

A Philosophical Reflection on the Challenges of Ethno-Religious Diversity and its Implication for National Unity in Nigeria

Osawaru, Osamede Christopher (Ph.D)¹

Abstract

In point of fact, the question that agitates the mind is; Can Nigeria ever be free from the virus of ethnic consciousness and religion? The need to answer this question is fundamental to the future of Nigeria as a nation. This paper therefore examines the effects of ethno-religious diversity on the national unity. It examines the future of the political, social and economic status of Nigeria given the present experiences in the country. This paper employs the analytic and critical method of philosophy with the view of showing both the positive and negative influence of ethnicity and religion on the overall development of Nigeria. The central argument of this paper is that ethnic and religious consciousness is so high that every policy of government at different levels is assessed from the standpoint of its impacts on the wellbeing of particular ethnic groups rather than on the country as a whole. Our position is that effort should be made to address the issues which promote negative ethno-religious consciousness in order to effectively reduce the problem of uneven development in our nation.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Religion, Diversities, National unity, Development

Introduction

Since the advent of colonialism on the African soil, there is virtually no sphere of the African life that is still the same. From politics to religion, socio-cultural system to economic, personality to identity, values to belief systems, Africans are left in the state of topsy-turvy and caught up in the crises of identity as to what is originally African. Achebe declares that the 1885 Berlin conference of European powers resulted in the creation of artificial boundaries which did violence to pre-colonial boundaries (Achebe,1). The consequence is that newly independent African countries became enmeshed in ethnic rivalry. Since Nigeria's situation is the focus of this paper, it is important to note that the ethnic groups which were brought together to form Nigeria were strange fellows. The Nigerian federation is a creation

¹ Department of Philosophy, University of Benin, Benin-City, Edo State, Nigeria. Can be reached at 08034158593 christopher.osawaru@uniben.edu, chrisosawaru4@gmail.com.

of over 400 ethnic nationalities whose consents were not sought prior to its formation and by virtue of the colonialist's rapacious craving for space, and control of a people's material and mind, colonialism bequeathed on Nigeria a country with a potential for conflict and instability. Built upon a wicked balkanization and disregard for established traditional social organizational structures, Nigeria became a colonial amalgam of portentous ethno-linguistic diversity and political restructuring that *abinitio* seemed destined for future unending political merry-go-round (Nnoli,158).

There has been a torrent of identity politics in the public sphere, with demands for ethnic and regional representation, in particular complicating the debate that was in the past dominated by nationalist discourses. Since independence, Nigeria's democratic journey has not been too successful in taking its diverse people to the destination of progress and national development as a result of ethnic competition and rivalry.

According to (Jarikre, 220) a nation with diverse ethnic groups and attendant cultural diversity would undoubtedly face difficulties in formulating, articulating, and implementing strategies that would be acceptable to its vast constituencies. The point here is that, factors related to birth, heritage, culture and language of an individual are the key markers of ethnic identity. Therefore, the society where one is born is a determinant of one's ethnic affiliation. Ethnicity does not exist in a pure form but it is closely associated with governance, political jurisdiction, religious and other social interactions. Suffice to say that ethnicity is closely related with national development. This paper examines the interface between ethnicity and national development, It tends to expose how ethnicity have done the nation Nigeria more harm than good in terms of development.

Conceptual Elucidations

Ethnicity

A basic definition of an ethnic group would be a community of people who have the conviction that they have a common identity and common fate based on issues

of origin, kinship ties, traditions, cultural uniqueness, a shared history and possibly a shared language. In this sense, an ethnic group is much like the ‘imagined community’ of the nation. Ethnicity, however, focuses more on sentiments of origin and descent, rather than the geographical imperative of a nation. Notions of ethnicity become pronounced and political when they are used to distinguish one social group from another within a specific territory. As such, this ‘contested’ ethnicity is of particular interest to political scientists. Scholars can learn a great deal from studying how ethnic groups relate to one other, and how these groups interact with broader social organizations such as the nation and the state. This is especially relevant in situations where more than one ethnic group resides within a single country.

