

The Ethnicity Question in Nigeria: Matters Arising

¹Anthony Idoko Okpanachi & ²Sunny Odikpa

¹ Department of Philosophy
Kogi State University, Anyigba
toniokpas@yahoo.com

&

²Department of History and International Studies,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
odikpasunny@gmail.com

Abstract

It can hardly be contested that Africa is the most ethnically heterogeneous continent of the world and Nigeria provides a classic example of modern settlement challenge in Africa with the most variegated cultures, languages, religions, histories, interests, power play inter alia. This study therefore assesses the centrality of the ethnicity question within the larger context of national integration and development that the different ethnicities and people bring about. It does this by locating the problematic of ethnicity as one of the core questions that needs to be realistically addressed; if the efforts of nation building is to yield good fruits. The question is along the lines of how well there can be mutual understanding, trust, fairness/fair play and harmonious cooperation among the different groups that make up country. The paper uses the analytical and critical tools of philosophy to examine the nature, matrix and relevance of the ethnicity question in the contemporary equation where ethnic or tribal conjugation takes precedence over the drive towards national integration or nation building. This is a humble attempt to reconstruct the more or less academic discussions of the issue so as to move from rhetoric to reality; until this is done, in my considered view the nation will continue to experience so much of motion without movement.

Keywords: Ethnicity, State, Nation Building, Development, National Integration

Introduction

Ethnicity is one of the factors adduced for the inadvertent shaping or re-shaping of the history of African. It is true that a significant number of countries of the world are heterogeneous in ethnic composition, but Africa as a continent seems to be the most ethnically segmented continent of the world. The question of ethnicity therefore remains one of the persistent aspects of the changing social structure of the new and old nations of Africa. It is worthy of note that Nigeria provides a classic example of a modern state in Africa with much diverse and variegated ethnic elements as well as diverse ethnic- relations. Nigeria has about 250 ethnic grouping with disparate histories, language, customs, religions and myths of origin.

Sadly, the terms ethnic majorities and minorities have been adopted as important denominators to classify ethnic groups in Nigeria with implications for access and opportunities to available resources and developmental agenda for groups concerned. In Nigeria for instance, ethnicity has defied various provisions designed to eliminate its negative manipulation. Thus, ethnicity remains a salient problem in contemporary Nigeria with cries of marginalisation and the various nuances that connotes. It impedes socio-political and economic development, as ethnic conflicts can be more socially disastrous and nationally disintegrative. This paper sets out to examine the ethnicity question with a view of highlighting the nature and relevance of ethnicity as an important component as far as the developmental equation is concerned in Nigeria.

Ethnicity: Nature and Operation in Nigeria

It is actually disturbing to note that in contemporary Africa, there is no country that is not prone to chaos and anarchy as a result of bogey of ethnicity, and Nigeria is no exception. The concept of ethnicity is strongly tied to ethnic group that form the connection between society and culture.

Ethnic group is used to designate the social group which sets itself apart from other groups on account of specific cultural trait, not only in a few details such as food, clothes but also in a complex of fundamental options (cosmogony, system of values and political organizations). Seen thus, ethnic group could be referred to as a nation.

In *Origin of the Nation State*, Correlia Navani states; a nation is commonly defined as a polity of homogenous people who share the same culture and the same language, and who are governed by some of their own number, who serve their interests. J. S Mill remarked in 1849 that nationalism makes men indifferent to the rights and interest of any portion of human species save that which is called by the same name, and speaks the same language as them. Elaigwu(2011: 103-104) noted that nation refers to at least three categories of human groups. First, it may refer to a stable historically developed community of people within a territory, economic life, distinctive culture, and language in common. Second, it may refer to the people of a territory united under a single government; country or state. Third, a nation may refer to a people. The extract describes the organisation of ethnic groups in Nigeria. They have evolved over the centuries of diverse historical experience in different geographical regions, into a more recent and complex heterogeneity of nations with different languages and exclusive loyalties wrapped together as Nigeria. Such is the situation of Nigeria where diverse politics are brought together to form the nation.

