Nigerian Federalism and the Challenges of Ethnic Identity since the 1999 Democratic Era

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Abstract

The intellectual debate about modern federalism – its meaning and significance- tracks back to the late eighteenth century. The peculiar circumstances that surrounded the shift from confederation to federation in the United States of America in the years between 1781 and 1789 shaped and moulded the nature of the subsequent intellectual debate in a way which had far-reaching consequences for understanding one of the most important historical innovations in modern government and politics. The American federal model established in 1789 was based upon a set of core principles that were consciously imitated by others, and in consequence it helped to spark an enduring analytical debate about what it meant to be 'federal'. Federalism is the darling of various developing and even developed nations. Many nations opted for this marriage of convenience due to the multi-ethnic nature of their cultural groups. Thus, the adoption of federal structure became popular as a way of managing the diversity of culturally heterogeneous societies. Nigeria opted for it as it is a nation of over four hundred diverse cultural groups in 1963 when it became a republic. The Nigerian federalism, modeled along the American Federalism, was hoped that the system will ensure inclusion rather than exclusion of all the cultural groups in representative governance. The aim of this study, using the principle of inclusive governance, is to give an assessment of this compromise arrangement in Nigeria, its feasibility in the face of the current ethnic nationalities challenges that besiege it since the commencement of this presently uninterrupted democratic governance which came on board in 1999. The findings of the study showed that Federalism will only work effectively in Nigeria if less premium is placed on political power calculation of extreme measures to win and to maintain political power.

Keyword: Federalism, Challenges, Ethnic and Identity

Introduction

The fourth Republic which took off on May 1999 set in motion a democratic era that has permeated all sectors of the Nigerian society. The uninterrupted fifteen years of military rule has created a situation where the leadership, the civil society and state institutions have to relearn how to operate within a more open system require in federal structure. This paper makes a critical analysis of the federal structure and extrapolates from the proceedings the prospects for

the sustenance of democratic governance in the Nigerian federation. Nigeria today is bedeviled by a high level of crisis which begged for the question of continue co-existence in the federation. The nagging question is what are the issues or reasons that could effectively explain the prevalence of these contestations? In answering this question, it becomes imperative to look at the chain of issues surrounding the phenomena that trigger the question of being or not be in a federation as well as attempt a discussion on the possible solution of the issue and finally draw a useful conclusion.

Conceptual Clarifications

Tamuno aptly noted the problem associated with governance in a federal democracy such as it is in Nigeria. He noted "Neither history nor politics nor economics has given the cause of "federalism" in Nigeria a smooth ride. However, a lot depends on what one means by the far from plain word "federalism"."[1] To the present researcher, federalism is that form of government where the component units of a political organization participate in sharing powers and functions in a cooperative manner and provide sufficient room for the co-existence of centre-seeking and centre-fleeing forces. Certainly these are some of the features of a federal democracy. Thus, Where was therefore forthright when he noted that democracy is a condition of federalism. In his words, "federalism demands forms of government which have the characteristics usually associated with democratic or free government."[2] It was in this vein that Tamuno aptly concluded that, "The major attributes of federalism include territorially-based, though centrally enforced power and resource distribution, 'a centre with limited responsibility', shared rule and self-rule; pragmatic and flexible leadership and rules of the game etc."[3] From the observation above, it becomes logical to conclude that, it is hardly possible to maintain, let alone consolidate, a legitimated federal system without due and strict observance of the forgoing attributes. It is therefore a cinch that federal systems cannot but grapple with the issue of collective identity, federalism and democracy which necessarily come into sharp focus on mutually dialectical relationship. In other words, there is the notion of "democratic idea" which is all about "the challenges often posed by the citizens' demands for greater control and participation even in countries generally regarded as highly

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[1] Tamuno N. Tekena, Nigerian Federalism in Historical Perspective" in Kunle Amuwo, Adigun Agbaje, Rotimi Suberu and Georges Herault, eds, Federalism and Political Restructuring in Nigeria, (Spectrum Books Limited, Ibadan, 2003) 13.

