URBANISATION, ETHNICITY AND THE QUESTION OF THE NIGERIAN IDENTITY

By

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Abstract

Nigeria, as a developing nation, continues to experience urbanisation uniquely. The nature of Nigeria's urbanisation, steeped in lack of industrialisation and high unemployment, aggravates the problem of ethnicity and the question of the Nigerian identity in the urban centres. Though the creation of Nigeria by the British Colonial Government as an amalgamation of diverse ethnic groups in one geographical space is the foundation of its intractable problems, it is inadequate to account for the country's current underdevelopment and poor social cohesion. Successive bad leadership has played a crucial role in the degeneration and predicament of the country. This paper assesses the issues of urbanisation, ethnicity and the question of the Nigerian identity. It contributes that while myriads of problems bedevil Nigeria, dishonesty and lack of the rule of law exemplified by the government and citizenry are their fundamental anchors. Therefore, a preoccupation with the values of honesty and the rule of law and the building of solid public institutions and infrastructures to transform Nigerian polity is indispensable. These would set the country on an all-encompassing path of progress and prosperity for all and facilitate the construction of the hitherto elusive Nigerian identity. Conflict theory is the theoretical framework for this paper, and the method adopted is historical analysis.

Keywords: cohesion, development, ethnicity, identity, urbanisation

Introduction

It is unarguable that Nigeria has yet to emerge strong and socially cohesive from its history of British oppression of colonialism and eventual artificial creation, which arbitrarily merged different ethnic groups into one geographical entity called Nigeria. The country continues to witness social disruption and radical changes, including the challenge of urbanisation, ethnicity and the Nigerian identity. Authors, including Gugler and Flanagan, writing in the late 1970s,

noted, "Despite a lack of commensurate industrial growth, West Africa experienced the most rapid rate of urban population growth of any region in the world between 1950 and 1970" (2). This pattern of urban growth without industrialisation continues in the 21st century through substantial rural-urban migration, resulting in a high unemployment rate in urban centres. Nigeria, in particular, is at the top of this trend as it continues to experience poor socioeconomic conditions and political instability since independence. Successive bad leadership has ensured that the country remains underdeveloped as many of the hitherto few industries have become comatose; some liquidated, while others have left the country and relocated elsewhere. The lack of basic amenities and infrastructures in rural areas, the desire for better livelihoods, and insecurity have been Nigeria's chief drivers of rural-urban migration. Although multiculturalism and ethnicity pose challenges to any contemporary society, developed or developing, the pattern of urbanisation in Nigeria complicates the matter of ethnicity and the question of National identity.

Globally, urbanisation has turned many cities into multicultural arenas where people from different ethnic groups interact regularly. In Nigeria, urban dwellers have shifted from rural farming to urban professions, thus heightening the struggle for the limited available opportunities. Due to poor public and social institutions in Nigeria, ethnic associations play some exigent useful roles by providing support, livelihood, and ethnic identity for migrants. However, these associations have not promoted social cohesion and values like justice, tolerance, and unity beyond their particular groups. This narrow focus does not foster a sense of belonging for all citizenry as it promotes exclusiveness for members of the ethnic associations. As such, it does not encourage trust among people of different ethnic affiliations nor provides upward mobility

for the generality of the people. All these markers are the opposites of the hallmarks of social cohesion.

While the influx of people from different ethnic backgrounds to the urban centres widens social interaction, it also worsens the problem of ethnicity as individuals and groups deploy it in their quest for survival and relevance in the urban centres. As a result, these ethnic associations become platforms for political groupings to struggle for political power and economic resources within their urban locations, which leads to ethnicity that weakens social cohesion. Though the difficulty of ethnicity associated with urbanisation occurs globally despite the advancement of the global economy and technology in developed societies, the Nigerian case seems worse, affecting development and prosperous living. Therefore, it has become imperative to examine urbanisation, ethnicity and the question of the Nigerian identity to curb existing dysfunctionality in the polity. This paper advocates that stakeholders in the Nigerian project, especially political leaders, should build solid public institutions that would drive the country's development, bring about shared prosperity among the generality of the citizenry and guarantee peaceful coexistence among the diverse ethnic groups within it. It is expected that reliable public institutions, which guarantee equality and inclusivity, will create room for the emergence of the Nigerian identity that all and sundry could embrace. When that is achieved, ethnic associations will no longer be vehicles for ethnicity and the weakening of social cohesion but will concern themselves with their primary role of providing customs regarding marriage, kinship, friendship, ceremonies, ritual beliefs, and practices to their members.

