

Challenges and Prospects of Multi-Ethnic Society in a Democratic Setting

Fabian Benjamin

*Joint Admissions and Matriculation Board
National Headquarters, Bwari, Abuja*

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Abstract

The study examined the challenges and prospects of multi-ethnic society in a democratic setting. Ethnic politics is inevitable in a diverse society as different groups strive to seek self-interest at the exclusion of others. However, this usually leads to a conflict of interest among these groups which usually degenerate into conflict and political instability of the country. The majority-minority political arrangement in a democratic setting has posed serious challenges to ethnic politics. This is because democracy is referred to as the 'game of number'. Nigerian experience has shown that even before independence, efforts have been put in place to ensure social justice and equitable distribution of powers and revenue amongst the ethnic groups that made up Nigeria. The introduction of federal character principles, revenue sharing formula among other things are some of the strategies put in place to cushion the demands of numerous ethnic diversities and also ensure social justice to sustain the fledgling democracy of the country. The paper describes the agitation of these groups in the Nigerian society. The study adopted the consociationalism theory as a theoretical framework for the study. The study concludes that ethnic conflict in a democratic setting arises from exclusion from resource control and leadership position. However, the study recommended among other things that efforts should be made to promote social justice and equity in a political system as dialogue and open discussions remain fundamental in achieving social justice for sustainable democracy.

Keywords: *Ethnicity, Democracy, Social justice, Politics, Nigeria*

Corresponding Author: Fabian Benjamin

Background to the Study

The long military intervention in Nigerian politics suppressed the demands of different ethnic groups that made up Nigeria. Immediately after the country returned to democracy in 1999, different ethnic groups began to express their concerns on the issue of domination. Though, while some of these ethnic-nationalists expressed their concern in a peaceful manner, others have manifested into insurgencies. For example, the Movement for the Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND) in the Niger Delta region, the Movement for the Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in South East, the Oodua People Congress (OPC) in the West Nigeria (Metumara, 2010). Those ethnic-militias' activities do not conform to the law of the land as their agitations were violent and resulted in crises of different folds. Though, this situation is not peculiar to Nigeria alone as it has been witnessed in other African countries, For example, Ethnic cleansing and genocide was witnessed in Rwanda and Burundi while Sierra Leone, Somalia and Liberia witnessed state collapse, In fact, countries that have not witnessed such threat to national unity have at one point or the other witnessed agitation for secession among ethnic groups that once lived as one nation (Infidon 1999).

The ethnic groups that made up Nigeria have their own exclusive territories. The three major ethnic groups that make up Nigeria are Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. The Hausa/Fulani (North) constitutes 28% of the population; the Yoruba (West) constitutes 18% of the population; the Igbo (East) constitutes 16% while other ethnic groups are minority groups (Ambali and Mohammed, 2016). However, these three major ethnic groups have at one point or the other threatened to pull out of Nigeria. The Northern Nigeria first attempted to secede during the constitutional conferences of 1950 organized by the British if the North was not allotted half of the seats (50 per cent) in the proposed house of representatives, the Yoruba had also threatened to secede if the decision of the British colonialists to constitute Lagos the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria was not reversed; in order to separatist agitations by the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria, the Igbo (Easterners), had also threatened to secede following the 1966 pogrom following the Nigerian first military coup (Achebe, 2012; Adangor, 2017; Maier, 2000).

Nigerian political climate was dominated by fear of domination, this was manifested in the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election. After the North has held onto power for 30years since independence in both military and civilian regime, an election that ought to have produced a southerner as the president after was nullified by a military president from the North for no good reason (Bello, 2005 as cited in Okah, 2017; Idowu, 2004 as cited in Onah and Onah, 2018; Maier, 2000; Achebe, 2012). The only interpretation that can be given to this action was that the North was unwilling to hand over power. This development has threatened the democracy of the country.

