Identity Politics and National Integration in Nigeria: The Sexagenarian Experience

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Abstract

Nigeria celebrated sixty years of political independence in 2020 despite sustaining an array of gains and losses, especially regarding the nation's inability to manage the several identities it houses and the potential they portend for national integration. Although, having plural identities should provide an opportunity for diversity-induced development, especially having stayed together since the cultural amalgamation 106 years ago (1914-2020), and since the country's independence sixty years ago (1960-2020). This should have provided enough time frame to enable the region to solidify its cultural, lingual, ethnic, and religious differences to move towards national integration. However, the reality is contrasting, wherein peaceful coexistence and respect for rule of law are conspicuously inconsistent. This paper, thus, adopts a descriptive approach to dissect Nigeria's sixty years of independence and the role identity politics has played in instituting national integration. The paper concludes that identity politics is as a result of colonial amalgamation and is indeed the bane of national integration in Nigeria. As a result, it is recommended that the arrangement of Nigeria's governance should be restructured to represent a more united front, where the views, demands, choices, dreams, cultures, and aspirations of all groups are captured through a constitutional conference.

Keywords: National integration; identity politics; amalgamation; independence

Introduction

There is no gainsaying that in a multi-ethnic, multicultural, multi-religious, and multilingual state, such as Nigeria, serious, and mostly undue, attention is paid to diversities such as where you hail from, what your beliefs are, and more ridiculously, what language you speak. These primordial affinities are often used as a basis for power acquisition, power consolidation, and, of course, power sharing. Beyond this, there are also attendant factors that determine one's access to resources, and, in extreme cases, societal influence. This is not to posit that plural identities, *inter alia*, are solely responsible for unhealthy power contestation and/or ethnic conflagration, neither does it berate the conscious efforts and progress made by states with multiple identities. For Jega (2000: 14), identities are unifying factors in society and are instrumental in fostering dynamism in social action. They are used to direct political comportment and formulate political agendas as well as to influence political behaviour. Identities also serve as civil society tools used to check the intemperance of the state.

This paper is an attempt to appraise the Nigerian experience and its tortuous journey from political independence towards national cohesion. Nigeria, in its six-decade struggle of gaining power from the previous colonial masters, has been grappling with the attendant, albeit disintegrative, tendencies that greeted the newly formed country at independence. This is, however, not unconnected with the forceful marriage of formerly autochthonous groups, all of whom struggled, and are still struggling, for relevance, dominance, and, of course, political supremacy. This is because, in a bid to satisfy their economic thirst and further their imperialistic stronghold, the British overlords ignored the diverse religious, ethnic, cultural, and lingual orientations of the existing ethnic groups. The result of this has not been far-fetched from the unhealthy entrenchment of identity politics, an ethnic crisis, marginalisation, civil war, coups, counter-coups, assassination, political instability, mutual suspicion, threats of secession, and, more disturbingly, national disintegration. This view was echoed by Ojo (2014: 6), who avers that the forceful merger of the various groups in Nigeria under the coordination of the British colonialists for administrative convenience engendered political discordancy, with each group left in a state of fait accompli.

The result of this dissociated stance toward the creation has continued to fan the embers of disintegration, violence, and commotion, which threatens to put the country in to a state of political comatose. Ebegbulem (2011: 76) in explaining the prevalence of identity consciousness in Nigeria posits that the colonial tripartite apportionment of Nigeria prevented the aforementioned groups from developing a national identity and, instead, became a motivation for stressing geographical borders and other peculiarities, such as religion and ethnicity, for the acquisition of political power. This trend gave rise to ethnic nationalism, regional politics, and ethno-political consciousness. There is no doubt that the British administration, in a calculated attempt, exalted ethnic nationalism to truncate the rise of a national identity. Beyond the consequent political exhaustion that goes hand in hand with domination, the south is also behind the curve in terms of political representation, thus, giving impetus to unhealthy contests for power with far-reaching implications for national integration.

The idea flowing from the submissions above is that as a plural society, Nigeria, is home to distinct ethnic, religious, and cultural groups, all of which contend for resources and seek to assert their identities, sometimes at the expense of the others. The result is that this unpleasant trend continues to plunge the country into a cesspit of an intractable political chasm which, not only threatens the prolonged existence of political union, but also debilitates national integration. The study introduces the colonial heritage of amalgamation as the precursor to identity politics, which in turn threatens national integration in Nigeria. This paper adopts a descriptive approach and relies on secondary data, primarily sourced from textbooks, journal articles, conference papers, government publications, and newspapers for relevant information. It is argued that in an effort to assert their interests, groups espouse identity politics to protect said interests, often to the detriment of other groups. This practice, which is capable of inciting conflict, violence, or violent-conflict, is not only inimical to democratic tenets, but as seen in the Nigerian case, is detrimental to national integration (Lenshie 2014: 158).

