Nigeria's Ethnic Pluralism: a Challenge to Political Participation and Nation Building

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ABSTRACT: Ethnic pluralism is an albatross to political participation and Nation Building in Nigeria. It has negatively impacted on the country's democratisation and Nation Building process in a way that political platforms now reflect ethno-national characters while the elites manipulate ethnicity in the quest for political power. Primary and Secondary data were used to show the tendency towards separatist political orientation among key political actors. The paper argued that the various crises generally associated with political participation and competition reflects the fear of possible perpetration of a situation of permanent majority and permanent minorities. It concludes that the above tendencies have greatly hampered political participation and the process of Nation Building in Nigeria and therefore, recommend the restructuring of Nigeria's governance process; tackling indigenship crisis as well as a Conference of ethnic nationalities as the panacea to the problems that ethnicity have constituted.

I. INTRODUCTION

In Nigeria's post-independence democratic experience, political participation has been greatly influenced by ethno-national considerations. Some of the issues that have affected political participation in Nigeria and which in turn have reflected on aspects of the country's crisis of democracy and nation building includes ethno-national identity of political platforms and their loss of ideology. They also include lack of understanding or commitment to the principle and functions of an opposition as well as the inability of elites to consciously strive to build a Nigerian nation. Yet, there is a strong feeling in Nigeria that political platforms must be national, rather than locally based. Those who espouse the philosophy of national structures argue that this is the only way of ensuring full representation and participation of all sections of the country at the central level of the country's polity and governance.

In spite of this, it has hardly been possible to determine how truly national parties could be organized in Nigeria. Some have advocated a one-party or even no-party government as the solution. At the same time, advocates of multi-party democracy have continued to maintain very strong views that multi-party arrangement is the best option that can guarantee durable political participation and Nation building. On the whole, this paper seeks to show that ethnic identities and its mobilisations have increased in Nigeria with negative impacts on the socio-economic and political circumstances of Nigerians thereby hampering the process of nation building.

II. METHODOLOGY

This paper is partly an extract from my unpublished PhD thesis titled: Ethno-national Identities and the crisis of Nation Building in Nigeria. There are two major sources of data for this study. They are (1) Primary sources and (2) Secondary sources. 1000 questionnaires were used as the main measuring instrument into the distinguishing aspects of Nigeria's ethno-national experience. The following States were purposively sampled from four of Nigeria's Geo-Political zones.
i.   Lagos State in South-western Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria;
ii.   Bayelsa State in South-south Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria;
iii. Kano and Kaduna States in Northern Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria;
iv.   Anambra and Enugu States in South-eastern Geo-Political Zone of Nigeria.

In the realm of secondary data, relevant textbooks, articles and book reviews were consulted. Although it has not been our concern in this study to be involved in the construction of indices or the translation of questions into abstract statistical concepts; both the descriptive and analytical methods were employed to analyse the data generated from the questionnaire in a manner that reflect our concern for relevance and consistency with our research objectives. The presentation and analysis of our empirical data mainly involved

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the use of simple percentages and charts to reflect our concern for logical flow of results and conclusions from the evidence obtained. Their logical applications to support our conclusions have been done as much as possible, in the known tradition of analytic political science.

Ethnicity, Democracy and Nation Building – A conceptual discourse

The ethnicity of Nigeria is so varied that there is no definition of a Nigerian beyond that of someone who lives within the borders of the country (Okpu, 1985). Yet, the concept of ethnicity in Nigeria requires definition. An "ethnic group" could be described as a "group of people having a common language and cultural values". These common factors are emphasized by frequent interaction between the people in the group. In Nigeria, the ethnic groups are occasionally fusions created by intermarriage, intermingling and/or assimilation. In such fusions, the groups of which they are composed maintain a limited individual identity. The groups are thus composed of smaller groups, but there is as much difference between even the small groups; as Chief Obafemi Awolowo put it, as much as there is between Germans, English, Russians and Turks. The count of three hundred ethnic groups and above in Nigeria overwhelmingly enumerates ethnic minority groups, those which do not comprise a majority in the region in which they live. These groups usually do not have a political voice, nor do they have access to resources or the technology needed to develop and modernize economically. They therefore often consider themselves discriminated against, neglected, or oppressed. There are only three ethnic groups which have attained "ethnic majority" status in their respective regions: the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Ibo in the southeast, and the Yoruba in the southwest.

