THE BASIS FOR DEFINING ETHNIC AND CULTURAL SUSTAINABILITY IN NIGERIA: PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Nigeria is a conglomerate nation, that is, a nation consisting of a multiplicity of ethnic groups or nationalities which are heterogeneous and pluralistic in various respects. The diversities among the various ethnic groups are best demonstrated in their differing linguistic and cultural heritage, social disparities, disproportional population sizes, uneven economic resources, educational imbalances, historical evolution, administrative systems and religion. In Nigeria today, ethnicity clearly constitutes a social problems. However, the objective of this paper is to critically examine ethnic and cultural sustainability in Nigeria. The paper observed that Nigeria is combination of ethnic groups with diverse history, culture, religion, language and tradition. The paper in its findings observed that Nigerian peoples have since the establishment of a federal structure in 1945 interacted and work together. This caused the walls of ethnic isolationism and marginalization to collapse. Ethnic and cultural sustainability was fostered by religion, trade, war or conflict, politics, sports, economic activities, exchange of cultural items, inter-marriages, education, festivals and carnival. Finally, the paper noted that there is the need to sustain ethnic and cultural sustainability in Nigeria especially as the nation prepare for 2019 General Election.The basic research methodology adopted for the study is a historical survey involving the use of both primary and secondary sources of data. Data for the study were collected through the use of oral interviews and library research.

Keywords: Ethnic, Ethnicity, Culture, Cultural, Sustainability, Nigeria, Politics, Economy, Social and Religion

Introduction

Before the arrival of the Europeans, the territories existed as different empires, kingdom, clans, village groups, communities, hamlets and kindred groups of different ethnics groups. The present composition of Nigeria as a nation is a recent development. Until 1914 when Sir Frederick Lugard Amalgamated Northern provinces into a simple geo-political entity and the territory had existed as consulates, protectorates and districts in structures which served the imperial designs of the European governments (Udoka, 2000; Kalu et al, 2018).

Ethnic groups are social formations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries. The relevant communal factors may be language, culture, religion, law, knowledge, custom, economic activities, social patterns and politics pattern and politics. As social formations, ethnic groups are not necessarily homogenous entities even linguistically and culturally. Minor linguistic and cultural differences often exist within the groups forming the basis for the delineation of sub-ethnic systems. More important still is the possibility of occupational and class differentiation. This is dependent on the level of production in the group, the level of growth of the productive forces, and the consequent extent of the division of labour within the social formation. In this regard, different ethnic groups may have a similar pattern of social differentiation (Nnoli 1978).

A society must rest on a set of moral beliefs to progress and unite the pattern of inter-human relations and symbols which the traditional technology and physical environment produce. It is a natural tissue which joins the vast majority of the population as they make their living. Ethnic and cultural consciousness is the central element in the creativity of a people (Nnoli,1978). Nigeria has more than 250 ethnic groups and in the near future, the number of ethnic groupings in Nigeria might increase geographically. The larger and politically dominant groups include the Igbo, Hausa/Fulani and the Yoruba other prominent but minority in nature include Edo, Ibibio, Tiv, Nupe, Annang, Ijaw, Kanuri, Efik, Ishan, ItsekiriNembe, Kalabari, and Urhobo.

Culture is here defined as that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief or religion, arts, morals, law, language, agriculture custom, tradition and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society (Iwe, 1985, Modo, 1994,Udofia, 2000). African culture is the reflection of the way of life of the people with their distinctive genius and spirit, their fundamental character, their orientations, world view institutions and achievement in various fields. Culture is both material and immaterial in nature. Presently, the diverse culture is characterized with its authentic institution and patterns of behaviour. It highly values social justice, ideas of truth, liberty, equity, hard work and peaceful co-existence though there are ethnic and cultural impediments to them. The Nigerian culture is growing and developing and has not yet attained full maturity as a culture. The Nigerian culture has been deeply affected by foreign inspired cultures and standards at the brink of losing its distinctive identity. Presently, Nigeria is characterized by ethnic and religious problems, marginalization, educational imbalances, economic and uneven distribution of wealth, corruption, killing and disunity, conflicting loyalties, lack of consensus, personality clashes and spirit of competition (kalu, 2018).