Conceptual Clarification

Urbanisation

Mutuku accepts that urbanisation refers to the rise in urban population, which is attributed to the migration of people from rural areas to cities and major towns in the country, leading to an influx and proportional increase in urban residents (2). The United States Protection Agency states that urbanisation refers to the concentration of human populations into discrete areas, which leads to the transformation of land for residential, commercial, industrial and transportation purposes. It can include densely populated centres and their adjacent periurban or suburban fringes ("Urbanization-Overview"). Anderson shows that researchers have used the term urbanisation in various ways because it is nuanced. She explains that urbanisation encompasses more than just a population increase in cities as it involves a shift in the proportion of people residing in cities compared to those in rural areas. The term takes on a broader meaning when it refers to a stage in the social development of advanced industrial societies, sometimes known as structural urbanisation.

Moreover, urbanisation is commonly associated with urban lifestyles, not exclusively confined to cities. This understanding, known as behavioural urbanisation, highlights urban lifestyles characterised by isolation, individualism and calculated behaviour (26). Little also remarks on behavioural urbanisation, saying, "By urbanisation is meant the process whereby people acquire material and non-material elements of culture, behaviour patterns and ideas that originate in or are distinctive of the city" (7). This paper recognises the nuances of urbanisation but clarifies that its narrow view of the proportional increase of population in the city compared to the countryside suffices for the present study. This view fits the Nigerian situation and many other African countries because behavioural urbanisation, characterised by isolation, individualism and anonymism, which characterise Western urbanism, is largely missing in Nigeria and most of Africa.

Ethnicity

Defining ethnicity encounters some difficulty because of how experts from various disciplines construe the term. Ethnicity is a term coined to replace the older word, "race", which became compromised by "racism." Yet, ethnicity has not succeeded in replacing race, thus raising the question of whether race and ethnicity are synonymous or aspects of the same phenomenon (Sollors 26). Some commentators consider ethnicity and ethnic group as synonyms, referring to a large group of people having shared culture, common ancestry, and language. In contrast, others distinguish between the terms, indicating that "ethnicity" refers to contention between ethnic groups. In his explanation, Cohen states that an ethnic group is a distinct social group that shares common institutions like kinship and religion and can easily communicate among themselves. Ethnicity refers to conflicts between these groups where people emphasise their identity and exclusiveness (4). This paper adopts Cohen's definition of ethnic group and ethnicity and their distinction.

Ethnic Association

In this paper, ethnic association refers to an association, group, or union formed on the existing identifiable ethnic groups to promote common interests and achieve goals for the benefit of members. The urban dwellers in the cities usually create these associations to cater to their needs and maintain a link to their cultural/ancestral roots for development. It is in the urban centres that ethnic consciousness and affiliation are predominantly seen and felt in people's lives (Ofili and Omoro 215). Associational ethnicity is one of Africa's most studied dimensions of contemporary ethnicity. Political scientists, geographers, economists and social historians have studied ethnic associations because of their all-encompassing functions (Osaghae 6). Osaghae noted four perspectives about ethnic associations in his discussion. First is the adaptive mechanism

perspective developed from the functionalist tradition, positing that ethnic associations emerged in the urban areas in response to the needs of newcomers who are trying to adapt to their newfound abode that may be unfamiliar and unwelcoming (13). The second perspective emphasises the welfare or socioeconomic and political tasks of ethnic associations. In this regard, they fill gaps left by governments in providing public goods and services, thus attracting members based on these provisions (14). These associations serve the needs of both urban dwellers and the home region. The third focuses on the mediating role of ethnic associations between individuals or groups and the state due to the lack of a direct relationship between migrants and the state (or host systems). Thus, ethnic associations act as intermediaries, protecting the interests of migrants and facilitating redress or compensation in relevant matters (15). The fourth perspective explains ethnic associations in terms of the desire on the part of members forming it, to develop their home town (16).