Ethnicity is one of the keys to understanding Nigeria's pluralistic society. It distinguishes groupings of peoples who for historical reasons have come to be seen as distinctive--by themselves and others--on the basis of locational origins and a series of other cultural markers. Experience in the post independence period fostered a widespread belief that modern ethnicity affects members' life chances. In Nigerian colloquial usage, these collectivities were commonly called "tribes." There is however the need to avoid the use of the term "tribe" to describe these ethnic groups. "Tribe," is largely a racist term. The Ibo and Hausa-Fulani of Nigeria are each made up of five to ten million people, a figure comparable to the number of, say, Scots, Welsh, Armenians, Serbs or Croats. Yet we do not refer to the latter groups as "tribes." The term "tribe" is almost exclusively, a label which emerged with imperialism in its application to those who were non-European and as we are attempting to discard the prejudices of imperialism, it is in our best interests to discard the use of the term "tribe" when referring to the ethnic groups of Nigeria.

In pre-colonial times, interethnic relations were often mistrustful, or discriminatory, and sometimes violent. At the same time, there were relationships, such as trade, that required peaceful communications. Nationalist struggles promoted peaceful inter ethnic relations as efforts were galvanised to fight a common enemy – the Colonialists. However, after independence, the distrust emerged again and is yet to abate.

Ethnic stereotypes remained strong. Each of the main groups had disparaging stories and sayings about the others that were discussed openly when a foreigner was alone with members of a single ethnic group. Such prejudices had refused to die especially with elitist influences. Thus, after forty-nine years of independence, ethnicity is more central than ever as a problem in Nigeria's political process. The interactions within the State have led to the formation of innumerable (overtly or covertly) structures of ethnic nationalism with grave consequences for participatory democracy and nation building.

Universally, democracy stresses the principle of numerical equality. It asserts, as against monarchy or aristocracy, that the mere fact of free birth is sufficient to constitute a claim to a share in political power. Abraham Lincoln, a former President of the United States of America stated what have become the simplest and arguably the most popular definition of the concept. "Government of the people, by the people and for the people". However, the existing party and electoral system in Nigeria to all intents and purposes reflects a re-definition of Lincoln's view in the sense that democracy is practiced as nothing other than: government 'off ' the people, ' buy ' the people and ' force ' the people. Apart from the above, Christenson, et.al. (1979) conceives democracy as a "Political system in which the people voluntarily consent to and are major participants in their government".

However, a preponderance of the literature defines democracy in relation to its basic features: popular participation in the decision making process, open and fair competition within firmly and generally accepted rules of the game and a normative dimension that consists of the acceptance of majority rule, respect for the rule of law, protection of individual and minority rights and the safeguard of the interests of disadvantaged group. (Mimiko, 1995),

Democracy allows the majority to determine the direction of things, and accepts the rationality of the people in making decisions that affect them. It allows the majority to choose their leaders and decide when to change such leaders, the fundamental principles of democracy being freedom of the individual, popular sovereignty, human equality, majority rule and the principle of government by consent and contract. In modern States, the clear expression of democracy is found in the equal rights of all normal adults to vote and to contest

election; periodic elections; freedom of speech, publication, and association, public accountability rather than in specific institutional forms.

The ethnic diversity crisis of Nigeria is such that Party affiliations are hinged on ethnicity. The contemporary electioneering and party processes has been bedevilled by increased manifestations of ethnic influences thereby, increasing citizen's apathy to political participation and in a way, further widening the divisive tendencies that have hampered Nation Building in the Nigeria.

The discourse on Nation Building posits that the traditional, pre-modern state was made up of isolated communities with parochial cultures at the "bottom" of society and a distant, and aloof, state structure at "the top," largely content with collecting taxes and keeping order (Rokkan, 2000). Through nation-building these two spheres were brought into more intimate contact with each other. Members of the local communities were drawn upwards into the larger society through education and political participation. The state authorities, in turn, expanded their demands and obligations towards the members of society by offering a wide array of services and integrative social networks (Anderson, 1994). The subjects of the monarch were gradually and imperceptibly turned into citizens of the nation-state and sub state cultures and loyalties either vanished or lost their political importance, superseded by loyalties toward the larger entity, the *state*.

Rokkan's (2000) model saw nation building as consisting of four analytically distinct aspects. These aspects could be regarded not only as aspects but also as *phases* of nation building. The first phase resulted in economic and cultural unification at elite level. The second phase brought ever-larger sectors of the masses into the system through conscription into the army, enrolment in compulsory schools, etc. The burgeoning mass media created channels for direct contact between the central elites and periphery populations and generated widespread feelings of identity with the political system at large. In the third phase, the subject masses were brought into active participation in the workings of the territorial political system. Finally, in the last stage the administrative apparatus of the state expanded. Public welfare services were established and nation-wide policies for the equalization of economic conditions were designed.

It appears that the Nation Building process meant assimilation into the larger society and the eradication of ethnic peculiarities with the expectation of complete assimilation of ethnic groups into a broad prism. However in Nigeria, ethnic loyalties and sentiments coupled with elitist influences and posture have affected opportunities for nation building.

