Uncivil Politics: The unnecessary precursor to under development in Nigeria

By

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ABSTRACT

The recognition of the rights of every ethnic group to participate in governance (at local and central level) in a multiethnic state is an indispensable factor for establishing and sustaining a just and egalitarian society. This study established that the exclusivity of the minority spells majority dictatorship and conflicts rather than the desired socio-political and economic development of Nigeria politically. This study represents an attempt to understand the reasons why the struggle to ensure national development has proved abortive in Nigeria and the interplay of ethnic cultures, supported by the incivility of Nigeria political leaders, hence the sterility of socio-political, economic and national integration.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Exclusivity, Development, Underdevelopment, Uncivil politics, Ethnic culture.

1.  INTRODUCTION

The recognition of the rights of every ethnic group to participate in governance in a multiethnic state such as Nigeria is significantly essential for establishing and sustaining a copiously just and egalitarian society. What this translates to mean is that a government must account for the rights of all groups, not just the majority groups. The inclusion of every ethnic group in governance enhances the likelihood of socio-political and economic development; strengthened by enhancing the civic capacity of the society and increasing the unity of the country, thus enabling individuals/groups to work as citizens of the country rather than as members of their specific ethnic groups.

Political inclusion can be conceptualized as full participation, representation in important decision-making institutions, influence on power, and adoption of public policies that address appropriate socio-political and economic concerns as the necessary precursor to development. The factors behind Nigeria’s socio-political and economic underdevelopment mostly include misdirected socio-economic policies where the majority ethnic groups want a fair share of the booty to the detriment of the minorities. Levine (2013) opines that it is a violation of a people’s right to self-determination to exclude them – whether by virtue of their ethnic membership, or for any other reason – from full political participation in the state under whose sovereignty they fall. Therefore attempts by the group (ethnic) excluded from political participation and their denial of their socio-political and economic rights often lead to conflicts, the consequences of which is underdevelopment.

Briefly politics is concerned with general socio-political and economic issues affecting the whole country. Politics involves the pursuit of the unrestricted interests of the state, formulation and execution of public policy (ies). It is concerned with winning and holding control over a government. It involves competition between various interest groups (parties) or individuals/groups for power and leadership in a government or other group. In other words, politics does involve the struggle for power and wealth – that is, the production, distribution, and use of scarce resources.

In its entirety civil politics is conceptualized as the inclusion of every ethnic group in the political process particularly in a multiethnic state. In the most deeply divided societies, like Nigeria, exclusivity of the minority spells majority dictatorship and conflicts rather than the desired socio-political and economic development. Therefore what Nigeria socio-political system need is a political regime that includes rather than excludes. On the other hand uncivil politics can be conceptualized as the exclusion of individuals/groups from the political processes. Political participation here is derived from the ability to take part in the conduct of public affairs; and to be elected and to hold office at all levels of government. In practice, however, there have always been cry of foul in the political arrangement of the country which by omission or commission has given room for the exclusivity of groups particularly the minority.
from participating in governance, the effect of which is conflict over the allocation of socio-political and economic resources. The question that arises from here is why uncivil politics?

From the foregoing it is apparent that the overlapping interests – full participation in the distributive socio-political and economic resources – as well as the hegemonic interest of groups constitute the framework for uncivil politics in Nigeria (the various ethnic groups pushing for power and economic dominance at the center, state, and local levels). This has redefined perceptions of various ethnic group’s interests leading to the frantic reformulation and repositioning of various ethnic groups in the political terrain to take advantage of particular shifts, or to shield themselves from potentially negative consequences. What this translates to mean is that there is no universality of values among the various ethnic groups as so much is at stake in the competition for power.

The hegemonic status of the majority ethnic groups no doubt, has incapacitated the minority ethnic groups politically and economically; depriving them of the opportunity to determine the role they will play in national development and as well determining their socio-political and economic gains in the system. This one would say is a wrong conception of socio-political and economic development which underlies ethnic conflicts in the system. Thus the struggle for survival of every ethnic group takes the form of inter-ethnic competition as groups tend to perceive their socio-economy development or otherwise in terms of the activities of other ethnic groups. This has made ethnic pressures and demands results into conflicts that threaten to repudiate the unity of the country.

The objective of this work is to examine the uncivil politics in Nigeria vis-à-vis socio-political and economic underdevelopment in the country. This will be done by explaining the contradiction inherent in the nature of civic culture and ethnic culture (by culture we mean attitudes of group and individuals that shape socio-political and economic development in Nigeria) which has constituted an impediment to socio-political and economic development and foster political instability within the context of the Nigerian state. But first, what is development and underdevelopment? Perhaps this will place our discussion on better perspective.