The methodology adopted for the study was historical survey method.Data was gathered from sample relevant population who are familiar with the issues of cultural sustainability.Library research was done and oral interviews conducted.The instrument was validated by experts in the field and reliability of the instruments established.The result presented was based on the data generated from oral source and library research.It is against these ugly trends that this paper seeks to examine ethnic and cultural sustainability as a solution to Nigeria's problem.

Cultural Sustainability

Cultural sustainability is an important part of the cultural side of sustainable development. Cultural diversity is necessary for sustainable development for two reasons: the first is human survival as a means of cultural existence. The coexistence of various cultures leads to humans being able to better adapt to the environment. It is because of the coexistence of diverse cultures that the human race has overcome environmental change and continued to survive. The emergence of differing culture and maintenance of cultural diversity has raised the possibility of the human race to adapt to environmental change in the future. Furthermore, in order for culture itself to retain its creativity and vitality, the existence of other cultures is a must. New ideas are born from other cultures, and the source of cultural creativity lies within constant encounters between different cultures. The second reason is guarantee of security and the safeguarding of human rights for minorities. Lack of mutual understanding between countries causes war, conflicts and terrorism. To build peace that leads to development, it is necessary to have mutual understanding and tolerance between cultures. If people accept cultural diversity and understanding cultures other than their own, it will contribute to the prevention of conflict, building of peace and development. Hence, cultural diversity in Nigeria nation should be seen as an asset rather than a burden.

It is saddening, and maybe appalling, that Nigeria with a lot of ethnic groups and rich culture is having culture decline as a result of neglect of her culture and the assumption and assimilation of a foreign or alien culture. Colonialism, inferiority complex, ignorance and half-education are the most basic reasons for culture decline in Nigeria. It is an established fact that an average human society should have a way of life she could call hers. There is no gainsaying the fact that one's culture is one's identity. Culture is not static but dynamic and as a result, it could be lost through conquest or subtle missionary agencies, if care is not taken. Indigenous cultures in Nigeria are dying gradually ever since the British stepped on the pre-colonial Nigerian lands and thereafter launched her colonial policy in the territory of this nation called Nigeria. The whole world is currently pursuing the attainment of a set of goals termed Sustainable Development Goals. Inclusive and equitable education as well as the promotion of life-long learning principles for all is Goal 4 of the Sustainable Development Goals. To this end, the appreciation of cultural diversity as well as the contribution of culture to sustainable development is the mandate of Target 4.7 of Goal 4 of the SDGs. Goal 11 and Target 11.4 enjoins Nations to strengthen efforts to protect and safeguard the world's cultural and natural heritage. The development and implementation of tools to monitor sustainable development impacts for sustainable tourism which creates and promotes local culture and as well as ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns is Goal 12, Target 12.4, of the SDGs. The cultures of the Nigerian people are gradually dying; in fact, some have gone into extinction, and some are at the verge of extinction.

In this paper, some theories that seek to explain the relevance of ethnic and cultural sustainability in Nigeria in relation to the present study and discussed below:

1.   **Functionalism or functional theory:** Functional theory attempts to show how the many elements of each society combine to create and preserve social order. To the functionalists, an institution that survives is by definition "functional" and institutions harmful or dysfunctional to society as a whole will not survive.

All classes and groups within a society normally share certain core values which hold that society together and each group or class makes a contribution to the society as a whole. Each group plays a part in maintaining the society's consensus. The functionalists stress social harmony, consensus and cohesion through consistent values promoted by the family, educational institutions, religious groups, peer groups and other social institutions (Parsons, 1977; Kalu et al 2018).

Functionalists do not argue that the many parts of a society are always perfectly integrated, because sometimes, they are not. When basic institutions conflict, the strain spreads throughout society, since all these institutions (ethnic groups) are interconnected, although society's normal conditions as the functionalists see it, is balanced equilibrium, conflict between social institutions may at times upset this balance and create pressure for social change. Temporary disharmony sets the stage for the creation of New Harmony (Kalu, 2015).