Clarification of Concepts

Identity – Your identity is not just who you assume yourself to be or the ideals you nourish, it is who you are. Elebeke (2010: 22) defines identity as a two-edged process which lays at the core of an individual and is pivotal to their communal beliefs. Identity connotes the possession of distinctive identifying characteristics exclusive to an individual or a thing. In other words, it is a typical denominator by which a person or thing is perceived. According to Wonah (2016: 4), identity surmises selfsameness and identicalness. When expounded, this portends that an

individual or an ethnic group may have defining features, qualities, cultural mannerisms, economic status, and realities, among other things, to which they are attached. These cursors tell a particular group apart from several other groups and, of course, becomes an underlying factor in the group's identity projection.

Onyibor (2016: 2) maintains that identity is a sense of individuality which becomes ingrained as a child distinguishes itself from its parents and family to assume a definite societal role. It refers to the consciousness of oneself and self-significance. Identity emanates from class, sexuality, ethnicity, and nationality, among other things. Identity could as well be individualised or affiliated to social groups with whom the individual identifies. Identity may be defined as a sense of belonging shared by a group of people having common history, beliefs, and values exhibited towards attaining a common goal. It is the notion of who we are, contrasted against who we are not. It is a sense of 'us', a sense of 'they', and a sense of 'self', often acquired at birth and exhibited throughout one's lifetime, and in the midst of several other identities.

Identity politics – Given that identity attracts the struggle for relevance, competition thus becomes an integral part of the relationship between various groups in society, with each group keenly pursuing its interests. These interests, when not managed and coordinated, are capable of disrupting the political system and jeopardising the mutual existence of the varied interest groups. It is upon this premise that identity politics is engendered. Identity politics is the deliberate attempt by a group to assert its identity and protect its interests above other contending interests (Wonah 2016: 5). Alubo (2006: 65), avers that identity politics is used to signify the process in politics of grouping and classifying people into clusters given their shared and apparent parallels. The point of vocalisation is that identity, apart from the collective trait, generally raises questions on the uniqueness of citizen-based communal values and dogmas because of its inclusive and exclusive nature.

Although, it would be over simplistic to opine that in all cases, identity politics promotes selfish interest. If properly managed, identity politics can be a stabilising force in a plural society by creating much-needed awareness and the objective conditions necessary for national integration (Oni 2008: 330). Yet, it is obvious that identity politics is a peculiar feature of Nigerian politics. This is mainly the result of inequity in terms of power and resource distribution in post-colonial Nigeria. As put by Obi (2001: 14), in Nigeria, the results of amalgamation have been precarious and exacerbated by socioeconomic crises, dictatorship, and inequality, which characterises the unequal distribution of power in an ethnically plural and oil-dependent state. These constraints have not only fuelled identity politics but have knitted it with violence and conflict.

National integration – Osimen *et al.* (2013: 80) define national integration as the bringing together of people of different racial or ethnic groups into unrestricted and equal association, as in society or an organisation. It is the process through which people living within the geographic boundaries of a country forget their difference of race, religion, and language and feel the spirit of unity and allegiance to their nation. National integration reduces socio-cultural differences or inequalities and strengthens national unity and solidarity, which is not imposed by any authority. People share ideas, values, and emotional bonds. It is the feeling of unity within diversity wherein a national identity is supreme. National integration in Nigeria is the bringing together of the different ethnic, racial, religious, economic, social, and political groups into unhindered, equal, and balanced association on national issues.

According to Onyibor (2016: 3), national integration refers to the growth of an incorporated and lucid national identity and awareness in a mixed society in which all citizens are given a fair

chance to achieve their maximum potential. Members are given a sense of belonging, irrespective of where they come from. National integration enhances the chances of creating firmer loyalties that displace parochial loyalties to ethnic cleavages. National integration in a multi-ethnic society, theoretically, is a process of building a new society and social order based on justice and fair play to all its members, no matter their ethnic group, language, or religion. According to Ibodje and Dode (2007: 3), integration connotes the pre-existence of heterogeneity, whether ethnic, political, economic, sociocultural, or lingual; the lack of which can impede the process of building a sense of national homogeneity. National integration describes a situation whereby the various ethnic groups understand the adequacies and otherwise of the groups and are willing to put up with each other in an ambience of compromise and reciprocity. Therefore, national integration is the ability of the groups in Nigeria to stay committed to the ideals of unity by guaranteeing equal opportunities and promoting the affirmation of the identities of the various groups.

