

Ethnic Politics and the Challenge to National Integration

Dr. Lucky Nwaoburu

lucky.nwaoburu@ust.edu.ng

Department of Political Science, Faculty of Social Sciences
Rivers State University, Nkpolu - Oroworukwu, Port Harcourt

Abstract

This paper examines the political implication of ethnic politics and the impact on national integration in Nigeria. Ethnic politics has been at the bane of staggering development and discordant unity in Nigeria due to sentimental selective preferences. For a country with over 200 million people, and more than 500 ethnic groups speaking over 1,300 dialects, it is impossible not to have hurdles on the path to national integration but managing the challenges to promote national integration is a prerequisite for development and national growth. From leadership tussles to resource allocations, the country has been stroking the bows of ethnocentric perspectives for decades. British colonialism introduced federalism through Bernard Bourdillon and the colonialists targeted the country for its natural resources, gaining dominance through the legitimate commercialization of indigenous products such as cotton, palm kernel, cocoa, groundnuts, and palm oil. During colonialism, the British interest in Nigeria's resources than its unity fostered a disparity that encouraged, and this left a crevice along its path to growth and development. The paper recommends Prioritizing national interest in lieu of personal and sectional interest as a critical factor in curbing the menace of ethnic politics in Nigeria.

Keywords: Ethnic politics, federalism, ethnic, region, national integration, unity

Introduction

Currently, Nigeria is bedeviled by many issues and paramount on that list is unity. The country has suffered economic sabotage and underdevelopment due to ethnic politics which has waltzed its way into the corridors of power. Entrenched in her democracy is the profound grand delusion of self often portrayed by power brokers who hold sway to political offices with disregard for the rule of law and legislative structures. This has allowed animosity to fester and fanned the embers of growing agitation for ethnic recognition. Since the introduction of federalism by Bernard Bourdillon in 1939, Nigeria has gone ahead to embrace this unitarian system of government given its perceived robust democratic principles. The tenets of colonial federalism in Nigeria during the 19th century were premised on the plundering and pillaging of natural resources rather than fostering unity which created a crack

in national integration. In an actual sense, the perspectives embraced by the federalism practiced today are not farfetched from the subversive inclination of the colonialists. “In the Marxian sense, politics is a class struggle, that is, the struggle between antagonistic classes in the society for the control of the state-the state being an ‘organ of class rule’ (Oluwatusin & Daisi, 2018). The British colonialists used indirect rule to gain control over the regions as they established an administrative network through installed local chiefs who served as stooges rather than rulers. “British policy was ... made to preserve the Muslim North in its pristine Islamic purity by excluding Christian Missionaries and limiting western education, by denying Northern leaders’ representation in the central Nigeria Legislative council during the period 1923-1947, and by minimizing the contact between the Northern and the more sophisticated and nationally minded southerners temporarily resident in the North. All these aspects of British policy and others tended to perpetuate the individuality and separateness of the North (p.322). For the colonial masters, they had their minds tethered to the economic gain lodged within their earmarked territories. The 1884 Berlin Conference which spanned four months saw the divisive and exploitative intent of the western world spreading its tentacles in the form of legitimate business and embracing the reins of leadership in various African countries. For Nigeria, it was simply premised on prevailing scenarios like the gravitation of the South toward western education and the utilization of the organized Caliphate institutions in the North to enhance their resource exploitation. National unity was the least of their priorities as they explored diverse ways to keep the people subservient to their dealings by establishing deep-seated sentiments which left the nation more divided than united after independence in 1960. After the creation of the three provinces by Bourdillon, ethnic segregation became a subtle ploy for dividing the spoil gotten from the regions subject to their authority. Sir Hugh Clifford who was the Governor of Nigeria in 1923 declared that it was cumbersome to merge the perceived independent states in Nigeria into a homogenous