Nigeria since independence in 1960 has experienced unstable democracy. Metumara (2010), noted that the diversities and heterogeneous nature of the country have led to the collapse of democratisation in the country. More often than not, ethno-related crises arise from contestation among rival groups whose activities divide the country's corporate existence. Ethno-religious conflicts have plunged the country into destruction which has led to the loss

of lives, investment and displacement of people. He further noted that Nigeria is on the verge of collapsing arising from the inter-ethnic and inter-religious crisis in the country (Imobighe 2003)

Nigeria remains the most ethnically diverse country in Africa, though, this diversity is expected to promote development but in the real sense, it threatens the country's national integration and polarization (Alubo, 2006). Nigeria is reported to have over 370 ethnic groups and also the third ethnic diverse country in the world (Imam, Bibi, and Abba 2014). Nigeria ethnic movement across the country is so strong that Nigerians have shifted their loyalty to their ethnic group while loyalty to the country has become secondary. Ugbem (2019) noted that ethnicity is the determining factor in electing political officeholders.

Competency of leaders is the primary consideration when electing leaders in a democratic dispensation, unfortunately, the ethnic affiliation of such leaders is usually the primary concern in Nigeria and this has no doubt led to nepotism, corruption and consequently underdevelopment as a round peg is being put in a square hole. This is one of the reasons why ethnic social movements have emerged in different regions to press home their demands thereby threatening democracy and the sovereignty of Nigeria. The resultant effects of these radical groups with highly violent activities have frustrated Nigerian democracy. It is on this note that it has become pertinent to examine the challenges and prospects of the multi-ethnic society in Nigerian democracy.

Conceptual Clarifications

Ethnicity

Ethnicity as a concept has defied consensus definition as the definition is as many as the scholars who have attempted to define the concept. Ethnicity is the discrimination of members by one group as a result of social-cultural differences (Otite, 1990). In his view, the consciousness amongst a common group is the source of social discrimination as the interaction of different socio-cultural groups in a heterogeneous society raises consciousness of difference. Abbink (1997), sees ethnicity as an interpretation of the cultural descent of people which opposes others and expresses a certain cultural style and behaviour. Though ethnicity is just a portion of an individual's identity in a social setting, it is usually expressed in conflict situations such as marginalization, conquest and incorporation and is usually politically to show some sense of political collectivity to press for ethnic interests. Nnoli (1978), is of the view that ethnicity as a social concept is associated with the identification of members of a group seeking protection of their interest in a political setting. He further stressed that ethnicity can be associated with prejudice, sentiments, solidarity, socioeconomic and political discrimination. Egwu (2004) in summary characterized ethnicity with common group consciousness, competing for scarce public goods which include the award of government contracts, employment, appointment into political class, award of scholarship, access to a lucrative business. Of course, ethnicity lacks fixed consciousness and because of that, it changes as the situation changes. Ethnic groups consist of people who have common ties as they speak the same language and share a common heritage who are emotionally united to preserve their type (Otite, 1999). Suberu (1996) as cited in Uzunmwangho and Epelle

(2011) sees an ethnic group as a “social collectivity whose members not only share such objectives characteristics as language, core-territory, ancestral myth, culture, religion, and/or political organization but also have some subjective consciousness or perception of common descent or identity” (P.4). Ethnic groups are defined as social formations with common ties such as culture, language, history, boundaries. The implication of these definitions owes to the fact that ethnic groups have a common affiliation that distinguished them from other groups. The common ties manifest in form of common origin, occupation, same behaviour pattern, values, norms and of course common language. 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.

Democracy

The word democracy is coined from duo Greek words; Demos (the people) and Kratos (rule) simply put as people's rule. The Greek perception of democracy simply means the direct participation of citizens in governance. Abraham Lincoln (1895) definition of democracy gives a holistic understanding of the word democracy. He defined democracy thus as “the people's government, by the people, and for the people, that is the rulership of the people.” (as cited in Chimezie and Oguromsi, 2018). Bolaji (2013) defines democracy as citizens' political participation; in which the three arms of government strive to achieve equality for its citizens; where individuals enjoy both fundamental human rights and political participation through their representatives elected to represent their interest (as cited in Ugbem, 2019). To Hook (1942), democracy is believed to be more desirable owing to the fact that it provides security, freedom and co-operative diversity compared to other forms of government. The nomenclature of the concept of democracy is gradually changing to mean the form of government where the citizens are seen to participate in choosing their leaders which are known as “rule of the majority”. In the view of Lary Diamond, a political scientist, the four major elements of democracy include:

- i. Choosing leaders through a fair and free election.
- ii. Active involvement of citizens in governance
- iii. Protection of fundamental human rights.
- iv. Equality of all citizens before the law

Omoregbe (2007), stressed that the following basic rudiments of democracy are:

1. Fundamental human rights protection.
2. Separation of governmental power.
3. Free press.
4. Freedom of religion and association
5. Rights to vote and be voted for.
6. Tenets of good governance.
7. Upholding of the principles of rule of law.

