Theoretical Review of the Variants of Ethnicity in Nigeria

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Abstract: *Nigeria's disparate ethnic structure and their patterns of interaction stimulate increasing scholarly interest. To classify this historic cumulative phenomenon and attenuate the vagary of emerging fissures and mistrust arising from ethnic tension, has been daunting with recourse to a myriad issues associated with ethnic action set and orientation namely ethnic agitation, violence , overt intra and inter- ethnic dissonance which pose challenges to socio-economic development of Nigeria. This paper identifies and discusses the variants of ethnicity in Nigeria. It contends that an orientation towards a theoretical review of the variants of ethnicity in Nigeria is important to understand the persistent challenges ethnic politics pose to democracy transformation in Nigeria. Although these variants suggest that it is increasingly difficult to disentangle ethic politics in the socio-political and economic life of Nigeria. Ethnic transformation is not ineluctable. From the political economy framework, the article argues that the ethnic behavior is mediated by dynamics of access to, and control of material resources, hegemonic power play and inclination that represents interwoven contests of meaning regarding the criteria of ethnic artifact's exchangeability, interaction and relationship that perpetuates ethnic strife, mistrust and intolerance among contending and competing disparate ethnic groups in Nigeria. In exploring the ethnic action set and relationship, the article is able to bring a finer degree of analysis of the variants of ethnicity in Nigeria and how they connect to the broader political economy of Nigeria.*

Keywords: *Ethnicity, Variants, Political Economy, Nigeria, Development*

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethnicity as a problem engendering national unity in Nigeria is manifest in all aspects of national life in the political, economic and social sense. On the national level it is the problem of ethnic "balancing" in arriving at major national issues (Graf, 1978). Richard Joseph(1992,p.32) recounts that one common item of information about Nigeria that is widely shared today ,apart from the fact that it is an exporter of petroleum ,is that it is made up of large ethnic groups often in conflict with each other. Thus, raging debates on the increasing rate of inter and intra ethnic strife and hostility in Nigeria abound.

A fundamental challenge at the immediate post-colonial Nigeria was the ability of the emergent political elite within disparate ethnic groups to evolve a true national leadership. At the time of independence, Nigeria with some 250 ethnic groups was divided into three regions: the northern Region, the Eastern Region and the Western Region .In addition there was the relatively tiny Federal Capital Territory. The northern region alone was bigger in terms of surface and in terms of population than the three other components put together (Graf, 1978, p.49).

Table1. *Regional and Geographical Structure of Nigeria 1960*

Region	Area in Sq.MI	Population	Percentage of pop
North	281,782	19,100,000	56
East	29,484	8,000,000	23
West	45,798	7,000,000	20
Federal Territory of Lagos	27	350,000	0.9
TOTALS	357,091	34,477,000	100

Source: *Graf, 1978*

When the Mid Western Regin was created in 1963 and again when Nigeria had a population figure of some 55million, the area and population picture of the Federation remained virtually the same:

Table2. *Regional and Geographical Structure of Nigeria 1963*

Region	Area in Sq.MI	Population	Percentage of Pop.
North	281,782	29,808,658	53
East	29,484	12,294,464	23

West	30,454	10,265,848	20
Mid West	15,344	2,535,839	3
Federal Territory	27	665,246	1
TOTALS	358,091	55,670,055	100

Source: *Graf, 1978*

By virtue of its population, and hence representation in the Federal Legislative Assembly, the Northern region dominated the political scene and could "veto' the other regions" (Graf, 1978,p.50).

Among the minority oil producing areas, the phenomenon of ethnic minority struggle has a long history which predates the colonial contacts. However the 1958 Willinks Minority Commission report did not allay the fears of the minority areas in Nigeria. This is partly because of the inherent contradictions of the character of the Nigerian State. For instance, the resurgence of Militancy in the oil rich minority Niger Delta region, at post amnesty in 2009, partly accounts for the failure of the Nigerian State to meaningfully transform the oil producing minority Niger Delta. The perennial challenge to cope and grapple with the colonial legacy that lumped incompatible ethnic groups together into one country and the failure of the political elite in this regard, marked the early military intervention in governance in Nigeria. Ironically military rule after several decades did not fare any better in my view, particularly in the context of ethnic transformation.

Studies on Nigeria's ethnic arrangement is confronted with complexity, contradictions and fluidity which often lend misconceptions in analyzing the phenomenon. The argument that the study of Nigerian politics is a study of ethnic affinity and interactions have been broadly elucidated (Nnoli, 1978; Graf, 1978; Joseph, 1992) .The growing literature on ethnicity in Nigeria however reinforces its relevance in understanding the unit and systemic analysis of politics in Nigeria.