Nigeria is a country is made up of divergent ethnic groups, which are nations at their own levels. Each member of these various nations in the federal government represents the interests of its own group in the sharing of limited nations wealth. This boils down to ethnicity. "Cohen" (1959) refers to ethnicity as the strife between ethnic groups in the course of which

people stress their own identity and their exclusiveness. "Ekhaton", (2012: 43) describes ethnicity as a factor for belief in and loyalty to one's ethnic group as a symbol of identity, he further stressed that it is also a social phenomenon characterized by cultural prejudice, and social discrimination

In a similar vein, Devos (*cited in Sanda 1976: 32*) sees ethnicity as a form of separateness and instability in respect to question of dominance that easily leads to social conflict. What one gleans from such conceptions is the characterisation that is negative in terms of the emphasis on strife, conflict and instability. However, the concept has a positive aspect. Sanda (1976: 32) observes that it will seem misleading, to consider strife or conflict as the only manifestation of ethnicity; on the contrary conflict is only an aspect of ethnicity. For him, "ethnicity refers to the intensity of ethnic identity or the feelings of allegiance to one's ethnic groups". In this kind of understanding, feelings of identification and allegiance are highlighted. No wonder then Glazer and Moynihan (1975: 8) characterise the phenomenon of ethnicity as ethnic pride; that has the feelings of identification and allegiance that may lead to conflict and strife in the face of actors who draw attention to and manipulate their differences in the context of competition over access to local and natural resources. Hence, Otite (1990: 60) "conceives ethnicity as the contextual discrimination by members of one group against the others on the basis of differentiated systems of socio-cultural symbols".

According to *Encarta World Dictionary* (2002), ethnicity is a universal human phenomenon which manifests itself in several forms and contexts and is variegated by the nexus of time and space. It encapsulates such terms that make possible the imagining of 'self' and 'other' within the praxis of cultural experience and difference. Yakubu (2000) states yet ethnicity is one ubiquitous category of human thought and transaction,

which has for several centuries, largely determined and continues to determine the nature and substance of African development. Yakubu (2000) is of the view that ethnicity from time imemoral has continue to hamper african development.

Ethnicity, National Integration and Patriotism

In Nigeria, there are three major ethnic groups with other smaller ones; in fact, there is an overwhelming diversity of ethnicity in Nigeria diversity which prepared the way for ethnic problems. It is pertinent to note here that in spite of the glaring ethnic complexities, problems arising there from would remain at a controllable level if not for what one might consider acts of omission or commission resulting from the efforts to rule hitherto disparate groups from one political centre. In a word, the thesis is true that, the historical and socio-political differences in Nigeria were aggravated and made more formidable by the nature of colonial rule. Among the many factors, colonial rule initiated changes that compounded the ethnic question in Nigeria the constitutional reforms of the British administration. In 1914, Sir Friedrich Lugard carried out the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Nigeria. But while one could speak of Nigeria from that date, the hard fact of the situation was that its unity existed only on paper. Administrative developments in both sections of the country continued to be distinct and independent.

Not only was the colonial structure culpable; in fact, the attitude of the immediate leaders of many African states left much to be desired. To this end, Ogbunwezeh (2005) has this to say "most of these states in Africa were created for imperial convenience. To that end, they were meant to serve a purpose after which their ontological legitimacy or *raison d' etre* would then expire. "At this expiration; the states, naturally not designed for self-propulsion; were condemned to tether on the brink, and finally

implode upon the inglorious weight of their inherent contradictions. Colonialism designed and inspired the problems. But the decadence was then driven along by a horde of native pirates; trained in the fine art of piracy. These set of political actors were rogue personalities, weaned on selfishness". They were brilliant students of kleptocracy and political perversity. In about four decades they completely outclassed colonial perfidy and bested them in thievery. They did an inglorious job of mismanaging Africa, so much so that she is today the laughing stock of the world.