According to Omoregbe (2007), he further offered the indicators of a democratic society as a society where rule of law is respected, freedom of the press is guaranteed, the citizens have the right to associate and worship freely and human rights are upheld. The implication of his

ideology of democratic society stems from the fact that the citizens and the democratic institutions have the opportunities to function together. This is more achievable when the citizens are well informed about their fundamental human rights, especially the right to vote and be voted for and press freedom which usually helps to beautify democracy.

Theoretical Framework

The study adopted consociationalism theory. Arend Lijphart is the proponent of the theory. The theory was formally developed between the 1960s and 1975. The theory “based mainly on the four western European democracies of Austria (1945-1966), Belgium (1918), the Netherlands (1917-1967), and Switzerland (1984)” (McGarry, 2019. P.1). The theory centres on the Western European doctrine with the main goal of ensuring stability in the government of a country in a diverse society using the strategy of power-sharing, promotion of democracy and conflict resolution that may arise in a polarized society where there is political exclusiveness.

The theory gives room for a power-sharing arrangement to reconcile society in a politically and ethnically fragmented society to carry all component units of the country along. The consociational political arrangement is to ensure national integration and cohesion in an ethnonational divided country, especially in countries that have dealt with issues of self-determination. The argument of Lijphart is only considered to be suitable for segmental isolation of regional communities, a society where loyalty is more in the region than centre and multi-party system. The struggle for power at the centre in a democratic society led to resentment and conflict because a particular ethnic group has been seen to have claimed the monopoly of leadership position because of the overwhelming population of the region.

While this may not negate the principle of democracy, the rotation of the leadership position of the country using the principle of consociational democracy will ensure social justice and national integration of the country. The grouping of the country into six (6) geo-political zones would make the principle of consociational democracy to be achieved which will ensure equitable distribution of presidential power and resources (Nwabueze, 1993 as cited in Onah and Onah, 2018). Therefore, the consociational theory can be applied in Nigeria by ensuring that the six (6) geopolitical zones have access to power without any form of exclusion. The adoption of the principle of consociational theory will reduce ethnic crises that will shift loyalty from ethnicity to the national government and also reduce political hegemony. The argument of the theory for adequate representation of all groups on the political and economic stage in a consociational arrangement will end the prolonged crisis of political marginalisation and domination of sorts.

Ethno-Nationalism in Nigeria

Ethnicity may occur as a result of choice or ascription. Barth (1969) noted that individuals can choose to be identified with an ethnic group or the membership of a particular ethnic group can be imposed. Individuals can choose their ethnicity but such choice has to be accepted in society. This means that ethnicity is a combination of individual choice and social imposition. Ethnic groups as “human groups (other than kinship groups) held together by the belief in their common origins, provides a basis for the creation of a community” (Mbaku, 2001, 61).

However, “ethnicity can be seen as referring to differences in language, religion, colour, ancestry and culture to which social meanings are attributed and around which identity and group formation occur” (Nagel, 1995, 443).

Nationalism is associated with exclusion which occurs when an ethnic group is mobilized politically. Joireman (2003), noted that nationalism is ethnic politicization that manifests itself whenever a group of people feel marginalized in a diverse political arrangement. The unification of various ethnic and cultural entities by British colonial rule is today called Nigeria. Though, prior to the coming of the British, these entities hitherto had their political structure, social and religious values different from one another (Okafor, 1997).

