

Review Article

Ethnicity, Democracy and the Development Nexus in Nigeria

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Abstract: Ethnicity is a very salient issue in Nigeria. It is highly mobilized and contested especially with regards to access to resources, opportunities, rights and responsibilities within the Nigerian state. This paper adopts a socio-historical methodology to examine the roots of ethnicity, and the implications for democracy and development in Nigeria. A social constructionist approach is adopted to show the constructed and open ended nature of ethnicity. The paper reveals that ethnicity was a colonial creation which has been reconstructed over time to reflect changing perceptions, aspirations and contentions and needs. Over the years ethnicity has been mobilized to contest inclusion/ exclusion, issues in Nigerian political process and structure thereby undermining the democratization process. This has had far reaching implications for development. The paper recommended restructuring of the Nigerian state as well as continuous socialization of Nigerians to embrace nationhood and nation building as against allegiance to ethnic groups

Key words: ethnicity, democracy, development, identity construction, Nation building.

Introduction

Ethnic politics, ethnic conflicts, identity contests and the emergence of historically new ethnic identities are recurrent trends across many countries of the world especially Africa. Within the last decade these trends have created tension among ethnic groups and reconfigured social relations from a the state of security and social interaction from peaceful coexistence to that of mutual suspicion and fear. In a radical departure from anti colonialist struggles, many countries have witnessed inter and intra ethnic struggles and conflicts resulting in the loss of lives and property and the phenomenon of internally displaced persons (IDPs) (Egwu 2005, Adetula 2005). Rwanda and Burundi have witnessed ethnic cleansing and genocide while state collapse has been witnessed in countries like Liberia, Sierra Leone and Somalia. Even in countries where these have not been witnessed, there appears to a rising trend of a pull from the state towards ethnic enclaves and violent and non violent forms of identity contests among ethnicities that hitherto existed as one (Kaza-Toure 1999, Infidon 1999, Spalding 2009).

This trend has refuted the assertion by modernization theorists that ethnicity was a barbaric aspect of the 'traditionality' in developing countries which would eventually fade away as the society became more developed as they followed the developed countries path to development (Lentz 1995). Events in Rwanda, Burundi, Darfur, Yugoslavia, Liberia, and Nigeria show that ethnicity is not an aspect of culture that can fade, be wished a way or buried under the guise of an all inclusive development in the society or defined in relation to the mode of production or as a form of class consciousness but it is an aspect of social existence that has to be understood in the context of the social historical interactions and developments. Nigeria is one of the most ethnic diverse states on the African continent. This diversity is expected to enhance development

and bring about progress but in reality it possesses a threat to national integration, a sense of belonging and participation in decision making (Alubo, 2006). According to language scholars and historians, Nigeria comprises of over 370 ethnic groups. And is regarded as the third ethnic diverse nation in the world (Imam, Bibi, and Abba 2014). Ethnic diversity in itself should not pose a threat to national unity and stability but the social construction of the Nigerian state on an ethnic tripod structure has *ethnised* social norms, values, opportunities and qualities. As such access to "anything" in Nigeria today is on the basis of ethnicity.

Ethnicity today has become a huge social movement across Nigeria. So strong is this movement that it is a preferred mode of loyalty as opposed to loyalty to the Nigerian state. Individuals and groups within Nigeria are first of all loyal to the ethnic group and loyalty to the Nigerian state is usually secondary. Ethnicity has eaten so deep into the fabric of Nigeria so much that at every level ethnicity determines access to positions, rights and responsibilities; from perfect selection in primary and secondary schools to the election of the political office holders, ethnic consideration are usually paramount and are mobilized. An individual in any position in Nigeria is first of all a citizen of his/her ethnic group and then secondarily a Nigerian. This lack of allegiance to the nationhood has had far reaching impact in all spheres of life. It has led to corruption, nepotism and latently underdevelopment. Over the years, various regional/ethnic social movements have emerged thereby threatening democracy and the sovereignty of Nigeria. The aftermath of this is the surge and resurgence of ethnic violence existence of individual and groups in mutual suspicion and the frustration of democracy and latently underdevelopment. This gloomy picture painted above suggests a need to examine the dynamics of ethnicity and its

impact on democracy as well as development in Nigeria.