country and that assertion tinkered with the opinion of the Nigerian political class who made no move to forge a cohesive union between the various states. In the wake of independence, the issue of unity became a panacea for national development and within the purview of that stance, the few intellectuals who were at the front burner for independence agitations sought ways to bridge their differences while pursuing the emancipation of a new Nigeria. Before independence, the colonial masters had encouraged the proliferation of western education in the south which saw a leap in urbanization and rapid development while the North thrived in land mass and agriculture but saw minimal development and entrenched poverty. So, the fear of intimidation from the South lurked within the hearts of the north who feared their educational acquisition will be leveraged to oppress them while the south dreaded the vast land mass owned by the North and thought that will be exploited to garner more political power at the federal level. Nigeria had been a federation where one constituent part (the Northern region) was much larger and more populous than all the other parts put together and this has triggered a constant fear of dominance because the regions of the South felt that in the nearest future, the North with its landmass, population size and the control exercised by the NPC over the area would dominate the politics of the nation, and hold the rest to a ransom. This shift entrenched divisive ethnic politics which has threatened national integration in Nigeria since her independence till date. “It is worthy of note that almost six decades of political independence and over hundred years of “marriage”, the nation is still being confronted with the challenges of national unity. (Duyile, Nwachukwu, Ediagbonya, &Pelumi, 2020). Within the purview of this context, national integration is a framework of functional systems poised to unabatedly support ideas and structures that will enable an all-inclusive governance that engenders national interest. All relevant stakeholders and institutions should amplify the need for national interest homogeneity across boards as this will nip in the bud the prevailing ethnic politics which permeate the country.

Theoretical Framework

The paper examines the impact of ethnic politics on national integration using the concept of ethnic politics and psycho-cultural conflict theory. This theory asserts that man is espoused to his identity because it is the basis for all his needs. Denying him that identity could be tantamount to agitation and violence. “Ethnicity is the employment and/or mobilization of ethnic identity or differences to seek advantage in situations of competition, conflict or cooperation. He sees the ethnic group as one whose members share a common identity and affinity based on a common language and culture, myth of a common, origin and territorial homeland, which becomes a basis for differentiation (Osaghae, 2017). The salient truth is that ethnic politics has played a more divisive role in the political scene in Nigeria than a unifying one. The first republic had a lopsided resource allocation because it had the Northerners strategically positioned in key areas of national politics, driving the wheel of decision and policymaking. This saw the allotment of resources to the northern region, establishing the tentacles of ethnic politics and igniting resentment from the marginalized group.

The spate of protests and agitation for the creation of states of political parties across the country over the decades has been incited by an entrenched ethnic marginalization. This has spurred the move by minority ethnic groups to seek recognition and inclusiveness in national affairs as well. Nigeria is a heterogeneous state and a component of a multicultural composition laced with diverse ethnic groups. “Nigeria is undoubtedly a country with a great political and economic potential in the developing world. It is a country with many people with diverse cultures. In terms of population and geographical spread, the major cultural groups of Nigeria are the Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Fulani, Ibibio, Kanuri, Tiv, Edo, Nupe and Ijaw. (Duyile, Ediagbonya, & Buhari, *Infrastructural Growth and Development in Nigeria*, 2020). Utilizing the concept of ethnic politics and psycho-cultural conflict theory to analyze the impact of ethnic identity on national integration. The theory asserts that ethnic identity

can instill behavioral tendencies that are in tandem with an etched stereotype which is capable of inducing agitations, hatred, fear and ethnic conflict when the opportunity presents itself. The post-independence period was permeated by regionalism bequeathed by colonialism because those were the times of regional structure perpetuated by the colonial masters to aid resource exploitation. There was a vivid delineation of regions; the Northern region (Hausa/Fulani), the Eastern region (Igbo), and the Western region (Yoruba). This regional stratification enhanced territorial and administrative control by the British and this became an entrenched rationale for political administration in Nigeria today. The disparity instilled by the colonialists paved the road for ethnic politics and sectionalism. The last general elections saw a clamor for ethnic representation in various offices. More prominent was the case of the All Progressive Congress (APC) presidential candidate, Bola Ahmed Tinubu, and the Labour Party (LP) presidential candidate, Peter Gregory Obi. The two contestants had massive supporters who were caught in an ethnic frenzy and avowed political stance premised on regionalism. Bola Ahmed Tinubu, who is of Yoruba extraction garnered stupendous votes from the Western geopolitical zone while Peter Gregory Obi who is from the Ibo ethnic group had a good chunk from the South-East and Eastern geopolitical zone. The electorates voted along ethnic lines thus bringing to bear the concept of ethnic politics in our present political dispensation.