Identity Politics in Nigeria as a Corollary of British Amalgamation

The ordeals of identity politics in Nigeria did not start today. Rather, its complexities bear root in an experiment carried out in 1894 by Lord Lugard, who was reassigned to the British government from the Royal East African Company, having worked with the East Indian Company (Ojo 2014: 3). Before May 1906, the North, East, and West of Nigeria had distinctive administrative structures, as overseen by the British Empire. In an attempt to correct this administrative difference, the 1914 amalgamation engendered another anomaly by drawing an erroneous boundary which, as seen during Biafra agitation, gave rise to internal demarcation challenges. The 1914 experiment, overseen by Lord Lugard, has no doubt attracted many unsatisfactory appellations, such as the, "mistake of 1914" by Ahmadu Bello (1953), the Sardauna of Sokoto, and "a mere geographical expression" by Chief Obafemi Awolowo (1947). Meanwhile, General Yakubu Gowon (1966) also retorted that, "the basis of unity was no longer there" (Mohammed 2013: 450 and Obi-Ani *et al.* 2016: 30). Mohammed (2013: 451) notes that, as a result of Northern and Southern provinces' amalgamation in 1914, an indirect rule system, which was operational in the Northern province, was replicated in the South thus furthering colonial rule in all of the provinces.

The political formation of Nigeria by the British was not purposed for the creation of a nation-state in its real sense. Rather, it was a ploy to make easy the daunting task of administering the provinces. As Ojo (2014: 6) puts it, the effects of the amalgamation in local administration was felt more in the north compared to the south. In other words, the north stood at an advantaged point where it benefitted from the prosperity of the south, even though the south had to watch and learn from the north's political experience and know-how. Beyond this, amalgamation resulted in an unbalanced topographical dispersion between the north and south, whereby the north was apportioned a larger artificial land boundary which it took advantage of in resource allocation. This placed the south at a great disadvantage. A cursory look at the Nigerian geographic landscape and its eventual partition shows, without a doubt, that more than half of the entire topography is allotted to the Northern region. This unequal partitioning gave the north undue advantage of political representation, and this has been a major motivation for ethnic rivalry and political contention in the country.

For instance, the political impropriety arising from this is found in the present Nigerian National Assembly, of 109 member, and House of Representatives, of 360 members, where the majority of the seats belong to politicians of Northern origin, thus making it difficult for the Southern representatives to influence a bill as the north repeatedly uses its numerical strength to either kill or influence the passage of a bill, depending on how well it aligns with its interests. Unfortunately,

this did not begin today. In 1950, there was a disagreement between the North and South (consisting of Eastern and Western regions) over the former's demand for half of the seats in the House of Representatives and the use of population as the basis for revenue allocation, which occurred at the Ibadan general conference. Of course, these demands were strongly opposed to by both the Eastern and Western regions. In spite of their resistance, the conference allocated half of the seats in the central legislature to the Northern region, thus, invariably creating a strategic concession of power to the North (Akinbade 2008).

This aberrational arrangement of political anomaly gave rise to most of the post-independent challenges faced in the country in the modern age, such as military interregnum, ethnic tension, ethnic agitation, and identity politics. According to Adegbami and Uche (2013: 60), there has been a recurring contest for power by various ethnic groups in Nigeria. These contests are either fought by the dominant ethnic groups (Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo) or by the minorities (Niger Delta communities, communities in Kaduna, and communities in the Middle-Belt) over an unrestricted access to the control of natural resources, both at state and national levels. The implication of this is that each group has only minded and fought to protect its own interest and identity, without regard for national integration or national identity, whilst deepening the wounds of disintegration and making it difficult to heal. It is as a result of this that several groups within the polity have used marginalisation as a defence in their calls for a breakup, breakaway, or secession from the union. The Nigerian elite, rather than sheath its sword of domination, has favoured the use of coercion through the state apparatus to increase political gain, whilst seeking refuge in ethnic affiliation and whipping up sentiments rooted in identity politics to cover up its actions (Bariledum and Serebe 2013: 169).

