

Primordial Sentiments, Nation Building and the Continuing Crisis of Democracy in Nigeria

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Abstract

The paper examined the problem of primordial sentiments, nation building and the crisis of democracy in Nigeria. It adopted the secondary sources of data collection involving a critical analysis of related literature. The findings revealed among other things that primordial sentiment is a critical factor affecting not only nation building, but also democracy in Nigeria. The paper holds that primordial sentiments pervade political parties arrangement, government policies, political appointments and in extreme cases legal processes. Primordialism was indicted as being responsible for the dearth of national patriotism, values and respect for democratic cultures. Against this findings, the paper recommended the following: an holistic approach to addressing national and nationality questions in Nigeria. This should involve the establishment of real equality, friendship, and fraternal cooperation between peoples. It aims at the abolition of the exploitation of one region by the other. Moreso, the federal government in Nigeria should put in place measures that would help to create confidence in the people that the government really cares for them. The government should be responsible and accountable to the people. This is because the Nigerian state as presently constituted is seen as an arena for accumulation of wealth. The fault-lines of ethnic and religious divisions in the country make it easy for the elite to manipulate and politicise ethnicity to advance self interests given the weak and distorted political economy of the country. For this to happen, civil society groups, the media, community based organizations and religious organizations have to collaborate in enlightenment programmes and citizen mobilization that engages the political system to become more citizen oriented. These efforts which will help to de-politicize ethnicity would naturally instill an image of patriotism which shall in turn foster national integration.

Keywords: Nation Building, Primordialism, Ethnicity, Democracy, National Integration

INTRODUCTION

It is a fact that Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation state with socio-cultural differences between its component ethnic groups. This cultural dissimilarity has been manifested by, for instance, the differences in language, diet, dress and types of social systems. Shrewd observers have noticed that even the globalization of democracy has not significantly diminished these differences. This situation has been due to a number of reasons, including the politicization of ethnic sentiments in all facets of the governance process in Nigeria. Primordial sentiments which arise principally from the hostility that derives from competition between ethnically different peoples for wealth and power has continued to influence key political and economic decisions and policies in Nigeria. Thus, five decades after Nigeria gained independence, the Nigerian diverse social structure in terms of her heterogeneity has not changed significantly (Abubakar, 2007). The diverse nature of the society has made identification with the 'nation' a difficult task. Over the years, primordial sentiments coupled with identity consciousness in the socio-political terrain of Nigeria has continued to breed abysmal performance of political machinery revolving around vicious cycle of agitation for political disunion and dismemberment making democratic consolidation and nation building an exercise in futility. Therefore, politics has become a pontificated investment in prebendal socio-linguistic ecology of Nigeria with its adverse effect on Nigerian nascent democracy. The problem of Nigerian democracy revolves around the multiethnic and socio-linguistic structures emanating from British colonial legacy. The diverse socio-classes welded without effective consultation has been considered as the origin of political hostility and animosity that continue to inject bitter politics in Nigerian democratic governance (Akwara, 2008). The emergence and entrenchment of ethnicity in the country's politics has its manifestation within the various democratic experiments. The feeling of belonging and rejection became the basis for distinguishing individuals within the polity as evidenced in the behavior of political elite. With lack of cohesiveness and threat to the unity of the country, ethnic consciousness increased in scope (Ezuonu and Korieh, 2010). Today, identification is easier at both family and ethnic levels. A consequence of this is that many of the citizens may never develop a proper concept of nation. This kind of ethnic group relations signify a negative dimension that no doubt affects the democratization process. This paper will thus explore the effect of primordial sentiments on nation building and the democratization process in Nigeria.

