020, with an estimated two-thirds of its population subsisting on a poverty threshold of one US dollar a day. Such developmental failure and impoverishment creates the conditions favourable to the recruitment of economically marginalized and disillusioned youths into Nigeria's notorious ethnic militias, while also undermining the capacity of the government to fund, equip and maintain neutral police and security institutions that can professionally prevent the escalation of inter-group conflict into deadly and destabilizing violence [32] With this kind of scenario, the challenges of attaining unity in ethnic diversity is greatly pronounced and disturbing.

The Way Forward

[27] argued that federalism is widely accepted as one of, and perhaps the most effective (that is rational), responses to the problems and challenges of diversity, which is why it is probably more appropriate to regard it as a solution rather than strictly speaking a system of government [27] Federalism is not a system for political conquest or domination. What keeps a federation strong and happy is the preservation of the uniqueness of the difference so that the identity of each group in the federation is maintained [8] The pathologies of the Nigerian federal system should not lead to the trivialization of the real achievements of the system in holding together the country's diverse peoples. Rather, these differences can, and should, stimulate rigorous thinking and bargaining on desirable and feasible reforms that may make a federal

system better serve Nigeria's needs for inter-ethnic amity, stable democracy, good governance, and socio-economic development [32].

Beyond a reformation of Nigeria's federalism, we need all-round and purposive education geared towards appreciating the differences in man as something that man made but not naturally made. Therefore, we must all appreciate our cultural differences in terms of different opportunities to natural resources, natural wealth, intelligence, opportunity and position. Such awareness would strengthen ethnic harmony and reduce ethnic tension. In the same vein, the family as the basic unit of ethnic society must provide knowledge and information about ethnic harmony to their children at the early part of their lives. Constant references to oral traditions, proverbs and folktales would be important tools for serious education [7]. Finally, there is a need to satisfy the yearnings and aspirations of various ethnic groups in Nigeria so that ethnic drives would be constructive and responsive to national goals rather than violence and threats to the country's democracy.

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