Economic exploitation and administrative convenience are the reasons for the Unification of Nigeria by the British. It can be stressed that the political system adopted has not made serious efforts to reduce the social, political and economic differences amongst the different ethnic groups that made up Nigeria as they have no interest in the social, economic and political development of the country (Asia, 2001; Duruji, 2008). Metumara (2010), subscribes to the view that the distrust, suspicion and cleavages resulting in rivalry among the ethnic groups arise as a result of the administrative style adopted by the British. The distrust has manifested in several violent confrontations in the pre-independence prior and post-independence periods. It can further be stressed that Nigerians who took over the administrative structure of the country after independence have not succeeded in appeasing the demands of the various groups that make up Nigeria but simply maintain the colonial model of administration they inherited from the colonial master. The policies of the political class who took over from the British aimed at suppressing the genuine demands of ethnic consciousness as those demands were seen as a threat to the corporate existence of the country. In the military dispensation, the demands were suppressed successfully, but on the return to democracy in 1999, those demands began to resurface in different folds.

Ethnic Identity and National Integration in Nigeria

Britain granted Nigerian independence in 1960. The lumping of the country together by the British has also given rise to so many problems especially on social cohesion and integrating the country into a corporate and indivisible entity. The political and socio-economic inequality created by the British remained without any efforts to change the structure (Emerson, 1960 as cited in Osuntokun, Ukaogo and Odoemene, 2016). The bringing together of the diverse ethnic groups within the country into a new state has created inequalities. Brubaker (2004) as cited in Samuel and Okinono (2019) stressed that social and economic policies are needed to reduce the existing ethnicity which has risen from group aspiration, deprivation and marginalization. The government of the day that emerged after independence did not improve such inequalities rather the political and economic policies further divided the ethnic groups.

At independence in 1960, the country lacked a sense of unity as the regions that make up Nigeria were not integrated to see themselves as a nation with a common purpose. The reality poses a serious threat to national unity and national integration of a newly born state where the loyalty of members of the country is to their various ethnic groups and not to Nigeria. The

citizens first see themselves as Hausa/Fulani, Igbo or Yoruba. Their identity as “Nigerians lay in the shadow of their tribal and parochial allegiance” (Osuntokun, Ukaogo, and Odoemene, 2016). In the wake of fighting for independence and self-government, little effort is made to achieve cultural and political unity or national integration of the nation. Samuel and Okinono (2019) were of the view that ethnic nationalists failed woefully in integrating the country as one but they recorded success in fighting for independence from the British colonial master.

Looking at the challenge of ethnicity within the Nigerian context, there is no doubt that some ethnic groups are more educated and have more economic advancement than other ethnic groups, this kind of natural inequality in the socio-economic development of Nigeria's ethnic groups affect the relationships that they shared. The fear of domination creates feelings of suspicious and hostile rivalries as a result of inequality in the socio-economic composition of the country which constitutes a serious bottleneck to national integration in the country (Davis and Kalu-Nwiwu, 2001). Though it is logical to expect that election into elective positions should be on the competency of leaders, it is not out of place to also ensure that emphasis should also be placed on the composition of the country by ensuring that elective positions are shared in proportion to the population of the ethnic groups in Nigeria (Tijani, 2005).

In an attempt to ensure national integration and avoid marginalization of minority ethnic groups, various modalities of ensuring equity in sharing of political appointment, employment into government establishment have been introduced with different names but one purpose (Samuel and Okinono, 2019). This has been translated into different paradigms as “ethnic balancing”, “quota system” and “federal character principles”. Government has always been in the game of ensuring ethnic balancing, by making sure that there is no lopsidedness in appointment and employment. More often than not, meritocracy is usually compromised to appease ethnic demands which are usually justified on the grounds of unity, peace and political stability in Nigeria.

The recent rise of the demands of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) is a clear reflection of what marginalization could lead to in a diverse society like Nigeria. The people of the South East who felt that the Buhari-led government has not reflected the demands of the Igbos are threatening to pull out of Nigeria which has resulted in a security threat in the South-Eastern part of the country. Nnaji (2009) is of the view that the artificial boundaries created have to be suspended before national integration of the country can be achieved. It should be stressed that the failure of the country on national integration cannot be blamed solely on ethnicity and also ethnicity cannot be disregarded as an important means of putting an end to national integration.