Through this theory, the diverse and different ethnic groups in Nigeria interrelate with one another irrespective of cultural differences, religious differences and social imbalances.

2.   **Conflict Theory**
Conflict theorists emphasize antagonism and conflict rather than consensus. No society can be in true equilibrium. For all class societies, one class exploits the others.

Exploitation creates conflict and violence, and eventually, social change. These contributions set the stage for a revolutionary violence that propels society to a new and higher stage, creating new social groups and classes, new antagonism and new sources of conflicts. The final stage of history, communism, represents a kind of society or social

plateau, a point where all conflicts have been resolved and social change and revolution are no longer needed (Goode, 1984).

Nigeria as a nation is having this problem and this theory captures the basic arguments of this study as well. The problem of Nigeria is the exploitation of some sections, groups or classes in the country by the dominant ethnic groups. In every society, social groups and classes complete with one another for scarce resources, often economic resources, and political positions, religious and cultural beliefs. Sometimes this competition breaks out in overt violence. Most conflicts, however, usually involves peaceful demonstrations and protests, debates in the mass media group agitations foe economic and political control, election conflict, lopsided political appointments and the subversion of laws which often end in polarization of social groups. The target-product of conflict in Nigeria is usually peace, therefore, conflict situation tends to bring people together for peace building etc. (Udoka, 2000).

3. The Institutional Theory

Proponents of this theory argued that in a developing society like Nigeria. There is the need for good leadership as a way of preserving ethnic and cultural sustainability. This theory is of the opinion that for a society to develop and maintain her unity, it must create political, social, cultural, economic and religious institutions that are capable of evolving innovative policies of social integration, ethnic harmony and unity, peaceful co-existence as well as sustainable development. The Socio-cultural, economic and religious institutions in Nigeria are aimed at bringing the diverse ethnic groups together for harmony, unity, love and progress.

(c) The Chequered Ethnic and Cultural Situation in Nigeria

Nigeria is a multi ethnic and cultural nation. According to Musa (1985,) the diversities among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria are demonstrated in their differing linguistic and cultural heritage, social activities and disparities, uneven population size, disparities in economic resources, educational imbalance, religious conflicts etc. These diversities have generated tensions in politics, mutual suspicion and disgust, intolerance and conflicts among Nigerians which have, at times, threatened and endangered the cooperate existence of Nigeria. For Agboike (1999), the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial history of Nigeria is replete with these conflicts and upheavals which have given rise on several occasions to insecurity of lives and properties of particular mention is the history and memories if pre-colonial wars, raids and other hostilities which were common place among the various peoples of Nigeria.

The colonial policy of indirect rule and divide-and rule helped in no small way to promote and foster the spirit of political, social, economic, religious, cultural and educational dichotomy between the Northern and Southern Nigeria. The policy too, did not encourage horizontal interactions among the various people of the nation.

The policy practice of regionalism adopted by the colonial administration in the governance of the country several to transform the vague awareness of the differences among the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria into a conscious instrument of politics. With the regionalization of the country, which restructured the nation into tri-national state, sectional loyalties were introduced into the politics of Nigeria till today.

Regionalism was built in the bogus theory that "one should be loyal to and protect the interest of one's region to the exclusion of others" (Osaghae, 1989). The system did not achieve its objective rather the system escalated mutual suspicion and intolerance among the various Nigerian peoples and groups.

The formation of political parties and the game of politics played in ethnic and regional chauvinism in Nigeria which resulted in the marginalization of ethnic minorities in the country. The creation of states in the country did not solve the problems of ethnic

minorities' whose interests continued to be peripherally addressed. In addition, it is common historical experience that inter and intra-party feuds and hostilities have, over the years, very often characterized the relationship among the various political parties in Nigeria particularly during general elections. A typical example is the intra-party disputes found in political parties in Nigeria over defections and inter-party disputes between APC and PDP over power. However, most of these political conflicts and the instability which they generated will have *adversely affected the process of ethnic and cultural sustainability as well as nation building* as a result of the factional struggles for power, internecine competition and lack of unity of purpose among the members of the elite class in the country. These politicians have unpatriotically orchestrated the diversities in the nation and to have sparked off disruptive ethnic and cultural beliefs which affected the peace and unity of Nigeria.