[2] Quoted in Jinadu, A. L. "A Note on the Theory of Federalism": in Akinyemi, A. B. *et al*, eds, Readings on Federalism, (Lagos: Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, 1979) 21.

[3] Tamuno, Tekena, op cit, 4.

democratic. These challenges will become clearer as they relate to Nigeria in the course of this work. A very crucial factor in nation building in Nigeria is that of accommodation and integration among the various peoples of the country. This is the crux of the issue tearing the various groups in Nigeria presently. While appreciating that there are different layers of identity contestations/conflicts in the country and possibly multiple causalities, we are for the purpose of this paper restricted to the identity struggles between and among ethnic groups in the Nigerian Federalism. There are multiplicities of these groups, but the study will focus on the relationship of minority groups verses the Hausa and Fulani dominant groups in the north. The principal challenge has been that these Hausa and Fulani groups, using both ethnicity and religion wish to perpetually dominant at both political and economic levels any other group in the north.

The concept of ethnic identity has been subjected to various definitions based on nationality, race and religion.[4] Seibel[5] and Clignets[6] used the terms ethnic group and tribe synonymously. Rose viewed ethnic group as those whose members share a common generational social and cultural heritage. According to her, ethnic groups are frequently identified by distinctive patterns of family life, language, recreation, religion and other customs which cause them to be differentiated from others.[7] Summing up varied definitions for the purpose of bringing the various dimensions of ethnicity under a single definition, Sanda defined an ethnic group as consisting of interacting members, who considered themselves as belonging to a named or labeled social group. The group, according to him, shares common identifiable interests with a unique culture while constituting a part of a wider society.[8] The co-existence of these ethnic groups within the same polity has frequently led to the description of Nigeria as an accident of history. This brought about competition and most often than not, conflict. This competition and conflict became apparent as groups struggle to get the maximum and not the minimum of the scarce resources. This created and reinforces common consciousness among the compositing groups. As an attribute of ethnicity, exclusiveness among in-

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[4] Gordon, M, *Assimilation in American Life* (New York, Oxford University Press, 1964) 6.
[5] Seibel. D, "Some Aspects of inter-ethnic Relations in Nigeria in *Ethnicity Relations in Nigeria*. Ibadan, (The Caxton Press, West Africa Ltd, 1964).
[6] Clingnet. R., "Ethnicity, Social Differentiation and Secondary Schooling in West Africa" *Cahiers African's*, VI, 1967pp361-378.
[7] Rose, P, *They and We,* (New York, Random House, 1965).
[8] Sanda, A, O, *Ethnicity Relations in Nigeria,* Ibadan: (The *Caxton* Press West Africa Ltd, 1976).

group-out-group relations panned out prominently; and with time, the relationship become marked and guarded jealously by the various ethnic groups. Acceptance and rejection on linguistic-cultural grounds characterizes social relations. These are expressed inevitably through inter-ethnic discrimination in jobs, marriages, business transactions or the distribution of social services. This factor of exclusiveness is usually accompanied by nepotism and corruption.[9] In fact to most Nigerian people, identifying with an ethnic group is more rewarding than identifying with Nigeria as a corporate entity. There are many definitions to the concept of a nation. The African Encyclopedia for schools and Colleges defines a nation as "a large group of people who live in the same country; and who share similar traditions, culture and ways of life.[10] Watson defined a nation as a "community of people whose members are bound together by a sense of solidarity, a common culture and a national consciousness."[11] Using Watson's definition, three factors are basic about a nation and they are: national consciousness; similar culture and tradition; and common geographical location. Where there are differences in the characteristic attributes of a nation, among the peoples of that country, problems are bound to arise in building such a nation. Problems generally arise as a result of differences in culture, tradition, religion and language. Also problems like alienation, discontent, disaffection or disillusionment may arise where there is low level of national consciousness.