Furthermore, even in the present arrangement the tribal factor or ethnic colouration remains so significant to the extent that failure to appreciate it has cost the nation so much and this will warrant and justify an elaborate quotation from his work titled *Africa: The Ontology of Failed States*. Observes "that before the advent of colonialism, Africa was a large mass of land, populated by quasi-isolated tribal pockets, and ethnic nationalities. These constructs interacted with each other through trade, intermarriage, and even wars. There were no states so to say. There were villages, kingdoms, empires and republican democracies. The Ashanti, the Kanem Bornu, The Ethiopian/Abyssinian, The Egyptian, The Benin, The Yoruba, etc were empires in their own rights. Ndigbo of Southern Nigeria had already fashioned a functional republican and egalitarian democracy in antiquity, while ancient Greece slumbered in primitivity".

These social embraces were characterized by singular political and culture centres within Africa sphere of influence. This gave rise to common identity, both lingual and cultural. They ran their societies on their own terms, save naturally, when conquered in wars. In spite of this, the cellular political unit of African life was the tribe. It was so basic, and yet so primordial. It transcends the clans, composed of families, to embrace a

wider collection of clans. This presupposed common ancestral or cultural ties, dating to time immemorial. Most of these tribes pay allegiance to one heritage. It was a basis of social bonding. It was the influential factor in the political matrix of the African tribal community. This could be seen today, in the fact that politics in Africa, despite its affinities to Eurocentric-Judeo Christian vision of modernity, and to modern conceptions of democracy, still conjugates the tribal verb.

Politicians play the tribal card to advance their interests because they know that it is so primordial, and remains the major perceptual goggle, through which an African views reality. Democracy is real, when it patronizes his tribe, and the military junta becomes oppressive, when his tribe is short-changed. This runs through all African countries, without exception. This is what many fail to appreciate about the African situation. The tribe is the *Summumpuncti* of his political consideration. And every idea or ideal is canvassed from the tribal pedestal. To this end, when the colonialists oscillated from blunder to arrant carelessness, in attempting to coax states out of these bunches of tribes, they naively failed to address the issue from the tribal angle.

Their metaphysic was exploitation, and not nation building. Whatever achieves that in the short run is patronized. And whatever runs contrary to it is eschewed. The colonial mission was never a charity concert designed to benefit Africa. No. It was an enterprise designed primarily to benefit the colonial power. Africa's benefit was never the propelling consideration. It comes last on the list. This was why the tribes were yanked together and conscripted without consultation, into unions they never bargained for; to bear each other like crosses, after the Whiteman must have had his fill of plundering their land.

Little accounts for the social restiveness and mutual platonic hatred

ravaging many African states today, more than the resultant hangovers of colonial political play-offs. Almost all the Modern states in Africa today were built on political ontologies, oozing from this engineered political metaphysic. The people never dialogued their differences as a basis for federating. They never talked to each other about a political union. They woke up one morning, and saw themselves conscripted into geopolitical constructs they neither chose nor bargained for. For the natives, it was a bazaar of unfunny jokes, and for the colonial officers; a duty for country and queen.

Ethnic Chauvinism and Underdevelopment

Foundations once destroyed, what can the just do? The Scriptures asks rhetorically. Ogbunwezeh (2005) accentuates this point thus: Nigeria is principally a coalition of the unwilling. She is simply a coercion of the unwilling; a conscription of federated grievances; a boiling cauldron of mutually-assured platonic hatred, mutual suspicion, and collective bottled loathing". To this end, nothing positive could ever be achieved on this platform of potentially explosive unease. No tribe believes in the goodwill of the other. Every tribe is of the worst opinion of the other. There is no good Igbo man as far as a Yoruba man is concerned and vice versa, even when that stereotypical generalization falls short of the laws of logic and thought, which should hold eminence and primacy in any rational postulation.

On this volatile base was erected a nation, which is most unfortunately expected to succeed. National success cannot be predicated upon a base of ontological instability. Hence the Nigerian dream was from conception, compromised and sabotaged to fail. All the attempts at salvaging an iota of sense from this boiling cauldron of dissensions, have failed woefully to avert the certain catastrophic disintegration, and disastrous implosion of this hegemonic geopolitical ogre, upon her

inglorious weight.