There have been fits and starts with several crises that have shaken Nigeria's unity to its foundations at critical moments when a 'Nation' could have emerged from the 'State'. Three of these are noteworthy; the state of emergency declared in the old Western region in the early 1960s; the civil war 1967-1970; and the imbroglio over June 12, 1993 annulled elections. In the main, these crises were by and large the consequences rather than constructs or the causes of the errors in various areas of public policy. What they stand for today, are historical reminders, of how the failures in public policy have impeded our efforts in nation building.

Regrettably, we seem not to have recognized yet, that the negative use of ethnicity can hinder the orderly development or enforcement of the rule of law as well as the overall conduct and management of national affairs. Today, there are still pockets of ethnically induced restiveness, replete with growing violence.

But it needs to be said also, that this restiveness continues, because some elect to exploit them for political and material gains. Thus, the real culprit in managing inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria is not the diversity, which we cannot abolish. Rather, it is the elite manipulation of ethnicity and religion and the failure to define and agree on national rules of the game on which to base our political and economic processes.

Theoretical Framework

This paper is situated within the Conflict Theory context. This theory posits that if a society has ethnic inequality, it would see this as mainly a cause of domination and exploitation (Skocpol, 2000). Ethnic stratification is a pattern that serves the interests of some dominant elite and the cause of problem is found in exploitative behaviour of either majority group as a whole or some wealthy and powerful segment of it. The minority groups are subordinated because doing so provides some benefit to the elite and because the minority lacks either the power or the awareness to prevent such exploitation. Ethnocentrism and other forms of prejudice develop as a way of rationalizing exploitation of minority groups.

The conflict theory could help establish this discourse because of its relative ness to the crisis of nation building in Nigeria with its attendant ethnic consciousness. Conflict theory focuses on conflict as an inevitable part of social life, Societies are characterized by inequality and thus there is an emphasis on the role of competition in producing conflict. Conflict is not necessarily a negative aspect of society since it produces social change. Society comprised of dominant and subordinate groups, which compete for resources – the have and the have-nots. Who benefits at whose expense is the question.

Marxism is essentially a sub-theory of conflict theory but it was the originator of conflict theory as well: focus was on class conflict, believing that the economic system was the primary determinant of a society, and within the economic system there existed two classes - the bourgeoisie (owning or ruling class) and the proletariat (working class); class membership was determined by relationship to means of production; belief that

the proletariat would organize and precipitate a revolution because of this inequality and thus capitalism would be transformed into socialism and eventually communism.

Although it tends to overemphasize tensions and divisions, it is close to illuminating this discourse if economic classes are substituted with ethnic classes. The above derives from the fact that in Nigeria, economic classes have vanished over time and ethnic classes have gained prominence. Successive regimes have shortchanged the public thus; drawing back expected allegiance to the State and promoting devotion to ethnic cleavages.

The Context

Beginning with the first republic, the three main instruments through which participation, competitive party politics and political recruitment found expression were the three regionally-based political parties, i.e. Action Group (A.G), Northern peoples Congress (NPC) and National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC). The main problem raised by this at the regional level was that minority groups were alienated from the main stream of political participation and recruitment. It was this that gave rise to agitation for the creation of separate states, to protect the socio-political and economic rights and interests of minority groups. The situation was hardly different with respect to national politics, as this was virtually dominated by majority groups. For example, on the eve of the collapse of the first republic, Nigeria had a federal structure of four regions, in which the northern-region alone was bigger than the other three regions put together, both in geographical and population size. The result was that the federal parliament could hardly be claimed to be satisfactorily representative of the various groups that made up the federation. This phenomenon impacted greatly on the fortunes of National Politics.

By 1979 when elections into the second republic National Assembly were held, structural reforms of the Nigerian Federation carried out through State Creation exercises at various times before then had altered the basis of representation in the country's political process. For example, the area designated as Northern region during the first republic had been split into ten states, namely, Sokoto, Plateau, Niger, Kwara, Kano, Kaduna, Gongola, Borno, Benue and Bauchi States respectively. Also, the political domination has remained one of the unresolved problems central to Nigeria's crisis of political participation and representation. For example, the second republic Senate was made up of 95 members, out of which 50 represented the then northern states. The western states were represented by 15 senators, while the eastern states were represented by 20 senators. Also, 240 members of the Second Republic House of Representatives, with a total membership of 449, represented the ten northern states, while the western and Eastern States were represented by 76 and 101 members respectively. The trend had not changed in the present republic. The important point to note here and which is of relevance to our analysis is that the area we have referred to as the Eastern States is not in any way monolithic in ethno-cultural, socio-economic and political respects. The same applies to the northern states. An important aspect of Nigeria's experience is that the lopsided nature of the country's federal set-up has often generated the fear of political domination among the various groups in the country. Indeed, it has been observed that Nigeria is a federation based on psychological fears of political and economic domination. (Akinyemi, 1979).