Nation building involves actions, behaviors and thoughts or feelings aimed at sustaining the attributes of a nation. The problem of nation building is more critical in the third world country generally and more particularly in Nigeria where there are peoples with different cultures, languages, religion and a diversity of inclinations who have been forced together into one geo-political entity.[12] In this study, nation building is defined as a process, whereby the leaders of a country strive to achieve unity and progress for their nation through various programmes. These programmes are normally aimed at promoting peace and harmony, reducing conflicts, laying good foundations for economic, social and political development and above all to create conditions for progress. Conflict is a crucial component of ethnic identity. According to Nnoli, this is inevitable under conditions of inter-ethnic

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[9] Maiyaki, M. M. *The Bassa and Egbura Conflicts: Challenges to Democratic Government*, Journal of Arts and Humanities, VOL.4. No.4. 2007.pp8-16
[10] The African Encyclopaedia for schools and colleges, 1974: 362.
[11] Watson, H., *Nations and States* (London. Methuen,1977).
[12] Ezegbe, M.O., Social Studies Education and nation building" in *Social Studies in Schools*. (Onitsha: Out rite Publishers, 1994).

competition for scarce valuable resources particularly; the fear of being confined to the bottom of the inter-ethnic ladder of inequality. He summed up by noting that this generates divisive and destructive tendencies and demonstrations, rioting and, various forms of violent agitations become instruments in inter-ethnic relations. Thus, the scarcity of much highly valued resource encouraged destructive competition.[13] It is therefore a cinch and as noted by Jega and Egwu in separate contributions that the recurrent nature of ethnic identity resurgence is intricately linked with the history, processes and distortions inherent in state formation in Nigeria from the colonial to the post-colonial period.[14] Profound transformations of ethnic identity since independence serve to highlight the centrality of the state in the definition and structuring of all forms of identity.

The Nature of Federalism

Clinton Rossiter observed, "The Federalist converted federalism from an expedient into an article of faith, from an occasional accident of history into an enduring expression of the principles of constitutionalism."[15] In Nigeria however there are palpable fraught in the practice of federalism that are reflected in both theory and practice. The term 'federal' has both an empirical and a theoretical resonance. Federalism deals simultaneously with fundamental moral questions as well as with amoral matter-of-fact issues. The former, like social diversity and individual and collective identities are highly charged emotional questions for many people while the latter involve the routine pursuit of economic profit and security and reflect for the most part calculated and dispassionate self-interest. The moral basis to federalism derives from certain inherent virtues, such as respect, tolerance, dignity and mutual recognition, which lead to a particular form of human association, namely, the federal state or federation. The amoral foundation suggests that no such qualities inherent in federalism at all and that it is nothing more than a particular constitutional and/or political technique for achieving certain overarching goals such as territorial expansion or economic benefits and security. Another reason why federalism has been so problematic for scholars is that it is multifaceted. In political science of course it directly engages the endless public debate about power, authority and legitimacy: how human relations are best organised in

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[13] Nnoli, Okwudiba, *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, (Fourth Dimension Publishers, Enugu, 1978).

[14] Jega, Attaihiru, "The State and Identity Formation Under Structural Adjustment in Nigeria" in Jega, A. (ed*), Identity transformation and Identity Politics Under Sturcuctural Adjustment in Nigeria*,(Nordiska Afrikaninstitutet, Uppsala and the Centre for Research and Documentation, Kano,2000); and Egwu, Samuel, "State and Class in Nigeria: Context for Framing Middle-Belt Identity, in Dakas eta l (ed), *Right to Be Different,* (League for Human Rights, Jos).