This term has differences in conceptualization in sociological, anthropological, theological and political perspectives. Ethnicity is a distinguished group in a society that speak same language and from same source or same cultural background and at times share the same ancestors. Ethnicity is sharing cultural characteristics: sharing distinctive cultural traits as a group in society. Ethnicity is culturally traditional: belonging to or associated with traditional culture of a social group. According to Osaghae “ethnicity is the employment of or mobilization of ethnic identity and difference to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict or cooperation” (Osaghae,2). what this definition denotes is that ethnicity is neither natural nor accidental but the product of a conscious effort by social actors. The definition also indicates that ethnicity is not only manifest in conflictive or competitive relations but also in the contexts of cooperation.

“Ethnicity is an ascribed membership, usually but not always based on claims or myths of common history, ancestry, language, race, religion, culture, and territory” (Ukiwo,1). What this connotes is that ethnicity encompasses the behaviour of the ethnic groups. An ethnic group “is a self-perceived group of people who hold in common traditions that are not shared by others with whom they are in contact. Such traditions include religious beliefs and practices, language, a sense of historical continuity and a common ancestry or a place of origin”(Wegh,11). From the definitions, one can deduced that a group is classified or categorized as having

a common identity that distinguishes it from others. Thus, ethnicity is not so much a matter of shared traits or cultural commonalities but the result of the interplay between external categorization and self-identification. In this context, ethnicity is employed to mean what other scholars will call tribalism, denoting the behaviour, attitudes and loyalties that result from belonging to an ethnic group or tribe and the mobilization of ethnic identity to gain political advantage in situation of competition.

Religion

Koenig argues that the definition of religion is generally agreed upon by scholars of religion. It comprises beliefs, practices and rituals that are related to the sacred God, to the mystical or to the supernatural (283). Religion accordingly, is not just a typical function or variable amongst other variables. It constitutes the root from which the different branches of life sprout and flourish. From this point, religion is of integral importance because it is basically about the deepest root of human existence and the integration of human life into a coherent whole.

Mbiti, on his part, had argued that it is difficult to define religion. He described religion as an ontological phenomenon that pertains to the questions of existence or being. Religion has rules and this guides the conduct of people within a social group and it is often organized and practiced in a community instead of being an individual or personal affair. Nigeria societies view life as one big whole and religion permeates all aspects of life. In terms of this thinking, it is the whole that brings about the unification of the parts. There is no such thing as compartmentalization or dichotomization when it comes to human existence. There is no division between matter and spirit, soul and body and religious practice and daily life. As such in the Nigerians world-view, religion permeates the political and socio- economic life of Nigerians, just as politics, economic activities and other vital components of life of Nigerians permeates religion.

In line with the above perspective, we uphold that religion constitutes the main fabric of Nigerian societies and is intertwined with their general existence including their socio- political and economic development. Within the framework

that allows for common understanding, this paper wishes to reconsider the role of religion in eradicating poverty and corruption and in so doing contribute to the socio- political and economic transformation of Nigeria. Religion is indeed fundamental to Nigerians, since human beings live in a religious universe. Both the universe and practically all human activities are in it, are seen and experienced from a religious perspective. This means the whole of existence is a religious phenomenon.

It is unthinkable for a Nigerian to live without religion. This religious world-view informs the philosophical understanding of customs, tradition, beliefs, morals, actions and social relationship of the Nigerian people; this same world-view also accounts for the religiosity of Nigerians in socio- political and economic life. That Nigerians resort to religion unconsciously shows how deeply religious consciousness is ingrained in Nigerians. It is therefore common for Nigerians to display their religious beliefs and rituals in moments of joy and despair. Nigerians come alive when they manifest their religiosity; expressions, in names, activities, symbols, celebrations, work, ideology and philosophies are loaded with religiosity.