Theoretical Framework: Conflict Theory

Conflict has been a constant aspect of human existence, evolving through time. The theoretical framework of this study is the conflict theory expounded by Marx and others. The Industrial Revolution, characterised by demographic changes, poverty, and class disparities, influenced Marx's conflict scholarship. Marx's analysis focused on class conflict and inspired a political revolution to reshape economic and social relations and eliminate social conflict (Bartos and Wehr 2). Marx's idea of dialectical materialism or economic determination recognises the economy as the base structure of society. The mode of production (capitalism) makes the owners of the means of production exploiters of workers forced to sell their labour for far less than what they contributed to production. This arrangement creates social stratification and inequality between the Burgeoises and the Proletariat. Other contributors to conflict scholarship, notably

Max Weber, have, however, criticised the traditional Marxist model's emphasis on economic factors, which leaves out other elements such as ethnic, racial, and religious divisions, political parties, organisation factions in modern corporation and state, friendship groups in the community and social mobility thus assuming a monocausal explanation for a multicausal world (Collins 13). Despite the non-realisation of the Marxist's hope of a revolution to reshape economic and social relations, the Marxist theory can serve as a call to a judicious use of society's natural resources and commonwealth to address inequality. This paper accepts a conflict theory that incorporates Weber's other factors within the framework of the Marxist conflict theory.

Multiculturalism and the Challenge of Ethnicity

Commentators have noted that for many years, social sciences preferred to ignore the brute fact of ethnic identity, but that is no longer the case. Recently, the tide has changed so much that many observers view it as detrimental to economic performance (Osadola 2). Scholars now agree that ethnicity is essential to social structure, everyday relations, self-understanding, international networks, and global political discussions and conflicts. The rapid cultural and ethnic pluralism brought about by globalisation with advanced technology in transportation and communication now poses new and significant global challenges (Verkuyten 11). Therefore, the mismanagement of multiculturalism and multiethnic realities in modern societies can pose a considerable risk, as it may result in identity-based violence rooted in religious, ethnic, and sectarian divisions. This violence threatens global peace and security (Cox and Sisk 1).

The danger of ethnic conflicts, such as civil wars and political violence, is that they reinforce fears and solidify informal organisations and civil society along identity lines. Such disputes often result in increased physical segregation of groups and the emergence of parallel

social and political institutions, where individuals, families, and communities seek safety and alleviate fear through bounding within their groups (Cox and Sisk 2). Journalistic accounts of wars in Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan and several other countries of sub-Sahara Africa in the 1990s have raised concerns that ethnic cleavages and overlapping affiliations of religion and race may undermine prospects for economic and political development in much of Africa (Osadola 2). The Nigerian civil war, which lasted 30 months from 1967 to 1970, may be said to have ensued due to ethnicity (ethnic rivalry and struggle for supremacy), took many lives on both sides of the divides but with more losses on the side of the Igbo people in the southeastern region who wanted to establish an independent nation for themselves.

According to Saha, the study of ethnic identification in civil conflict yields two generalised conclusions: one, materialistic interpretation suggests that conflict can stem from people's pursuit of material benefits such as land, positions, and jobs reflecting discontent in society; two, sociological and psychological theories stress the emotional and sometimes primordial origins of ethnic conflict, rooted in long-standing social interactions. These generalised conclusions imply that moral considerations are limited in identity construction. However, the issue of ethnic identification is complex to the subjective experience of exclusion, whether real or imagined (1). Thus, leaders of nations must closely watch the impact of ethnicity on the structures of society.

Cohen correctly observes, "The exploitation of ethnicity in the informal articulation of political interests has been observed almost everywhere in the world " (5). He describes the paradox of the socio-cultural change in the urban centres of Africa as "detribalisation" and "retribalisation". Detribalisation refers to forming new alignments of power that involve members of different ethnic groups, suggesting modernisation. In contrast, "retribalisation" refers

to a process by which a group from one ethnic group, in the contest with members of another ethnic group for political and economic interests, manipulates and weaponises its customs, values, myths, symbols and ceremonials from its cultural tradition in that struggle (2). Gugler and Flanagan buttress the point, stating that in urban environments, ethnic identities gain significance amidst economic competition and political conflicts. These identities are new forms of existing ones influenced by shared origins, aspirations to uplift the home regions, and perception of economic and political interests within the city. Tension arises when one ethnic group is perceived to monopolise economic privileges and political power (3).