[15] Clinton Rossiter, Conservatism in America, (New York: Alfred Knopf: USA, 1955) pxii.

order to preserve, promote and generally accommodate viable distinct identities. Adjunct to this is the concept of representation which has a number of quite different – though related – uses, each with its own characteristic context, assumptions and implications. It was, in short, 'a sort of uneasy combination of all these uses'. But the central core, meaning of 're-presentation' was 'a making present of something absent' while 'not making it literally present'. Representation, then, meant 'making present indirectly', via an intermediary, but it could take many forms so that the concept and its uses were 'complex and multiple'. The two great points of difference between a democracy and a republic are: first, the delegation of the government, in the latter, to a small number of citizens elected by the rest; second, the greater number of citizens and greater sphere of country over which the latter may be extended. Federalism has now become one of those good echo words that evoke a positive response but that may mean all things to all men, like democracy, socialism, progress, constitution, justice or peace.

The Practice of Federalism in Africa

In the words of former Senegalese leader, Leopold Sedar Senghor, politics no longer is "a question of the art of governing the state for the public welfare in the general framework of laws and regulations. It is a question of politician politics – not even ideological tendencies – to place oneself, one's relatives, and one's clients in the *cursus honorum* that is the race for preferment – 'the image of personal rule.'"[16] According to Professor Peter Ekeh, "The political history of Africa has become a tale of drift and instability…. Standing above and set aside and apart from society; the African state has turned out to be arbitrary, because it operates outside societal rules."[17] The arbitrariness of the African state has conferred on African political culture, attributes of negativity, so that "African political culture has become characterized by a vast array of negative elements such as corruption, violence and mistrust."[18] With the tendency to blame every of the continent's woes on the incidence of colonialism, it remains debatable, however, whether it was the nature of the state inherited at the end of formal colonialism or the neo-patrimonial and particularistic orientation of the competing power elites who inherited the post-colonial state that is the problem. Whichever, the African state remains characterized by huge disconnect with the society. Those negative elements identified by Ekeh,

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[16] See Robert I. Jackson, Protest and Power in Africa, (Worldpress, New York: USA, 1998) 17.
[17] Ekeh, P. P. "Nigeria's Emergent Political Culture," in Ekeh, P *et al* (eds). *Nigeria Since Independence in the Last 25 years*, Vol. V, Politics and Constitution. Heinemann Educational Books Inc, 1989.p5
[18] Ekeh, P. P. "Nigeria's Emergent Political Culture," in Ekeh, P *et al* (eds). *Nigeria Since Independence in the Last 25 years*, Vol. V, Politics and Constitution. Heinemann Educational Books Inc, 1989.p5

and much more, have all combined to make the African state irrelevant to the citizenry, thus eroding its legitimacy. Additionally, the state becomes prone to economic dislocation and political instability – all which are indices of state failure.[19] Here, Rotberg's articulation of the characteristics of a failed state in economic and political terms is illuminating. According to him, the economic sphere is characterized by deteriorated standards of living, a lack of public goods and services, the flouring of corruption and rent-seeking, and a pervasive economic stagnation.[20] In the political sphere, some leaders and their allies readily work to subvert prevailing democratic norms by coercing legislatures and bureaucracies into subservice, compromising judicial independence, stifling the emergence of civil society or space, and abusing security and defense forces for parochial ends. Moreover, the political sphere is dotted with ethnic discrimination and resultant discord. Governments that once appeared to operate for the benefit of all the nation's citizens are perceived to have become partisan. Corrupt ruling elites invest their ill-gotten gains overseas, building lavish residences and palaces with state funds.[21]

The Nigerian Federalism and Challenges of Ethnic Identity Groups

A number of conflicts grow out of a past history of conflict between groups that has led to the development of negative stereotypes, racial intolerance and discrimination. The differences in value invariably create the "We" and 'Others" dichotomy. The fact that 'others' are perceived as different gives feeling that they are entitled to less or are inferior by reason of values. This disrupts the flow of communication between and among in-group and out-group and to that extent, twists perceptions that groups have about each other. The high conflict potential of the Nigerian ethnic identity groups could indeed be a function of frustration caused by economic deprivation.[22] Frustration-aggression tendencies often also manifest misplaced aggression. This trend has featured in the series of violence inflicted upon the ordinary citizens of Nigeria, most of who have no direct connection with political and economic elites whose mismanagement of the country's resources engender the unemployment, poverty and deprivation that breed frustration and foster violence. As Dougherty and