Religious issues, especially since independence has been a source of perennial conflicts and violence in Nigeria between the adherents of Christians and Muslims as well as traditional religious. Religious conflicts showed their ugly faces during the Jihads of Usman Dan Fodio. Today, Boko Haram has taken the centre stage in religious war against who they call infidels. The religious fanaticism and intolerance of Islam and Christianity have constituted a disturbing variable in the realization of the nation's dream of ethnic and cultural stability, integration and unity.

Ethnicity which is a social phenomenon associated with interactions among members of different ethnic groups is one of Nigeria's biggest problems. Ethnicity clearly constitutes a social problem in Nigeria. Millions of Nigerians are systematically discriminated against for their cultural beliefs and ethnic background. In Nigeria, ethnicity implies negative feelings directed against in ethnic group and its members. The negative attitude that characterized ethnicity is called Prejudice, while the behaviour directed towards an ethnic group which is motivated by prejudice is called Stereotype (Ogbogu, 2018). The marginalization of the Igbo and refusal to give them BIAFRA is purely because of ethnicity. Conflict is an important aspect of ethnicity. Ethnicity is as a result of difference in ethnic nationalities. Onyia and Aniche (2001) describe ethnicity as a situation when an ethnic group sees itself as "we" and others as "they" and psychologically consider themselves as pitches in a perpetual battle of survival against others.

(d)   Achieving Ethnic and Cultural Sustainability In Nigeria
The following factors are considered to be the ways of improving ethnic and cultural sustainability in Nigeria:

1.   Religious Relations
According to Adebola (2006), "Religion is a unifying factor in inter-group relations in Nigeria". Religion has been the source of tolerance and understanding because it cuts across ethnic differences. People worship together in the Church, Mosque and traditional shrines. Christian and Muslims have maintained a far-reaching healthy religious relationship that is now common experience to see the attendance of each other's worship with less inhibition during political campaigns,burials and official religious ceremonies(Adebola,2006).It is also normal occurrence these days to see Muslim being invited and contributing to the fund-raising ceremonies towards the building of a church as his Christian counterparts would also freely and happily do same in a similar event for the building of a Mosque.This was the case of the building of the Presbyterian church cathedral at Ohafia where muslims donated for the building in 2009(kalu,2015).

Granted, religion has become a source of crises between muslim and Christians but that is not withstanding, objectively, it is evident that religion is indeed essential to social integration and nation-building in Nigeria through its Sacred or Ultimate commitment to some set of norms, value and beliefs. In other words, it has provided a sense of sharing

social integration to the collective of the entire members of the Nigeria society. There is always a religious dialogue after religious crises to restore peace (Stark, 1966; Awoniyi, 2006). Religion is also a great political mobilizing tool in terms of electioneering campaigns, party affiliation, voting behaviour, pressure groups and diplomatic relations. Furthermore, the paths created by the slave trades in the South provided safe route for Christianity to permeate the hinterland from the coast. The establishment of Christianity in Yoruba land is very instructive in this respect. It was the returnee slaves who had earlier embrace Christianity brought it to Yoruba land. Ajayi (1965) has explained that the Egba accepted Christianity on the understanding that they would be precluded from attack by slave traders. In Calabar area, Christianity spread through trade routes earlier created by the Aro slave traders. Many Christian churches like the Catholic, Anglican, Pentecostals Churches as well as white-garment churches have their members drawn from all ethnic groups in Nigeria.Christians from diverse ethnic backgrounds in Nigeria interacts in their different churches during religious programmes.Religious leaders were posted out of their states,communities and villages to other ethnic groups for church planting,evangelism and mission works.