Given the ethno-regional politics in Nigeria, the southern part of the country has always expressed fear of domination by virtue of the large size of the northern part. There also exists fear of political domination among minority ethnic groups on grounds that the federal structure as it exists makes it virtually impossible for them to ever control power at the centre. This makes the idea of majority rule as a democratic principle rather problematic and of limited political value in the Nigerian context. This is because if the principle of majority rule were to be applied strictly to the letter, we are likely to end up with a formalisation of a situation of permanent majority and permanent minorities.

Another dimension to the above is that the respective ethnic nationalities that constitutes Nigeria alleges that it is being marginalised once the machineries of government is not at their beck and call. Given the geo-political and ethno-sectional character of political platforms in Nigeria as we have shown earlier, and given the usual tendency towards separatist political orientation among key political actors on the Nigerian political scene, it can be argued that the various dimensions of crisis generally associated with Nigerian politics, particularly those associated with political participation and competition reflect the fear of possible perpetration of a situation of permanent majority and permanent minorities. It is this same fear that seems to make political contest a zero-sum game and to that extent, fought with much zeal. This also tends to reduce the political value of majority rule as a democratic principle. Under conditions of majority rule, the fundamental rule of popular participation is bound to be violated in a plural society such as Nigeria. As a result of the tendency to regard politics as a zero-sum game, and because of the ever-present separatist and ethno-regional political orientation in Nigeria, the contributions of both Arthur Lewis (1985) and Richard Joseph (1991) to the theoretical study of democracy, especially from the perspective of the principle of majority rule must be appreciated in their relevance to the Nigerian experience. Lewis (1985) for instance, has shown that in class society, the main

purpose of parties and politicians is political warfare to capture government in order to benefit one group at the expense of another.

This is however not tolerable in a plural society, where the purpose of parties and government should be to represent the views and interests of their sections; groups of supporters under conditions which permit governance in coalition with leaders of other groups in a bid to foster nationhood.. This implies the imperatives of negotiation, compromise and consociation attitude towards politics and limited emphasis on majority rule in plural societies. The reformulation of the requirements or conditions of democracy in plural societies along lines which tend to de-emphasise majority rule as a principle must not, however, be misconstrued as a devaluation of democracy. Rather, it must be appreciated as an ecological necessity, to make democracy both workable and acceptable.

The need to reformulate the principles, requirements and conditions of democracy in order to meet the peculiar nature of the Nigerian society can better be appreciated when considered against the background of the extent to which problems arising from the country's ethno-sectional configurations in relation to political competition and participation have contributed to persistent difficulties in establishing an enduring democratic political order in Nigeria. In more recent time, we have also seen how the same factors have been reflected in the pattern of behaviour and struggle over political recruitment, even under the aborted political process of the third republic.

From the insight provided by our present study, we submit that participation, distribution and integration crises are among the most fundamental factors in the formation of political platforms and shaping of patterns of participatory political behaviour in Nigeria. Looking at the political parties which have contested elections in Nigeria since the advent of the elective principle in 1922, we find that the crises of participation, distribution and integration have had tremendous influence on party emergence.

It is neither necessary nor desirable to repeat any detailed treatment or analysis of how the first major political parties in Nigeria emerged from a number of such ethnically oriented associations because these were the subjects of special works such as Dudley's Parties and Politics in Northern Nigeria, Joseph Sklar's Nigerian Political Parties and James Coleman's Nigeria: Background to Nationalism. We only need to highlight the point that each of the major parties derived its main support from a specific ethnic group and that ethnic-conscious groups influenced the emergence of each of them. Some of these parties fully represented the aspirations of ethnic minority groups. As argued by Okpu (1985:28), the ethnic minority groups were obliged to organize themselves politically, in a situation where the interests of the majority groups were jealously protected by their political parties.

A number of studies on the problems and eventual collapse of the Nigerian first republic have drawn the conclusion that politics of scarcity, epitomized by inability to resolve the distribution crisis which faced the country's political system as well as other dimension of crisis such as participation and integration crises were largely responsible for the failure of Nigeria's first attempt at democratic rule. For example, in place of national leadership, regionally-based political leaders emerged as the source of distribution of rewards, political goods, socio-economic values and opportunities. Political loyalty and support were also divided along such regional lines. To that extent, politicians now finds it difficult winning votes by appealing to universalistic principles and values based on ideology and party manifestos.