CONCEPTUAL DEFINITION

Democracy and Nation-Building

Democracy and nation-building are fundamental for development. For a democracy to survive and flourish, a critical mass of its citizens must possess the skills, embody the values, and manifest the behaviours that accord with democracy (Akwara and Ojoma, 2013). They must know enough about the basic features of a democratic political system to be able to access it when their interests are at stake and they must believe in the importance of certain key democratic values, such as tolerance for divergent

viewpoints and support for the rule of law. They must also be willing and be able to participate in local and national policies. They must believe that their participation is important to the continued viability of the democratic political system.

In most mature democracies, citizens have had the opportunity to absorb democratic beliefs and practices over a lifetime. As they participate in family and neighborhood life, join local organizations, move through the educational system and are exposed to a free and independent media, citizens have the opportunity to absorb and practice the basic norms of a democratic culture and nation building. In countries emerging from long periods of authoritarian rule like Nigeria, this preparatory experience is largely missing. While many informal democratic practices may exist at the community level, citizens are unlikely to have much knowledge about formal democratic structures and processes and may be unaware of the opportunities that exist for advancing their interests at the local, regional, or national levels (Ismagilova, 2008). Furthermore, after many years of arbitrary rule in Nigeria, citizens may have unrealistic expectations about what democracy is able to achieve and may experience difficulty adjusting to the competition, compromise and loss that are inherent parts of the democratic political process. Without values such as political tolerance, trust in democratic institutions, and respect for the rule of law, this more competitive aspect of the democratic process can be severely destabilizing, particularly if it ignites or exacerbates economic, ethnic, religious, or regional tensions. In new fledgling democracies like Nigeria, leaders need necessary knowledge to gain the skills, values, and behaviours that are necessary for a stable and effective governance.

Ethnicity and Religion

Nigeria is synonymous with deep divisions which cause major political issues to be vigorously and violently contested along the lines of intricate ethnic, religious and regional divisions. Issues that raise the most dust are those that are regarded as essential for the existence and the validity of the state. Opposing and contending assemblages have a tendency to assume an exclusive winner-takes-all approach. These issues include the control of state power, allocation of resources and citizenship. As a result, states with such divisions are disposed to be delicate and unstable because almost by definition, they have very little in common with regard to convergence and harmony which are necessary to reduce the centrifugal forces that rip them apart (Osaghae & Suberu 2005:4). Therefore, breakdown, breakaway, civil strife, civil war, minority nervousness, and violent clashes, all of which would typically be regarded unusual in normal states are common forces or actual occurrences in divided states (Osaghae & Suberu 2005:4). Because of a complicated network of politically silent identities, coupled with a history of protracted and seemingly stubborn wars and instability, Nigeria is high on the list as one of the most unstable states in Africa. Since its independence, Nigeria has been driven hither and thither by recurrent crises of regional or state illegitimacy, often impairing efforts at democratisation, stability, economic transformation and national cohesion. A peak of the crisis appears to have occurred during the civil war of the 1960s, which began

shortly after independence (Okpanachi 2010). Since 1999 when Nigeria transitioned to civil rule, the country has witnessed a rapid increase in the number of conflicts. The aim of this study is to examine the relationship between religion, ethnicity and conflicts in the country. It looks at the notion of Identity in an attempt to explain the crisis of development and the complexities of modern Nigeria.