Theoretical and Conceptual Issues

Ethnicity has been defined variously by scholars. Abbink (1997) defines it as a cultural interpretation of descent and historical tradition by a group of people, as opposed to others, and expressed in a certain behavior and cultural style. Ethnicity is only a part of a person or group's social identity but it is articulated in situations of conflict such as conquest, incorporation or marginalisation and is often concisely appropriated in a political sense by a collectivity. Ethnicity refers to subjective interpretation of ethnic differences which are in turn mobilised to press for ethnic interests To Otite (2008), ethnicity is the contextual discrimination by members of one group by others on the basis of differentiated social-cultural symbols. According to Otite (2008), ethnicity has the properties of common group consciousness and identity and group extensiveness on the basis of which social discrimination is made. In his view, ethnicity houses a consciousness of difference derived from objective and subjective elements as members of different socio-cultural groups interact in a plural society. Nnoli (2008) sees ethnicity as a social phenomenon associated with the identity of members of the possible competing communal (ethnic groups) seeking to protect and advance their interest in a political system. He further describes ethnicity as characterized by such as prejudice and discrimination, in-group sentiments, sense of solidarity, socio-economic and political discrimination and can be mobilised for political action. The definitions of ethnicity above first of all show that it is a social construction based on a myth of common origin and exclusiveness which is more visible in situations of competition. Egwu (2004) summarises the characteristics of ethnicity as existing in a polity in which there are a variety of ethnic groups; common consciousness of being one in relation to others; it is a tool of competition for individuals and groups for scarce public goods, such as contracts, employment, political appointments, scholarship, access to land as well as opportunity for lucrative trade and commerce; it is a political phenomenon as far as it has much to do with the allocation of values. It is not a fixed form of consciousness and therefore situational as it alters from place to place. This implies that ethnicity is not static. It is dynamic in nature and varies across time and space. This suggests that the reality of ethnicity varies across societies of the world.

Ethnicity is a function of the existence of a multiplicity of ethnic groups as it describes in group/out-group relations. To arrive at a clear understanding of ethnicity, it is also pertinent to define ethnic groups. An ethnic group is defined as categories of people characterised by cultural criteria of symbols including language value system and normative behavior and white members are anchored in a particular part of the new state territory. Otite (2000) and Badmus (2001) define an ethnic group as consisting of people who conceive themselves as being of a kind. They are united by emotional bonds and concerned with the preservation of their type. They speak the same language and they have a common heritage. Nnoli (2008) looks at ethnic groups as social formations

distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries, shared culture, language, shared history or a combination of these. These definitions imply that that ethnic groups have they have myths of common origin, membership is by occupation, similar pattern of behaviour, norms, values and a common language as well as social boundaries created and sustained by myths and symbols.

Ethnicity in Nigeria has been given various theoretical explanations by scholars. This paper focuses on the primordial and constructionist views. The primordial view of ethnicity is based on the biogenetic understanding of social life. The primordial approach was first proposed by the American Sociologist Shils in 1975. He claimed that individuals often had a primordial attachment to the territory where they lived, to their religion and kin whether these attachment involves strong bonds of loyalty and intense and comprehend skill solidarity. The primordial approach regards ethnicity as a collective identity that is deeply rooted in historical experiences and/or biological traits (Shils1975,Shils 1957),. Members of an ethnic group divide the world into us and them and have intuitive bond with those who belong to their group (Haralambos&Holborn, 2008). Primordial ethnic attachment comes through the process of socialisation and may persist for many centuries and can be a basis for conflict between ethnic groups. According to this school of thought, ethnicity is a primordial phenomenon. Ethnic groups are bound by common history, language, customs, beliefs and these are invariant. Their identities are fixed and do not change throughout life. The primordial view of ethnicity sees ethnicity as being embedded in inherited biological attributes and a long history of practicing cultural differences. Sometimes the primordial view is taken to extremes of socio-biology where the belief the ethnicity is based on genetics is promoted.

The primordial view of ethnicity has been criticized on various grounds. According to McKay (1982), the primordial view assumes that ethnic groups do not have any choice about their sense of attachment but in reality ethnic attachment vary from individual to individual. Furthermore, it tends to assume that all individual will have an ethnicity identity and thus offers no explanation for rootless cosmopolitans. The approach cannot deal with changes in the identity of ethnic groups. It also focuses so much on emotional attachment without recourse to the social, political, and economic that individuals live in. Furthermore, the primordial view does not examine the impact of the nature of the political and economic system on ethnicity. By focusing on bio-cultural factors, primordialists treat significant units of social action as though they are innate and the structure of the society is different far removed from reality. It does not recognize the fact that the socio-environment of individuals has an impact on their ethnic identity. It also does not take into cognizance, the role of significant other groups in the creation of ethnicity. Primordial view also has no explanation for the changing boundaries of ethnic groups and the fact the issues of ethnicity vary with space and time.