National Unity

National unity is the integration of the various ethnic groups in the country or nation in such a way that they see one another as brothers and sisters devoid of tribal sentiments, nepotism and all other vices that bring polarization of the people (Usara, 20). This means the coming together of Nigerian citizens, to speak with one voice, appreciate the circumstances of their nationality, contribute meaningfully to the development of their country and jointly protect the sovereignty of their country. It is a sort of action that means a collective responsibility to swim and sink together in a genuine spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood.

National unity is a collective orientation of members of a society towards the nation and its society in such a way that micro-loyalties are not allowed to jeopardize the continued existence of the nation and its objectives, goals and ideals. This connotes that the purpose of national unity is to build a holistic and strong indivisible nation. Similarly, Ogunjemite (224) believes that national unity relates

to the building of nation-states out of disparate socio-economic, religious, ethnic and geographical elements. According to him, this entails the translation of diffuse and unorganized sentiments of nationalism into the spirit of citizenship through the creation of state institutions that can translate into policy and programmes in line with the aspirations of the citizenry. Stated in another way, national unity means welding together a plural society to enhanced development but without necessarily jeopardizing ethnic identity (18).

Also, national unity is used to refer to “specific problem of creating a sense of territorial nationality which eliminated subordinate parochial loyalties. “In this sense, it is generally presumed that there exists an ethnically plural society in which each group is characterized by its own language or other self-conscious cultural qualities. This unity is used to refer to the tensions and discontinuities on the horizontal planes in the process of creating a homogenous progressive reduction of cultural and regional territorial political community (Bamiseye, 152)

From the array of clarifications above by different scholars, it is obvious that there are many meanings of the term even though some of them have similar elements. One thing we cannot take away from these definitions is that, they all cover a vast range of human relationships and attitudes. As diverse as these definitions maybe, they all point to the fact that unity is what holds a society and a political system together, we can also deduce that national unity is a situation where every member of the state or society see themselves as one, treat one another fairly and work cooperatively, freely agree to resolve and do resolve their differences peacefully in the overall interest of the nation.

Development

There is no agreement as to what development is. It was coined by developed nations to describe the powerful and powerless nations .According to Onwuliri (71), there are various aspects to what constitutes development, however common to all these is a positive change in human wellbeing. The individual and his quality of life must be the centre of the conception of national development. It is in this regard that Oladipo avers that development should not start with goods, but with the

people, their education, organization and discipline. It is not all about money, profit and the number of industries. It is understood as a long-term improvement in the standard of living, as felt and judged to be by most of the people in the country (17).

Schumacher names education, organization and discipline as the three ingredients of development (45). This perspective sees development as an overall social process including economics, social, political, cultural and moral dimensions of life. In the past, discussions and commentaries on development easily tended to be developed by economists who saw it primarily from the perspective of economic growth. In that context, so long as the monetary value of goods and services (Gross Domestic Product) increased yearly, there was development. This perspective is false as there could be an economic growth, but not development, that is, if the majority of the people did not benefit from it. Onwuliri thus opines that development thus goes beyond the narrow lines of economic and material advancement (72). It is all encompassing. Development is a multidimensional process involving the totality of man as it pertains to his political, economic, psychological and social relations. As Andre (1970) rightly observed, it is erroneous to see underdevelopment as an original state which must be characterized by indices of traditionalism and that therefore development consists in abandoning these characteristics and adopting those of the western world. Development is not a completed affair; it is an on-going process. Thus people are the objects of development. It must involve among other things the eradication of certain human-demeaning social phenomena, such as poverty, illiteracy, lowlife expectancy; in short the creation and maintenance of what M.S Swaminathan calls livelihood opportunities (195).

Ethno-Religious Rivalries: The Nigerian Experience

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and multi-religious nation. This is one of the legacies that Britain bequeathed to Nigeria. These ethnic groups had diverse historical, social, religious and political backgrounds. Even before independence, it should have been obvious that it was going to take a great deal of sagacity to fashion a nation - state out of many ethnic and religious groups. Unfortunately, the founding fathers rather than work to unite the ethnic and religious groups chose to exploit the distrust

among the different groups for their own political interest. With a new democratic dispensation, the gap of Nigeria's ethno-political cum ethno- religious differences continues to widen rather than abating.