Furthermore, another consequence of amalgamation is the formation of ethnic-based political parties, whereby, ethnic groups team up against one another so as to control the political affairs of Nigeria. During the Second Republic, Northern led political parties joined forces against Chief Obafemi Awolowo of Action Group (AG) in Southwestern Nigeria, labelling it a Yoruba political ethnic group; and this was the case with other regions. The Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU) and Northern People's Congress (NPC) was dominated by politicians of Northern origin, while the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) was formed by the Igbos in the East, giving basis for ethnic politics and ethnic nationalism (Ebegbulem 2011: 76). All of these transcended the political domain and cascaded into other areas in the country. For instance, there was an unprecedented prevalence of sectionalism in appointments, promotions, and transfers, especially in the military. These occurrences provoked identity consciousness and mutual suspicion among major and minority ethnic groups. According to Adegbami and Uche (2015: 65), merit was jettisoned for a quota-based system for admission of students and the appointment of head teachers into schools. As a result, junior teachers from the North were placed ahead of their seniors in the South. The military also did not help matters, as it deliberately subverted and eroded democratic principles and amplified the already rife ethnic apprehension and trepidation. This, no doubt, birthed violent conflicts that foreshadow the tearing apart of the country.

As Mbalisi (2017: 83) puts it, the period between 1945 and 1959 saw the desire for power at its high and the era became branded by scheming, as political leaders at this time were more interested in advancing their financial and political empires, thence sacrificing nationalism for regionalism and identity politics. The political scenery at this time was dominated by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo. Dr. Azikiwe, Zik as he was popularly called, joined the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), which was made up of two trade unions, two political parties, eight professional bodies, eleven social clubs, and 101 tribal unions. The Yoruba in the NCNC were petrified of Igbo domination and denied Zik the opportunity to represent the

Western House in the Federal House in 1951, a position he would have attained with ease. This practice of identity politics pushed Zik far and he went home and expelled Eyo Ita from the NCNC in 1952. As a result, Eyo and his people left the party (Ogugua 2004: 121). This situation was to play out in successive elections and had gravitated Nigeria towards civil war. During the post independent era, most, if not all the political parties had subscribed to identity politics. For instance, the Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), National Party of Nigeria (NPN), and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) were all tribal parties initially. Each was formed by a group of people from the east, north, and west, respectively (Ojo 2014: 16).

Above all, the peaceful atmospheric ambience that would have otherwise been enjoyed by the various ethnic groups in Nigeria was truncated by the British colonial amalgamation, which forced them together into a non-consensual union of British convenience. This has dealt an indelible blow of colossal proportion to the integration of these diverse, distinctive, and plural groups; as each group has repeatedly accused one another of being a predator denying access to equitable representation in Nigerian democratic politics.

Identity Politics and the Challenge of National Integration in Nigeria

In spite of the nation's rich endowments in both human and natural resources, Nigeria is still being characterised by its underdevelopment and is yet to be unclassified as a third world country or developing country. As Onyibor (2016: 4) notes, one of the factors that has prevented this is Nigeria's lack of national integration and its weak national identity. His argument is hinged on the presumption that national identity is necessary for progress and development, and every country needs the support and cooperation of its citizens. With a unified or national identity, the country will be better suited to work with its citizens to assert its place in the continent and defend its big brother role, as well as justify having the biggest economy in Africa. This is possible considering the vast human and natural resources that the country possesses. Indeed, to assume our role as the "giant of Africa", Nigeria needs to forge and project a national identity.

Citizens' apathy and structural weakness becomes increasingly pronounced in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria when citizens become detached from and dispirited towards their country. The resultant indifference and apathy are inimical to progress and entrenches underdevelopment. Indeed, the progress and development of a nation is inherent in citizens' participation and commitment to the country. It is in realisation of this that the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, as amended, states that, "the fundamental objectives and directive principle of the government policy should be to promote the people's welfare and that the people are supreme and that is to say sovereignty belongs to the people" (Onyibor 2016: 4). It further states that, "the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government". Conversely, the bitter politics of identity ingrained by colonial rule has inhibited political advancement in Nigeria, causing groups and their members to believe that they have unmistakable and persistent enemies in the country, leading to incessant calls for disintegration (Raheem *et al.* 2014: 166).

