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IDENTITY CRISES, CAUSES AND SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

The identity question is still pervasive in the social and economic life of Nigerians. This paper highlights the plight of this issue and how it is a persistent hindrance to nation-building and the countries developmental strides. It utilizes historical and descriptive methods of research in unravelling the genesis of this problem and how one ethnic group in Nigeria are gaining an upper hand over other tribes in the national affairs. It was discovered that many people in Nigeria are also contributing negatively to nation-building in Nigeria because of sheer loyalty to ethnicity. In light of this, the paper argues that every Nigerian citizen should place a premium on the Nigerian entity by doing things that bring unity, development and proper integration of all Nigerian tribes. The paper recommends that every citizen in Nigeria should be proud of his or her country. This will bring an iota of respect to our dear and loving country.

Keywords: Crisis, Tribe, Development, Nigeria, Quest for Integration.

Introduction

Identity is a thing of concern in Nigeria. The reason is that engagement does not extend to the nation itself often times, but is to the tribe that you claim. Ours is one to ask Nigerians to start re-evaluating the necessity for resolving this issue and the impact it has on the socio-economic advancement of our country over personal and selfish goals. Identity broadly is the condition of being a certain kind of object. The word refers to an individual overall nature, hardly his temperament.

Identity is a sociopolitical concept that holds both individual and collective meanings (Akinyetun, 2021). The question of identity has been identified as an issue that has denied many citizens in Nigeria that should ordinarily be entitled to many benefits and privileges. But, identity is foundational, persistent, and essential for the possibility that identities were iterated through sociopolitical efforts (Lapid, 1996).

Nigeria being abundantly blessed with both natural and human resources is capable of achieving such a feat that will propel the country to a great economic, social and political status. Nation integration is still in a very weak or no identity. Nigeria who has the most efficient and reliable sources like human and natural resources would surely specifically protect the interest of other countries because if every citizen of Nigeria carries such a positive attitude towards national identity then it would play a major role to protect the interest of some of the countries because Nigeria is making use of the efficient and reliable resources. Out of National Identity comes Social and Economic Progress. Such as Nigeria is a multiethnic country it can be epileptic on the issues of identity when every citizen of the great nation becomes indifferent on the development of his/her country. Progress and development being the key solutions comes as naturally as Nigerian citizens find that love

of the nation their best medicine. Doing this will lead to development, fast economy, social growth and unity.

In recent times, this identity crisis of Nigeria entity has led to several agitation within the nation. In this regard, Abdu states that identity conflicts have become a critical security threat a common decimal to Nigeria, and more so within the Northern part of the country (Abdu, 2002). On the same topic, it has state by state questions and ideas of tribe in Nigeria. Kwaja in his discourse elaborating it, shows it has led to a lot of problems in between these tribes.

Land disputes have also a significant role and have been a source of violence and ethnic cleansing in Nigeria as played out between Chamba vs Kuteb, the Ogoni vs Andom in Rivers State, the Sharia crisis in Kaduna State, the Tiv vs other ethnic groups in Azara of Nassarawa State in 2001 and the Tarok vs Hausa/Fulani in Plateau State in 2004, the Geomai vs the Hausa/Fulani in Shendam Local Government of Plateau state (2002), Quan vs pan in Quan'pan Local Government of Plateau state in 2006, Hausa/Fulani vs the Beron, Anaguta and Afizare in Jos North Local (Kwaja, 2009)

The matter of identity cannot be solved by a single person. Which explains why it is a collaborative effort, one that calls for the engagement of all citizens. Countless of the crises that are currently still with the country are rooted in identity issues. In certain areas of Nigeria, many of the citizens has been denied of job opportunities even though they merit such a jobs. This development has affected millions and even caused the stall on socioeconomic development for some regions in the country.

Conceptual Analysis

Ethnicity: Ethnicity is a complex, and highly fluid concept in reality (Anugwom, 2000; Odeyemi, 2014). It denotes a group of people characterized by distinctive racial, religious, linguistic and cultural features and tends to transcend continent. Against this background, Nnoli describes it as a social phenomenon, which refers to the interactions among members of different ethnic groups ... characterized by the communal nature of their boundaries. (Nnoli, 1980). An ethnic group consists of social formations that are defined by their community factors such as language, religion and culture. As Agbor regards, ethnicity has distinct linguistic or cultural affinities with shared consciousness and identity that make them conscious of being one in relative difference with inter-ethnic groups (Agbor, 1999). Ethnicity is one of the problems creating identity crises in some countries in Africa. It was the colonial government that designated the role that this would play in the ethnic identity formation process. A comment on the literature of colonialism that facilitated and, indeed, invented ethnicity in Nigeria is renewal interesting. (Rangers, 1993). Every citizen has the sense of patriotism towards his loving native land.