Recently a group of youths stormed some cities in South Eastern Nigeria in agitation for self-determination, notwithstanding the widespread criticisms of the manner of their protests and organisation, these youths seem to be motivated by the skewed nature of the Nigerian society. As *The Guardian* observed, from the agitators that : "For many years successive administrations have maintained a portentous imbalance and inequitable structure that disfavours meritocracy. They have glossed over the continuous capitulation of the political class in a progressive fashion to a point of disaffection. And by so doing they have fostered forced unanimity"

Interestingly, some scholars have argued that Nigeria's multi-ethnic nature is markedly different from that of the United States. Ebiem believes that the "harmony" in the United State is as a result of the "civilised" domination of the European stock over other groups. But in the case of Nigeria, Ebiem claims that: "there will never come a time when things will begin to function well as long as the various indigenous cultures and religions are not given equal recognition, in Nigeria if all the tribes would not be allowed to thrive, then the country should be divided" (43)

It is obvious that Ebiem is in support of a break-up of the country since, as he recognises, it is not possible other ethnic groups allow any of the major ethnic groups to dominate others. It should be pointed out that the proposal for a multi-ethnic state is not as simple as it sounds even though it is obvious that the current structure in the country breeds unnecessary conflict among groups which feel marginalised. The cry of marginalization usually comes from groups which are not in control of the federal government. Thus, at one time or the other in the history of the country, some groups have actively canvassed for the right to secede. However, once the pendulum of political control swings in favour of such group, the agitation for secession is relegated to the background till another day.

Some scholars have pointed out that these agitations are traceable to the legacies which Britain left behind after independence. In the opinion of Sisk, “colonialism legacies are thus pervasive throughout Africa some fifty years after the system of domination began to crumble. These legacies are political, economic and cultural” (17). The opinion of these scholars is that these legacies are defective in nature and responsible for development challenges facing the country. There is some truth in this view but we are talking of over fifty years after the departure of the colonialist. Even with much talked about notions of neo-colonialism, neo-liberalism, etc, we should begin to look inward for the reasons why the level of development in Nigeria is not commensurable with the enormous resources. As we do so, we shall discover that one of the major reasons why no administration has been able to enable even development in Nigeria is basically because of ethnic and religious bias of different person in power.

This means that the emotional content of any developmental decision and policy is viewed from the perspective of the benefits or negative effects on the ethnic groups or geographical location and religious affiliation. This egoistic attribute of those in power helps to fuel the growth of negative ethnic and religious consciousness of the members of other groups. This is the reason political office holders feel the burden to provide social and economic infrastructure for the communities they come from and the religious group they belong to. The implication is that the political future of office holders may be in jeopardy if they fail to show proof of what they have done in terms of provision of infrastructures or empowerment of indigenes of their ethnic and religious groups. This scenario is very pervasive in Nigeria.

The issue that needs emphasis is that during colonial rule, ethnic rivalry among the ethnic groups existed, especially among the major groups. Historically, the rivalry was responsible for Nigeria having to wait till 1960 before having her independence because one of the major ethnic groups was apprehensive that if Nigeria had her independence earlier, there was the danger of the other ethnic group being marginalized. However, with such apprehensions, leaders of the different

ethnic groups were unable to work together in the process of achieving independence for Nigeria before 1960.

Ogunbadejo argues that ethnicity has played an important role in Nigeria's development. According to him, 'principles, issues and national interest were usually subordinated to sectional imperatives in specific situations'(2). Thus, he identifies structural imbalance as a major factor why Nigeria is facing conflict and why corruption is part of national life. We agree with his view that during colonial rule nationalists were united in wresting power from the colonialists but that when the common enemy left, the leaders of the ethnic groups transferred their loyalties to their ethnic groups. This is the bane of ethnicity for it deals with the perception that only members of one's ethnic group should be trusted. Thus, ethnicity is the perceived awareness that the interests of one's group should guide one's conduct and view of life. The implication is that ethnic consciousness incorporates a group's shared values, history, cosmology, religion, etc.