According to Okwudibia Nnoli, the predisposition of an ethnic group to state power is an integral element in ethnic politics. The access or lack of it strengthens or weakens ethnic participation in political structures. The politicization of ethnicity in Nigeria has created the proliferation of ethnic cleavages and regional disparity which has posed a challenge to national integration for decades. Today, ethnic loyalty and regional interest have presented negative consequences which have continued to threaten national integration in Nigeria. Ojo's historical analysis of ethnic conflict in Nigeria assumes an intrusive stance from the

colonialists where he posited that the colonial tripartite division of Nigeria prevented a Nigerian nationalistic movement, manipulating geographical boundaries to reinforce the separation between ethnic groups and transforming ethnicity into an identity by which to gain political power, this structure along with other administrative decisions emphasized ethnic nationalism and regional politics, resulting from significant uneven development within each region (Ojo, 2014).

The ‘victim mentality’ as postulated by Richardson Jr. & Sen asserts that stereotyped ethnic groups, especially those who suffer discrimination on the grounds of their ethnic group identity have a predisposition to conflict agitation and violent inclination. In Nigeria today, ethnic politics has created a heightened political composition of ethnic interest in the political parties vying for national positions. From the tussle for national resources to ethnic proliferation in political offices, ethnic politics has eaten deep into the fabric of the nation, amplifying sectionalism and eroding structures that promote national integration. “The evils of tribalism in Nigeria are many. Tribal appellations cause tribal idiosyncrasies; these lead ultimately to variety and superciliousness and disharmony. A Hausa may think a Yoruba is inferior, while the Yoruba looks down on the Igbo and the Igbo prides about the that both the Hausa and Yoruba are just the people without gut (Ngozi, 2018).

Nigeria has over 500 ethnic groups but has three distinct recognized groups which are the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba, and Ibo ethnic extraction. The clamor for recognition by the other ethnic groups prompted the creation of the six geopolitical zones by General Sani Abacha in 1995 and that includes the Northern, Western, and Eastern provinces. This was done to promote even allocation of political and economic resources and national integration but that is quite different from what is obtainable today. Ever since Nigeria gained independence, there have been decisive efforts to mend the disintegrating unity, but ethnic politics has continued to drive a wedge between its accomplishment. The constitution of the first republic

which lingered between 1963-1966 suffered a major political relapse because of several factors. Foremost on the list was the lack of clarity in the constitutional implementation, western interference, and the amalgamated structure of 1914 amongst others. It presented a lopsided system with uneven geographic landmass. The Eastern region had 8.3% of the country's total area while the Northern region amassed 29% and the West grappled with 8.5%. This statistic gave the North demographic leverage over the other two regions. Furthermore, the 1963 census also reflected the asymmetry in population. The Eastern region accounted for 22.3% of the total population of 55.6 million while the Lagos Federal Territory had 1.2% and the Western region had 18.4%. The Mid-West region had 4.6% while the Northern region accounted for 53.5%. This incongruity created tension and a fertile ground for ethnic politics to thrive. It bred acrimony and agitation, deepening the waning national integration that existed in the country. "If there is any area this ethnicity-induced federalism in Nigeria has its significant negative effect on, it is the area of practice of fiscal intergovernmental relations or revenue allocation. As a consequence of the tension and rancor associated with ethnicity, Nigeria has betrayed annoying inability to establish an agreeable revenue allocation formula more than five decades after independence (Jega, 2013; Lijphart, 2018).