Unexpectedly, retribalisation is the predominant phenomenon in Nigeria in the 21st century when modernisation should have become ubiquitous. This reality points to the fact that Nigeria has yet to manage its multiculturalism and diverse ethnic groups for development. Ayotunde and Bewaji comment that Nigeria is a country in "a cauldron of combustible forces pulling and pushing in various negative and often destructive directions at the same time"(2). They further state that "What should have been empowering factors-multi-ethnicity, multiculturalism, plural languages, and diversity of religions and spiritualities-have become great disadvantages, constantly driving the chants for division, restructuring, or dismemberment of the country as a contiguous nation-state" (3). Though the current situation of Nigeria fits "a microcosm of the global identity crises that confront most modern nations/states/countries" (Ayotunde and Bewaji 1) the persistent nature of the Nigerian experience appears to distinguish it among others.

Nevertheless, Osaghe distinguishes between negative and positive ethnicity, stating that negative ethnicity is exclusivist and discriminatory and a threat and hindrance to national integration and economic development. In contrast, positive ethnicity is possible where the focus

shifts from ethnicity as a means of accumulation and competition over common resources to a means of producing surplus and complementing the activities of the state (15). Osaghe's postulation on positive ethnicity is not the same as Cohen's detribalisation in that the former focuses on how ethnic groups can generate local capital and provide amenities and services that complement the state's effort in developing the country. In contrast, the latter emphasises forming new alignments across various ethnic groups.

Urbanisation in Nigeria

Urbanisation is a global phenomenon, but its evolution and character vary in different parts of the world. This point is particularly true when comparing urbanisation in Europe and America with that of Africa. Most scholars acknowledge that urbanisation in Africa predates the European adventure of trans-Atlantic trade and colonialism, as there were already large cities or villages existing in the area before the arrival of Europeans. For instance, before the European invasion of the area later named Nigeria, cities or large villages such as Old Oyo-ile, Ile-Ife, Eko, Abeokuta, Kano, Katsina, Sokoto, Zaria, Maiduguri, Aba, Enugu, Benin, Portharcourt, etc., which in their own right qualify as traditionally urban centres, had emerged (Bloch, et al. 11). Olukoju identifies some discernible factors in the emergence of the Nigerian traditional urban centres as follows: i) the geographical location of some villages or cities favoured their expansion, ii) the economic roles certain places played as commercial entrepots, iii) religious or ritual significance of some centres where prominent religious leaders and shrines resided, iv) some villages or cities served as military havens and other strategic purposes.

Although the colonial administration was not responsible for the emergence of urbanisation in Nigeria, it furthered the growth of existing large cities/villages and the emergence of new ones in the area now known as Nigeria. Another impetus to urbanisation in Nigeria was

the introduction and construction of railways by the British Colonial Government in 1898, which transformed long-distance trade among several regions of Nigeria. It increased migration and brought people of diverse ethnic groups together in commerce and political activities in the urban centres (Falola and Salm 4). However, the Nigerian Railway Corporation was poorly managed, especially after the departure of the colonialists. That mismanagement brought the rail system into decay and comatose, which adversely impacted the growth of the transport system, urbanisation, economy and other sectors of the Nigerian polity. But, if the government's efforts at resuscitating the railway system are sustained, urbanisation and other elements of the Nigerian state will soon witness a facelift.

It is pertinent to note that though most urban centres in Nigeria now are heterogenous with one ethnic group (the indigenous ethnic group) dominating the urban environment, social research on African urbanisation has clarified that "ecological and demographic features such as heterogeneity, density, and mobility are not necessarily associated with urbanism, or with one another, or with such assumed sociopsychological attributes as secularisation, anonymity, and individualism" (Huper 12). In Nigeria today and other African countries, state capitals serve as growth hubs, drawing a growing population seeking economic and political opportunities in urban centres. These cities are vibrant centres of popular and traditional cultures, fostering social and religious expressions. Conflicts, including organised violence, emerge as cities expand and resources become scarce and unevenly distributed (Falola and Salm 1). Social research has shown that urban dwellers, far removed from their tribal homes, have multiple cleavages, which include ethnicity, religion, economy, class, vocation, etc., to choose from in their new abode. Although several cleavages, including ethnic, racial, religious, and political affiliations, friendship groupings, etc., entice the urban dwellers, economic and political power (to control

resources) seems to underpin their struggle in the urban centres. As such, other cleavages become proxies in their quest for economic and political advantage over other people.