Tribe: A tribe is a category of social groups based on shared interests. Nigeria is presently home to over 300 tribes. These tribes are known for their individual cultures and ways of life (Tribe 2022). The definition of tribe is contested, in part because of the conflicting theoretical understandings of social and kinship structures, and the problematic application of the concept to extremely diverse human societies. Anthropologists contrast this concept with other social and kinship groups, and it is hierarchically larger than a lineage or clan, but smaller than a chiefdom, nation or state. Those terms, too, are contested. Here the term can have a legalistic usage, where tribes are recognized above and apart from the national or federal government, granting them some political autonomy from this similar hierarchical body of governance (Tribe,

2022), creating tension with anthropological definitions. Many tribes in Nigeria have been severed from other tribes due to identity issues. Nigeria should take the first steps to integrate them entirely and without qualms.

Theoretical Framework

Thus, the paper is grounded in the instrumentalism theory of ethnicity that understands ethnic identities in predominantly rational degrees. Nevertheless, there are two instrumentalist perspectives of especial interest that stand out, the elite perspective and the social engineering perspective.

According to Brass, he theorizes that elites and counter-elites within ethnic groups select elements from the group's culture, imbuing them with new value and meaning, and thus use them as symbols to mobilize the group, defend their interests and compete with other groups (Brass,1979). His work explains why the masses, prisoners and otherwise, often pursue what seem to be self-defeating collective goals. In those, elite interests are accommodated or preserved. While it offers much in the way of explanation, there are limits to how far it allows us to stretch the instrumentalist line. He notes that "ethnic and ethnonational identities are constructed through the selection of particular dialects or religious practices or styles of dress or historical symbols from a range of available alternatives" (Brass,1991)

Identities can be drawn from thin air: there is have to be a pre-cognate artefact to scaffold. That does not imply, however, that this artefact must be primordial: if only that, at any given moment, elites do not have free reign to define ethnocultural identity for a group.

The elitist perspective is associated with social-engineering perspective. It describes a set of systematic processes that are at work in both the formation, and the sustenance, of ethnicity. In this regard, I focus on the relevant dimensions of the work of Eric

Hobsbawm (1983) and of Ernest (Gellner 1983). Addressing this first, that of 'invented traditions', Hobsbawm argued that societal customs that may seem, and which numerous ethnic and national entities take to be, ancient or primordial are actually considerably more recent and intentional in genesis. Instrumentalists believe identity matters, given how elites determine identity and it disappears when it is no longer useful. This implies that because ethnicity is politically useful so ethnicity is deeply entrenched.

The Factors Responsible for Identity Crisis in Nigeria

There are many factors responsible for identity crises in Nigeria. The underlying cause was the merging of the country in 1914 and the struggle for independence. Overall, it is really challenging for different culture people to meet each other in most of the situation. Among the endemic factor preventing the development of a national identity and integration is the heterogeneity of the Nigerian ethnic groups that made of Nigeria and the inter-ethnic jostling for the control and distribution of national wealth.

The Amalgamation of 1914

The issue of ethnicity did not have a solid based before Nigeria has the independence from Britain, and this fundamental problem has continued to eat deep into the relevance of Nigeria as a single nation. It was hard to create patriotism and emotional loyalty to a country that was formed by a foreign conqueror, and filled with people whose previous loyalties had scarcely extended beyond their families, villages or kingdoms. It is astounding how blind the British were to the massive upheaval that merging would provoke. The British did not contemplate stabilizing the country by dividing it into territorial units in line with ethnolinguistic dominions. (Eric Teniola, 2021). To a large extent amalgamation continued to play a role in Nigeria in crises of identity.

Reflecting on this issue of identity crises, Odeyemi notes that;

The inability of the various tribal groups to negotiate their merger is at the heart of much tribal squabbling and agitations, ethnic shouts of marginalization, greedy and controversial and indeterminate census, vote rigging, stalled economic growth and nepotism in Nigeria. (Odeyemi, 2014, 9).