Then came the second republic which saw General Olusegun Obasanjo initiate a transition into the American-style presidential system. This was done in a bid to reflect the tenets of federalism. The political parties were compelled to have a $\frac{2}{3}$ registration across the states with each state having one cabinet member to represent them at the federal level. Although the second republic promulgated the sustenance of federalism, leadership incompetence, and avowed corruption marred its sustainability. Political parties emerged, walking on the ledge of ethnicity and regional accord thus embracing sectional partisanship. There was the formation of parties along ethnic lines such as the Union Party of Nigeria (UPN) which had

Obafemi Awolowo at the helm of affairs strutting the Western region for representative rights and then the National People's Party (NPP) controlled by Nnamdi Azikiwe had the Ibos tagging along for more Eastern region representation while the Hausa speaking region clamored for a fair share in the national polity through the Greater Nigerian People's Party (GNPP) candidate, Ibrahim Waziri. Here, the country was already embroiled in subtle ethnic chauvinism which was a vivid delineation of ethnic politics. "In a circumstance of mutual suspicion and fear of domination, competition for power among ethnic groups becomes unavoidable. Again, it is on the basis of this fear of domination that formation of political parties in Nigeria always reflects a strong dose of ethnicism. The point is that colonialism left behind for Nigeria a non-hegemonic state that further aggravates the crisis of ethnicism (Osaghae, 2017). When Nigeria's Chief of Defence Staff, Major-General Abdulsalami Abubakar was sworn in as the 11th head of state on June 9, 1998, the door to democratic leadership was held open, especially with the emergence of Olusegun Obasanjo on May 29, 1999. The new zest for civilian rule spurred the adoption and legislative amendment of awry constitutions which failed to embody the appellation- federal character. To establish good governance in a democratic setting, structures that embolden federalism were sacrosanct to national integration and these structures include birthing a vision that should be encompassing and embrace national interest. Secondly, good governance should be consistent with stewardship of resources imbued with transparency and standards of probity.

Today, Nigeria is grappling with frail unity which is threatened by ethnic politics and sectionalism. "The implication of this was that the Nigerian federalism lacks the requisite foundation for a formidable federal system, the resultant effect of which is loyalty to ethnic groups rather than loyalty to the nation (Suberu, 2017; Gboyega; 2016; Obayan, 2018). The amalgamation of 1914 circumvented national integration by breeding religious boundaries and ethnic bigotry which has become the hydra-headed monster bedeviling national

integration. The aftermath of this forceful cohesion is the building of walls than bridges thus severing the national integration that should aid unity. Colonialism was paved with disintegrating structures and ethnocentric bulwarks. It was laced with exploitative intent which was hinged on the divide-and-conquer rule used in its administration.

Many scholars have debated the impact of ethnic politics on national integration. The concept of ethnicity and political sectionals are intricately interwoven, especially in Nigerian politics. The gravitation toward democratic rule ought to establish unitary politics but that seemed to pale out in comparison with what is obtainable in the political system of Nigeria. Nepotism thrives in every system while corruption is enthroned across political divides, exacerbating the growing feud between the ruling class and marginalized sect. “The Nigerian federal system plays a pre-eminent role in collective distributive interest in Nigeria, Typical consideration is usually given to ethnicity, and then associated primordial paradigms of communalism, religion and regionalism have emerged as the primary organizing principles for conceptualizing, articulating, protecting or promoting collective distributive interests in Nigeria (Suberu, 2018:22). Immersed in the self-absorbing path of ethnic politics, the country is slowly fanning the embers of disunity and ethnicity-induced federalism which will inadvertently create the enabling environment for ethnic sentiments to luxuriate.