The second theoretical explanation to be considered is the constructionist. The constructionists emphasise that ethnicity is

not supra historical and quasi-natural membership in a group but rather a social identity constructed under specific historical-political circumstances (Lentz, 1995). This means that ethnicity is beyond hereditary membership of an ethnic group. Ethnicity usually has to do with competition. It is usually constructed in relation to other groups. Ethnicity inherently differentiates between “us” and “they”, “we” and “them” as the case may be and it is usually constructed and mobilised in situation of competition for scarce resources and valued goods in the society. According to constructionists, ethnic groups always exist in the plural sense, this implies that they define who they are in relation to others in the society. Ethnicity according to constructionists is subjective and can be manipulated. This perspective sees ethnicity as created, maintained and reinforced by individuals and groups in order to obtain access to social, political and material resources. This view holds that ethnic identity is not only made up of objective attributes such as language religion or culture but also of intensely held subjective feelings and beliefs about them. Nnoli (2008) plausible as the argument of constructionism seems it has some limitations as it tends to underestimate the emotional power of ethnic bonds and assumes that ethnicity is always related to common consciousness. This perspective does not take into cognizance the place of clan in the promotion of ethnicity. On the whole a synthesis of the relevant points of the two perspectives may give a better understanding on issues of ethnicity. Ethnicity may be based on primordial interest or may be constructed in different sets of circumstances which may change over time. Ethnicity is not fixed. It changes over time and a single approach may not account for the variation.

The word democracy is coined from two Greek words; *Demos* (the people) and *Kratos* (rule) which simply means the people’s rule. In its Greek perception it means the right of citizens in the Greek city states to participate directly in the act of governance. Sithole (1994) defines democracy as a form of governance in which supreme power or authority in a society is vested in the people and that power is exercised by the people directly or indirectly through an institutionalized system of representation involving periodically held free and fair elections. Bolaji (2013) further looks at democracy in terms of what it promotes. He defines democracy as equality and participation of all citizens in a given polity; where all institutions – legislative, executive, judiciary and their agencies are subordinate to achieving the equality of its citizens; where individuals enjoy their fundamental human rights and ensuring their political participation through their elected representatives. Though democracy has an ideal definition, it is practiced variously across countries depending on their specific socio-historical circumstances. According to Ojie (2006), there are various types of democracy example of which are Marxist Lenin type, Western Libertarian type as well as the Third World Mass Mobilisation type. The specific realities of the countries influence the nature of democracy practiced and as such there is confusion as to what a democratic society should really look like.

In the ideal or purest form of democracy people make their own decisions about the policies and distribution of resources

that affect them directly. This form of democracy is impractical especially in Third World countries. These representative democracies are much more common. In this types of democracies people elect officials to represent them in legislative roles on matters affecting the population. This type of democracy is more common. In this type of democracy effort is made to ensure that individuals who govern the society have the appropriate talent skills and knowledge. A major feature of representative democracy is voting. Democracies are not perfect, decision making processes can be quite slow and sometimes leaders can take decision for selfish interests. It still remains the acceptable form of leadership across the world. The expectation is that democratic rule should ensure the spread of development across the country.

The concept of development has been variously defined by scholars as such there is one acceptable definition of development. The earliest conception of development was based on economic development. Economic development was the main feature of development. It was believed that economic growth would not only result in an increasing personal income but also a higher quality of life. Economic growth is measured using the Gross National Product (GNP). This is an approximate measure of the total value of goods and services produced by an economy for a year. Overtime, it was discovered that the correlation between economic growth and improvement in standard of living was inconclusive. Therefore, it became unjustifiable to use economic growth as a measure of development. This fact is caused by an uneven distribution of gains from economic growth as those who were rich became richer and the poor became poorer. This led to a shift to a more holistic definition of development. Development is a multidimensional concept encapsulating widespread improvements in social as well as material wellbeing of all in society. The United Nations (UN) defined the concept of development as follows:

A more equitable distribution of income and wealth for promoting both social justice and efficiency of production, to achieve a greater degree of security and to expand and improve facilities for education, health, nutrition, housing and social welfare, and to safeguard environment. The qualitative and structural changes in society must go hand-in-hand with rapid economic growth, and existing disparities – regional, sectoral and social – should be substantively reduced. These objectives are both determining factors and end results of development (Jones, 1981 cited in Gore, 2000, p.5).