From a socio-political perspective, identity bears a personal and a social meaning. Processes related to identity are 'located at the core of the individual and yet in the core of his community culture' (Erikson 1968:57; Okpanachi 2010). Thus, identity can be said to be an individual's 'sense of belonging to a group if (it) influences his political behavior' (Erikson 1968:57; Mary Anderson 2010; Okpanachi 2010). Identity is built into an individual's physiological 'givens' and in social roles (Erikson 1968:57; Okpanachi 2010). Identity is characterised by features such as an 'emotive tie to a group', 'love and belief for a group', 'pledge to a cause', and 'commitments and duties to a group' with which a person identifies (Smyth & Robinson 2001:7-11; Okpanachi 2010). Generally, identity implies similarity and contrast at the same time (Jenkins 2004; Okpanachi 2010). 'For an individual, or for a group, there may be a plurality of identities. Yet, such a plurality is a source of stress and contradiction in both self-representation and social action. This is because identity must be distinguished from role-sets' (Okpanachi 2010). The above characterization perhaps explain the recent carnage been perpetrated by the Fulani herdsmen across Nigeria. Historically, identities have played a significant role in the Nigerian political process during the colonial period and in the post-colonial era. During the colonial period, the administrators allowed the emergence and aggravation of an 'us' versus 'them' syndrome, where Muslims were pitted against Christians, Northerners against the Southerners, Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo against each other, and so on (Adefemi 2003:14; Okpanachi 2010). In this era religious and ethnic differences became prominent factors in instituting and executing socio-economic strategies and applications. Therefore, the differentiating outcomes of colonialism became the forerunner of the socioeconomic disequilibrium among the different regions, and then this became an important factor in the stimulation of identity awareness so as to efficiently 'divide and rule' (Fearon & Laitin 2003:82; Okpanachi 2010). But, as a counter argument it must be said that internal factors are more determinant than the external ones in creating the cleavages in Nigeria. In recent times, socio-economic and political changes have taken place and transformed the delineations of identities and politics in Nigeria. To begin with, patterns of group mobilisations have shifted. This perhaps aptly explain the action of the Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

This paper adopted the theories of the two publics developed by Peter Ekeh (1985), Prebendalism popularized by Richard Joseph (1987.1991) and Gurnal Myrdal's (2008) soft state thesis. Others have captured Africa as a rentier. Patrimonial and Neo-patrimonial state. These theories are credible not only in the understanding of the state and its predicaments in the African countries but also in providing important

explanations for the pandemic ethno-religious crisis ravaging African countries and (Nigeria in particular). For instance, Ekeh (1985, 2005) argued that one of the most striking impacts of colonialism was the emergence of two public realms, the primordial and civic public realms which, related differently with the private realm in terms of morality. For Nigeria, and generally for Africa Ekeh (1985:45; 2008:12) has argued; only rights (i.e. benefits) are expected from the state by its citizens, who owe duties (responsibilities) to a native sector. The former forms the basis of an “amoral civic public realm”, and the latter a “moral primordial public realm”. Therefore, the civic public realm was associated with illegitimate and exploitative colonial rule and had no moral linkages with the private realm. It was an amoral public realm in which cheating the system was considered a patriotic duty.

The result is that as the same actors operate in the two realms, the state apparatus is employed to fatten the nest of the primordial public, thereby making ethnic sentiment, the hallmark of the civic public (Osaghae 2008: 303). According to Ekeh (1985: 108), A good citizen of the primordial public gives out and asks for nothing in return; a lucky citizen of the civic public gains from the civic but enjoys escaping giving anything in return whenever he can. But such a lucky man would not be a good man were he to channel all his lucky gains to his private purse. He will only continue to be a good man if he channels part of the largesse from the civic public to the primordial public. That is the logic of the dialectics. The unwritten law of the dialectics is that it is legitimate to rob the civic public in order to strengthen the primordial public (Ifidon,2006: 102).

The “acme of the dialectics”, according to Ekeh (2005:110) is a dysfunctional governance system which takes two dimensions- the embezzlement of public fund from the civic public and the promotion of ethnic sentiment by the civic public by those who administer these services. Though Ekeh’s thesis has provided for some time, a sound framework for understanding the impact of colonialism on Africa, and the explanatory framework for the endemic nature of ethno-religious crisis ravaging the continent. In fact, the primordial sentiment is nothing but an instrument of political deception, trickery and manipulation in the hands of the privileged political and bureaucratic elite for personal aggrandizement and less for group benefits. Consequently, it is not impossible for power to be used for personal or group aggrandizements. In patrimonial societies, ethno-religious conflict seems to be intrinsically part and parcel of the political economy culture. Neo-patrimonialism, a related term to prebendalism and a new form of patrimonialism is a term used to describe and explain state failures in Africa. It is used to describe patrons using state resources in order to secure the loyalty of clients in the general population, and is indicative of informal patron-client relationships that can reach from the very high up in state structures down to individuals in the lower levels (like in the small villages). “As a result of that kind of patron-client or identity politics, Nigeria has regularly been one of the lowest ranked nations for socio-political and economic transparency by Transparency International (TI) in its corruption perception Index. With such politicization of primordial rivalries, the political class and opportunistic bureaucrats found a safe sanctuary to promote their interest using ethno-religious sentiments. The