Nigeria is a country laden with so many natural resources but plagued by underdevelopment which is due to mismanaged resources and economic sabotage. The issue of ethnic politics is akin to a class struggle for recognition and resource control paved with pitfalls by colonialists and ethnocentric polity. Therefore, within the purview of the Psycho-cultural conflict theory analytical context, ethnic politics is threaded through a class struggle for relevance and recognition. To rid the country of this entrenched error, ethnic politics must be nipped in the bud by tackling the root which is the ethnically biased mind. Disabuse a mind imbued with an idea and the same is clean of it and ready to imbibe another. The impact of ethnic politics on

national integration is summed up in the retrogressive effect it has on development. In Nigeria, the parlance ‘national cake’ became a delineation for corrupt politicians who hold sway over resources by employing methods that would aid exploitation and self-aggrandizement. This became the rhetoric for political officeholders who amassed wealth at the expense of the citizens, giving room for ethnic politics to thrive. Political seats have become ancestral stools where political officeholders lounge on the largesse of their loot, leveraging their opportunistic inclinations to install people of the same ethnic group into positions and political offices thus spawning the web of ethnic politics which has engulfed the political system in Nigeria.

The concept of ethnic politics and political conflict

Ethnic politics has become the bane of political rivalry and class struggle for decades. Its entrenched tentacles go beyond sectionalism to enclose a formidable abhorrence for the growth of other ethnic groups. Nigeria is a multicultural state with diverse ethnic groups and this complexity in our national stratification has enabled the superiority complex which exists for major ethnic and an inferiority complex for minor ones. Since the espousal to democracy, Nigeria has been oscillating between primordialism and fundamentalism thus downplaying the entrenchment of true democracy. “Democracy is defined as the continuous process of promoting equal access to fundamental rights. In lieu of this, Ake argued that the struggle for democratic culture that can bring about real development in Nigeria is the one sustained by economic and political development based on centralization of power, and reliance on indigenous communities to provide some refuge from the centralized state (Duyile&Oyewale, 2021). In Nigerian polity, true democracy has become more passive than perfunctory as the word is peddled without its execution. According to Jean-Jacques Rosseau assertion, he argues that “if, when the people, being furnished with adequate information, held its

deliberations, the citizens had communication one with another, the grand total of the small differences would always give the general will, and the decision would always be good.” The challenges ethnic politics pose to national integration are profoundly etched in the underdevelopment that permeates the country today. From insecurity, corruption, political instability, and national disloyalty to tainted personal interests, the negative impact of ethnic politics on national integration takes many forms and assumes different scenarios. The availability of immense natural resources should be a panacea to poverty and underdevelopment but within the ambit of the Nigerian political space, it is an avenue for self-enrichment and continuous hold to power.

Mismanagement of resources and prolonged corrupt practices have crippled the economy and plunged the same into debt and incessant reliance on foreign aid. It is no news that Nigeria’s debt portfolio has trickled into trillions. According to the Debt Management Office, Nigeria’s debt as of September 2022 currently stands at 44.06 trillion Naira and has the potential of trickling into 77 trillion Naira by June 2023. The spate of loans has increased significantly, further throwing the country into abysmal despair as accrued revenue from local and foreign investments is not even enough to pay off foreign loans not to mention support for economic development yet the politicians live a grandiose life hinged on ‘national cake’ parlance at the detriment of taxpayer's money. This has encouraged a heightened political tussle for power and societal recognition often shrouded in proclivity for corruption. There are several instances of ethnic groups clamoring for political power and national recognition through appointments in various offices. These contestants resort to utilizing any means to waltz their way into political positions. From bribery, political thuggery, and godfatherism to nepotism, the methods employed are better imagined than said. Ethnic politics enables acrimony and deep-seated resentment to fester, thereby throwing the country’s polity into jeopardy. Okwudibia Nnoli emphasized this stance when he stated that in the distribution of basic

socio-economic infrastructures in Nigeria, intense ethnicity for equitable division holds sway and this is the fulcrum of ethnic politics. It drives the motive for the continuous gravitation toward sectional politics and aids its implementation.