Meanwhile, the calls for disintegration seems to be longstanding. For instance, as Obi-Ani *et al.* (2016: 29) document, the demand for the disintegration of Nigeria dates back to the era of nationalist movements in Nigeria. Many ethnic groups in Nigeria had called for the divorce of this union. From pioneers of independence movements to this present generation, the agitations for separatism have continued unabated. In the early 1940s, at the peak of nationalism, some had already lost faith in this union called Nigeria. Comments and attacks against the union remain

predominant. According to Meredith (2011: 77), in 1948, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who was to become the Prime Minister of Nigeria, commented that:

> "Since 1914 the British government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country but the Nigerian people themselves are historically different in their backgrounds, in their religious beliefs and customs and do not show themselves any signs of willingness to unite… Nigerian unity is only a British invention."

Meredith (2011: 77) also records that, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the doyen of Western Nigerian politics, wrote in a book that:

> "Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no "Nigerians" in the same sense as there are 'English', 'Welsh' or 'French'. The word Nigerian is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria and those who do not."

The above signifies the condemnations of the nationalists who had vast followers that looked up to them to navigate the ship of this country to a safe and unified harbour. Such comments, rather than unify, tend to deepen disunity and our differences. The differences in culture and political institutions of the various groups added to the ethnic and religious tensions and rivalries. The crack in this union has been noticeable since the merger in 1914. Even the colonial administrators after Lugard shared such cynical views about the insolubility of the Nigerian state. The British administrators from 1922 to 1948 saw that the amalgamation was never intended to unite the various component units. They did not anticipate that a united and independent Nigeria could emerge for a very long time. Obi-Ani *et al.* (2016: 30) states that:

> "The day when Nigeria from being a name written on a map by Sir George Goldie and an administrative framework put together by Lord Lugard becomes a true federation still more a nation is still far away."

According to Obi-Ani *et al.* (2016: 31), the asymmetrical development of the various groups is yet another factor that has set the stage for the demands for dissolution. Due to its formation, western influence has unequally impacted upon the people of Nigeria. It was from Lagos that western influence spread into the western region from as early as the 1860s. The result of the protective policies of George Goldie, Lord Lugard, and their successors were that such influences had very little impact upon the Muslim North. These spatial differences in western penetration in the areas of communication, hospitals, education, housing, public works, sanitation facilities, and other aspects of modern civilisation had bred identity competition and rivalry between the late comers and early starters. The result was that, as Nigeria moved towards self-government, some politically exposed leaders became aware of the positions of the groups and regions on such westernising influences.

The above events still haunt Nigeria a century after and the thrust for integration seems weakened with the passage of time. The calls for dissolution resonate at every corner, giving impetus to the bourgeoning of identity politics. It is, therefore, imperative to appraise other factors that have culminated into present-day national integration, or disintegration. National integration in Nigeria is expressively threatened by persistent struggles for the control of national wealth by the ethnic groups in the country, which makes the absence of homogeneity a preeminent national problem. Nigeria, a miscreation which exemplifies the vestige of colonial arrogance, has sectionalism as the blight of its development. This finds interpretation in the historic system of rule and domination

created by the colonial powers which enabled the colonialists to arrogate power to itself whilst bloating ethnic identity formation and its consequent political use (Anugwom 2000: 71; Onyibor 2016: 5; and Orji 2001: 482).

What is being iterated here is that the British colonialists adopted the policy of divide and rule for political-cum-administrative subjugation, and in the process, truncated the fluidity of identity consciousness between and among the various tribes and regions in Nigeria to create an intransigent identity relation between these groups. This was made possible by the Colonialists' reliance on the subjective research of Nigeria's anthropologists who ranked the ethnic groups according to their characteristics and cultures as believed to be seemly for political ascendancy (Oni 2008: 46 and Onwudiwe 2011:1).

Identity politics and its attendant implications for national integration can also be viewed in the context of the activities of the political elites. The ruling elite, using their various groups, laid the foundation for the bolstering of an ethnic group dichotomy which has repeatedly strengthened mutual distrust, suspicion, and fear among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. This has also made the efforts towards forging a platform for national identity and integration in Nigeria exhausting and less rewarding. This stands at the core of identity consciousness, identity chauvinism, and identity politics by each group to secure a place in the control of the nation's resources. To be specific, the political-cum-economic struggle by various ethnic groups in Nigeria over the control of political power and natural resources has not waned. This has continued unabated since the attaining of independence in 1960, six decades ago (Ebegbulem 2012: 17; Nnoli 2008; and Ter-Abagen 2016:18).