reoccurring ethno-religious conflict therefore, is inextricably tied to the problem of identity and the problem of citizenship. It is rooted in the psycho-political perception of Nigeria by an average Nigerian. The problem could also be said to be rooted in history. For example in 1947, Obafemi Awolowo one of the foremost nationalists (cited in Coleman 1986: 320) wrote, Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no “Nigerians” in the sense as there are “English”, “Welsh”, or “French”. The word “Nigerian” is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not. In 1948 Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, (cited in Coleman 1986:320) a leader of the Northern Peoples Congress was quoted as having said that, Since 1914 the British Government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian people themselves are historically different in their backgrounds, in their religious beliefs and customs and do not show themselves any sign of willingness to unite ... Nigerian unity is only a British intention for the country.

In all, the primordial public which, as an emergent social formation because it evolved out of the dynamics of the colonial process grew up to satisfy some of the personal and group demands that could not be met by both the colonial and postcolonial government. This public is what Joseph (1987) think is best described in communal terms as ethnic nationalism and the origin of prebendal politics in Nigeria. Simply put, prebendalism has been described as the process of using government positions to pursue personal and parochial or group interests. In the civil public in Nigeria, it is perfectly in order and the norm to exploit one’s position in the public realm to pursue private, parochial or sub national interests. The real problem is that the same sets of individuals operate in the two publics being altruistic in one and very instrumental in the other. This duality, which has subsisted since colonial times, helps to explain the problems of ethnic nationalism, democratic deficit and of course political instability in Nigeria. The problem of having a universally acceptable revenue allocation formula has been on in Nigeria for long. According to Nnoli (1980) there are ‘ethnic watchers’ who monitor what each ethnic group gets from the federation account. When they think that what their ethnic group is getting is not favourable they are expected to raise ‘ethnic alarm’, even in the ongoing democracy.

The Problems Posed by the Absence of National Identity and Integration on Democratic Governance in Nigeria.

In Nigeria the formation of a sense of national identity has been an up-hill task because it involves the alteration of primordial loyalties and rapid development of consensual political consciousness within a context of diffuse unconsciousness. Often, this alteration creates ethnic cleavages between the various ethnic groups. This leads to national symbols to vie with local or tribal symbols. This also leads to divided loyalties and loyalty to sub-national unit becomes primary (Iyaji, 2000). This problem has become acute in Nigeria because ethnic or national boundaries are defined by historical, linguistic, religious and cultural boundaries. Since the creation of this sense of national identity is being championed by the ruling elites of the various groups in

the country, the sense of national identity by the members of the various groups becomes bi-focal. It focuses on the personalities of the charismatic leaders; and on emotionally charged symbols (Verba, 1968). And when these happen, the sense of national identity thus created is fragile, rejected on the onset, and fades when the symbols and personalities are no longer there. Personality crises result from the vacuum thus created by the exit of the personalities and leadership crises ensue.