Politicians seeking mass support also found that only political platforms based on local interests aroused any enthusiasm. Under such a situation the attainment of the democratic ideals of majority rule and representative government has remained problematic. Perhaps, the most outstanding attempt made so far to create an analytical model of the interconnected processes of the mutually reinforcing interplay between ethno-sectional identities and the pursuit of material rewards within the arenas of competitive party politics is that by Post and Vickers, to which, we earlier referred. As shown in their study, the Nigerian system tend to structure political life in a way as to make it an unending struggle for various kinds of rewards between sectional groups. Hence the basic conflict has remained the mobilization of people towards intermediate sectional identification rather than towards some transcending symbols of national loyalty. It is hardly any wonder that among the political reforms which were initiated to ensure a more viable and durable democratic second, third and fourth republics was the requirement that a political party must be national oriented in order to be accorded acceptance and registration.

Unfortunately, the second attempt made at democratic rule in Nigeria also failed like the earlier one while the third attempt was truncated by the military. Despite the zeal to establish national political platforms, subsequent party formation exercises especially in the aborted third republic and the present fourth republic still reflected to a large extent, ethno-national colourations. According to Egwu (1998), the salience of ethnicity in party formation process in Nigeria can be explained by at least three factors:

One is the remarkable absence of class based or
 ideological politics which could have the effect
 of providing alternatives to ethnic mobilization;
 Two, the visible role played by personalities who
 can hardly be separated from their ethnic origins
 and the role they play in the construction of
 ethnically based patron-client networks. Three,
 the reality of the problem of opportunism and
 obsession with power that is associated with the
 political class.

In the present republic, despite the fact that efforts have been made to downplay the place of ethnicity in political participation, a threatening dimension of political practice that further whittle down the drive towards nationhood have emerged. This dimension is the manifestation of ethnic/regional identification at all strata of governance; a tendency that continues to strengthen primordial affiliations. From the Central Government down to the Local Governments; caucuses that aptly reminds citizens of where their allegiance ought to be keeps emerging. This is to say that platforms such as Northern Senators Forum, Southern Senators Forum, Southern/Northern/Western Governor's Forum e.t.c are simply reminders that a Nigerian Nation may not emerge soonest.

Also, the over liberalisation of the political turf by the registration of over fifty (50) political parties (at times in negation of the regulation of national spread) has definitely reduced the tempo with which a Nation could emerge compared to the scenario provided by the duo of National Republican Convention and the Social Democratic Party of the aborted third Republic.

Ethnic groupings/ Ethnic platforms and Ethnic Identities have remained a grave barrier to liberal political participation and Nation Building in Nigeria. The analysis of the administered questionnaire revealed among other things that Nigerians have an increasing allegiance to their places of ethnic origin and this impact on their socio-political and economic commitments. For instance, the Table below contains the findings on the impact of ethnicity on Nation Building in Nigeria.

Table 1: The Impact of Ethnicity on Nation building

Geo-political region	Strongly disagree (response) (%)	Disagree (response) (%)	Uncertain (response) (%)	Agree (response) (%)	Strongly agree (response) (%)	Total (response) (%)	X (Mean)	Rank
South east	(21) (8.4)	(23) (9.2)	(47) (18.8)	(77) (30.8)	(82) (32.8)	(250) (100)	3.704	2nd
South west	(19) (7.6)	(33) (13.2)	(36) (14.4)	(69) (27.6)	(93) (37.2)	(250) (100)	3.736	1st
South South	(18) (7.2)	(36) (14.4)	(46) (18.4)	(55) (22)	(95) (38)	(250) (100)	3.652	3rd
North	(33) (13.2)	(51) (20.4)	(33) (13.2)	(41) (16.4)	(92) (36.8)	(250) (100)	3.432	4th
Total (response) (%)	(91) (9.1)	(143) (14.3)	(162) (16.2)	(242) (24.2)	(362) (36.2)	(1000) (100)		

From the above table, it will be seen that the impact of Ethnicity on Nation Building is greatest in the Southwest as indicated by the computed mean whereas it has least impact in the North. This response indicates that Nigerians admitted that ethnicity is indeed a huge barrier to the nation building efforts since independence. The result is also illustrated in Figure 1 for easier interpretation.