This definition is inclusive as it focus is on qualitative and quantitative improvements in standard of living of individuals and a society. It furthermore focuses on the elimination of conditions that inhibit social and economic wellbeing and also emphasises the distribution of public goods in such a way that disparities are significantly reduced. Todaro (1981) defines development as a multidimensional process involving the re-organisation and re-orientation of the entire economic and social systems. To him, develop is a physical reality as well as a state of mind which society has through the combination of social, economic and political process secured the way of obtaining a better life. Roger (1990) defines development as a

long participatory process of social change in the society whose objective is the material and social progress for the majority of population through a better understanding of their environment. This definition furthermore emphasise the organisation of resources in society to ensure equitable distribution of goods and services as well as the enhancement of the standard of living of the members of the society. The definition also shows that development is a process as well as a condition. On the whole, development refers to a planned process of social change as well as a condition of qualitative and quantitative social wellbeing.

Various theoretical explanations have been advanced by development scholars. The modernisation perspective which owes its origin to the western scholars emphasises a top-bottom approach to improvement in standard of living while the dependency perspective which owes its origin to scholars of the developing countries emphasises explanation by developed countries as the cause of underdevelopment and emphasises a bottom approach to development. These two perspectives have formed the basis of many development strategies that have been adopted in many developing countries over time. Many times, these efforts have been manned by corruption, nepotism as well as lack of proper planning and implementation. Having examined the three concepts, it is important to understand the reality of ethnicity in Nigeria.

The Social Reality of Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria

Ethnicity in Nigeria owes its origin to a plethora of factors and has manifested in various ways in contemporary Nigeria. Ethnicity in Nigeria according to a group of scholars (Alubo 2009, 2006, Nnoli 2008, Osaghe 1995, Egwu 2004) owes its origin to the social construction of Nigeria on an ethnic tripod. The ethnic group/nations/cultural groups that make up Nigeria today had hitherto existed as independent nations and groups until British colonial occupation on conquest. These ethnic nations were selectively colonised and brought under the Northern and Southern Protectorates. These two protectorates were eventually merged to form Nigeria. Within these protectorates were ethnic nations/groups that has been lumped together and given the identity of the most supposedly dominant ethnic group. In the Northern protectorate, over 250 ethnic groups were lumped together and a Hausa/Fulani were regarded as superior to the other groups. In the Southern Protectorate which was initially divided into Eastern and Western regions. In the Eastern region, other groups such as Efik, Ijaw, Ibibio, Ikwere, Calabar, etc were lumped under an Igbo identity while in the West, other groups such as Edo, Ishan, Isoko were forced to adopt a Yoruba identity. This tripod structure existed through the colonial period and became the platform for the mobilization to contest for inclusion or against exclusion in the Nigerian political process and structure. Within these regions, groups began to mobilize on the basis of their ethnic consciousness to contest their relationship with the Nigerian state as a whole. There were threats of secession within the regions. A classic example is one led by Isaac Boro in the Eastern region at the eve of independence in 1966. The Tiv of Central Nigeria also

threatened secession and it subsequently led to a Tiv Riot and consequent repression of the Tiv by the Federal Government. The regional arrangement therefore had an ethnic tripod-structure which became the basis of the mobilisation of ethnicity to contest relationship with the Nigerian state.