Omorovie (2005:3) insists that ethnicity is a phenomenon that informs politics in Nigeria. In fact, public policy, education, electoral voting patterns and almost every aspect of life in Nigeria; ethnicity matters and is a factor in the Nigerian situation, for to overwrite it is to fail to understand the dynamics of contemporary Nigeria. Hence, the need to respond to the ethnicity factor creatively and channel it for positive growth and social health of the nation cannot be over emphasised. The desire to promote, protect, preserve and propagate ones ethnic identities, values is almost universal. Same author writes that in metropolitan cities like New York, we see this phenomenon clearly. Though people have travelled thousands of miles across the pacific and Atlantic to be in the United States; they always cherish a sense of identity with the locality, ethnicity and nationalities they come from. This is why various national restaurants, groupings flourish. The desire to love ones ethnicity, locality, and nation is innate and is spontaneous. No one normally hates his own people even though he may criticise the evils of his people. It is possible that this love when not well harnessed and channelled could go beyond patriotism and lead to chauvinism, racism, bigotry, parochialism and ethnicism.

The social contract remains a crucial factor in understanding the claims and counter claims of ethnic dominance and marginalisation in Nigeria. The part played by the differences in views and characters of some nationalists in Nigeria's political scene is no less significant in the problem of ethnicity in Nigeria. Key figures as Sir Ahmodu Bello, Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Chief Obafemi Awolowo and their followers. These educated and leading nationalists were very decisive determinants of the tone and nature of inter group relations in Nigeria, from the days of early nationalism through independence up till the demise of the

first republic. This was because these leaders had basic differences in origin, philosophies and general attitudes to issues.

Ethnicity as a bane of natural integration and patriotism has also been affected by the system of rewards pull. According to exponents of this view; Vickers and Kenneth (1973:8), it was a common desire to have the largest possible share in the benefits to be had through the Systems of Rewards which brought a degree of co-operation (or otherwise) between participants of rival cultural groups. Politicians felt that the distribution of electoral representation and of material resources and the use of political power rested on population figures the effect among the various ethnic groups therefore, was to produce as high as population figures as possible.

Moreover, one notices that in the course of the competitions between individuals for jobs, political power and other benefits accruing from the system of rewards is the order of the day. This is being translated into competition for status among majority groups. The crucial question of who would share what and where is he/she from is the nagging problem of politics. It is particularly significant that it has melted into ethnic and regional conflicts. Here one very dangerous trend is the emergence of elite class and their manipulative tendencies in pursuance of parochial and selfish interests. Graf as quoted in Ujomu (2002) argues that the process of elite formation in Nigeria was contingent on their capacity to meet the demands of their various ethno-political constituencies. The situation compels the elite, and subjects them to cross pressure to divert or channel government resources to their ethnic and kinship groups. This situation arises because the elites need the support of these ethnic groups in order to remain in power. Such diversion and clientelism within the context of scarce national resources had to be accomplished at the expense of other elites' constituencies, thus, ensuring the permanence of conflicts over

appropriation, resources and position within the country with telling consequences for the project of nation building and integration.

No wonder then, Egwu (2000) states that the case of Nigeria illustrates quite vividly the collapse of the nation-state project. In Nigeria, the state has failed to manage effectively and imaginatively, the co-existence of multiple ethnicities in view of peaceful and progressive ends. The ruling elites have continued to employ ethnic and regional affiliations and mobilization in the struggle for state power. And Ujomu (2002) adds that one of the ways in which these leaders have engendered conflicts in the society, is undermining the values of genuine national and ethical education.

From the foregoing, it seems clear that the development of ethnic problems progressed in different stages and was due to many factors. Basic underlying differences of cultural and historical nature provides the classical setting; British policies aggravated these differences and the personalities, philosophies of the key figures in the Nigerian political scene did not make the existing difference any less grave. Other important factors were the attitude of the politicians regarding the tempo of the nationalist activity and the competition amongst them for a paramount share in the system of rewards.