2. DEVELOPMENT

Development is not purely an economic phenomenon but rather a multidimensional process involving reorganization and reorientation of entire economic and socio-political system. In essence development must be seen as representing the whole gamut of change by which an entire social system, turned to the diverse basic needs and evolving aspirations of individuals and groups within that system, moves away from condition of life widely perceived as unsatisfactory toward a situation or condition of life regarded as socially, politically and economically better as observe by Todaro and Smith (2011). What this translates to mean is that development has different connotations to different school of thought. The meaning a particular person (scholar) attaches to the term depends on the person’s idiosyncratic view of the socio-political and economic world. Indeed, the meaning of development is not only a product of the individual’s perspective but also of the particular period in time when the word is being expressed. In the 20th century, scholars, economists, politicians, and others frequently use the term “development”. Within individually contested conceptualizations there is space for extensive and multiplicity of views, thus making differing schools of thought to overlap. This overall multiplicity of definitional debates includes a general agreement on the view that development encompasses continuous change in a variety of aspects of human society involving socio-political and economic growth.

The dimensions of development are very diverse, it includes economic, social, political, legal and institutional structures, technology in various forms, the environment, religion, arts as well as culture. One can thus say that development is a process of improving the quality of all human lives with some important aspects; which include creating conditions conducive to the growth of peoples’ self-esteem through the establishment of social, political and economic systems and institutions which promote human dignity and respect. Put in another form, development can be couched as the actions taken to involve not only economic growth, but also some notion of equitable distribution, provision of health care, education, housing and other essential services all with a view to improving the quality of life of every individual and group.

Gran (1983) conceive development as a social and practical process which aims at the liberation of human potential so that people acquire maximum socially feasible and practical control over all the available resources needed for the realization of basic human needs and security. Development is therefore about the liberation of human potentials towards absolute control over socio-economic and political resources to meet their needs. Significantly one can say that development is for the people and by the people.

In Nigeria development could be accomplished when the operation of the political system is in line with the prevailing legal and ethical principles of the political community. But where one ethnic group lord it over others there is bound to be instability and eventual underdevelopment. In essence the determination of resource distribution based on the three main ethnic and geographic groups in Nigeria – the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo – may be one of the reasons why the problem of ethnicity has remained intractable.
Young (1982: 15-19) identifies six goals of development which includes growth which he says is the central objective of development; equality of distribution of socio-economic and political resources, autonomy and self-reliance, the preservation of human dignity through constitutional form of governance or charter of human rights the absence of which may lead to repression of people, participation in governance; that is to say there must be a mechanism for citizens access and involvement in administration and the ability of the state to respond to new challenge and demand to adapt to changing needs. The absence of these arguably may translate to underdevelopment.

3. Underdevelopment

According to Otite (2011) underdevelopment is not lack of development, because development of some sort and degree thus exists in the state of underdevelopment. What this translates to mean is that in reality, underdevelopment does not mean zero-level development; it is still greater than zero. Underdevelopment only takes place when socio-political and economic resources are not used to their full capacity, with the result that local or regional development is slower in most cases than it should be. Furthermore, it results from the complex interplay of internal factors that allow less developed groups only an uneven development progression.

In the light of the above, underdevelopment therefore can be seen from the comparative perspective. Taken from the socio-economic perspective, the term underdevelopment only make sense when we compare societies (ethnic groups) and we observe that one of the two has advantage over the other, as a result of which the quality of life of individuals of that society is really higher than that of the individual member of the other society. A look at the educational sector in the country will help us to understand this argument.

According to Graham (cited in Mustapha, 2006) it was precisely in the sphere of education that regional differences were increasingly manifested during colonial governance in Nigeria. And this then had a knock-on effect on the regional formation of human capital and general socio-political and economic development. Yoloye (1989) conceives that by 1958, a paltry sum of 9 per cent of the children of primary school age was enrolled in the north; the comparable figure for the South was 80 per cent. In the same year, while the North had 4,000 children in secondary schools, the South had 40,000. By 1960, while the Western Region had 47.3 per cent of the students at the University College Ibadan, the Eastern Region had 39.8 per cent and Northern Nigeria only 8.4 per cent. What this translates to mean is that the East and West were far ahead of the North.