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[19] For details, see, Uzodike, U.O. and Maiangwa, B. "Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria: Casual Factors and Central problematic." *African Renaissance* 9(1), 2012. p86

[20] Noted in, Uzodike, U.O. and Maiangwa, B. "Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria: Casual Factors and Central problematic." *African Renaissance* 9(1), 2012. p96

[21] --------- Boko Haram Terrorism in Nigeria: Casual Factors and Central problematic." *African Renaissance* 9(1), 2012.96-97

[22] Alozieuwa S. H.O*., Contending *Theories of International Relations: A Comprehensive Survey*, second edition. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1990.p266

Pfaltzgrate Jr. have rightly noted, hostilities in such instances, are directed "toward someone or something not responsible for the original frustration." [23]

Beneath the façade of northern hegemony, however, the resentment against Hausa-Fulani hegemony over the rest of the north among other northern political blocs persists. Perhaps the boldest expression of this resentment was the expulsion of the five northernmost and predominantly Hausa and Fulani Nigerian states from Nigeria by Army Major Gideon Orkar in the coup against General Babangida's regime in 1990. With Babangida (IBB) viewed generally as a proxy for the Hausa and Fulani, Major Orkar, who was of the Tiv ethnic minority group of northern Nigeria, had accused the Hausa and Fulani of seeking to perpetuate their rule at the expense of the predominantly Christian peoples of Nigeria's Middle-Belt. The age-old resentment of the old Kanem-Borno Empire towards the over-arching influence of the Sokoto Caliphate in the north also remains. When the late General Sani Abacha, a Kanuri, assumed the leadership of Nigeria in 1993, he retired several top military officers, many of whom were regarded as 'IBB Boys' and were mainly Hausa and Fulani. Abacha's later deposing of the Sultan of Sokoto, Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki, and concomitant prominence accorded the Shehu of Borno by his regime, was perhaps the climax of a revived age-old rivalry between old Kanem-Borno and Sokoto Caliphate. That interlude, however, did not redeem the peripherality of the Kanem-Borno axis in the northern domination of Nigeria's political power trajectory. Significantly, in 1999, retired army captain and former military intelligence operative, Sagir Mohammed, formed a northern militia, the Arewa People's Congress, (APC) to "protect and safeguard the interest of the North wherever it is."[24] Outside of the north, the APC is perceived by some as "the maintenance of [northern] hegemonic control in national politics."[25] As Akinyemi has argued, "Unlike the other ethnic militias who seek change, the Arewa People's Congress seeks the maintenance of the status quo, irrespective of its crises of marginalization."[26] Although the APC appears to have now disappeared, in the general context of Northern angst over the loss of central power, Boko Haram may be conceived as a resurgent Northern ethnic militia or in the specific

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[23] ---------------------- *Contending Theories of International Relations: A Comprehensive Survey*, second edition. New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1990.p266

[24] Obasi, K. N. *Ethnic Militias, Vigilantes and Separatist Groups in Nigeria*. Abuja: Third Millennium Ltd., 2002, p43

[25] ----------------- *Ethnic Militias, Vigilantes and Separatist Groups in Nigeria*. Abuja: Third Millennium Ltd., 2002, p43