This is owing to the fact that in Asia and Latin America, despite the fact that the nations are highly ethnicized, the nations are able to integrate purposefully. Therefore, the Nigerian situation must be understood to ensure that nationhood is attained so that ethnicity can be properly managed to achieve national integration.

Challenges of Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria

In contemporary Nigeria, ethnicity owes its origin to a plethora of factors in different ways. Ethnicity in Nigeria owes its origin to the social construction with an ethnic tripod (Alubo, 2006; Nnoli 2008, Osaghe 1995). Hitherto to the British conquest, the different tribes that makeup Nigeria were in existence as independent nations. The ethnic nations were colonized and finally brought under the Northern and Southern Protectorates which were later merged as Nigeria. In the Northern protectorate, over 250 ethnic groups were merged and the Hausa/Fulani were dominant.

The Eastern region and Western region were carved out of the Southern Protectorate. Ibibio, Ikwere, Efik, Ijaw, Calabar, etc were lumped with Igbo being the dominating ethnic group while Edo, Ishan, Isoko were also lumped together with Yoruba being the dominating ethnic group. The division of the country into this tripod structure became the platform for the political process mobilization. These ethnic groups within the regions began to mobilize based on their ethnic group to fight for their interest. Threats were also made by those regions to secede from Nigeria once a particular ethnic group felt short-changed.

For example, Isaac Boro made such a move in the Eastern region in 1966. The Tiv tribe also threatened to secede from Nigeria which later resulted in the Tiv Riot. Consequently, the Federal Government repressed the Tiv for threatening secession. There are other minority ethnic groups whose identities had been subsumed by the major ethnic groups. For example, over 250 ethnic groups are in Northern Nigeria which has been dominated by the Hausa/Fulani. The Eastern region and Western region had dominant Igbo and Yoruba respectively. Ugben (2019) noted that “over these years, these groups have engaged in exclusion and inclusion identity contests and as a result, ethnicity is a very salient issue that is vigorously contested”.

In Nigeria, the creation of the country along ethnic lines has made access to the centre to be on the platform of ethnicity. The sharing of resources, scholarships opportunities, employment opportunities are usually done based on ethnicity. The allegiance of the citizens to their respective ethnic groups supersedes that of Nigeria. Ethnic politics in Nigeria is characterized by a majority-minority group that try to control at the expense of others. At the regional, state and local government level, the issue of majority-minority is also applicable. It is not out of place to say that ethnicity has made a significant impact on the democratic experience in Nigeria.

Colonial masters created territories where the different ethnic groups worked as means of livelihood and payment of tax, therefore, territories were created in places where raw materials like rubber, cocoa, cotton, tin were found so that the ethnic groups migrated for the purpose of working (Nnoli, 2008; Egwu, 2004). Owing to the fact that the Hausa/Fulani were seen as being superior, the colonialists used the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group as administrators in the centre of Nigeria. Efforts of different ethnic groups to settle at a later time has manifested into a platform of mobilizing ethnic groups for self-advancement and protection of their interest. More often than not, the formation of this ethnic group usually

degenerates into crises of various folds, for example, the Jos tin mine crisis of 1932 and the Tiv crisis in 1960 and 1964 which were as a result of marginalization. The ethnic unions formed in many of the urban cities focus on how to protect the interest of their ethnic groups.

The union that was formed includes the Egbe Omo Oduduwa which was formed in 1995; the Urhobo Progress Union formed in 1928 among others. Nigerian fourth republic is characterized by socio-political organizations that compete for inclusion and exclusion issues within the Nigerian political sphere. The actors that compete for such democratic relevance include the elite from the North, West, East, Middle Belt and Niger Delta (Nwachukwu, 2003).

The Northern elite formed the Arewa Consultative Forum with the origin from the Northern region comprises the ruling Hausa, Fulani, Nupe and ethnic groups as they draw their cohesion from Islam being a common religion. The Yoruba elite that occupy the West which comprises other sub-groups like Ife, Ijesha, Ekiti, Oyo, Ijebu, Kefu and Onde. Those ethnic groups that resisted the political and religious domination of the Hausa/Fulani formed the middle belt which comprises a large number of ethnic and linguistic groups. The elites in those ethnic groups control the democratic process of the country. More often than not, they are usually able to use ethnicity to mobilise their people to contest against others and to make sure they hold on to leadership (Ugbem, 2019).