Considering the multi-ethnic nature of Nigeria and the perceived disadvantageous position of some ethnic group in terms of educational attainment, the Federal government introduced quota system policy as an instrument for bridging the educational gap between the North and the South on one hand and to bring about unity on the other hand. However this principle seems in its practicality actually fosters discontent among groups (ethnic) in the country. For example the cut-off marks (the least mark a candidate must secure to be considered for placement in junior secondary school) for entrance to Federal government managed Unity Schools located across the country released after the conduct of the entrance examination held in April, 2013 require a pupil whose state of origin is Anambra to score a minimum of 139 out of 200; Imo, 138; Enugu 134; Lagos 133; Ogun 131; Delta 131; Abia 130; Osun and Oyo 127, and Ondo 126. However, a male pupil from Yobe who scores two out of 200 marks, or a male from Zamfara that scores four out of 200 and two for Zamfara females, or Taraba males that scores three and their females that score 11 or Kebbi and Sokoto males that scores nine and Sokoto female that scores 13 will be considered for admission (Editorial Board, The Punch Newspaper July 3, 2013). What this translates to mean is that a candidate from Anambra State who fail to score 139 may not be consider for admission while a male pupil from Yobe who scores two would be consider for admission. This system has been criticized and seen as tantamount to fraud designed to stagnate not only the educational movements of the educationally advantaged states but its socio-economic and political development. More so the misapplication of the principle has helped to keep Nigeria development down. One fact that needs to be mentioned here is that while the gap in educational attainment between the north and the south flowed as a result of government policies, other inequalities also emerged, fuelled by differences in geography and natural economic endowments. For example the Southern part of the country is economically buoyant as a result of the location of crude oil in the region. As a result of this the combined and collective effects of the educational and economic inequalities continue to bedevil Nigerian society to this day.

These observable patterns of socio-economic inequality between different regions and ethnicities in Nigeria are now expressed, not in the old regional terms, but in terms of the 36 states and the six geopolitical zones that make up the Federal Republic of Nigeria. It is this kind of disturbance which promotes among the people some actions and counteractions, common distrust, prejudice and loss of trust in the concept of fair play within the polity, the result of which is conflict and economic underdevelopment.

Economic Development implies a lot more than economic growth. It is a qualitative measure of how the economic wealth of countries (or regions) has improved the economic, political, and social well-being of its citizens (Soubbotina cited in Dike 2012). Therefore economic development is the tool to mitigate the discontents and the misery in various regions or zones in the country.
Thus, the development level of each state depends on its access to the material and nonmaterial resources. Differences in the value of export crops in the global market meant that each region developed a different pattern of wealth accumulation and the related development of social infrastructure and social capital. What this translates to mean is that each region definitely will have different manufacturing activities and indirectly dictate their pace of socio-economic development.

One dysfunctional impediment to development in Nigeria has been the use of political maneuverings to disempower groups. This has made the overriding objective of national development a failed project. In Nigeria political system marginalization of any ethnic group is considered to be tantamount to underdevelopment, this is because the more representation they have at national level the faster the development of such ethnic group. Marginalization stems from groups perception of their treatment in the allocation or distribution of socio-economic and political resources which may be factual and apparent. Adedeji cited in Anugwon (2000) conceive marginality as the relative or absolute lack of power to influence a defined social entity, while being a recipient of the exercise of power by other parts of that entity. In other words other group lacks the socio-economic and perhaps political capability to influence significantly, those who are in charge of the allocation of socio-economic resources in the larger social entity. Marginalization is therefore considered to be the deliberate disempowerment of a group of people in a federation politically, economically, socially by another group or groups which during the relevant time frame wield power and control the allocation of materials and financial resources at the center of the federation opines (Anugwon, 2000).

For example the Yoruba of the south west zone believe they are being marginalized in the distribution of topmost positions in the country claiming their absence in apex of political positions such as the President, Vice president, Senate President, Speaker, House of Representatives, Chief Justice of the Federation, Deputy Senate President, Deputy Speaker of the House of Representatives, President, Court of Appeal, Secretary to the Government of the Federation, Chief of Staff to the President, National Security Adviser and Head of Service of the Federation, control of the principal economic and financial agencies. The Yoruba contended that the absence of Yoruba in the above power apex has consequential adverse effect on the zone in respect of appointments and job security throughout the Federal Government (Ajayi, 2013).