[26] Akinyemi A B. "Ethnic Militia and the National Question in Nigeria," in Tunde Babawale, (ed) *Urban Violence, Ethnic Militia and the Challenge of Democratic Consolidation in Nigeria*. Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited, 2003, p22

context of the Kanuri sense of marginalization, an emergent militia for that ethnic group. In the north-central, or Middle-Belt area generally, two developments have combined to change whatever cohesion which existed in the northern region. One, although religious extremism in Nigeria has been a northern phenomenon, re-occurring ethno-religious conflicts in Jos, Plateau state which has pitched Hausa and Fulani Muslims particularly against the predominantly Christian indigenous population has helped to bolster common consciousness among the minority Christian ethnic groups in the region. This common consciousness is defined by shared Hausa and Fulani hegemonic burden, and re-enforces the resentment towards that hegemony. Two, Kukah has noted that "the Middle Belt, with its clusters of Christians and traditional religious worshipers, remain central to the geo-political calculation of both the ruling class in the North, and those of the South, with each laying claims on a different basis. While the Muslims in the North lay claim to the area on the basis of geographical congruity, the South lays claims to religious brotherhood."[27] Towards the 2011 presidential polls, this tendency was exploited to mobilize support for Jonathan. The patronage accruing to this region emanating from that support towards Jonathan's electoral success, and the increasingly Christian brotherhood consciousness fostered by the ethno-religious conflict in Jos, have combined to rally strong support for the Jonathan administration within the region

The Question of Remaining Federal
Babangida named what he called the 'Doctrine of Nigeria's Settled Issues,' which according to him cannot be compromised. They include the country's unity, her republican constitution, the states as federating units and the capitalist orientation of the economy. Babangida was a veteran of the Nigeria civil war fought to keep Nigeria as one Order.[28] In his words, "You see in this country we fought the war for almost three years for the benefit of living together. I have a bullet in my body, so nobody will talk to me about secession or breaking away. If you do, I would always say yes, get my tailor to take my measurement, get on my khaki and I go back to fight a war to keep this country together."[29] In central Nigeria, the ethnic identity issues have been a total rejection of the colonially imposed social, political and even religious inferiority and superiority and subordinate and super ordinate status placed on them. This disposition

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[27] Kukah, H. M. (Reprint Edition). *Religion, Politics and Power in Northern Nigeria*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, Limited, 1993, pxiii
[28] Turner, T. "Politics in Nigeria," in Williams, G (ed), *State and Society in Nigeria*. Idanre-Nigeria: Afrografiika Publishers, 1980, p74
[29] Daily Trust, Abuja, Friday, January 27, 2012.

which put them at polar end with their colonially imposed overlords has been at the root of the much discontents among the minority groups in this region. The placing of these groups under the emirs and Islamic stance was in fact a marriage of inconvenience that was bound to implode. Governance which was built on falsehood provided the litmus test for this implosion. And in the federal governance which became utilitarian in Nigeria as an effective and efficient identification, deployment and management of human and material resources for the benefit of Nigerians has been inadequate and in some instance lacking in almost all sectors. This is the situation since the attainment of independence. It is also the source of most of the angst among ethnic identity struggles in the country. In this vein, Onoja rightly described the issue of governance in Nigerian Federalism as prompting ethnic identity issues thus,

> "We adopt governance perspective in an attempt to make sense of our intervention in group resort to arms in negotiating space in Nigeria. We attribute poor or weak governance to proliferating corruption which weaken or destroy institutions. We argue that institution is the life wire of any organisation. In this discourse, there is an organic connection between declining governance, non performing institutions and deepening corruption. We have argued, when the occasion present itself, in different forums, that getting governance right is fundamental to addressing numerous challenges confronting Nigeria. At the heart of the governance travail is corruption.[30]

The Way Forward

If federal governance is the effective and efficient form of government for the contemporary global world, its utilisation for the benefit of Nigerian people has been lacking in this respect since independence. Onoja again averred rightly that:

> Embedded within the notion of governance is planning and implementation. When leaders, whether in the public or private sector, come with agenda and proceed to implementing this agenda in a coordinated fashion within a stipulated period of time, their agenda embraces the ideals of planning and implementation. In

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[30] "Groups' Resort to Arms in Negotiating Space in Nigeria: The Central Nigerian Exception?" Being text of lead paper presented at the conference on "ethnic minority agitation and Nigerian politics: reflections on the Tiv "revolt" of 1964: 50 years after", organized by Benue State University, Makurdi, 1-3 April, 2014, p3.