Raheem *et al.* (2014: 164) posit that the political-economic activities of the few Nigerian elites and petit bourgeoisie who took over the administration of the country after political independence in 1960 undoubtedly perpetuated the development of spatial inequalities. This, coupled with identity, has now taken shape as different forms of violence and periods of crisis in. As a result, these spatial identity-based politics created fears during the 1950s in the period preceding independence. As Chukwuma *et al.* (2018: 66) aver, the anxiety of domination and the struggle among rival groups over the issues of power sharing is a non-negligible part of the causes of identity politics in Nigeria; which comprises of groups competing, not only for resources within the political landscape, but also for the assertion of their various identities.

Commenting on the place of regional inequalities, as the cause of identity-based politics in Nigeria, Raheem *et al.* (2014: 164) asserts that the present overwhelming regional inequalities that are products of agitations are likely to have evolved during a one hundred-year (1861-1960) period in Nigeria. The implication is that any society where the regional imbalance is noticed, there is the tendency for agitations by groups which are traceable to the cumulative activities of the ruling elites in that society. Chukwuma *et al.* (2018: 66) argues that identity politics is nothing new because politics, at its emergence in human history, is based on identities, and all identities are political. Therefore, what underlines the rationale for every decision in politics, whether in the developed or developing countries, is identity. That is why identity politics have constituted the fulcrum of all human history as related to the governance of men. Odeyemi (2014: 87) concludes that the failure of the various tribal groups to negotiate their amalgamation is the root of many tribal wrangling and agitations, ethnic hues, and cries of marginalisation, greed, controversy and inconclusive censuses, vote rigging, stagnated economic growth, and nepotism in Nigeria, and not necessarily its huge territory and population size with its multifarious ethnic groupings.

Although, it would be unfair to state boldly that the political elites are oblivious of the challenges to national integration and have not made efforts to curtail them. For instance, in a bid to address these challenges in Nigeria, laudable steps have been taken, such as the creation of states and the institutionalisation of land use decreed to strengthen Nigeria's unity; the creation of National Youth service Corps (NYSC) to promote the interaction among graduates in the country; the initiation of Federal Character Principle for fair representation in positions of power; the relocation of the Federal Capital Territory from Lagos to Abuja; readjusting the revenue sharing formula to quell the violence ravaging the oil rich Niger Delta; the National Policy on Tertiary Education; the establishment of unity Schools; and the introduction of a uniform Local Government system in Nigeria (Ojo, 2009: 392; Onifade and Imhonopi 2013: 78; Ugoh and Ukpere 2012: 6775).

As expected, identity politics keeps rearing its ugly head to thwart each of the aforementioned efforts or programmes. For instance, in spite of the Land Use Decree, Nigerians are discriminated against from buying certain pieces of land on the grounds of their ethnic and religious identity. Even the revered NYSC scheme has been troubled by cronyism and favouritism in the posting of corps members. The Federal Character Principle is fraught with mediocrity, corruption, and seen as stimulating volatility rather than integration. The siting of the FCT at Abuja is regarded as, "a revenge project" belonging to the north. Admission to Nigerian tertiary institutions and the Unity schools are characterised by quota systems with undue preferences given to the educationally disadvantaged, mostly from the north (Ojo 2009: 392; Ugoh and Ukpere 2012: 6778; Onifade and Imhonopi 2013: 78).

By implication, identity politics has engendered a deep-seated structural inequality in the distribution of resources, employment, education, and the sharing of power, resulting in uneven development, resource and power imbalance, sheer distrust, and unhealthy competition for resources. This continually puts national integration in Nigeria at its brink.

Discussion and Recommendations

To be sure, the first step towards filling the missing link or providing research answers is identifying the problem. Having traced identity politics in Nigeria to British amalgamation, it is only reasonable to recommend the renegotiation of collective existence. A conference should be held to decide on the need to continue living as a Nation. The opportunity of setting the terms of the country's union, which conspicuously eluded us in 1914, should be given while the grievances of the various identity groups can be addressed with the view of engendering an environment that recognises such distinctiveness. In line with this context, the authors propose the restructuring of the Nigerian arrangement to a more united front where all groups' views, demands, choices, dreams, cultures, and aspirations are captured in a new constitutional conference that reflects the willingness of all the participants to stay together. Indeed, this will change the narrative of blaming the 1914 British experiment.