From these components of ethnicity, it is not difficult to see that it can have negative consequences on the progress and development of the country. This is because when members of one ethnic group view members of other groups as 'enemies', though from the same country, there is the likelihood that attempt to initiate policies that will bring about even development may be resisted or viewed from an ethnic perspective. This means that policies to bring about national development must take into consideration ethnic and religious sensitivities. It is not surprising, therefore, that successive regimes have not demonstrated any concrete seriousness or make commendable efforts to develop the human and material fortunes of Nigeria.

Ethno-Religious Diversity and its Implications on National Unity and Development in Nigeria

Ethnic politics and religious conflicts are the most fundamental factors to the underdevelopment of Nigeria. Ethnic consideration has been comprehensively substantiated as a major trait in determining the level of development whether in the military or civil regimes. It is not surprising that different individuals find it

convenient to appeal to ethnic and religious sentiments in order to garner support during elections.

Anugwom argues that politicians have exploited the phenomenon of ethnic and religious affiliation “in the quest for political gains”(1). This tendency may be explained in terms of feelings of insincerity by members of the different ethnic and religious groups which constitute Nigeria. These issues may be regarded as contributory factors for the occurrence of underdevelopment in Nigeria but we argue that they are the symptoms of ethnic nationalism to an extent. The important thing to note is that they pose a threat to the corporate existence of Nigeria because where there is no peaceful co-existence and understanding, the pace of development will be very slow, a situation where every developmental plan is viewed from ethnic and religious sentimentalism, it cannot bring about even development.

We argue that the contest for power in Nigeria has led to nepotism or what may be regarded as public centered corruption. In a situation where members of different ethnic and religious groups tend to identify with their group aspirations rather than the national goals, it becomes easy to appropriate national resources for one’s group. The reason behind this action is that given the chance, members of other groups would act in a singular manner. This is the basis for the ‘*it’s our turn to eat*’ mentality. This mentality of perception is difficult to combat unless certain defective structures are corrected in Nigeria.

It was Ojukwu (1989) who observed that “tribalism is perhaps the one factor that has nullified all our efforts at evolving a national development and made impossible for us to fulfill our national aspiration”. I agree with him, the role he played in the Nigerian civil war notwithstanding. He believes that the civil war was fought by the Igbos of South-East Nigeria as a last resort, in self-defence, to stop them from extinction. First in this regard is the fact that the regional structure of the nation is not balanced. The northern region alone is bigger than the other three – the Eastern, the Western and the Mid-western regions combined. Though states have been created to replace the regions, yet the influence of the regional structure is still very much with us.

Eme Awa, ex-chairman of the National Electoral Commission (NEC) has noted that “Northern claim of numerical superiority over the south, with the resulting concentration of political power in the hands of Northerners, constitutes the greatest threat to the unity of the federation”. That such a situation leads to underdevelopment of other part of the nation is quite obvious. This politics of ethnicity permitted and encouraged excessive regionalism and tribalism, nepotism and mediocrity in our national leadership. Hence, the then Head of State, General Obasanjo in 1979 opined thus: One major cause of failure of civilian administration in this country was that our leaders concentrated on the part and ignored the whole; hence regionalism, tribalism, sectionalism and ethnicity became the order of the day (1979 New Year Message)

With this observation made before the birth of the second Republic and similar ones made by other well-meaning Nigerians ever since, one would have expected a change of attitude. But what has been the case? We are still concentrating on the part and ignoring the whole. The Yoruba socio-cultural organization, Afenifere, recently decried the inability of Yoruba governors to forge a common front on crucial matters affecting the interest of the Yoruba race. The group called on the South-West Governors to remain focused on “a common regional agenda”. It noted that more than any other consideration, the single-minded resolve by the South-South governors to withdraw their commitment to the Federal Government amnesty offer to militants of Niger Delta, if government went ahead with a purported plan to relocate the proposed University of Petroleum Technology from Effurum, Delta State to Kaduna made the Federal Government to change its mind. Similarly, the group opined, the Northern governors called an emergency meeting and spoke with one voice on the “Boko Haram” crisis, with a view to forge a common policy on aliens coming to the North (Vanguard 11).