Factors that encourage ethnic politics

1. Ethnic marginalization and discrimination

The concept of ethnic politics is an embodiment of an anti-democratic perspective because of the ethnocentric narrative it emboldens. ‘‘Ethnicity In Nigeria, the agitation for the creation of more states and local governments in Nigeria stems from a class struggle for emancipation from perceived marginalization. From time immemorial, man has found himself embroiled in one stratification or the other. Before independence, Nigeria has been boxed into a regional stratified space for easy exploitation of her natural resources by the colonial masters. They earmarked these regions, set the boundaries, and planted the idea of regional superiority which distorted the rich value system embraced by Nigerians before independence. This disparity has fostered a grip on ethnic politics and in the wake of recent events across the country, it is no doubt the reason for the break in public peace and gross insecurity amongst others. The need for ethnic recognition gave birth to groups like the Odua People’s Congress (OPC), Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Arewa People’s Congress (APC), and the Niger Delta Avengers (NDA). These groups were borne out of a class struggle against ethnic marginalization and discrimination, especially for regions imbued with the natural resources which fuel economic prosperity in the country. The lopsided features of ethnic politics promote sectionalism and this oscillatory trajectory in Nigeria’s polity has continued to pose a challenge to national integration.

The disparity bequeathed on the Nigerian state through the entrenched regionalism created by colonialism has aided ethnic politics in the country which has enabled the regions to skirmish continuously. Since marginalization is a composition of suspicion, ethnic agitations, distrust, and discrimination, it is the grounds for violence and agitations and if left unchecked could spiral into national conflicts and societal disintegration. Riding the system of tribally induced cleavages will enhance transparent democracy and integration of cohesive polity across boards.

2. Uneven resource distribution

The asymmetry in resource allocation across the regions in Nigeria has been the drive for ethnic feuds and agitation for resource control. The monopolization and politicization of resources by the elites and the ruling class have continued to undermine national integration by instilling sentimental politics and sectionalism. Several steps have been taken to forestall an agreeable distribution formula for revenue allocation through instituted agencies such as the revenue allocation commissions but the implementation of policies to integrate these cohesive features has received passive attention thus fueling acrimony and class struggle for resource control. “There have been nine different commissions on allocation since 1946, yet the discontent arising from the subject is yet unsettled (Osaghae, 2017). Several Ad-Hoc Committees have been set up to bridge the disparity and uneven resource distribution which has contributed significantly toward ethnic politics. The revenue allocation system began in 1946 when Richard’s Constitution endorsed regional autonomy which enhanced a responsive interaction between the regions and the federal government. The principles utilized were hinged on equitable distribution based on population, even progress, and derivation. In the Phillipson Commission of 1946, this system of revenue allocation saw the Northern Region grossing 46% while the Western Region received 30% and the Eastern region taking 24%.

These allotted percentages seemed equitable based on the variables utilized in the resource distribution but that was disproportionate given the objectives of the commission.

Then came the Hicks-Phillipson Commission whose principle was based on derivation, independent revenue, need, and national interest. Subsequently, the Chicks Commission Report of 1953 was introduced, and then the Raisman Commission Report which was accompanied by the Binns Commission Report and the Dina Interim Revenue Allocation Review Committee Report of 1968. These resource allocation committees kept changing to embrace structural policies that were in tandem with the dynamics of the country. From the discordant tax legislation ratios to uneven percentage allotment, the revenue commissions saw the need to improve on their existing resource allocation formula to dissuade ethnic rivalry. In 1977, the Aboyede Technical Committee Report was based on the principle of absorptive capacity, fiscal efficiency, independent revenue, minimum tax effort, equality of access to development opportunities, and national minimum standards for national integration. Then the Okigbo Commission of 1980 was also created to push the narrative of equitable resource allocation. The disparity has been created ab initio and utilizing revenue allocation principles that reflect sentimental values deepens the penchant for ethnic politics. Currently, the Revenue Mobilization, Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC) peg the revenue distributive ratios at 45.17% for the federal government, 29.79% for the state governments and the local government receives 21.04%. These statistics allot 52.68% of the revenue share to the federal government, 26.72% to the state governments, and 20.60% to the local governments. According to these emerging statistics, the government seeks to address the uneven resource allocation which has incited ethnic agitations for resource control. Taking into consideration the emerging dynamics of the political space in Nigeria, it behooves the federal government to enact revenue allocation policies that will drive national integration. From the agitation of the Niger Delta region for more revenue allocation to the

Southeast region's clamor for more political representation, ethnic politics has been at the center pulling the strings of discord and tinkering with unity amongst the regions.