In Nigeria, since colonial days till date, this sense of national identity has been more or less focused on the personalities of the ruling elites of the various ethnic groups as they serve more or less as symbols of ethnic unity and intergration for the particular ethnic group (Iyaji, 2000). This manifests in the decoration of any indigene that gets a national appointment with traditional titles and ethnic reception by his/her ethnic group. One dimension of the problem with primordial sentiment on nation building and democratization process in Nigeria is that it makes most Nigerians not to be patriotic. Right from 1960, patriotism, as far as Nigeria is concerned, has been thrown into the river and ever since, it was replaced by individualism, personalism, sectionalism, nepotism and parochialism. To worsen matters, you hardly could find loyalty to a cause, in an average Nigerian. The highest levels of patriotism are expressed at the sub national levels (Odion-Akhaine, 2000).

Again, most students of politics will readily agree with John Locke and others that a nation compels patriotism and loyalty when the citizens perceive it to be representative of, and pursuing their common good. A tentative hypothesis therefore would be that where a nation does not take sufficient care of its citizens, the level of patriotism is likely to be low and vice versa. As to why this should be the case, two plausible reasons have been adduced. First, ethnic nationalism was already well developed before the nationalist era. Ethnic loyalty was something that made sense to a lot of people, and its utility was already demonstrated in the urban areas, where ethnic associations catered for the needs of new immigrants from the countryside. Secondly, the appeal to ethnicity was very likely to be successful in a society with little industrialization and a rudimentary development of secondary associations (Ake, 1978). In another instance, Ake (2000), argued that the civil society in Africa is so rudimentary that political society is not constituted as a "public", a unity of abstract legal subjects and a solidarity of complementarities and reciprocities arising from their self-seeking. Instead of political society being one public, it is segmented into a plurality of competing and alienated primary publics, because people are alienated from the state and tend to give their primary loyalty to ethnic, sub-national or communal groups rather than the state.

In the theoretical model of patriotism, allegiance and loyalty of a typical Nigerian illustrated below, one is able to see what an average Nigerian stands for in his or her relationship with the Nigerian state. First, a typical Nigerian thinks of 'self before others. And when he or she think of others, the thought is about members of both the nuclear and the extended families. From that level a typical Nigerian think of people from his or her native town or village and then to the level of the ethnic group. And from the level of the ethnic group, the loyalty, allegiance and patriotism of a typical Nigerian moves to that of the religious group (Oyadare, 2004). This is because most

Nigerians are very religious and have very strong emotional attachment to one religion or the other. This is the more reason why ethno-religious violence is very common in Nigeria. The final stage to be reached is that of the nation. Everyone puts the nation last in the scheme of things. Even some of our past Heads of state and highly placed Nigerians are not left out. They make parochial declarations and utterances all in the spirit of protecting ethno-religious agenda and interests (Oyadare, 2004). All of these again goes further to lend credence to the assertion that most Nigerians have not imbibed the spirit of patriotism and nation building. Thus it is not surprising to find people more patriotic at ethnic or sub-national levels than at the national levels. The entrenchment and institutionalization of primordial sentiments in Nigeria has also meant that parties are formed along ethnic lines. According to Ake (1978), the regions and political constituents tended to be homogenous in ethnicity. Thus to win an election you had to win an ethnic group and if this happened to be large, a political base was guaranteed. It is thus a norm for parties to be formed along ethnic lines in Nigeria. This was the trend in the First Republic when the three predominant parties Northern Peoples Congress (NPC), Action Group (AG) and the National Council of Nigeria and the Camerouns (NCNC) stood for the three dominant ethnic nationalities — Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Tiv respectively. The trend was not different in the Second Republic when the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP) again stood for the three major ethnic nationalities; Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Ibo. The third republic was different because the military only registered only two political parties. Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC) (Undiyaundeya, 2012). In the Fourth Republic, things did not change radically. Between 1999-2007, parties like the Alliance for Democracy (later Action Congress of Nigeria, (ACN), All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), All Progressives Grand Alliance (APGA) were all ethnic based political parties. The All Peoples Party (APP) is more or less a party of the Northern people as it did not capture any state in both Ibo and Yoruba land. The Alliance for Democracy (AD) was exclusively and predominantly based in the Southwest and a party of the Yoruba people. Although, the recent mergers of parties to form the All Progressive Congress (APC) to challenge the dominance of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) gives a glimmer of hope of the possibility of having a truly national party, the result of the 2015 election in which the APC captures four out of the six geopolitical zones leaving the PDP with dominance in the South East and South-South region This invariably dismissed any hope of a truly national party in Nigeria.