Nigeria is a republic and in the words of Richter “in a large republic. Like Nigeria, the common good is sacrificed to any number of other considerations; it is subject to exceptions. It comes to depend on accidents. In a small republic, the public good is more keenly felt, better known, closer to every citizen; abuses are spread less widely, and consequently are less tolerated (BK VIII chapter XVI). He

goes on to say that, in a large republic, there are large fortunes, and therefore but little moderation in the minds of men. Its resources are considerable... interests become increasingly individual. In it, a man may first come to feel that he can be happy, great, glorious, without his native land, then that he can only be great standing by himself upon the ruins of his native land (BK VIII chapter XVI).

Nigerians need to watch out ethnic tendency. As things stand in Nigeria, it is easy to lose sight of the common good and general welfare of the entire Nigerian populace and concentrate on promoting only the welfare of a group or a section. Nigerians sacrificed much between 1967 and 1970 to keep Nigeria together. Nigeria should be governed as one. Parochialism and ethnic affiliation account for the alarming difference in the development of both parts of Nigeria.

According to Vanguard newspaper of Wednesday August 19,2009 a prominent traditional ruler in Ondo State (in Southern Nigeria) Oba Aderemi Atewogboye, the Alaani of Idoani has cried out over the pitiable state of some major roads in Ondo state and has appealed to the Federal Government to repair the federal roads linking Ondo State to neighbouring states. The government should not identify with any one group in any special way. Such identification, if permitted, can only promote uneven development (11).

Igwe stated that in view of the problems associated with resource allocation, religious intolerance, fear of domination, etc. most of the ethnic groups from colonial groups have been silently at dagger-drawn at each other's throat and it never comes into the purview of leadership to evolve permanent solutions to these problems (133).He further stated that, In Nigeria, development as per escaping ideology should be whether the people are self-reliant and confident. Are they able to generate the mobilize energy which is capable of running independent and democratic government, and of inducing a productive and distributive economy which is self-generating and self-perpetuating(151).

The whole gamut of national development –political, social, and economic cannot be achieved without a lofty goal of promoting unity among Nigerians. Policy decisions are not self-enforcing; the government must transform hope into reality

through his programmes. In virtually all areas undergoing rapid modernization, the government has become the major stimulus to economic activity. Government has assumed near total responsibility for economic planning and coordination, as well as primary responsibility for the operation of the state's major industries. The development and promotion of imaginative solutions to the economic and social problems confronting the nation will either come from the government or will not come at all. What we observed in Nigeria is that people have been appointed into offices mainly because of religion, ethnicity, peer group factor and of course on the Federal character principle. At times transfers and dismissals are made to reflect this. The consequence of this inadequate executive capacity is of course is inability to adapt to the changing needs of the economy.

Ethnicity has hampered the development of Nigeria in the sense that the bureaucrats often times face the constant pressure of nepotism and parochialism which prevails in transitional societies. Such appointees are most of the time constrained between primordial-parochial interest and civic interest. It is not uncommon for indigenes of communities requesting their sons and daughters in government that they make full use of their opportunities to benefit people from their ethnic group now, since his or her stay is transitional. He or She is reminded that whatever he or she does will be remembered of him or her. Thus he or she deviates from the belief in national interest and ethics of professionalism which places quality performance above the temptations of parochialism and petty corruption and shoddy work. It is common in Nigeria to see political appointees placing primordial interest against the spirit of stability and even development in the nation. It is political expediency that rank most in their order of priority against economic factors (156).

Ethnicity is seen as an impediment to national development, political integration and the attainment of the essence of nationhood and some sort of an atavistic residue that will be erased in due course with the march of modernity. Obaje noted for instance that ethnicity is often characterise by nepotism and corruption, inter-ethnic discrimination in jobs, housing, admission into higher institutions, scholarships, distribution of welfare services, and sometimes

marriage(176). In a society where ethnicity is in play, merit is quite often sacrificed on the altar of ethnicity and this creates resentment from persons who have a different identity from those in control of state powers thus triggering ethnic crisis as the resultant effects.