More so, a broad-based reorientation should be organised to annihilate the trees of discord that have grown so much, as planted by our founding fathers, who were raging ethnic nationalists, and thus correct the 1914 abomination of proportional consequence. This reorientation exercise should have, as its major focus, the Nigerian youth who have been erroneously indoctrinated into identity politics, identity differences, and national disintegrative discourse. The 774 Local Government Areas in Nigeria should establish and fund leadership institutes. In addition to this, the usefulness of the institutes should be emphasised for the Nigerian youth so as inform them of the relevance of the institute for societal and political rehabilitation, with national integration as the ultimate goal.

The culture of economic, political, and administrative responsibility should be entrenched in all government offices, either at the local, state, or federal levels. This will reduce widespread corruption to a minimum. This is attributable to the fact that the competitive rivalry displayed by various identity groups is due to the perceived benefits accruable in politics in Nigeria. Reducing these benefits will make politics unattractive to the greedy political elites. Serious emphasis should be placed on a merit system against the quota system currently being used in the admissions process to Unity schools and for securing appointments in federal government parastatals and agencies. Rather than stressing the oddity of state of origin, state of residence should instead be entrenched in Nigeria. Doing this will de-emphasise separatism and identity politics as well as promote homogeneity and foster a national identity.

Sequel to the above, a priority should be placed on developing a national identity where the emphasis is no longer on identifying with one's family, ethnic group, or religion, but on national identity as a belief in one's membership of a nation state. With this, people will no longer look at themselves as belonging to any component unit within the country but as belonging to the country (Nigeria). When a person is endeared to their country and is ready to sacrifice their personal interests for the sake of national interest, patriotism will increase and the efforts towards national integration will be greatly rewarded. Good governance and equity should become the nation's target. The challenges of identity politics, ethnic crisis, marginalisation, civil war, coups, countercoups, assassination, political instability, mutual suspicion, threats of secession, and national disintegration, as previously identified, are partly as a result of bad governance. A country enmeshed in bad governance is a breeding ground for poverty, armed robbery, kidnapping, militancy, insurgency, ethnic cleansing, and terrorism, as is currently being experienced in Nigeria. As a result, government should ensure equity in the delivery of social services to the citizens by engaging the services of civil society organisations.

The practice of federalism in Nigeria suffers due to the absence of fiscal federalism, unproductive states, an over-centralisation of power, and the absence of a state police, among other things. More significantly, federalism in Nigeria has failed to guarantee national integration on one hand and fails to guarantee local rule on the other hand. Thus, attention should be paid to devolution of powers to the constituent units to make them viable, productive, and competitive while fiscal federalism should be the watchword. As such, government should commit to the practice of federalism in its true form by creating a platform for an all-inclusive dialogue between the various ethnic nationalities in the country. Equitable distribution of resources between the federating units and the decentralisation of power should also be ensured. The principle of self-determination and creation of more states should be encouraged to allow for a balanced federation and improved grassroots development.

Grassroots development and improved service delivery should be ensured. This will, in addition to engendering a healthy democracy, improve living standards which will ultimately reduce people's resentment for the government. This is important because local governments influence the civic spaces in which people live, work, and interact, and is thus close to the people and more appropriate for the improvement of essential services delivery. If there is any time to restructure, it is now. Government should de-emphasise its reliance on oil and invest more in human capital. By so doing, the country will adequately take advantage of its teeming population for inclusive development. A serious commitment to all of the afore-stated policy recommendations are a noteworthy sexagenarian gift.

Conclusion

As a country, Nigeria has come a long way in spite of the circumstances surrounding its formation. It is unquestionable that, in creating Nigeria, the various ethnic groups were lumped together without regard for their consent, interest, or approval. With respect to the objectives of this paper, identity politics is as a result of colonial amalgamation and is indeed the bane of national integration in Nigeria. Meanwhile, the overwhelming challenges of identity politics makes national integration problematic. The political scenery has been dominated by an unrepentant breed of selfish and avaricious political elites who, in their bid to compete for and elongate their hold on power, stress the identity differences of their group whilst demonising other groups. This, coupled with endemic corruption, has deepened the alienation and estrangement among several identity groups in the country. A classic example of this is the constant daily banter and e-wars that Nigerian youth engage in on the pages of social media. The danger here is that Nigerian youth who should be instructive in the drive towards national integration have been prematurely conscripted into identity wars that predate their conception; who then will see to the realisation of the integrative dream?

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