The anxiety that has greeted Nigeria as a result of marginalization which translates to the underdevelopment of some regions has produced ethnic conflict which is a reflection of the economic frustration endured over time by these groups. This is the case of the Niger Delta region, the bulk of Nigeria’s revenue is derived from crude oil extracted from this area. The Niger Delta communities are provoked that the proceeds from oil were being used by the government to develop other areas of the country while they were left to bear environmental problems of oil exploration. Despite the fact that they produce over 85% of the nation’s wealth in oil revenues, they lacked adequate pipe borne water, electricity, good health and other social facilities. When an ethnic group is left in the cauldron of neglects, the group no doubt feels that it occupies an inferior position in the process of resource allocation and access to societal resources (Ekanade and Ekanade, 2011; Oritsejafor, 2000).

The condition of the area manifests the paradox of poverty in plenty, epitomized by infrastructural decay, widespread poverty, rising tensions, and the escalation of ethnic militias, amidst rising oil revenues opines Omotola (2007). Arguably, positive socio-political and economic change is possible in Nigeria. As long as the change agents for example the civil society; ensure the legitimacy and responsiveness of the state, the deepening and expansion of democracy, good governance that will midwife development and national unity in Nigeria.

3.1 Politics of civic and ethnic culture in Nigeria

Without any point of contradiction all multi-ethnic nations like Nigeria are profoundly divided along religious, ideological, linguistic, cultural, ethnic or racial lines. They are virtually made up of separate sub-societies each with its own political party; it owns interest group and its own means of communication. What this translates to mean is that in such society flexibility necessary for national integration would be lacking. Thus situation like this promotes the incivility of the ruling majority; they become more dangerous to those minority ethnic groups who are persistently denied access to political power.

Nigeria has witnessed numerous ethno-religious and socio-economic and political crisis which has almost become a regular feature of the state. The interplay of power as well as ethnic forces in Nigeria has downplayed the existentiality of civic culture that can foster socio-political and economic development. The Nigerian federation has been enmeshed in contradictions, paradoxes, controversies and crises. These are subsumed in the national question, and social groups of varying ideological leanings cohere on the central issues. These are linked to national unity, local autonomy and self-determination, equitable distribution of socio-political and economic resources (Oshewolo, 2011).

The inability of a central government to equitably relate to the interests of the various ethnic groups has given rise to centrifugal forces within the polity. When this happens, the levels of citizenship become entangled in...
The term civic culture and ethnic culture are two socio-political terms relating to individual and groups believe/orientations towards the political system in a multi-ethnic state like Nigeria. If we are to ascertain the relationships between civic ethnic attitudes and developmental patterns, we have to separate the former from the latter even though the boundary between them is not as sharp as our terminology would suggest. The term civic culture thus refers to the specifically socio-political orientations – attitudes toward the socio-political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system. When we speak of a society, we refer to the socio-political and economic system as internalized in the perceptions, feelings, and evaluations of its population. People are inducted into it just as they are socialized into nonpolitical roles and social systems. From the perspective of this work civic culture is pro-national integration and development as against ethnic culture which give preference to ethnic development as against the overall development of the polity.

According to Almond and Verba (1989) the political culture of a nation is the particular distribution of patterns of orientation toward political objects among the members of the nation. In essence what determine the attitudes of members of a political society hinges on their orientations to the political system – what they can gain from the system as individuals or group. Significantly in Nigeria peoples political allegiances are sometimes determine by the shape of their ethnic affiliations which invariably determine their political objects (desires).

In a plural society – a society divided by segmental cleavages Eckstein (cited in Lijphart, 1977:3) there is always political divisions that follows lines of socio-political and economic differentiation, most especially those particular salient in society. The effect of this is that political parties, interest groups and voluntary organizations tend to be organized along ethnic cleavages; some of these organizations may have national outlook but in principle they are actually representing their ethnic interests. For example in the First Republic, the Action Group (AG) though claims to be a national political party but the party under the leadership of late Awolowo was an apology of ethnic politics, the same thing applicable to Northern Peoples Congress with the motto “One North One People”. The only political party that seems to be national was the National Convention of Nigeria Citizens as a result of its national orientation and nationalist commitment. This however does not mean that there wasn’t any element of ethnic perception as the party had more representation in the Eastern Region than any other region. This primordial loyalty unarguably has been detrimental to socio-political and economic development in Nigeria.

This brings us to the assumption that socio-political and economic development is dependent on national integration. What this suggests is that development in general cannot take place without a sense of deep identification of every ethnic group with the total system. Lijphart (1977) argues that the importance of national integration in developmental process leads to political development which translates to nation building which must be accorced priority by the political leaders, thereby eradicating primordial subnational attachments and their replacement with national loyalty.