Our main worry here is that occasions where projects are sited and diverted because the diverter want such project in his or her primordial home is that the communities that have the resources are denied. Such complaints of undue neglect is reasoned to have caused the introduction of ‘‘federal’ ’state’’ and’’ local’’ character in our constitutions as *modus operandi*. In sum, it can be asserted that the distribution of infrastructure in Nigeria is characterised by ethnic sentiments. Worst still is the fact that every average Nigerian politician believes that ethnicity is the cheapest means of scoring political points. They calculatively appealed to ethnic sentiments among their kith and kin to mobilise support for self-aggrandisement. The question is, how can we move from here?

Conclusion

It is no doubt that British colonialism has greatly shaped and facilitated the way ethnic groups developed and acted upon their ethnic consciousness. Now, like before, every tribe or ethnic group is holding tenaciously in employing ethnic affiliation in vying for political positions, idealistically preaching Nigerian unity, while realistically promoting sectionalism and tribalism which ontologically cannot breed true national patriotism and sense of nationhood. Without advocating for unmitigated abandonment of ethnic consciousness, our national consciousness should be central in advancing the Nigerian project.

Family, clan, and ethnic groups are still the essential structures of social relationships and one’s identity is ethnic, not national .Nigerians still value their ethnic affiliations ahead of nationhood. Unfortunately, Nigerians leaders have very little to convince the people that nationhood offers more benefits than ethnicity. Rather, they use ethnicity and religion to achieve selfish interest while discarding nationhood and the notion of common good. Though a difficult task, this approach makes the welding together of differentiated ethnic groups and religious group into

a large cohesive political community or nation state that would promote development and eliminate confusion.

The focus of every Nigerian should therefore be on finding ways to promote nationhood. Political leaders should focus on fulfilling their promises of providing infrastructure, security and social good to the people irrespective of their ethnic and religious affiliations. If social good is at the forefront of governance, the negative side of ethnicity and religion would be jettisoned for the positive side of harmony and promotion of diverse culture and a spirit of nationhood. For Nigeria to experience unprecedented development in every ramification of her endeavours, every Nigerian leader must strive to promote justice, equity, and fair play. National interest must not be sublimated and subsumed under ethnic interest. It is not equality of resources or the facilities, infrastructure but a determined effort at redressing an over bloated imbalance between the haves and the have-nots. We are talking of sacrificial redistribution of resources. The development and progress of Nigeria is very possible if we embrace the spirit of nationhood. We insist that ethnic and religious sentiment is detrimental to the national project and anti-thesis to national development and unity. The process to the sense of “we”, Nigerians, requires a consensus among ethnic nationalities for overall development of Nigeria.

Works Cited

- Achebe, Chinua. *There Was Country, A Personal History of Biafra*, New York: Penguin Books, 2012.
- Agundu, Teorsev “Ethnicity, Regionalism and the Politics of Recognition in Contemporary Nigeria”, in Ashiko J.B,(ed.) *Faculty of Arts Journal*, Benue State University, Makurdi: Obeta Continental Press ,Vol.5,2008.
- Akpotor, Akpotor “Problematic Bureaucracy and National Development: Some Salient Issues in Bello –Imam, I.E& Iyoha, F.E,(eds.) *Politics and Administration in Nigeria*, Ekpoma: John Karis Publihers,1997.
- Amucheazi,,Chimezie “The Colonial and Heritage and Issues in National Development” in Amucheazi, E.C, (ed.) *Readings in Social Sciences: Issues in National Development*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension, 1980, .13-27.
- Anugwom, Elliot, “Ethnicity, Politics and Elections in Nigeria: Overview of Current Trends” www.ethnonet.africa.org. Accessed 4/08/2023
- Ebiem, Obiem, *Nigeria, Biafra and Boko Haram: Ending the Genocides Through Multistate Solution* ,New York: Page Publishing Inc.2014.
- Elliot, Chikezie. *The Development Debate*, London: SCM, 1971.
- Igwe, Stanley, *How Africans Underdeveloped Africa*, Port-Harcourt: Professional Printers and Publishers, 2010
- Jarikre, Martins, “Ethnicity, Governance and Social Order in Africa” in Oyeshile &Offor. F,(eds) *Ethics ,Governance and Social Order in Africa, Essays in Honour of Godwin S.Sogolo*, Ibadan: Zenith BookHouse Limited,2016.
- Koenig,.Graham. ”Research on Religion,Spirituality and Mental Health: A Review ”*Canadian Journal of Psychiatry* 2009.
- Mackintosh, Paul. *Nigeria Government and Politics*, London: Allen and Unwin, 1975