It was the English colonial rule's style of governance of “divide and rule” that sought to instill the legacy of changing the flexible and fluid identity relationship between the different ethnic groups in Nigeria into one of rigidity. (Oni et al 2008). They did so by using the often-biased work of colonial anthropologists to place the different ethnic groups on a spectrum of culture that they considered to be beneficial to their pursuit of dominance. Based on this, Kuna (1998,83) explains that from the beginning of colonial rule in Northern Nigerian identity was “Islamic” and “Hausa”, meaning that social categories then became even more politically dominant within the region. It is colonialism that sowed the seed of disintegration into Nigeria through the intentional system of structural disunity it instituted into the administration of the country. The British colonialists governed Nigeria as a separate country in 1914. It was spilt into four colonies: the colony of Lagos and three protectorates that include the West, the East and the North.

Some of the constitutions of the colonial era also contributed to the identity problem in Nigeria. The 1951 McPherson constitution provided more emphasis on the regions as centres of political and social life. The regions at same time made Nigerian 's politics built on that both for the form and finally for the result and that led to put the ethnic groups at front, among which Nigeria was carved properly in history. However, Diamond (1988), marked by appeals to ethnic prejudices and vituperates rhetoric's. The Federal system was enshrined in the 1954 Constitution of Littleton as it had proven itself not to douse the increasing ethnic conflicts only serving to benefit the colonial government. The thinking of Many analysts of historical development in Nigeria are of the view that the colonial

government longed for such conflict not to go down fast since such conflict took the peoples' mind away from coming to the centre to demand leadership cum political independence. However, this demand needed to be made. It was, after the first general election in 1959; the stage was set for a political independence which Nigeria received from Britain in the following year. However, the loaded gunpowder of tribal politics of bitterness was prepared for detonation in 1966

The Independence of Nigeria in 1960

Nigeria became independent from Britain in 1960. Since Nigeria is a multiethnic society, nothing was properly documented on the question of identity. On race that rouses the place, the founding fathers of Nigeria more than likely factored in other tribes and ethnicity. The quest for dominance and recognition in the Nigerian federation, which is a core motivation for the burst of violent identity conflict that the country has suffered over recent decades, lies largely in the fact that a majority of the identity groups in Nigeria are minorities and have been so for decades and yet the dominant identity groups are eternally dominant, which has significant implications for inter-ethnic and religious relations among the majority/minority ethnic and religious identities in Nigeria. So, the factors which motivates actuation, acceptance and negotiation has been eroded in this manner it poses a great challenge for the peace-building mission, as various ethnic category (Akinyetun, Tope Shola and Bakare, Kola Muheeb, 2020, 1-14).

Language Difference: This factor has created ethical questions in Nigeria, and still continues to affect the nation in many ways. For the most of the part, the people from Northern part of Nigeria are known as Hausa, The people from West are known as Yoruba, The people from East are called Igbo, People from Southern and Middle Belt speak languages like Ijaw, Kwale, Tiv, and many others. There are over 250 languages in Nigeria as a country. Felicia illuminates the complexity of Nigeria's linguistic situation when she says;

For instance, the linguistic situation in Nigeria is very complex. It is heterogeneous but, each ethnic group and its indigenous language is part of our ethnic identity even before the coming of the Europeans. This is an expression of how we are identified by the language spoken in the country. Extending on sterling's comment above, in Nigeria for example, the Yoruba man from the South West has an identity with his fellow Yoruba, language is another avenue establishing this relationship and identifying as a Yoruba man. This transcends ethnic lines in that the Igbo from the South East or the Hausa from the North who speaks the Yoruba language fluently automatically can catalyse the same kind of relationship with the Yoruba man (Oluchukwu Felicia Asadu, 168).

The language barrier remains a challenge to national development and social growth in Nigeria. In some states in Nigeria, Yoruba, Hausa or Igbo, is their business language. Those who don't understand any of these languages will leave one at a time. The fact that we are not able to manage these languages in our daily activities in a way every tribe will be carried along is the reason behind this.

Diverse Cultures in Nigerian: Culture is the life of an individual and culture is used to mention to the individuals of a nation or tribe. Much of the habits and lifestyles of the country are simply based on the region. If one relocates from his or her place of residence to another state in Nigeria, and does not check out their way of life, such scenario will bite one hard. They will be separated in one manner or the other; they will not be.” On primitive society, Edward B. Taylor (1832-1917) defines culture as a complex whole including knowledge, belief, art, morals, laws, customs and any other abilities and habits acquired by people as members of society (Orbis, Mary knoll 1988, 133-149). As a collective psychological phenomenon, he argues, culture is largely unconscious. Culture as psycho-

social real is a feature of man and society because man and collective consciences are constantly interacting. The culture of the various tribes in Nigeria in a way cost the unity and social growth of the country. For example, if you belong to the Igbo tribe and you find yourself among the people from the Northern part of Nigeria, you will be segregated in so many ways, simply because you do not belong to the culture. For example, these areas isolation represent local language and also is likely through their cultural activities.