Together, these kept the embers of ethnic problems glowing, pervading all political issues and neutralising all efforts towards a social and political development. Kalu (2004) underscores same point poignantly thus: while the founding fathers of Nigeria established for themselves a congruent relationship between their own nation and the newly created state, the idea of *state* was imposed on the several nations within the geographical territory called Nigeria. And, although, the founding fathers of Nigeria's eventual political independence from Britain clearly articulated and even

resented the idea of Nigerian unity, nonetheless these nationalists were enticed by the possibilities of winning independence and controlling the instrument of power offered by the western model of the state with its promises of economic growth and political stability based on the romantic expectation that "seeking first the political kingdom" would eventually result in the addition of everything else to the newly independent state including, perhaps, a united polity that would transcend their primordial loyalties to legitimize the authority of the new leadership.

He argues further thus, the western state as an organized aggregate of relatively permanent institutions of governance, was neither entrenched as an institutionalized legal order in Nigeria nor was it respected as a framework for unifying the different aspirations of Nigeria's several nationalities. Rather, the state in most of Africa and particularly in the case of Nigeria became a material object hijacked for personal, class or group interests. Consequently, the current effort at democratic transitions and constitutional debate in Nigeria and much of it is both an effort to understand the concept of democracy and how it applies in Africa. Such understanding requires a clarification of the concept of state and government and their mutually reinforcing capacities for advancing the individual and collective interests of citizens in a particular state.

Answering the Ethnicity Question

The moral foundations of the Nigerian polity must provide rules for the harmonious and productive/beneficial blending of various conflicting interests of groups in the society, toward attaining the common good. Hence, there must be some visibly humane, just and mutually acceptable rules of co-operation, coexistence and interaction among the various groups within the Nigerian society. After all, there will always be healthy competitions and tensions as long as society remains and humans

from various backgrounds live together (Ujomu, 2001).

For a just society to be entrenched, the need for ethnic justice is a proviso; as ethnic justice will demand the respect for the promotion of individual rights and also respect for collective rights as pertains to their given social identity, ethnicity and corporate distinctiveness. Respect for human rights demands respect for people of all ethnicity; for ethnicity does not abrogate the rights of human beings as individuals. It rather enhances and consolidates those rights. In Awolowo's words as quoted in *The Ogoni Bill of Rights*, (article 20); "in a true federalism, each ethnic group, no matter how small is entitled to the same treatment as any other ethnic group, no matter how large". Kalu (2004) contends that in essence, then, the *state* as originally established in Europe was the center of social relations, which enforced allegiance to *national identity* over and above religious loyalty that competed for the attention of citizens. In this regard, Section 10 of Nigeria 1999 Constitution would be ideal in a political framework characterized by popular legitimacy and leadership accountability.

Thus, emphasizing national above religious or cultural identities, the organizational structure of the state would make it possible for the Nigerian state to act as a unifying factor for national integration and development. Such situations easily lend themselves to the establishment of national institutions such as the civil service and academic and industrial foundations for the development of the nation. For Europe, as it should be for Nigeria, such a state was not merely the means of keeping political order within the national society; it was a carrier of the scientific and industrial revolutions under-way in Europe as well as the engine of economic growth and social progress. Implicit in this idea of relationship between the state and the nations was the concept of civil society. In its

framework the ethnic minorities could exist as social categories which could preserve their esoteric life-styles, their cuisines and their costumes. But they could not function as groups and communities whom devised and lived by their own ideas and traditions of political rule and cultural organizations.