Fig 1: The Impact of Ethnicity on Nation Building in NIgeria
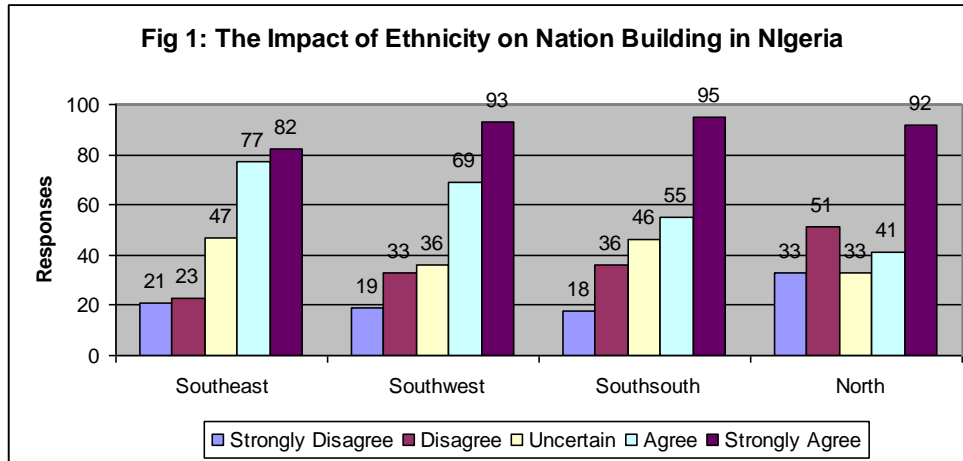
From the above analysis, it is clear that ethnicity has seriously affected the process of nation building in Nigeria.

Similarly, Nigerians demonstrated great allegiance to their ethnic origin. This research asked if Nigerians first consider themselves as citizens of a particular ethnic group before considering themselves as Nigerians and below is the response:

Table 2: Citizen's allegiance to ethnic origin.

Geo-political region	Strongly disagree (response) (%)	Disagree (response) (%)	Uncertain (response) (%)	Agree (response) (%)	Strongly agree (response) (%)	Total (response) (%)	X (Mean)	Rank
Southeast	(0) (0)	(0) (0)	(0) (0)	(63) (25.2)	(187) (74.8)	(250) (100)	4.748	1st
Southwest	(0) (0)	(7) (2.8)	(0) (0)	(42) (16.8)	(201) (80.4)	(250) (100)	4.748	1st
Southsouth	(0) (0)	(13) (5.2)	(0) (0)	(39) (15.6)	(198) (79.2)	(250) (100)	4.688	3rd
North	(0) (0)	(17) (6.8)	(19) (7.6)	(51) (20.4)	(163) (65.2)	(250) (100)	4.44	4th
Total (response) (%)	(0) (0)	(37) (3.7)	(19) (1.9)	(195) (19.5)	(749) (74.9)	(1000) (100)		

In response to the extent of citizen's allegiance to their ethnic origin over and above the State; the Southeast and Southwest exhibited the greatest impact of primordial allegiance although none of the geo-political zones denied the existence of the phenomenon in Nigeria. Figure 2 is the pie-chart showing the responses from the field.


Fig 2: Citizen's Allegiance to Ethnic Origin
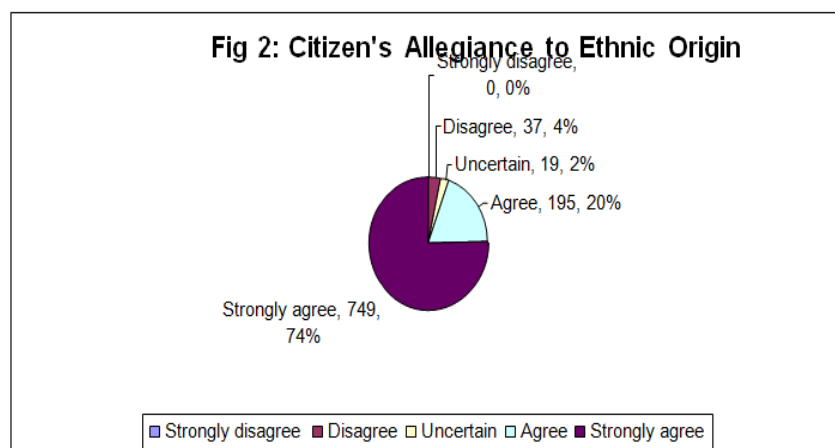
Interestingly in Nigeria, some citizens still hope that the State will disintegrate. The numerous foci of power as exemplified by structures such as the Governors/Senators forum of the respective geo-political zones coupled with the numerous ethno-national cum militia movements that are identifiable with the respective ethnic nationalities prompted this research to ask respondents if some Nigerians still think and wish that the different ethnic groups will become respective countries in the future, thus bringing the existence of Nigeria to an end. The findings are presented below:

Table 3: Hope in the future disintegration of Nigeria.