> Nigeria, we have an enabling environment, particularly in the public sector that discourages this orderly ascension to power.[31]

Most Nigerian leaders came to their position by chance. In this circumstance, the implementation of the basic rules and principles of federalism are circumvented. This is because primordial interests were what brought him/her to office and these vested interests must be serviced, thus, planning and implementing genuine programmes for the benefit of the people become abused. This is the enabling environment that proliferate corruption, undermine institutions and affect efficiency and effectiveness in the Nigerian federalism. This provided fertile ground for identity contestations in the share of the country's fortunes. It should be noted that one important social category that has been affected by these chains of identity contestation and/or mobilisation is the youth. In Nigeria, youths have increasingly become violent in their activities. This paper argued that youth violence in Nigeria do not connotes sheer criminality or anti-democratic dispositions. In a dependent capitalist society like Nigeria, characterised by structural inequality and insensitive political elite whose policies and programmes intensify inequality with shrinking socio-economic opportunities, such violent reactions are definitely not unexpected. In this regard, in the frustrations created by the Nigerian state, youth violence in Nigeria is seen as reactions to the unacceptable socio-economic conditions imposed on them. The objective road map for a better federal structure which will checkmate, to some extent, the contestation of ethnic nationalities in Nigeria, is to change the prevailing enabling environment by lessening greed among the leaders. This will certainly decrease the susceptibility of Nigerians to the politicians' manipulation. What Nigerians expect from the politicians is transparency and opportunities that will add value to their lives and wellbeing in the process of governance. This will increase the patriotism of the led and limit the prospect of becoming tools in the hands of elite for promoting their own selfish goals which are most often garbed in ethnic identity. In this vein therefore, there is the urgency for reorientation in governance that should straddle all levels of government. This reorientation and responsiveness to the yearnings of the people in the process of reinventing good governance in the Nigerian federation should place emphasis on the roles of all tiers of government. Furthermore, most ethnic groups in Nigeria are not ready to subjugate local ethnic loyalties to those of the public good of the country. Thus, the task of nation-building within the context of Nigeria federation is besieged by a variety of problems as noted in this paper. The

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[31] Ibid p.17.

following lines of action are however recommended in view of the peculiarity of the problems in the country.

Firstly, the twin issues of economy and politics have remained at the fore of contemporary dynamics of politics in Nigeria. Thus, to address the problem of ethnic identity, it is important to respond to the economic and governance questions. This requires moving away from politics of exclusion to that of inclusion.

Secondly, combating diversity is not about eradicating centrifugal issues- issues that divide- they will always be there, it is about managing them; create a level of understanding, bridging existing gaps and strengthening the centripetal forces for sustainable peace and development. Trust must therefore be established across ethnic nationalities in the country.

Thirdly, to effectively manage issues of identity contestations with conflict potentials in Nigeria, there is the need to put in place mechanisms for dialogue and civic engagement. The basic premise for this is that management of ethnic and/or religious identity contestations is to accept certain realities, that such contestations cannot be eliminated, suppressed or wished away. Thus, it requires devising strategies to reduce the disruptive effects of such contests to the lowest possible level. Moreover, the pervasive winner-takes all syndromes in Nigerian political landscape should be checkmated so as to carry everybody along irrespective of political affiliation.

Conclusion

The greatest challenge to the world community in this century is how to promote peaceful co-existence between people of different histories, languages, and religions, who find themselves intertwined in a single state. Thus, this paper has provided good explanatory bases for understanding the dynamics of inter-ethnic identity contestations in the process of practising a federal structured administration in Nigeria. The study provides a nuanced understanding of the role of the leaders in generating fissiparous identities and divisions and how this could be checkmated. This paper has therefore advocated good governance by all the tiers of the federation with a view to understanding its implication for the entire Nigerian society.

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