Illiteracy and Ignorance Also Contributes to Identity Crises: This germ has eaten deep into the fabric of many Nigerians. Only certain class of people can distinguish between Local Government, Tribe and Nationality. These people tend to have more loyalty to their tribes and ethnic groups. Hence, when you ask them where are you from, they will told you that he or she come from one village or another instead of identify themselves as citizen of Nigeria. Patrick Okon in the light of this asserts that; the rate of national development is impeded by illiteracy. This aspect remains an impediment to Nigeria's development. (Patric Okon, 2022). Highly every citizen in Nigeria must begin to see nationality as more priceless than ethnicity. This will solve a long way identity problem in the country.

Acquisition of Local Government of Origin Certificate: One of the conditions made by the Federal Government of Nigeria to work in certain government establishments made acquisition of local government of origin certificate very crucial as such many people attach importance to tribe than the nation Nigeria. This is one of the reasons why many persons in Nigeria find it difficult to introduce themselves as Nigerian when you ask them about their nativity.

Solutions to Nigeria's Identity Crises Issues

More so, patriotism would immediately provide constant solutions to Identity crises and the will to correct each other for the love of our country will replace being mediocre among us if by all means every Nigerians are ready to give their all for the growth of our country. Problem of disloyalty and hatred for the country Nigeria is one of the most, that has refused to go

away in Nigeria especially among Nigerians. Most populations have a somewhat shared allegiance to their beloved nation. But Nigeria is also able to resolve the problem with the below things.

The Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria must once again be amended to guarantee that they'll have unreserved loyalty to the nation of Nigeria as every citizen of the country. Even the pitfalls concerning identity issues which form the bedrock of problem of the basic problem according to the 1999 Constitution; was lent from the 1979 Constitution. It is so because it explicitly stipulates that for one to enjoy access to positions and opportunities based on “federal character” one must be an “indigene” of the state or local government in question. Indigeneity is confirmed by evidence that one belongs to a Local Government or State via one's parents or grandparents, implying membership in a more local body of cultural and linguistic group. Hence, a person who cannot prove membership to a group of people is defined as a “stranger” who does not qualify for all the rights and privileges of indigenes and/or natives (The 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria). Demonstrating the same inclination, Section 147 of the 1999 Constitution stipulates that the president shall appoint at least one Minister from each state, who shall be an indigene of such state. (The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria). Incorporation of these provisions in the Constitution were motivated by a desire to strengthen the Federal Character Principle. This positive change on the Constitution shall however be modified in such a way that will diminish ethnic consideration and hence place premium on loyalty to the Federal Government.

Enumerating how Nigeria Constitution keeps giving birth to identity problems, Osimen Goddy said in the same vein. He notes;

It formed their dual-indigeneity, which people appear to savor and sell, to the displeasure and eventual resentment of the hosting communities. Our Constitution must be amended to provide that indigenes rights for single indigenes, for anywhere a Nigerian citizen decides to

stay will confer him indigenous rights only for the state where that Nigerian citizen is staying. Therefore, his or her State of origin is only the State of residence in which he or she is living and also earning. There must of course be no doubt about what is meant here and it is nothing less than the abrogation and freezing of the concept of State of origin and for the first time in the history of humanity everybody automatically becomes the indigene of the State he or she is staying and earning his or her daily bread. No more of the to-ing and fro-ing between the two poles, no more ferrying of personal goods across the great divide between the two poles, no more marriage between "home-boy" and "home-girl", as a considered act of rooting himself in his "State of Origin". Osimen Goddy U. 2013, 85).

The identity problem spawned by this Constitution has not yet been wiped from the nation. The problem has also worsened into crisis and riots in some areas especially among some tribes in the Federation. This descends the politics of ethnicity in Nigeria, and this will give a solution to the matter of identity in Nigeria. This still unresolved identity issue keeps manifesting itself throughout our country in various forms. Virtually everyone values his or her tribe more than the Nation. On the issue of ethnicity bedvelling the nation politically and socially, Eghosa E. Osaghae and Rotimi T. Suberu, point out in this direction;

that ethnicity pervades every facet of life and is widely viewed as the most fundamental and politically potent identity in Nigeria. In both competitive and non-competitive environments, Nigerians define themselves based on their ethnic affiliations more than any other identity (Eghosa E. Osaghae and Rotimi T. Suberu, 2005, 27), and this attests to the claim.