Parochial Benefits of Ethnic Associations in Nigerian Urban Centres.

Ethnic associations in Nigeria emerged due to the phenomena of migration and urbanisation. Having left their rural areas, urban dwellers usually seek support and recognition through group alignments in their quest for survival. Living among different ethnic groups in the urban centres often presents new urban dwellers with challenges and unfamiliarity. Thus, joining an ethnic association in the new terrain provides a sense of belonging, self-esteem, and security within the collective for the urban dwellers. But the development and functions of these associations over the century in Nigeria have moved beyond their initial roles of providing support for their members. They have gravitated towards ethnic empire building in urban centres, where they have no ancestral roots. Such gravitation and the exclusionary nature of ethnic associations has been reckoned to weaken or threaten social structures. Ofili and Omoro wonder how urbanisation in the Western world fostered national sentiment, while in Nigeria, it tends to strengthen ethnic divisions and identity (216). No doubt, ethnic associations in Nigeria tend to compound social interactions, even as they promote political agendas that benefit their members, leading to avoidable conflicts and making observers conclude that they are a crucial impediment to development (Osadola 1).

While many scholars emphasise that ethnicity has negative implications, Osaghae has shown that it also has some benefits (4). Yet, what Osaghe considers the positive role of ethnic associations mainly occurs in intra-ethnic group interactions. This paper regards such benefits of ethnic associations in Nigeria as parochial. Nevertheless, it is pertinent to identify some of these advantages in agreement with Osaghe. One key benefit is that ethnic associations help new

migrants overcome the initial fear, anxiety and insecurity in their new and alienating environments. When moving to a new ethnic area where one's ethnic group or identity is in the minority, there is always the fear of discrimination, marginalisation, suppression and oppression. And ethnic sentiment and affiliation come in handy as the easiest. Thus, having an ethnic association one could join provides relief and confidence, which come from friendship and social networks within the associations to help one understand the new terrain and adjust appropriately.

Also, ethnic associations help new and old migrants removed from their ancestral and cultural homes or towns keep their identity and continue to speak their language, practice their customs of marriage, burial, child-naming, etc. Members of these ethnic associations become happy and proud of their ethnic heritage (Osaghae 14). It also reduces their isolation and creates a sense of belonging and solidarity. Many urban dwellers often find that their home people deride them because their children raised in the urban centres could not speak their ethnic language and exhibit their customs whenever they visit home. Joining ethnic associations where members can continue to speak their language and perform other cultural practices mitigates such experiences of alienation in urban centres.

Similarly, ethnic associations connect their members to public officials, highly influential people in positions of authority, and business or company owners and managers for employment, contracts, school admission, scholarships, and other financial support such as government and non-governmental organisations grants. These associations also give monetary donations to members and offer comfort in times of need, such as funerals, marriages and other ceremonies involving money and emotional stability. They also provide various kinds of loans to members on better terms than banks and other financial institutions. These unions are traditional financial institutions or 'savings' ("*esusu*") clubs. (Osaghae 15).

Again, ethnic associations provide public goods and services for their home communities. In this regard, they establish schools, give scholarships, and build health centres/hospitals, post offices, parks, town halls and roads in their home communities. Though members of the ethnic associations live in urban areas, they maintain a linkage to their home communities and foster developmental projects to uplift their relations in the towns and villages. Some observers consider these ethnic associations community development unions in light of this role (Osaghae 14).

In addition, ethnic associations serve as mediators between their members and the government in times of conflict. They intervene when members face marginalisation, human rights violations, or issues like poor infrastructure, neglect, religious persecution, ethnic conflicts, and genocide (Osaghae 15). Numerous examples of these situations exist in Nigeria. Socio-cultural groups such as *Afenifere*, *Ndi-Igbo*, *ACF, IYC, Middle-Belt Forum,* and others, had on several occasions negotiated one thing or another with the governments (federal and states) on behalf of an individual or few individuals or whole ethnic group. For instance, Raph Uwazurike, leader of MASSOB, was released from prison through this kind of mediation. Presently, leaders of *Ndi-Igbo* have been making efforts to mediate the release of the leader of the proscribed Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), Nnamdi Kanu, who is in detention. The ACF had clamoured for compensation for their members affected by the Sasha market crisis in Ibadan and other locations in the southern part of the country. Also, some commentators perceive the recently created Federal Ministry of Livestock Development as the government pandering to the wishes of the Fulani socio-cultural groups such as MACBAN and MIYETTI-ALLAH.