From all indications, parties in the ongoing democratic dispensation are still ethnically based thus allowing the pursuit of sectional agenda. There is a problem with power relations in Nigerian politics. As events and reactions in the ongoing democratic dispensation have shown, the northerners are not comfortable that power is not in their hands. The propaganda of the Northern oligarchy is that the South have always been in control of economic power and to balance the equation, the North must hold on the political power. Yet, with the recent success of the North in gaining power, other region like the South East has begun to cry foul, further indicating the tenacious hold that primordial sentiments still have over democratic process in Nigeria. The

ongoing leadership crisis in the National Assembly also has a strong primordial flavor, that is already affecting the newly elected government of President Muhammadu Buhari. Even though the South-South region recently had a stint in governance, the fact that power has often been monopolized by the three dominant ethnic nationalities has also meant that the region is even more apprehensive over their future in the democratic process.

Yet, it should be noted that apart from the pervasive nature of primordial sentiments, power at the centre and the resources that comes with it in Nigeria is too attractive. This makes the competition for power so fierce. The reality of Nigeria's political economy is that if an ethnic group loses at the centre, it has lost all. This is more so because politics is a zero-sum game in Nigeria. The way power is obtained and used in Nigeria is usually in terms of what the various ethnic nationalities can benefit. All this scenario no doubt remain the crux of nation building and democratic crisis in Nigeria.

The Effects of Primordial Sentiment on Democratic Governance in Nigeria

Having dealt with the factors that accounted for the predominance of ethnic nationalism in Nigerian politics, our next task will be to examine the impact of this phenomenon on the ongoing democratic dispensation. First, the interplay of primordial sentiments has meant persistent threat to political stability. There are cries of marginalization and impeachment all the time since the inception of the present Republic in 1999. Again, this has also meant a threat to the consolidation of democracy. For it is going to be difficult to consolidate democracy in a country that is politically unstable. Second, the predominance of the spirit of ethnic nationalism also gave rise to the emergence of ethnic militias all over the country - the common ones are - Odua Peoples Congress (OPC) for the Yoruba nationality, Arewa Peoples Congress (APC) for the Hausaland Fulani nationality, Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) for the Igbo nationality and numerous others in the Niger Delta Region. The emergence of these ethnic militias has also meant an increase in the level of political violence, riots and conflicts. Third, the interplay of primordial sentiments has also made the sharing of the national revenue a much more volatile and sensitive issue. In Nigeria, the centre is the primary source of private wealth accumulation. So much resources lies with the government at the centre. This consequently makes the struggle for control of power at the centre so fierce, competitive and intense, thereby undermining nation building, accountability and democratic justice.

The current on shore/offshore dichotomy in the principle of derivation also aggravated the already tensed situation. This offshore/onshore dichotomy is now seen as an indication of contempt and hatred for the ethnic nationalities in the Niger Delta who believed that they are already marginalized, traumatized and exploited. Finally, the interplay of ethnic nationalism has also divided and fragmented the civil society in Nigeria. Oyadare (2004) contended that the problem in Nigeria is traceable to the heterogeneity and the adversarial nature of the civil society itself. The civil society in