Within these regions were ethnic groups whose identities had been subsumed under the identity of the larger ethnic groups. For instance, Northern Nigeria had a dominant Hausa/Fulani identity through these were other over 250 ethnic groups within the region. The Eastern region and Western region had dominant Igbo and Yoruba identity as the other so-called 'minority' ethnic groups identity had been subsumed under these larger ethnic groups. So over these years, these groups have engaged in exclusion and inclusion identity contests and conflicts. As a result ethnicity is a very salient issue that is vigorously contested. The creation of Nigeria on an ethnic tripod inherently implied that access to the 'centre' had to be on the platform of ethnicity. Beyond the centre of resources, access to opportunities, scholarships, etc had to be on the platform of ethnicity. So strong is this allegiance that ethnic citizenship supersedes the Nigerian citizenship. Nigerian citizenship is vague and holds no promise without ethnic citizenship; ethnicity in Nigeria is characterized on the whole by a majority-minority context where majority ethnic groups try to control power to the exclusion of others. This majority-minority context is replicated at the regional, state, local government and ward level. As such ethnicity has had a huge impact on Nigeria's democratic experience. Nnoli (2008) and Egwu (2004) further explain that the colonialist created towns where various ethnic had work to earn a living so as to pay tax. Towns were created in areas where raw materials such as cotton, rubber, cocoa, tin were available as such individuals from various ethnic groups migrated to these areas to work. Also the Hausa and Fulani ethnic groups were seen by colonialist as superior to other ethnic groups so the colonialists used them as administrators especially in the central area of Nigeria. The movement of various ethnic groups to settle later became a theatre for the mobilization of ethnicity. Issues of marginalization arose and this led to the riot in Jos tin mine in 1932 as well as the Tiv riot in 1960 and 1964. Furthermore ethnic unions were formed in many urban towns and the focus was to protect their ethnic interests. As such there was the emergence of such unions such as Egbe Omo Oduduwa in 1995, Urhobo Progress Union in 1928 among others. Presently most ethnic groups in Nigeria have socio-political organizations which ethnic "entrepreneurs" mobilize to contest inclusion and exclusion issues within the Nigerian political process and structure. This has implications for Nigeria's democratic process and structure

The Nigerian democracy is characterised by competition between certain key actors. These actors comprise the Northern elite, the Yoruba elite, the Igbo elite and the Middle Belt elite and the Niger Delta elite (Nwachukwu, 2003). The Northern elite originated in the Northern region and comprise the ruling elite of the Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri and Nupe ethnic groups. This group of elites draws their strength and cohesion from a common religion – Islam as well as common language –

Hausa. They formed the Arewa Consultative Forum. The Yoruba elite is constituted by several distinct sub-groups of the Yoruba Wa, Oyo, Ife, Ijesha, Ekiti, Ijebu, Kefu and Onde. Arising from the regionalism in 1940, they established a cultural association known as EgboOmoOduduwa and in present times Afenifere a socio-political pressure group.

The Igbo elite is characterised by leadership of Zik Civil War. Today, they go by names such as Ohaneze Ndigbo. The Niger Delta elite comprise political leaders from the Niger Delta, Akwa-Ibom, Bayelsa, Cross River, Delta, Edo and Rivers. Through this group is heterogeneous culturally and ethnic use, they share common historical experience and this group of elite actually owe their emergence to the mobilisation of competition surrounding oil in Nigeria. The Middle Belt elite comprises of elite from the former Benue and Plateau Provinces. The Middle Belt actually comprise of a large number of ethnic and linguistic groups that have historically resisted political and religion domination of the Hausa/Fulani

The democratic process in Nigeria over the years has been characterised by inclusion and exclusion contest and conflict between these elites. These elites control the democratic process. They are usually able to use ethnicity to mobilise their people to contest against others and to make sure they maintain their hold on leadership. The power sharing arrangement in Nigeria is purportedly an arrangement for rotational leadership between these elite on behalf of their ethnic groups/regions. Various militant movements have emerged around these groups agitating for equity, social justice, regional autonomy and their own share of proceeds from the country's resources. These elitist groups fly on the wings of ethnic agenda to decide who gets what, when and how. The militant groups are used to show displeasure at political arrangement. Most conflict in Nigeria result from failed attempts to access and control the "National cake" to the exclusion of others. Nigeria's democracy is covertly characterised by recurrent conflict between these elite. Beyond the competition between the elite, Nigeria's democracy is characterised by political repression. Those in-charge of government machinery control it to the exclusion and suppression of others. Members of the ruling party are declared corruption free even if they have misappropriated funds while those of the opposition are persecuted with the anti-corruption agencies for the mere reason that they belong to the opposition Nigeria's democracy is also characterized by a high level of instability (Omotola, 2009). Nigeria's pre-colonial experience has been that of coups and experience counter coups and this has made the democratization process in Nigeria very unstable. Furthermore, former military leaders return and still hijack the apparatus of power as civilian leaders with many of them having the "voice of Jacob and the body of Esau". This has also contributed to the instability of the democracy in Nigeria. clientelism, predendalism and godfatherism are characteristics of the Nigerian democracy. This results in the political process being manipulated to the benefits of some to the exclusion of others. As such elections which are critical to democracy are characterised by competitive rigging through the use of political thugs, ethnic militia ballot stuffing and snatching,

intimidation of opposition party members and agents, falsification of results (Oyedira&Adigun, 1991; Onuoha, 2003; Omotola, 2009).