The Question of the Nigerian Identity

It is easy to find expressions of the various ethnic identities in Nigeria in daily interactions. In contrast, the Nigerian identity, which should be the rallying point for all ethnic nationalities to foster unity and development, is missing. There is a strong indication that the question of Nigerian identity still needs to be settled. It is baffling that many Nigerians within the country even reject Nigeria despite the opportunities the country offers them. The rejection of Nigeria by Nigerians in many forms, one of which is the denial of the Nigerian identity by members of various ethnic groups in the country. According to Balogun and Obsoi, "The form of cultural identity being portrayed in Nigeria today is not an identity of being a Nigerian, but one of being from a part of Nigeria".(Balogun and Obosi 57). It is socially unhealthy that many Nigerians within the country reject their Nigerian identity to express displeasure against perceived marginalisation and non-inclusion in the policies and programs of the nation.

As such, many commentators say that Nigeria lacks national identity and values. If this assertion is correct, it means that Nigeria needs to catch up in setting the necessary machinery or drivers of development for a modern state. The reason is that many observers agree that national identity and values are the ethos of a modern nation-state. The absence of the national identity, which constitutes the Nigerian identity and national principles, is partly responsible for the continued problem of ethnicity and its attending issues. It is correct then to talk about Nigeria as having identity crises or fragmented identities (Bewaji 2). Omosulu asserts that the Nigerian identity crisis is linked to its name, which lacks an ontological connection to the people. He further explains that "Nigeria" is a misnomer that conflicts with the culture, traditions, and psyche of its populace, as names hold significant ontological meaning in the minds of Africans, especially Nigerians (58).

Similarly, some commentators have pointed to the linguistic problem of constructing Nigerian identity, noting that Nigeria inherited English, a "foreign" language, as its official national language. While many perceive this development as the continued subjugation of the country, others have pointed to its usefulness as a neutral language amidst the many languages of competing nationalities within Nigeria. It is because of this reality that Simpson and Oyelade conclude that "for the time being, until better foundations are created for the strong growth of a single Nigerian nation, the retention of English as an official language of the state might seem to remain the best imperfect fit for the country" (194, 198).

It should be added that apart from the historical error of the British lumping diverse ethnic groups in one geographical entity, Nigeria's major problem can be subsumed into dishonesty and the lack of rule of law. These two problems underpin other difficulties in the country. Dishonesty in Nigeria's private and public affairs erodes the country's social fabric. The different challenge that encourages dishonesty in the general attitude of Nigerians and the government is the absence of the rule of law. Campbell's comment touches on this point, "Despite the regular abrogation of the rule of law, the high levels of violence, and official corruption and incompetence, Nigerians regard themselves as fundamentally free, and they have never been afraid to express their opinions, even during the years of military dictatorship" (8). The basic tenets of the justice system, which the country claims to subscribe to, must be followed in practice. In the justice system (both civil and particularly criminal), justice appears to be on sale for the highest bidder or the strong party.

Therefore, in constructing the Nigerian identity and values, there is a need to consider honesty and the rule of law as a twin philosophy on which national values will rest. Drawing from the former National anthem and shared values among the diverse ethnic groups in the

country, Nigerian national ideals/values should include: i) loyalty to the Constitution and country, ii) upholding honesty and love, iii) the rule of law, iv) rendering service for the development and wellbeing of the country, and v) equality and inclusivity (cf. Omosulu 66). We should expect that since Nigeria had had a civil war, that experience should have motivated the creation of a realistic and meaningful national identity acceptable to all because the battle ensued from the problem of ethnicity, but that is yet to materialise. Constructing or reconstructing the Nigerian identity has become a topmost task for the country to progress and fulfil its role. Kiwuwa correctly captures this point when he remarks that in the aftermath of conflicts driven by identity dissonance, post-conflict responses must prioritise national identity as a fundamental component of overall reconstruction efforts (11).