2.   Political Relations

The establishment of federalism in 1945 united the different ethnic groups together politically. Politicians from different ethnic enclaves came together for the very first time and there was exchange of political ideals and culture. The politicians trained in multi-ethnic colleges, who congregated in urban areas that formed the first crop of nationalists that fought and overthrew colonialism in Nigeria. One important product of interactions during the colonial period was consensus building among Nigerians from diverse ethnic groups.

In the political setting of the nation, in the three decades, the relationship among the ethnic groups has always been geared towards unity and brotherhood so as to make the sovereignty of the nation work. To achieve this objective, different ethnic groups have made magnanimous gestures of cooperation, membership of political parties, voting and election into offices have always been based on varying socio-political factor. There has been the policy to balance out political offices to make for harmony and social integration. In sharing of political power, the principles of federal character and zoning of political offices factors of inter-group relations in Nigeria (Agboike,2006;Udoka,2000;Adewale, 1989).

3.   Socio-Cultural Relations

According to Adewale (1989), "Nigerians co-exist in villages, towns, cities and most government departments and business houses are a mixture of people from different ethnic groups. Christians and Muslims work together, eat together, drink together and travel together. Social clubs and associations in many cases have member from different ethnic groups coming to look after the affairs of the association'.

The element adopted from each other include mode of dressing, from of speaking, religious groups and cultural items. These days, it is common to see Christian using traditional Muslim dressing patterns and Muslim youth now dress in Christian form of dressing that is they put on shirts and trousers. In social interactions, we frequently see Christians and Muslims attending each other's parties naming ceremonies, marriage, fund-raising ceremonies and other social functions and participating in all of them fully in the spirit of brotherhood. During religious activities such as Easter and Christmas for the Christians and Idel-Fitri and Id-ii-Kbir for Muslims there are exchanges of greetings, visits and gifts to demonstrate neighborliness and brotherhood as evidence of peaceful co-existence and social integration (Adebola, 2006).

4.   Economic Relations

The interaction among the different ethnic groups range from the common form of trading were they meet in buying and selling in the market in different parts of the country to the complex and exclusive mutual involvements in industrial undertakings. At the industrial level, we have people from different parts of the country working together in companies established by both Christian and Muslims. Economic activities are part of social integration and people have always united under the banner of the same social and economic rights, having common markets, similar economic base between societies and social integration can be easily strengthened. People from the south depend from the north for agricultural commodities like onions,beans,yam,carrot,watermelom,cow,sheep,maize,leather products,milk products etc., while the south supply palm oil,crude oil,garri,vegetable to the north.There is tripartite trade relations amongst the Hausa,Igbo and Yoruba as well as the minor ethnic groups in Nigeria(Awoniyi,2006).

5.   Educational Relations

In the educational field, the relation that has grown among the different ethnic groups has been largely positive. Not only has the educational system in the country brought members of various ethnic nationalities into close contact, like the unity schools, federal government owned universities and tertiary institution. Developing in them attitude of cooperation, tolerance and mutual struggling for the enlightenment and progress of the society, they have both employed the gains of education to come together to better knowledge and understanding of the relationship between each other. Children from different family and ethnic backgrounds come together in cultures other than there to collectively serve the country in a National Youth Service Corp at the end of their tertiary education and all these have gone a long way to afford students from different ethnic groups ample opportunities to study together, work together and build mutually positive relationship many a time through marriages. *This has no doubt enhanced peaceful co-existence and strengthened social* integration, ethnic and cultural sustainability (Agboike, 2006).

(e)   Evaluation of Ethnic andcultural Sustainability in Nigeria

There are positive resources in cultural and African Traditional Religion in achieving ethnic and cultural sustainability. Religion inculcates in Nigeria a deep sense of communality which people manifestly demonstrate in their social relationships. African Traditional Religion act as a bulwark against the erosion of such traditional structures and institutions as family, linage unity, tribal unity, ethnic unity and kinship relationships which are very essential for ethnic and cultural sustainability in Nigeria.