Geo-political region	Strongly disagree (response) (%)	Disagree (response) (%)	Uncertain (response) (%)	Agree (response) (%)	Strongly agree (response) (%)	Total (response) (%)	X (Mean)	Rank
Southeast	(0) (0)	(0) (0)	(0) (0)	(41) (16.4)	(209) (83.6)	(250) (100)	4.836	1st
Southwest	(93) (37.2)	(11) (4.4)	(61) (24.4)	(27) (10.8)	(58) (23.2)	(250) (100)	2.784	3rd
Southsouth	(36) (14.4)	(26) (10.4)	(38) (15.2)	(21) (8.4)	(129) (51.6)	(250) (100)	3.724	2nd
North	(151) (60.4)	(37) (14.8)	(17) (6.8)	(26) (10.4)	(19) (7.6)	(250) (100)	1.9	4th
Total (response) (%)	(280) (28)	(74) (7.4)	(116) (11.6)	(115) (11.5)	(415) (41.5)	(1000) (100)		

From the above table, the Southeast ranked first in expressing hope for the future disintegration of Nigeria while the North ranked fourth. It is to be noted that the present Southeast constituted the region that once fought for a 'Republic of Biafra' between 1967 and 1970. It therefore implies that the issues and activities that led to the cesession struggles are still potent in the mind of the people of that region. The hope that Nigeria may cease to exist at some future date if the increasing wave of ethnic nationalism is not addressed appropriately is also demonstrated by the responses from the Southsouth and Southwest. The chart in Figure 3 below further explains this position.

Fig 3: Hope in the future disintegration of Nigeria
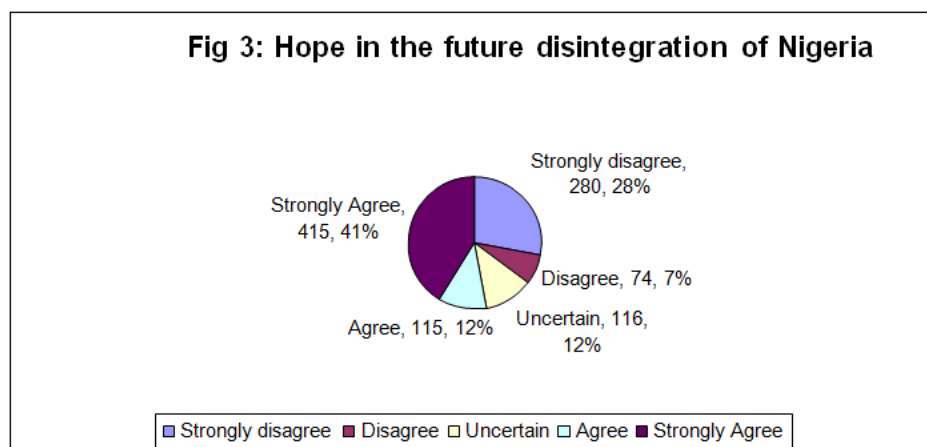
From the foregoing, it becomes apt that the Nigerian political society has been dissolved into ethnicities that are far from crystallizing a national identity. The displacement of national loyalty and identity by ethnic identities and loyalty has to some extent been blessed on the nature of the Nigerian state as a non-caring and hostile force, whereas the ethnic groups as perceived by most people cares and delivers; thus, appearing as a fertile ground to entrust allegiance and condition aspirations.

III. CONCLUSION

This paper has focused on the impact of ethnicity on political participation and its implications for Nation Building. These identities have been enormously shaped by the colonial and post independence governance experience which created a culturally artificial and divided Nigerian state but did very little to nurture a unified Nigerian nation. Subsequent political elites/leadership have continued to pay lip-service to

political, economic and social interactions within Nigeria thus making the desire for Nation Building to be unrealistic. Efforts at making broad platforms of political participation to have a national outlook have always resorted to some ethnic persuasions seizing the stage sooner or later. This is because in Nigeria, there exists a distinction between the specific functional public policies on national unity on the one hand, and the broad political regimes and ideologies that invariably shape, constrain or inspire such policies, on the other hand.

There is thus a real ambivalence among Nigerians on their attitude to the nation-state. They are dissatisfied by the present arrangement and would like to retreat to their primordial shells, and yet, they frequently realize that they need the country to survive as a protector for their own identities, regions and tribes.

IV.   RECOMMENDATIONS

1.   Decentralisation and Restructuring of the governance process

Nigeria has witnessed great economic reforms in the last four years without a corresponding reform in the political arena. Thus, there is need to decentralise governance and restructure the governance system. The starting point is a drastic reduction in the powers and responsibilities of the federal government.

To achieve this, there must be decentralisation which should be hinged on the constitution of the existing six geo-political zones into zonal governments to which a substantial quantum of the powers and resources currently held by the federal government (including over the police and sundry agencies of government) would be devolved. The zonal governments, each of which must have its own constitution, albeit deriving existence from the national constitution, can then decide how and through what structures to deliver governance at the local level. There is nothing that would be lost if the prevailing uniformity in local governance which has no regard for the peculiarities of the cultures and experience of the people and therefore alienatory, is removed.