Significantly the adoption of a federal system can be seen in the light of efforts geared at promoting national integration, a defensive reaction to the threat of ethnicism, fear and a reasonable political security of every ethnic group particularly the minority groups. Aiyar and Tiwari (2009) notes that the key component of progressive socio-political and economic development can be located in inclusive governance as the means of empowering the disadvantaged with the aim of enabling them to overcome socio-political and economic deprivation. Therefore for accelerated socio-political development that breed’s national cohesion in a multi-ethnic state there is needed to hitch the horse of political system to the wagon of inclusive governance. The political mobilization of ethnicity, exclusive claims, significantly is a threat to national integration and emergence of corporate identity in a multi-ethnic state. Therefore considering the implication of ethnic culture as against socio-political development efforts must be made to create a political atmosphere that will boost the confidence of every ethnic group in a multi-ethnic state.

This study elucidates the importance of inclusive governance to national cohesion in Nigeria. Inclusion is conceptualized in terms of degrees of representation that legitimately exclude either many or few political interests. On such a continuum, a more inclusive policy process generates a broader representation of every political interest. No doubt inclusive governance will significantly impact socio-political development.

Put differently where the political system favors inclusive governance, there is tendency for ethnic integration which in turn translates to a united and sustainable socio-political development. It is however very significant to state here that good governance as against uncivil politics will define the sustainability of inclusive governance in Nigeria. Inclusive governance in Nigeria political context is a process through which every ethnic group and particularly the traditionally underrepresented ethnic group participates in governance. The system seeks participation/representation from every group in a multi-ethnic state thus ensuring socio-political and economic growth of every ethnic group. What informs political inclusion in Nigeria is the degree to which the socio-political
interests of some ethnic groups are excluded from governance; the consequence of which is lack of national cohesion as well as socio-political and economic development on the part of the group excluded. The assumption here is that inclusive governance will no doubt enhance equitable socio-political and economic development as well as engender national cohesion, knowing fully well that uncivil politics of exclusivism may form the basis for ethnic conflicts the result of which is underdevelopment. Inclusion in Nigeria context includes federal character, power sharing and other socio-political mechanisms designed to ensure the participation of every ethnic group in governance. However the uncultured political leaders who see nothing but their own ethnic group in the distribution of socio-political and economic resources has made Nigeria to continue to grope in the darkness of underdevelopment created by ethnic culturalism of these leaders, hence the denial of the expected national integration which would have translated into development.

3.2 Ethnic Culture

In an ethnically divided society a determined effort to defeat the negative ethnic tendencies that chooses to assert its control over other ethnic group proclaiming success and closing its minds to the underdevelopment of others, must be made. This statement is an eye opener to the dangers of ethnicity in a multiethnic state. According to Baumann (2004) the term ethnic falls under the irreconcilable difference of ‘Us’ and ‘Them.’ The ‘Us,’ the majority, are regarded as non-ethnics and the ‘Them,’ new minorities, as ethnic. Therefore ethnic culture as use in this work derives its foundation from combined memories of the past and common expectation. Significantly individual’s consciousness of himself/herself in terms of his/her ethnic group is a continuous process. The intensity of the consciousness definitely will vary from period to period. In essence his/her socio-political activities may be very high or low depending on what he/she intends to achieve or gain.

From the above we can theorize ethnic culture as a dynamic reflection of structural conditions in which people are consciously manipulated in the pursuit of socio-economic and political interests. Individuals/ethnic groups are therefore viewed as social agents acting strategically in the pursuit of their group’s interests, hence ethnic culture as a shared disposition of a particular ethnic group. Ethnic culture is concerned with the role of ethnicity in the mediation of social relations and the negotiation of access to resources, primarily economic and political resources forms of human agency.

Overall, the underlying truth of ethnic culture is that it is a product of self and group identity that is formed in intrinsic contexts and social interaction. It is in part the symbolic representations of an individual or a group that are produced, reproduced, and transformed over time. Ethnic culture is the product of actions undertaken by ethnic groups to assert their control over distributive socio-economic and political resources. It acts as a pole around which group members are mobilized and compete effectively for state-controlled power and economic resources. Under the leadership of the predatory elite, members of the ethnic group are urged to form an organized political action-group in order to maximize their corporate political, economic, and social interests (Aquiline, 2010).

Significantly as socio-political situations changes in a multi ethnic society the individual/group that carries the portfolio of ethnic identities also change in various situations and vis-à-vis various groups. As group change, the socially defined arrays of ethnic choices open to the individual/group changes. For example when Nigeria decided on option of federal form of government at the 1953 constitutional conference with self-government to be first devolved upon the regions; the north was unwilling to see a Nigerianised central government until they were better equipped politically to compete within it. The south was equally unwilling to defer African access to political power waiting for the northerners who at that time were not ready for political independence opine Young (1982). The political effect of this was the delay to acceptance of federal type of government on one hand and on the other hand each region came heavily under the control of the three major political parties.