African traditional religion and culture also uphold the cherished values of people like respect for elders, leader, parents and national values of the country. The norms of the different ethnic groups prescribed traditional educational system that ensure that children were taught basic skills and were appropriately socialized and made to imbibe the norms and cherished traditional values of the society. The adherence and observance to these norms and values made for harmony, peaceful co-existence and social justice among the ethnic groups. In view of this development, everyone was his brother's keeper and the extended family system practiced by the people was used to care for the young and the age in the society.

Ethnic Sustainability is the act or process of building a linkage or synergy where people from different ethnic backgrounds live peacefully in harmony,inter marry,work together,do business together,sharing of cultural beliefs and items,religious harmony,tolerance,genuine love etc. Sadly, every form of differences is immediately attributed to religion which is very untrue.

The objective of ethnic cultural sustainability essentially was to provide ways and means by which the people achieve peace and harmony, and co-exist among themselves. Through celebration of festivals different ethnic groups and cultural enclaves come together to share cultural values, merrymaking and also improve the psychological wellbeing of the people. Nigerians need to resort to these factors as a sure way to promote mutual tolerance and achieve enduring and sustainable reconciliation among the embattled people and groups in Nigeria.

The spirit of mutual cooperation, fraternal love, social solidarity, ethnic consciousness and cultural sustainability inherent in the society be invoked and channel towards inspiring Nigerians to see themselves as one irrespective of diverse ethnic affiliation, different religion and culture. Ethnic sustainability has to do with those ethnic values, norms and traditions that helps to build an enduring relations, peaceful coexistence and brotherhood devoid of war and conflict. It tends to build ethnic capacity for future peace and development across the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria.

(d)   **Recommendations**

From the findings of this paper, the following are hereby recommended as a way forward:

1. Restructuring of Nigeria in order to accommodate the minority ethnic and marginalized groups is inevitable and ethnic denomination by the large groups would go a long way in solving the problem of Nigeria.
2. Nigeria needs ethnics and cultural dialogue to achieve her ethnic and cultural sustainability, right attitude, value and cooperation among the ethnic groups should be paramount.
3. There should be the continuous encouragement of the spirit of cooperation, unity, love and fruitful social integration which is aimed together irrespective of cultural, religion, tribe, colour and ethnic origin.
4. Sustainable reconciliation of the aggrieved ethnic groups, religious groups and persons is a vehicle for ethnic and cultural sustainability.
5. Removal of ethnic and cultural mutual suspicion and hatred which have characterized relations among Nigeria peoples would bring the much needed ethnic and cultural sustainability.
6. The adoption and implementation of good mechanisms to enhance inter-groups relation aimed at fostering social harmony, integration and unity must be proactive.
7. Finally, there should be institutionalized programmes aimed at inculcating discipline, tradition of hard work, love national unity, and sustainable national interest.

(e)   **Conclusion**

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic and cultural nation with more than 250 ethnic groups. Contrary to Eurocentric opinion that the different ethnic groups in Nigeria never interacted, it is the task of this paper to refute such assertion. This paper has revealed that there were areas of ethnic and cultural sustainability through economics relations, political relations, cultural relations, marriage, educational relations, religious relations etc. From this standpoint, one could predict a future or ethnic and cultural integration, solidification of tolerance and peaceful co-existence among the different ethnic groups. Such values will discourage the rampant inter-ethnic conflicts that stand in the way of national unity, progress, cooperation, social integration, brotherhood, love and togetherness. Such a relationship if achieved would put Nigerian in the fore front and limelight in the international community especially as the nation prepares for the 2019 general Election that breeds violence and ethnic war.

Finally, the understanding and practice of good ethnic and cultural values should be so generous and all-embracing to enable people stay together as one indivisible nation. The resources of our ethnic diversification should be our strength and not disunity in the attempt to harness our culture for societal progress and development. Nigerians are rooted in their culture and are acknowledged to be very religious peoples too. All these have helped in achieving meaningful and sustainable ethnic and cultural sustainability Nigerian.

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