Implications

Though there are several implications of the study, those considered most significant have been selected and discussed as follows:

Weak Social Cohesion

As the most prominent black nation on earth today, Nigeria is a strategic country globally. However, compared to other developed nations, Nigeria is said to be underdeveloped because of its challenges and absence of specific global standards. The myriads of challenges confronting Nigeria include neo-colonialism and globalists' interest in Nigeria and its resources, high mass illiteracy of the citizenry, religious extremism, low levels of productivity, low level and inadequate living standards, high rates of population growth and dependency burdens, high and rising levels of unemployment and under-employment, heavy dependence on unprocessed agri-production, shortage of capital among others.

Nigeria's social cohesion is very poor, and this is evident in the struggle with trust, equity, and inclusion. The indicators of social cohesion: economic growth, social justice, pluralism, and shared values, are missing in the Nigerian polity. To a large extent, the country lacks meritocracy and faces issues of nepotism and injustice. Calls for restructuring, power, and succession highlight the country's division (Balogun and Obosi 54). Cultural diversity is not the problem; it is mismanagement due to poor leadership. Successive failed leadership has fueled exclusivity and a lack of sense of belonging. The 2023 general elections exploited the existing faultlines of religion and ethnicity in an unprecedented manner. Many Nigerians, especially the youth, have been expressing frustration and disillusionment, demanding change at all costs. The ENDSARS protest in October 2020 in the southern part of the country, including Nigeria's commercial capital, Lagos, exemplifies these sentiments. The anger and unrest among the youth persist, with observers noting that their grievances remain unresolved. It is thus imperative that Nigeria must manage its multiethnic dimension and promote the elements of a cohesive society, which will in turn make a Nigerian identity possible and ensure national progress.

Nexus between Reliable Public Institutions and the Promotion of National Identity

The nexus between infrastructure development, strong public institutions, and national identity is crucial. Positive government impact and utilisation of natural resources for the prosperity of all foster a sense of belonging and national identity. However, Nigeria currently faces challenges in achieving reasonable conduct and development. Collapsing social institutions hinder social inclusion necessary for subjugating ethnic identities. Scholars highlight social exclusion as a source of societal cohesion issues, emphasising the need for inclusive policies (Ratcliffe 1). The Nigerian government and people will need to consider working on some aspects of the polity to

evolve the national identity and manage its multiethnic dimension, and these include the following:

i. New Constitution

The majority of observers have noted the unsuitability of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution mainly because the document was orchestrated and imposed on the Nigerian people by the Nigerian military at its last exit from the political space in 1999. Azikwe states that some people consider the Nigerian Constitution in its present form impracticable. However, critics of this opinion are quick to disagree, stating that Nigeria's problem is not with the Constitution but with the implementation of the provisions of that document. The major flaws of the "military" Constitution bequeathed to the Nigerian polity include its false preamble, which claims, "We the people", when in reality, it was a bunch of military men who orchestrated the Constitution and that the Constitution's contents unduly concentrate powers at the centre to the detriment of an actual federal system in the country (Azikwe 195). In light of this, an amendment to the Constitution becomes necessary. It is crucial to note that any amendment to the Constitution should go beyond cosmetics, unlike the attempts made so far, by mobilising and engaging various ethnic nationalities through a referendum. Concerted efforts must be directed against vested interest opposing the amendment of the Constituiton. Recently, a senior lawyer and former president of the Nigerian Bar Association, Olanipekun, was reported to have described the Nigerian 1999 Constitution as a fake document and that his appeal to the former president of the country, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, while in office, to amend the Constitution almost resulted in the president physically punching him ("Obasanjo Nearly Punched Me").

A good and relevant constitution can not be over-accentuated as it underpins a functioning and viable modern nation-state. Nigeria certainly needs a new set of laws, that is, a

national constitution that would address the seemingly intractable problems of the country and one that reflects the consent and aspiration of the constituent ethnic groups that make up the geographical entity called Nigeria.

ii.   Infrastructure Development and Industrialisation.

There is much to do regarding infrastructure in Africa because "Africa's infrastructure networks increasingly lag behind those of other developing countries and are characterised by missing regional links and stagnant household access" (Foster and Garmendia 1). Nigeria's acute infrastructure deficit indicates its underdevelopment due to the corruption and failure of successive government administrations to invest adequately in infrastructure development. Sadly, many roads are in bad shape in the country; the refineries are comatose, electricity is erratic, public water supply is non-existent, public health institution needs to be better equipped, and educational facilities are in shambles. Industries are also in short supply, which makes Nigeria a net import economy that depends on goods and services from Europe, America and Asia. Nigeria primarily exports raw materials from agriculture and mineral deposits. Nigeria's exports have little or no value addition, including its primary foreign earner, the crude oil.