Nigeria is relatively weak, parochial in outlook and divided most especially along ethnic, religious and linguistic lines. If the civil society is divided, it is obvious that it will have some adverse effects on the nascent democracy in place. The fact that the problem of ethnic nationalism continues to stare us in the face is an indication that something is wrong somewhere with the Nigerian state. Unfortunately, the lack of national consensus has affected democratic culture especially in the present Fourth Republic. Evidently, the dominance of primordial sentiment have promoted a political culture laden in political violence, assassination, manipulation of electoral process amongst others. Primordialism has also resulted in situations where political elite and even the citizens concerns has become how to amass wealth and misappropriate the commonwealth of the state. The elite and indeed the Nigeria state have without doubt become a specific modality of class domination. Primordial sentiment has further produced an essential feature of state dominance. The domination of the state results from the fact that the state lacks autonomy. The limited autonomy means that the state is weak to perform adequately the essential functions of the state. The state is thus unable to mediate the struggle between classes and even within classes. The net effect of this is that politics, essentially the struggle for control and use of state power becomes a warfare. Power is thus overvalued and security lies only in getting more and more power. This helps to explain why the state equally lacks legitimacy. The government in power is thus necessarily based on a very narrow range of interest. Without a veneer of legitimacy, the government is delinked from the society. This makes the government including the dominant class utterly disinterested in promoting national integration and development, but only in keeping its hegemony. The need to hold on to its hegemonic interest means that state resources are used to satisfy and promote the interest and values of those who support the ideals of the ruling class. Thus, since the people see the state as an alien force, they make no commitment to its policies, rather they seek to exploit them to their own advantage through various means including the use of violence, primordial sentiments and many other anti democratic values. It is in this crossroads that the current crisis of democracy plaguing Nigeria manifests the most.

CONCLUSION/RECOMMENDATION

The vast majority of the citizens of this country have always reduced the national question to contradictions and antagonism between the various ethnic nationalities in the country. In order words, they see the national question in terms of inter-tribal hostilities only. But the national question is far bigger and more complex than this. The national question is a big complex of political, economic, ideological, legal and other problems that arise during a people's struggle for liberation and for favourable internal and external conditions for further development; and also in the course of establishing equal, friendly relations between peoples. The national question is always subordinate to the main problem of the socioeconomic development of the society, and has a different content and significance at various stages of a nation's development. As such, it should involve the establishment of real equality, friendship, and fraternal cooperation between peoples. It aims at the abolition of the exploitation

of a region by the other. This must be discussed to bring about equity and justice in the allocation of the nation's resources to create the sense of belonging on the peoples of the country and to foster national integration.

It is only when the various groups and peoples in the country are involved in the formulation of governmental policies and their implementation; get a fair share of the nation's resources; and are not considered as peoples whose values, opinions and feelings do not matter in the country that they can cultivate the necessary sense of belonging and identity with their fellow citizens and the governments at all levels; and work in unity toward the building of a united and strong nation-state in which all will be proud to belong. As must be stated, it has become very necessary to address the issue because of the deepening ethno-nationalism in the country which has resulted in the proliferation of ethnic organizations (militias) and violent ethnic clashes.

The federal government in Nigeria should put in place measures that would help to create confidence in the people that the government really cares for them. The government should be responsible and accountable to the people. It should respect the rule of law, reduce poverty if it cannot be eradicated; provide functional infrastructural facilities; improve on the security situation in the country and check corruption and conduct free and fair elections across the country; and punish people who violate the laws. In addition, those issues which engender resource competition and the character of the Nigerian state need to be addressed. This is because the Nigerian state as presently constituted is seen as an arena for accumulation of wealth. The fault-lines of ethnic and religious divisions in the country make it easy for the elite to manipulate and politicise ethnicity, to advance self interests given the weak and distorted political economy of the country where a large army of vulnerable unemployed and disillusioned population abound. There is a need for a national programme of empowerment of the country's vast poor to remove the conditions that make joining ethnically based militant organization possible. To sustain such a programme, there is need to enthrone a truly democratic government in the country. For this to happen, civil society groups, the media, community based organizations and religious organizations have to collaborate in enlightenment programmes and citizen mobilization that engages the political system to become more citizen oriented. These efforts which will help to de-politicize ethnicity would naturally instill an image of patriotism which shall in turn foster national integration.

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