Though, the issue of rotation of power is put in place by the ethnic groups and regions to ensure equity among these ethnic groups. Various militant groups emerged along with these ethnic groups for the purpose of ensuring social justice, equity, the autonomy of the regions and sharing of revenue. The militant groups are usually used as an instrument of showing displeasure when a particular ethnic group is not well represented in a government. The conflict situation in Nigeria usually arises as a result of one ethnic group trying to control the commonwealth to the exclusion of others. Democracy in Nigeria is characterised by frequent crises among the ethnic elite. The politics of winner take all is also very practised in the country's democracy where members of the ruling party who have misappropriated funds are declared corruption-free while those in the opposing party are prosecuted by the anti-corruption agencies simply because they control the agency (Omotola, 2009).

Pre-colonial Nigeria witnessed a coup and counter-coup which destabilized the democratic process in Nigeria. The same men who have ruled as military heads of state took over power as civilian government immediately after the country returned to democracy which has contributed to the instability of Nigerian democracy. The politicians continue to struggle for political power which usually results in the manipulation of some at the advantage of others. The intense struggle for political power through an election in a democracy is usually characterised by rigging through the use of thugs for ballot snatching, intimidation of opposition members and result falsification (Oyedira and Adigun, 1991; Omotola, 2009). The Nigerian democracy is characterized with majority and minority groups competing for control of power and access to resources and also inter-ethnic showdown by ethnic groups that are displeased. Ethnicity promotes feelings of suspicion where members of ethnic groups are unable to relate with others outside their group without suspecting their intentions.

Development can be said to be hindered because the groups do not co-exist peacefully. Nigeria is structured in a way that opportunities, resources, employment, etc are given based on ethnic origin which makes allegiance to be for ethnic groups and not the Nigerian state. This is why it is so easy to mobilize people on the ground of ethnic sentiments. It is instructive to say that a level of allegiance to Nigeria is required to ensure development.

However, the ethnic divide has been the bane of development over the years. The right people are not usually selected or elected because the emphasis is usually placed on ethnicity. “The emphasis is usually 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” (Ugbem, 2019, 23). In such instances, a political office holder may end up having inadequate knowledge about the office he occupies. Most educational, health and religious institutions in Nigeria consider ethnicity when resources or leadership issues are involved which usually lead to mismanagement of resources.

More often than not, when anti-corruption agencies apprehend individuals, it is usually interpreted as an attack on the access of the ethnic group to their share of the “national cake”. Once the leadership of the country is from a particular ethnic group, another important portfolio is usually occupied by that ethnic group. This point was stressed by Ugbem (2019) when he noted that:

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 natural resources and ultimately lack of development or under-development (5403).

It is on this ground that politics are organised around the line of ethnicity which makes political office holders represent their ethnic groups at the local, state or federal level with a high level of impunity in the country. Though, there is no doubt that the introduction of democracy and the constitutional provision for the principle of federal character has also cushioned the domination of the various ethnic groups that made up Nigeria. Otherwise, the minority tribes would be more dominated by the majority tribes since democracy is a game of numbers. Therefore, the ethnic politics in Nigeria has made an impact on Nigeria democracy and also shaped the understanding of the heterogeneous nature of the country.

Prospects of Ethnicity and Democracy in Nigeria

Nigerian political history was characterized with the goal of managing ethnicity among the different ethnic groups for the purpose of nation-building even before the attainment of independence. The adoption of federalism which gives room for regional, states and local governments creation, the jettisoned of parliamentary system of government for the presidential system, the establishment of a quota system and federal character principle, discouragement of ethnic oriented parties, adoption of politics of consociationalism are some of the measures put in place to manage and respect the diverse nature of the conflict for the sake of managing ethnic conflict in the country (Ukiwo, 2005).