What this translates to mean is that the uneven rates of socio-political and economic development among the groups, which generally coincided with regional boundaries, strengthened the forces of regionalism. The creed became north for northerners, west for westerners, and east for easterners. This has continued to affect national politics (socio-political and economic development). This situation has emerged because of unequal distribution of socio-economic resources, unabated corruption at the national level, and irresponsible leadership. The situation is combined with the political unwillingness to address structural injustice. The inability to go beyond the ethnic framework has intensified the climate of political crisis.

Ethnocentrism has been described as the cancer that threatens to eat out the very fabric of the nation. Almost every political leader in multiethnic states, practices it, most of them are more ethnic chief than national statesman, and it remains perhaps the most potent force in day-to-day African life. It is a factor in political struggles and distribution of socio-political and economic resources (Aquiline, 2010). Ethnic culture often determines who gets jobs, who gets promoted, by its very connotation it implies sharing among members of the extended family, making sure that your own are looked after first. In Nigeria for a political leader to choose his closest advisers and
bodyguards from the ranks of his own ethnic group is perceived to be an assurance of security, continuity and not patronage, as well as a good common sense.

Therefore ethnic culture focuses and encompasses the process, such as mobilization and solidarity, by which members of ethnic groups attempt to use their ethnic identity to compete and dominate others. This is applicable from the political and economic viewpoint, they (ethnic groups) dominate a particular trade and they create entry barriers for any one from another ethnic group. Such ethnic group build an ethnic solidarity on the basis on which members are mobilized to advance a course which they may not all believe in but seen as collective ethnic action. The economic development of ethnic groups transforming into interest groups is a contributing factor in this approach. The relative success of ethnic groups in the Nigeria polity informs what their interests are. In recent years, the economic resources, political advantages and opportunities groups attain are aligned to ethnicity for their members. It is often argued that economic insecurity makes self-interest seekers recruit men and women of their own ethnic groups into authoritative positions for the interest of their ethnic groups. Ethnic identities, taken from this perspective, generate a loss of national culture, a culture that could be enriched immensely by the absorption of different ethnic identities. If ethnic identities are constructively appropriated they could become a national treasure.

Since independence till date the ethnic group from the north has ruled Nigeria for more than 38 years or 71.7 per cent of its existence, while people of western origin was in charge for about 11 years or 20.8 per cent of the time. People of eastern origin have been in power for only six months, or 1.5 per cent of the time and those from the South have only been in power for about three years or 5.7 per cent. This time chart is often used to support the argument of northern domination of Nigeria's political system. What this suggests is that the ethnic culture characteristics of Nigeria cannot be separated from its development as well as socio-political stability. This feature influences the discussion of identity for Nigerians and is constantly linked to several ethnic conflicts. This is the consequence of politics based on ethnic identity rather than any of the usual ideologies and principles that hold modern democracies together. Instead of evolving, it seems Nigeria's democracy have degenerated to producing ethnic leaders more intent on leading their people in warfare against rival ethnic groups. Ethnic differentiation as promoted by ethnic leaders, revolve around the practice of ethnic discrimination. The phenomenon of ethnic discrimination comes into play when each region is identified with a certain ethnic group, and whenever political misunderstandings emerge those who are identified as outsiders are always forced to retrieve back to their original ethnic homelands.

Because of the ethnic competition for the scarce economic resources and political power, each ethnic group tends to fight to have a president from their group. For them, the president will use the power of office to ensure the appropriation of the proverbial national cake and political offices to better the lot of his ethnic group. In other words, the president is not for the state, but his ethnic group. This is the essence of the struggle to control the state. This can be termed ‘ethnic strategies’ which are often connected with the resources of modern economy, such as in gaining employment, education, and seizing appointments for lucrative political and economic offices.

The introduction of multiparty politics in the early years of 1950s opened a competition that has shaped the context of struggle for political power among the political leaders and ethnic groups in Nigeria. Under the influence of ethnic politics voters need not appeal to the standards of economic performance or socio-political deliveries and the common good. The important concern for them is to ensure that many from their ethnic group control government offices. Political leaders convince ethnic groups to believe that they rule the country on their behalf. Obviously the elected leader is seen as an ethnic leader. Consequently, the believe is that whosoever holds the office is held in trust for the benefit of their ethnic group. It is from this perspective that a number of political parties promote ethnic politics, and regard the introduction of multiparty democracy as a way of decentralizing the state in favor of ethno-nationalism. The tendency of self-assertion emerging from different ethnic groups – big or small – for survival is, in fact, a bane to development as well as political stability in the country today.