Thus, if ethnic groups choose to be part of a states territorial boundaries, they could not then choose to live outside the sovereign states constitution, while enjoying the security rights provided by the state. Consequently and ideally, as the state performs its function as a platform for integration, it paves the way for all citizens -- majority and minority within the framework of government to participate in the process of nation-building without obstacles. In the process, the state will demand the highest quality of input from its citizens by institutionalizing the concept of *merit* as a criterion for employment. This would ensure that competent and qualified citizens are attracted and retained to serve the national interest. In the same context, the state through its constitution makes explicit provision for revenue allocation that ensures that all parts of the country are adequately integrated into the national policy agenda. Nigeria needs such policy priorities aimed at enhancing the collective goal to assuage the tensions in the ethnic minority regions as well as those that result from perceived marginalization by some segment of the Nigerian state.

However, in Nigeria and for the sake of *Federal Balance*, government policies have tended to politicize national appointments rather than mitigate against ethnic consciousness. Successive governments have used this approach to intensify the negative aspects of ethnicity and embolden the perception of ethnic domination, exploitation and crass opportunism by the minority groups. Indeed, the various occupants of government positions, mostly from the northern region and especially at

the executive level have converted such status-conferring social standing from government employment into status-honour to the detriment of national unity. It is clear that ethnicity, without politics and the harnessing of scarce economic resources, is atavistic. In multiethnic states like Nigeria, ethnicity comes alive as the basis for a politicized search for redistribution of scarce resources, which are almost always contentious. Although European expansionism encouraged ethnic sentiments in states like Nigeria by nurturing peoples' differences rather than their similarities; ethnicity is neither immutable nor inherently conflictual. Ethnicity is like a two-side sword, it tends to be the basis for communal identity and security (primordialism); but, it is also a basis for exclusionary practices (instrumentalism), which sometimes result in conflict.

Summary and Conclusion

It is the case that we live in a world where difference matters, and difference as in the case of human existence has been conceptualised along lines of ethnic configurations, race, religious affiliation, gender lines. It becomes inevitable and inescapable affirmation of our human existence. Beyond the cosmetic approach in dealing with the question of ethnicity in Nigeria; until the problem of ethnic oppression or marginalisation is addressed in a manner that the nation can still lay claim of patriotism from all her citizens, then the nation-state called Nigeria will remain a scalar quantity with so much of magnitude without positive direction. Ezeanya (2009) writes thus: whenever a people lack a realistic nationalistic ideology and consciousness that bind them together as one entity, they very ordinarily fall back to other stronger ties. The United States of America, large a country as it is and with widely varied ethnic and nationalist groups strongly believes in the greatness of their country whereby every person thinks of what to do for the country and not what the country would do for

the person. They do so because the country is ready to go to any length in protecting their interests as citizens. The situation in Nigeria is there is lack of such realistic ideology and so it is common to find people comfortably falling back along ethnic lines rather than believe in the strange-bed-mates they are under as a country. Consequently, politicking, voting, appointments and announcements are coloured by ethnic bias as people are chosen not for any meaningful and beautiful manifestoes but for the place of origin, tribe and tongue.

In Ezeanya's thinking, the former anthem of Nigeria was more realistic than the present one as it contained a phrase that says "though tribe and tongue may differ in brotherhood we stand", but some mischievous but influential statesmen rejected it on the ground that they do not want to be reminded of their tribes and tongues; yet the tribes and tongues are cankerworm that chiefly destroys the country till date. They now prefer to say "arise o compatriots Nigeria's call obey". Nigerians ordinarily do not obey this call as to begin to love Nigeria because they do not find any security or future in the union. It is not an egalitarian state. People, however, love Nigeria only for the exploitation they would make of it and the "national cake" they hope to cut from the country's rich resources to the detriment of people from other ethnic or geographic affiliations. Even the people in government who swore to be protecting the national call often never obey this call!