There is no doubt that these mechanisms have enjoyed the backing of institutionalists who subscribe to the view that there is a link between ethnic conflict or peace and the political institutions of a country (Horowitz, 1985). However, many of the scholars that have written on ethnicity in Nigerian political arrangement have succeeded in examining the role of these mechanisms or strategies in ethnic conflict management (Ekeh and Osaghae, 1989; Adamolekun, 1991; Horowitz, 1985; Mustapha, 1986; Suberu, 2001, Edewor, and Aluko, 2007).

The conclusion of the authors arising from different theoretical points of view remains that these initiatives have no doubt resolved the initial issues but have also succeeded in giving rise to latent consequences which have worsened ethnicity. Suberu (2001) has noted with respect to revenue sharing formula:

The establishment of nine separate commissions on revenue allocation since 1946 has led to neither development of an acceptable or stable sharing formula nor the elaboration of an appropriate framework of values and rules within which a formula can be devised and incrementally adjusted to cope with changing circumstances (p. 11).

Some analysts have attributed the limitations of the ethnic management strategies to improper implementation and lack of political will. The whole aim is to ensure national integration of the country. National integration within the Nigerian context is a way to forge “unity in diversity”. The imposition of uniformity by successive military rules despite complex cultural diversity sought to negate socio-cultural differences. More often than not, the more effort that is made to ensure unification of the country by the military men, the more conflicts erupted which posed obstacles to peaceful coexistence, progress, unity and stable development of the country. National cohesion in a diverse country like Nigeria is not achievable without an entrenchment of public culture constitutes the common grounds on which the diverse groups appreciate the state.

National integration comes with benefits like democracy and political stability which can be realized with the entrenchment of a strong and supportive public culture. Edewor et al. (2014) noted that unity does not necessarily mean uniformity; rather, understanding and respecting socio-cultural diversity is much more important. Nigeria can only survive its diversity in the 21st century when there is tolerance despite the socio-cultural differences instead of pursuing self-interest (Jega, 2002).

In the wake of ensuring democratic prosperity of the country, Suberu (2001), recommends decentralization of funds by revisiting the vertical division of revenues and with increased rewards for local revenue generation. Therefore, democracy is a way of ensuring that the interest of the minority group is also heard in a diverse society like Nigeria because it gives room for adequate representation of the citizens.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It can be concluded that ethnic conflict in Nigeria arises from exclusion from resources control and leadership positions. Ethnic conflicts in Nigeria have continued because the elites in Nigeria have succeeded in splitting the country along ethnic lines. Voting patterns in Nigeria during elections usually reflect this reality as it is usually common for electorates to vote for those with the same ethnic affiliation with them which usually resulted in ethnic rivalry and hostility among leaders and their followers.

However, bold steps have to be taken to ensure the management of conflict and national integration and cohesion. It is common to expect ethnic conflict in an ethnically diverse society like Nigeria but what is expected of the government is to provide strategies to minimize these conflicts that have manifested into different folds. There is no doubt that the lack of efficient institutions in Nigeria to mitigate the conflict situation have impacted the corporate existence of the country with frequent agitations for secession from ethnic groups that are not well represented in revenue sharing and sharing of leadership positions in the democratic dispensation of the country.

The paper, therefore, recommends the following:

- i. Efforts should be made to promote social justice and equity in the Nigerian political system. Dialogue and open discussions remain fundamental in achieving social justice. An equitable modality for the governance of the country with significant support from people at the grassroots would ultimately ensure the sustainability of Nigerian fledgling democracy.
- ii. There is the need to change ethnic politics into an inclusively mutually beneficial one. This can be achieved by developing new institutions and mechanisms that can address issues of poverty, revenue allocation and political power-sharing peacefully. The provision of the dividend of democracy to the people will make people less concerned about those at the helm of affairs since their interest is extensively satisfied and it will lead to harmonious relationships.
- iii. The federal character principle as enshrined in the constitution should be strengthened to ensure social justice especially in the distribution of employment and positions. Therefore, the principal needs to be reviewed in a way to ensure social justice without compromising merit to ensure national integration in Nigeria.
- iv. Nigerian government should ensure adequate public enlightenment programs through the National Orientation Agency and other relevant authorities. This orientation should focus on younger generations especially in our schools to ensure that the younger generations are enlightened on the effect of ethnic nationalism and the ways to avoid promoting ethnic sentiments.

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