The challenge is not how to overcome the culture of ethnic identities, but how to integrate them into social relationships and political processes that will engender development. The effort of promoting an ideal democracy cannot succeed without taking into account the challenge of appropriating ethnic identities into the structure of nationality. Lipshart (1984) explains ideal democracy as government whose actions would always be in perfect correspondence with the preferences of all its citizens. Any project, be it social, political, or economic, which involves the mobilization of people must take into account the cultural contexts in which individuals live, rather than those in which someone may think they ought to be living. The process of building democratic institutions will succeed insofar as it starts with what people are and from where they are.

Significantly ethnic identities provide meaning and content to the nation-state. Whatever point of view is adopted, the issue of ethnicity must be approached in a constructive way. This is because it cannot be suppressed by the state. In acknowledging the role of ethnic identities, however, we must be ready to contend with this question. Because of the multi-ethnic nature of Nigeria polity, what form should Nigerian state assume? What form should national and ethnic integration take for development to take place? Put in another word the failure to recognize the
power of ethnic identity and adoption of the institutionalization of political integration will continue to foment political instability, and thereby exacerbate the situation of socio-political and economic underdevelopment of the country.

4. DEVELOPMENT UNDER SIEGE

The assertion that Nigeria is a creation of British colonialism is no longer irrefutable. Driven by economic considerations, the colonialists annulled the sovereignty and independence of the hitherto disparate autonomous socio-political entities which had inhabited Nigeria. The conquest of the country by the British inevitably led to the establishment of a system of administration alien to the people. The consequence of this resort is that the various nationalities inhabiting Nigeria have not been welded into a nation in which all of them would have a stake rather it provided a favorable environment for mutual suspicion and distrust among the disparate groups in Nigeria (Bello, 2012).

The problem of acrimonious existence among the diverse ethnic groups and interests in Nigeria leading to mutual distrust, suspicion and inter-communal conflicts has become perennial and endemic in the nation’s body politic and has worked against the socio-political and economic development of the country. As a result of mutual suspicion existing among the various ethnic groups, whatever the issue at hand in Nigeria, the patterns of reaction to it will be determined by ethnic considerations.

The working of this post-colonial variant of the divide and rule strategy is clearly evident in the practice of federalism in Nigeria, in the way citizenship in Nigeria is defined and their access to government opportunities and services, as institutionalized by some innovative federal principles introduced to promote national belongingness, loyalty, and even socio-political and economic development. This situation no doubt impedes efforts at national unity as it applies to the building of a united Nigeria out of the incongruent ethnic, geographic, social, economic and religious elements in the country.

One question that rightly comes to mind here are what efforts had been made and what are the effects of these efforts considering the fact that most of these efforts were geared towards development and sustainability of the polity but the uncivil politics that revolve around socio-political and economic policies has since been an impediment to development in Nigeria. Policy (ies) is defined as governmental socio-political actions or course of actions, or proposed actions or course of proposed actions that are directed at achieving certain developmental goals (Ikelegbe, 2006).

Ethnic culture arguably is a complex socio-political phenomenon; defined as a set of beliefs about the superiority and differences of one’s ethnic group and a defense of its socio-political and economic interest above all others. In the theoretical model of loyalty writes Aluko (2009); allegiance and loyalty of a typical Nigerian is illustrated below, first, a typical Nigerian thinks of self before others. And when he or she thinks of others, the thought is about member of both the nuclear and the extended families. From that level a typical Nigerian think of people from his/her native town or village and then to the level of his/her ethnic group. And from the level of the ethnic group, the final stage to be reached is that of the nation. Everyone puts the nation last in the scheme of things. What this translates to mean is that an average Nigerian is more committed to his/her ethnic group more than the national cause; hence the low level of socio-political and economic development in the polity.

Fayemi (2013) comments that an ethnic attachment on the part of Nigerian leaders has been described as the bane of the practice of true federalism in Nigeria. On federalism and the quest for national integration which is the awareness of a common identity amongst the citizens of a country; though we belong to different ethnic group, religions and speak different languages we recognize the fact that we are all one, and very important to socio-political and economic development in Nigeria. The character of leadership since the advent of federalism in Nigeria has betrayed the concept of true federalism as they only advocated federalism in name, but actually worked towards the accrualment of advantage to their ethnic units.