According to Kalu (2004), the question is whether the government is capable of managing ethnic relations and the legitimate rules (constitution) used to direct and guide such interactions and processes. Obviously, the Military autocrats imposed the 1999 Constitution on Nigerians and thus, even with its revisions, the constitution remains largely irrelevant to the masses and to the management of ethnic relations in the

country. As already noted, ethnic group strategy is usually aimed at securing scarce economic resources from the central government, which by arrogating more power to itself encourages the use of ethnic identities by elites to manipulate demands on the state. Consequently, irrespective of the claims of the preamble in "We the people," there is nothing fundamentally democratic about the 1999 Nigerian Constitution. For example, the six-week time frame allocated to the Constitution Debate Coordinating Committee (CDCC) in 1998 to draft a new Constitution for Nigeria is evidence of the extent to which the Nigerian leadership misunderstands the enormity of the responsibility of the transition from military rule to civilian government for Nigeria and Nigerians. In contrast to General Abdulsalami's 1999 Constitution, a process-led constitution that is capable of serving as a framework for managing ethnic relations is characterized by dialogue, consultation, debates and open involvement of various civil service organizations, labour unions, student groups, intellectuals, market women and the general masses.

Against such back drop, Ogbunwezeh (2005) posits that failed states were the culmination of a process, which manipulated social, cultural and political variables. Under this scenario, the state is a festival of dysfunctions, which can never as it is, connect towards navigating an exit out of the social questions, engendered by the failure. Since this was a process, it could be untangled. First of all as in the case of Nigeria, we should undertake a study into the circumstances that gave birth to this conscription of federations, called Nigeria; which has degenerated into a geopolity of federated grievances. This study must then be laced with a political will to ventilate our anger and aspirations, as a people in a broadly representative national dialogue. This will create an essential arena, for forging alliances and agreements on whether we want to paddle along this

national canoe, as a unit, or not. This agreement is the fundamental key towards unravelling our failed State in order to rescue it from its aimless spin towards social implosion.

Every other issue, like the repressed anger and bottled dissensions of the ethnic nationalities, would be redirected into propelling energies of social renewal. Agreement has been the fundamental bond that creates coalitions of willing agents that can shoulder their collective destiny together, through thick and thin. Once an agreement or semblance of it is absent, the whole social structure is patronized with a lackadaisical dereliction from all participants in its concourse. Such a process can also benefit from the experiences in constitution-making of countries like Eritrea, Uganda, Ghana and South Africa where the involvement of the citizens at large produced truly sovereign and protective constitutions for their respective countries. Beyond the foregoing, securing popular legitimacy for the constitution requires that those charged with drafting a new constitution be perceivable as honest and capable individuals. Members of the constitution drafting committee must be (a) committed to constitutionalism, (b) have the resources to carry out their assignments, (c) establish viable mechanisms for taking the draft constitution to the people and (d) ensure that the process ends peacefully with the people voting for or against the adoption of the draft constitution. Such an inclusive process will transfer ownership of the constitution to the people--the legitimate foundation upon which the government derives its power. In such a situation, ethnic conflicts are not likely to completely atrophy, but the popularly legitimized constitution will facilitate the provision of acceptable routes to conflict resolutions through the democratic process (Kalu, 2005).

In conclusion, this paper has shown that the problem of ethnicity

has had immense impact on the unity, security and progress of the Nigerian nation. While ethnicity cannot be ruled out from the social and historical reality of the Nigerian project which is an uneasy amalgamation of cultures and groups lacking in unity and national consciousness. Nigeria as a conglomeration of many ethnic groups had and continues to experience manipulation by self serving leaders and elites to the detriment and disadvantage of the larger populace. Thus, puts in danger the very core resources the elites exploit and extort; the need for negotiation or renegotiation is critical and pertinent.

The ethnicity question simply boils down to the extent to which an average young man in Anyigba or in any other part of Nigeria really perceives himself or herself as a Nigerian outside the requirement to filling forms! The idea here is consistent with calls in several quarters for the initiation of social and political process which will ensure the renegotiation of the basis, and the principles that will underlie human social existence in Nigeria. Its merit is in the position that the only partnership that is or can be enduring, stable and viable is one in which all participants are happy, satisfied and have a sense of belonging, (*African Research Bulletin* 2000, as quoted in Ujomu, 2021). This is in view of establishing an institutional platform with clear and acceptable constitutional rules which will largely determine the impact of ethnicity on the political economy of Nigeria since ethnicity is more of a political phenomenon than cultural in Nigeria.

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