When governance is decentralized in this manner and the six geo-political zones are turned into governance structures superintending the States and Local Governments, a dispersion of the centers of governance will occur thus, removing a major factor for acute competition (over the imperial central government), and by implication make the country much more stable politically and unified. One critical reason why India has continued to sustain its democracy in spite of extensive divisions and conflicts is the fact that these are localized to the regions. None of the conflicts ever attains the status of a national crisis in terms of extending to engulf the entire nation. As long as the pockets of instability do not occur simultaneously therefore, they constitute little or no overall threat to national stability.

Would this arrangement unleash some centrifugal forces and become the basis of the disintegration of Nigeria? The answer is no. Ethiopia ached for so long under a similar assumption of the inevitability of collapse. The type of arrangement we are here recommending for Nigeria would have been enough to keep Eritrea within the former Ethiopia, but it was rebuffed by the dominant political tendency in the latter for more than four decades. By the time the Eritreans successfully broke out of the country, what remained of Ethiopia had learned its lessons. It wrote a new constitution that went extreme by making provision for any of the federating units to secede at any time if it so wishes. It is significant that no unit has taken up this novel constitutional offer a decade after the promulgation of that constitution! The same forces are certainly not at play in Ethiopia and Nigeria. Even so, we are persuaded that it is the denial of a composite (not peripheral) political reform agenda, and by implication the continuing alienation of most Nigerian citizens that more than anything else threatens the foundations of the Nigerian State, This is what the experience of the failed States of Africa and the recent history of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia has shown.

2.   A full democratisation of the polity

Democracy should be practiced in Nigeria in a way that there would be popular participation of all citizens either directly or through their representatives in the decision making process. This process must however be open and fair within firmly and generally accepted rules of the game. Room should be made for a normative dimension that consists of the acceptance of majority rule, protection of individual and minority rights and the safeguard of the interests of disadvantaged groups. Although, democracy allows the majority to determine the direction of things, and accepts the rationality of the people in making decisions that affect them; it nevertheless allows the majority to choose their leaders and decide when to change such leaders while the minority still have a say in terms of how the values of the society are authoritatively allocated. Thus, the government must create affirmative action packages for disadvantaged groups, which will emphasise the 'management of diversity'. At all times, the structure of government must constitutionally change to make way for a government of national unity through power sharing mechanisms that appreciates proportionality rather than 'winner-takes-all'. A genuine Nigerian Nation would likely emerge through ample freedom of the individual; popular sovereignty; human equality; majority rule and the principle of government by consent and contract.

3. Tackling Indigeneship problem

Nigerians must be taught to see themselves as one entity whereby any one can settle in any part of the country without discrimination of whatever form (politically, economically or socially). This will enable us to appreciate each other and learn each other's culture. While doing the above, there will still be the need to introduce the indigenous languages of the various ethnic nationalities in our educational curriculum so as preserve the heritage of the different groups.

4. The convening of a conference of Ethnic Nationalities

In fact, rather than gloss over critical national problems and issues that are so loudly echoed by the numerous ethnic groups in the country, the federal Government should initiate dialogue and call a conference of ethnic nationalities to deliberate on issues of national importance. Such an approach could assist efforts aimed at sincerely addressing important issues like development, transparency, accountability and good governance at all levels in the federation. A National Conference will provide a forum where all groups and nationalities can express their grievances and offer ideas on how to recompose Nigeria. This forum will provide the opportunity for Nigerians to reach some consensus on how the nation should be structured, how rights will be protected and how a truly democratic Nigeria can be established. This national conference will make the various ethnic nationalities to state categorically those things that will make them shift their allegiance, loyalty and patriotism from the level of their ethnic nationalities to that of the nation at large. This may be slow and difficult. But the logic of our reasoning remain that ethnic identities are not fixed, but can change a great deal over time through a slow process of political manipulation with social and economic transformation.

The question has often been asked that who sponsors this conference? What will the composition look like? Why call a conference of ethnic nationalities when there is an existing National Assembly? What will be the role of incumbent public office holders? The above and many other questions should not be clogs to the convocation of a Conference of Ethnic Nationalities.

First and foremost, the Federal government should initiate the Conference and sponsor it. Also, the Federal Capital Territory remains the natural choice of conference. Experts estimate that Nigeria contains between 250 and 400 distinct ethnic groups including three major players: the Yoruba, Hausa, and Ibo. It is my recommendation that each of these groups be allowed to send five or ten representatives to an initial conference at the respective geo-political zones. The zonal conferences would have harmonized some of the positions or grievances of the respective ethnic groups thus leaving the main conference in Abuja with the role of ratification. Thus, the Abuja conference will suffice with one or two representatives to present the positions of their respective ethnic nationality. Since the decisions of the Conference will reflect the wishes of Nigerians, it should not be too much burden for the existing National Assembly to incorporate it to the existing constitution or better still, make it the basis of an entirely new constitution for Nigeria.

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