3. Ethnocentrism and corruption

Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs in 1954 proposed that man's needs are spurred by a relentless tendency towards behaviors or methods that would lead to the satisfaction of his physiological needs. The concept of ethnocentrism is etched in its collective espousal to ideas that resonate with ethnic identity and origin. In this regard, ethnic politics, as a conveyor of sectional interests promote the needs of one region or ethnic group as opposed to the needs of others. It drives the wheel of chauvinistic inclinations for deep-seated corruption among the ruling class in Nigeria. Incompetence permeates the political sphere as most elected officials lack the essential quality of leadership which is integrity. The salient truth is that the promotion of ethnic politics has allowed nepotism to thrive, and this has saturated the system with inept individuals who are consciously and inadvertently sabotaging the tools of national integration. Prompted by the need to satisfy physiological needs, many people are running on the treadmill of corruption and self-enrichment. The entrenched practice of ethnic politics in the Nigerian system has allowed the seed of corruption to germinate, budding and branching into every stratum of the economy. Talk about political corruption and the role of ethnic politics in the appointment and installment of unworthy individuals into positions that are not deserving, and you will understand the impact it has on national integration. These individuals are an embodiment of anti-democratic initiatives and once appointed into political offices seek to satisfy their personal needs instead of the collective interest of all. The 'national cake' parlance was rhetorically forged out of ethnic politics and the need for regional representation. This has encouraged economic and commercial corruption in immense proportions where everybody sees political appointments as a passport to resource

loot and aggrandizement. Recently, ethnic politics has assumed an organized corruption role because it has become a roundtable for lopsided resource allocation, preferential position allotment, and general sectionalism. Underdevelopment is fueled by resource diversion and economic sabotage which is perpetrated by individuals who pursue a personal interest as opposed to a national interest.

Another challenge that ethnic politics poses to national integration is the administration of shrewd federalism. The tenets of true democracy are juxtaposed with awry ethnocentric politics which shrouds the essence of true federalism. Nigeria in a bid to enhance national integration proposed the implementation of structures that will promote unity and cohesive interest. From the National Youth Service Corps that was initiated on the 22nd of May 1973 to the establishment of Unity Schools in 1966, the role of unity in the national integration of the Nigerian state has become an accessory that is paramount to her development. Although these structures are in place, ethnic politics thrive in the corridors of power and within the administrative structures. This goes to show that the seed of disparity sown by the colonial masters has taken a deeper root than the sprouting tendrils of ethnic politics and harvesting the root seems to be the curative measure for this anomaly.

Conclusion and recommendation

National integration is akin to national development and when shoved aside and kicked to the curb, the consequences are grave, especially within a multi-ethnic environment like Nigeria. Purging the system of ethnic politics might seem like an arduous task yet it can be done. Sensitization and deconstructive techniques can be applied to disabuse the minds of the people, especially the younger generations, on the negative impact of ethnic politics on the general well-being of the country. Socially, it is disruptive and creates room for sentimental dispositions and economically, it is a vehicle for economic sabotage and self-gratification

while politically, it is a bane for violence and incessant political conflicts. Ethnic politics impedes development, promotes unhealthy rivalry and regional conflicts, sustains political instability, and destabilizes public peace. To promote enduring and sustainable federalism, ethnic politics must not be allowed to thrive. The National Orientation Agency (NOA) must push the narrative of national integration beyond jingles and media sensitization. They should organize workshops and seminars across the geopolitical zones to enlighten the public on the impact of ethnic politics on national integration, buttressing the significance of cohesive interest and true federalism.

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