Industrialisation is vital in achieving rapid socio-economic progress, as evidenced by the high living standards in Western European countries, the USA, Canada, Japan, and China. While successive Nigerian governments, since independence in 1960, have ostensibly prioritised the goal of rapid industrial development to modernise the country, the manufacturing sector has yet to make the desired impact in transforming the national economy. Key factors contributing to this setback include a substantial electricity deficit, corruption, and a culture of impunity (cf. Adegbite 1, 4, 21, 22). Therefore, a new Nigeria must prioritise infrastructure and

industrialisation anchored by a firm rule of law to meet its domestic needs and export finished products of international standards.

Restructuring of Nigeria's Federation and Political Administration

The political/governance administration system needs an overhaul to ensure the prosperity of the majority instead of the few currently prevailing in the country. The current federalism in the country must change to reduce wastage, bureaucratic bottleneck and inefficiency. Despite the taunted promise of federalism as the panacea for irreconcilable inter-ethnic hostility in multiethnic societies, it has failed in many countries of Africa to engender national cohesion envisaged by its advocates (Nurudeen and Othman 86).

Compulsory, Productive and Relevant Universal Basic Education

Nigeria needs compulsory, productive and relevant universal primary education for its young population. The mandatory basic education for children should be up to secondary school, considering the country's high illiteracy level. Such productive education envisages incorporating vocational training that will equip Nigerians from their early life to use acquired skills to meet Nigeria's domestic and industrial needs. Nigeria's ability to create a demand-driven education system that focuses on lifelong learning will determine the country's capacity to embrace the benefits of the knowledge economy. To transition into a knowledge economy, Nigeria must improve the quality and applicability of education, particularly vocational training, and increase access to tertiary education. By strengthening the education system, Nigerian youth will find equipment to seize economic opportunities and actively contribute to the economy (Radwan and Pellegrini 2).

Trust and Peace-building efforts

Post-civil war peace-building in Nigeria has been inadequate and ineffective, as fear and distrust persist among ethnic groups, threatening the fragile unity. Overcoming trust issues, inequality, social injustice, and non-inclusive governance are crucial for Nigeria's prosperity and social cohesion. Nigeria must foster a sense of community and work towards building trust, equity, social justice, and inclusive governance. Foreign assistance alone cannot develop Nigeria; it requires internal efforts. A ministry should be dedicated to these values and goals to address these challenges effectively.

Crafting Widely Accepted National Identity

Musa Abutudu says the national question poses a persistent challenge to Nigeria's existence, focusing on demands for restructuring the federation and developing governmental structures. The approach to restructuring often aligns with the framing of the national question. Since its adoption in 1954, federalism, Nigeria's governmental framework, has consistently faced calls for minor adjustments and substantial reforms. Throughout this process, the underlying discourse on the national question has played a crucial role in shaping these demands. He proposes that addressing the national question should involve implementing reforms that grant political significance to historical, ethnic nationalities, and sub-nationalities. These reforms should manifest in distinct governmental units, structures, and institutions with substantial autonomy, collaborating with the central authority (Abutudu 52).

Conclusion

This paper has noted the peculiar pattern of Nigerian urbanisation with its lack of industries and infrastructures and high unemployment in the urban centres. Coupled with the development challenge is the collapsing social/public institutions. All these factors have complicated multiculturalism and ethnicity in the country, thereby making the construction of the Nigerian

identity difficult. The paper suggests that Nigerians must tackle the issues of dishonesty and lack of the rule of law, focus on building reliable social/public institutions and infrastructures, and then construct a national identity by drawing on shared values already mentioned in the former national anthem ("Arise O Compatriot"), which includes: i) loyalty to the Constitution and country, ii) upholding honesty and love, iii) the rule of law, iv) rendering service for the development and wellbeing of the country, and v) equality and inclusivity. There are enough examples of nations today who had left behind underdevelopment by towing such a path. The Nigerian government and people would do well by taking behavioural and policy changes needed to translate the country from a mere geographical entity to a well-functional modern state bestowing peace, welfare, development and prosperity to all.

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