Mbiti, John. *African Religions and Philosophy*, 2nd edition, Oxford: Heinemann, 1999, p.15

Nnoli, Oholi. *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1979

Obaje, Yakubu, "Religious, Governance and Communal Conflict" Paper presented at NIPPS, Kuru, Jos, Plateau State, 2002.

Obasanjo, Olusegun. New Year Message, Daily Times Publication, January 1, 1979.

Ocholor, Leo. "Failure of Leadership in Nigeria" in *American Journal of Social Sciences and Management Sciences*, 2(3) 2011, 265-271.

Ogunbadejo, Oye "Conflict Images: Colonial Legacy, Ethnicity and Corruption in Nigerian Politics, 1960-1966" *African e-Journal Project*, [http://digitl.lib.msn.edu/projects/african journal](http://digitl.lib.msn.edu/projects/african%20journal).

Okullu, Harris, *Church and Politics in East-Africa*, Nairobi: Uzima press limited, 45-46, 1987

Ojo, Segun and Fagbohun, Fakunle "Military Government and Civil War: Ethnic Hegemony as a Constructive Factor in Nigeria", *Global Journal of Human Social Science*, vol.14, issue 4, 2014

Ojukwu, Odimegwu. *Because I Am Involved*, Ibadan: Spectrum Book limited, 1989.

Oladipo, Olusegun *The Need For a Social Philosophy in Africa*, 17th Convocation lecture delivered at Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria, 2008.

Oladipo, Olusegun, *Philosophy and The African Experience*, Ibadan: Hope Publications, 1996

Onwuliri, Christian. "The Church as an Agent of Progress and Development in Onyeocha, I (ed.) *The Church as Agent of Progress and Development*, CIP: Jubilee Essays, Imo State University Press, 2008.

Osaghae. Eghosa, “Managing Multitude Minority Problems In a Divided Society: The Nigerian Experience” in *The Journal of Modern African Studies*, vol.36, No 1, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Ozumba, Godfrey, & Chimakonam, Jonathan.. *Njikoka Amaka: Further Discussions on The Philosophy of Integrative Humanism, (A Contribution to Africa and Intercultural Philosophies)* vol.two, Calabar: 3rd Logic Option Publishing, 2014.

Plato, *The Republic*, London: Oxford University Press, 1941.

Richter, Michael, *The Political Theory of Montesquieu*, London: Cambridge Press University, 1977.

The Guardian, Editorial of 7 April, 2012.

Schmacher, Fidelis, *Small is Beautiful: A Study of Economics As If Mattered*, London: SCM, 1975

Sklar, Rick, *Nigeria Political Parties*, Princeton: Princeton University press, 1963.

Sisk, Tarr, “Nigeria and South Africa” in Michael J. Sodaro (ed.) *Comparative Politics : A Global Introduction*, New York: McGraw Hill, 2001.

Ukiwo, Ukiwo, *The Study of Ethnicity in Nigeria*, Oxford : Routledge Oxford Development Studies, 2005.

Vanguard Newspaper, vol.25, No 60914, Wednesday, August 19, 2009.

Wegh, Frederick, *Understanding and Practicing Inculturation*, Ibadan: Caltop Publication limited, 1997.