If only every Nigerian begins to value the nationality of Nigeria over tribes and ethnicity, such identity crisis can be put to rest. In related development, Lewis and Bratton state that according to the seminal 2000 survey on “Attitudes to Democracy and Markets in Nigeria”, ethnicity “is demonstrably the most salient group identity in Nigeria” (Lewis and Bratton 2000: 27).

But in a notable recent survey addressing issues of identity, it found that nearly half of Nigerians but the vast majority—55.2%—dented for ethnic identity, against just under a third (28.4%) who preferred class identities and 21.0% who picked a religious identity. In fact, nearly two in three people consider themselves to belong to primordial ethnic, regional and religious groups. But “Nigerians are more likely to gather around the cultural solidarities of kin than the class solidarities of the workplace” (Lewis and Bratton 2000: 25). Moreover, “religious and ethnic identities are more fully formed, more holistic and more strongly felt than class identities” and are reflected in the fact that “whereas pride in group identity is nearly universal among those who identify with religious and ethnic communities...loyalty to a social class is somewhat less certain and pride in it even less so” (Lewis and Bratton 2000: 26). Under such circumstances, all of this is not surprising, given that ethnic formations are possibly the most historically resilient social units in the country, which were also further buttressed by colonial and post-colonial regimes. (Lewis and Bratton 2000: 24–26).

The social and political problems that came with identity have robbed many youths of the opportunity to work. The issue regarding identity beyond economy, politics and governance remains a major challenge to nation building in the country. At times it led to intense conflicts and clashes in the country.

Besides, the Federal government needs to initiate a programme that has the potential to create oneness. Such programmes will further impress the need to priority undivided loyalty to the nation Nigeria rather than on ethnicity.

Such a programme should educate all citizens on why he or she need to introduce himself or herself as a Nigerian before asking of his or her tribe. Do this and a semblance of nationhood will emerge. Examples of such state policies meant to integrate the various ethnic nationalities into one entity are: The National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), the Unity Schools, the Federal Character Principle and State Creation were all national integration programmes initiated by the Federal Government since independence (Alapiki, 2005). The reason these programmes were intended to be introduced have been vanquished. Thus Federal government should initiate other initiative that will lead Nigerian unity rather than tribal unity in Nigeria.

Adding to this, Nigeria has been divided along religious line. I am Muslims, was the introduction of some classes of people and I am Christians. Some Nigerians find it difficult that I have to say I am a Nigerian. Nigeria has three segments of religious identities, which are Christians, Muslims and Traditional African Religion. Traditional Religion is the least practised in terms of numerical strength; it consists of several hundreds of ethnic groups and subgroups, villages, clans and kin groups as well as the worship of different gods and goddesses consisting of the three dominant religions. In any other parts of Kogi, Kwara, and Nassarawa state, masquerade activities often derived from traditional religion have been a problem from conflicts. (Eghosa E. Osaghae en Rotimi T. Suberu, A 2005, 27). Christian and Muslim identities are the main bases of religious differentiation and conflict, but Nigerian Muslims are far more likely to verbalise a religious identity than Christians (Lewis and Bratton 2000: 5). The religious issue pertaining to identity should be downplayed. Our Nationality is our Identity and when you are asked, what is your nationality, you should aim to answer: I am a Nigerian it is better than knowing diseases of a particular tribe.

Conclusion and Recommendation

From the analysis thus far, identity crisis could an be addressed politically, socially and administratively. Every citizen of the nation needs to play their part and as well contribute their quota in addressing this bedevilling issue

that continues to affect the nation in many areas. On the side of the Federal Government, the Constitution needs to be amended again with the aim of addressing these ethical and identity problems affecting the nation. Every Nigerian should be acquainted and imparted with the spirit of patriotism.

The paper, therefore, recommends that every citizen of Nigeria should be taught how to put the nation first before any ethnic interest.

Journalists, men of God, and the press should always be truthful in their reports, particularly when it involves an ethnic and religious crisis. The formation of associations and groups that are ethnic in nature should be discouraged, while groups and organisations that promote Nigerianism should be upheld and encouraged. The government should establish orientation programmes on the need to educate the citizens of the nation on how to attach importance to the nation of Nigeria rather than placing a high premium on ethnicity.

Since many citizens in Nigeria have adopted the nomenclature of unreserved loyalty to ethnicity, the government should come up with a slogan that will promote the unity of the country. In addition, Nigeria should come up with another form of national registration that will promote Nigerianism.

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