Equally, the character of the leadership that Nigeria has experienced since the advent of a federal system in the country has constituted a very significant challenge that has been remarkably formulated into the notion of Two Publics, Ekeh cited in Fayemi (2013) which make ethnic affiliations and affirmation privileged over the national good. As such, some of Nigeria’s leaders/rulers have been described as nationalists by day and ethnicist by night, as they only advocated federalism in name, but actually worked towards the accrualment of advantage to their ethnic units.

Mustapha cited in Alubo (2004) opines that while the nation-building project was going on, along with the rhetoric of national unity, old patterns of exclusion and domination were continued and new ones invented. Consequently, the reality of nation building was often that some ethnic groups consolidated their grip on state institutions to the exclusion of others. This thus makes the competition for power so fierce, because if an ethnic group loses at the center, it has lost all. This is more so because politics is a zero-sum game in Nigeria. The way power is obtained and used in Nigeria is usually in terms of what the various ethnic nationalities can benefit; this has been a great challenge to socio-political and economic development of the country.
From the foregoing it is significantly important to say that socio-political and economic development is at its lowest ebb considering the spate of ethnic conflict over distribution of political goods. Responsible for this is the coloration of the polity into ethnic and national culture where citizens are more loyal to their ethnic affinity than to the national. National development is an aggregation of the aspects of the society’s development effort. It borders on political, economic, social, cultural, educational and technological. Every society desires to attain maximum development. Put differently without responsible citizenship – a situation where every Nigerian sees himself/herself as a member of the national body – developmental goals may not likely be achievable. Nigeria would like to promote the sense of oneness for all Nigerians. Yet through its uncivil political practices it has not only retained the original differentiated identities that have characterized the area since the colonial period, but has added to the sense of divided identities in its citizens.

This brings us to the principle of federal character. Much as one would say the principle is a laudable one. In theory it refers to the distinctive desire of the peoples of Nigeria to promote national unity, foster national loyalty and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation notwithstanding the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language or religion, which may exist and which it is their desire to nourish, harness to the development of Nigeria.

The regime of federal character in Nigeria negates various definitions of national or territorial integration that will engender development. It has been argued that the principle will make for a more equal federation to which more people will owe loyalty because, they see themselves represented meaningfully therein but unfortunately, the principle while stressing the imperative of ethnic balancing, invariably enthrones ethnicity and deemphasizes the nation. In the process, too, it strengthens the parochial, particularistic orientations and individual ethnic attachments of Nigerians. Thus by focusing on regional and ethnic representation, federal character exacerbates differentiation instead of enhancing mutual trust, accommodation and national development. Hence, the basis of disaffection among various ethnic groups in Nigeria with its attendant effect on Nigeria’s socio-political and economic development.

5. CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of ethnicity in Nigeria has become the most essential aspect of national identity in Nigerian political system; this is because people are more susceptible to their ethnic identity than being a Nigerian. From all the discussions made so far it is obviously clear that the socio-political and economic development of Nigeria is on shaky grounds. As long as the problem of uncivil politics anchored by the coloration of ethnic nationalism where the determinant of socio-political right of citizens hinges on their ethnic affiliation remains; national integration will continue to elude the polity. As it is today in Nigeria, arguably, there seems to be no empirical socio-political evidence to suggest that ethnic divisions and the nationalism attached to it are losing their significance in any part of the country.

The interplay of ethnic culture as supported by the politics of citizenship in Nigeria has meant persistent threat to socio-political and economic development and national integration. The preponderance of the spirit of ethnic culture as discussed earlier in this work has given rise to the emergence of ethnic militias all over the country. For example Odua Peoples Congress (OPC) for the Yoruba nationality, Arewa Peoples Congress (APC) for the Hausa/Fulani nationality, and Bakassi Boys for the Igbo nationality and Egbesu Boys for the Ijaw nationality. The emergence of these ethnic militias translates to an increase in the level of political violence, and ethnic conflicts with its attendant effects on development and national cohesion.

Within the Nigerian experience, the access to political power is vital in determining the allocation and distribution of resources, and it provides the opportunity for those who control power to expropriate a large percentage of the wealth from the resources to their own advantage, even at the expense of those who possess the resources. And, while this control and mode of distribution in Nigeria have been highly contentious, they have also been underscored by numerous socio-political and economic policies that place ethnic loyalty above national loyalty. Therefore this had made the interplay of ethnic culture vis-à-vis national culture a hindrance to socio-political development as well as national integration.

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