On the whole the social reality of ethnicity and democracy in Nigeria is such that majority and minority groups are locked up in a protracted competition for the control of state power, larger access to scarce resources at the expense of others as well as inter-ethnic showdown by deprived ethnicities. According to Streeck (2011), Nigeria is characterised by a democratic capitalism where a political economy ruled by two conflicting principles of resource allocation exists. One principle is based on merit and the other based on entitlement while these two principles are at conflict with each other. This political economy is ruled by a dubious political economic class. This on the whole sums up the Nigerian democratic experience. This situation has implications for development.

Ethnicity at the group and individual level promotes mutual suspicion. It results in a situation where members of ethnic groups are unable to relate with others outside their group without suspecting their intentions. This does not enhance peaceful co-existence and can in turn hinder meaningful development from taking place. Social interaction is a critical aspect of social existence in society but ethnicity results in creating meanings and suspicions even when they do not exist. Ethnicity promotes allegiance to the ethnic group at the expense of the Nation. In Nigeria, people regard themselves first of all as citizen of their ethnic group. Citizenship of the Nigerian state apparently has no meaning without allegiance to ethnic groups. The Nigerian state is structured such that opportunities, resources, employment, etc are given on the basis of ethnic origin. There appears to be a pull from Nationhood or the Nigerian project to ethnic enclaves. In Nigeria today, it is very easy to mobilize a group of people once ethnic sentiments are introduced. A level of allegiance to Nationhood is needed by Nigerian citizens for development to take place. But emphasis on ethnic divide has been the bane of development over the years.

The emphasis on ethnicity results in a situation where the right people in many cases are not selected or elected for leadership positions. The emphasis is so much on the "son of the soil". As long as one comes from a particular ethnic group that is preferred once he or she is irrespective of qualification, is the given position. This has played out in Nigeria where some political office holders know little or nothing about the offices they hold. The latent effect of this is that the Nigerian state is seen as an entity or centre where resources can be pulled from to enhance one individual and ethnic status. Most people see Nigeria in terms of what they can get from it and not what they can give to it. Observation in most educational, health and religious institutions in Nigeria is that ethnic considerations are paramount when benefits, resources or leadership issues are involved. This has led to so much mismanagement of resources. When corruption agencies apprehend people it is interpreted as an attack on the access of the ethnic group to their share of the "national cake". As long as the leadership of an organisation is from a particular ethnic group, the important positions are given to members of that ethnic group. They are

even allowed to go on with impunity without being checked. In the political sphere, ethnicity is the reason why party politics are organised around ethnic lines as such political office holders are ethnic representatives either at the local government, state or federal level of control of resources. A president of the country is first of all a president of an ethnic group before he regards himself as the president of Nigeria.

The ethnicity situation in Nigeria impacts negatively on democracy as it results in politics of division, promotion of mediocrity, political instability, violent conflict, un-heightened unhealthy political competition, civil unrest, depletion of national resources and ultimately lack of development or under-development.

Recommendation/Conclusion

Ethnicity is a social construction that is mobilized for access to resources and valued goods in the Nigerian state. Ethnic diversity in itself is not a challenge as diversity can be mobilised to enhance development in various ethnicities. Ethnicity is the bane of the democratic process as well as development in Nigeria today. Ethnic cleavages can be used to enhance distinctiveness, organise development efforts within ethnic groups. The paper suggests a re-orientation of Nigeria in terms of their ethnic cleavages. There can be mobilised for benefit and not as a tool for suspicion and competition. Allegiance to Nigeria as a country should be preached in religious sectors, taught in schools. Agencies of socialisation should socialize individuals and group about the dangers of ethnicity.

The political process and structure in Nigeria will have to be addressed. It is important for leadership to be on the basis of merit and not just because an individual comes from an ethnic divide. Some have argued against this on the premise that some ethnic groups may be marginalised on the basis of this. In spite of this, this paper is of the opinion that merit should not be sacrificed for inclusion. Efforts can be made to enhance the supposedly 'disadvantaged people's' capacity for leadership and other opportunities. The political class needs to be re-oriented to lay aside exclusionary politics and work for the development of their communities and the nation in general. Development in any society can only thrive where the social environment is conducive to it.

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