Nigeria's population comprises over 375 ethnic groups (Otite, 1990), almost equally split between Muslims and Christians. It has a literacy rate of less than 60 % per cent. The country is structured along six geopolitical zones which are not constitutionally entrenched however recognized as the basis for sharing power and promoting equity among the federating units. As a plural society with disparate ethnic groups which vary in size with divergent ideological, religious and cultural values, the tendency for ethnic sentiments and dissonance remains deeply entrenched. This underpins a key defining context for Nigeria's ethnic classification .The tendency for the political elite to politicize and exploit these identities has led to an intense competition for State power and publicly controlled resources (Ibrahim and Egwu, 2008) .These ethnic groups form a complex whole of often antagonizing but mutually reinforced classes of both upper and lower echelon including farmers, workers, artisans, youths, men, women, the girl child etc. The implicit dissonance often emanates from the quest to maximize and exploit ethnic prowess for sectional rather than national interest. This accounts for "micro nationalism" in Nigeria and obvious failures in major national endeavors such as evolving accurate census figures, credible elections, accountability in public office, capacity for governance etc. A central defect of this state of affairs has been a poor federal   arrangement and unequal state structure.

Contemporary debates on ethnic politics in Nigeria seek to examine the dynamics of emerging variants. Identifying these variants have been difficult especially with recourse to the largely behavioral dimension of ethnicity, isolating it within a specific mode of character could be misleading. However any such analysis must take cognizance of both the compulsive, confrontational and agitating connotations of ethnicity beyond a unicausal perspective. Thus, the ethnic action set should be studied from both sociological, political, religious, economic, ecological, global and technological dimensions. Nuanced in a myriad of complex approaches, its singular thread is gleaned from an emerging agitation on access to resources. John Burton (1990) popularized this perspective which takes a conflict dimension.

In the face of growing debates and literature on ethnicity few attempts have been made to examine the emerging variants. This has become increasingly important in a period of nascent democracy in Nigeria and the plausible quest to understand a possible departure from the political past. To do this, this paper will interrogate certain assumptions on ethnic politics and further examines the interconnection of these variants and their binaries on the political economy of Nigeria. It seeks to understand the role of ethnicity in Nigerian political economy which is still largely agrarian and non-industrialized since the discovery of oil in commercial quantity in Oloibiri in 1957. For instance, "Oil minority politics" has become a mantra in analyzing ethnicity in Nigeria. This seemingly inept

economic diversification has a lot to say about pattern of resource allocation and ethnic incursion fostering and promoting sectional rather than national interest. The culminating competition and contention on oil exploitation, expropriation and control, its effects on the oil bearing regions and implications for Nigeria has been phenomenal in analyzing contemporary ethnic politics.

The various views held by authors on the meaning of ethnicity suggest that it is seemingly ambiguous necessitated by varying degrees of socio-economic and ethno-religious factors inherent in and distinct within various polities. At the conceptual level, ethnicity in Nigeria has received varying scholarly attention. Interfacing ethnicity with politics, Nnoli (1978) comes the closest, other scholars have examined ethnicity from economic perspectives (Osaghae, 1986; Egwu, 1998). Ethnic identity has equally been explored as a paradigm for explaining oil minority identity (Obi, 2001;Otite, 1990)and in understanding the federal character dynamics in Nigeria (Elaigwu, 2002).Ethnicity in a plural society has also been given attention (Lijphart,1977). Suberu (1996) has examined ethnic minority conflict in Nigeria when he explained that there has been a growing wave of mobilization and opposition by ethnic minority groups against their perceived marginalization, exploitation and subjugation in the Nigerian federation. This ethnic minority ferment has engendered violent conflicts involving thousands of fatalities ,in the oil producing areas of the Delta region in southern Nigeria and the middle Belt region of northern Nigeria(Suberu,1996,p.2).Similar Literature conceptualizing ethnicity from a conflict perspective abound (Gur,1993;Young,1976;Amersfoort,1978; Thornberry, 1980; Horowitz,1985;Rupesinghe,1987;Welsh,1993).

On the problems and prospects of democracy in culturally segmented societies Rabuska and Shepsle,(1972) and Lijphart, (1977) have advanced conceptual insights which reinvigorates the dialectical exploration of ethnic agitation among disparate groups in the society .There is perhaps scant studies specifically examining the variants of contemporary ethnicity in Nigeria particularly in the period of nascent democracy. To decipher these trends and their effects is pertinent in this paper, as it seeks to deconstruct the nuances of ethnicity within the context of often over lapping variants, simmering 'false ethnic consciousness' and 'ethnic mistrust' in an increasingly elitist nascent democracy.

This paper argues that post- colonial Nigerian politics has been largely hinged on three dominant classificatory ethnic analysis namely the Majority/Majority variant, the Majority /Minority variant and the Minority/Minority variant. This has been the key categories from which Nigerians draw to build their ethnic identities. The paper recognizes the important political, economic, and institutional forces of ethnicity that structures and reshapes the connections between different ethnic groups in Nigeria and focuses on the interconnectedness apparent in the understanding of contemporary ethnic politics of material and discursive ethno-religious, economic and cultural relationships .The study will demonstrate in details that from this three broad typologies, other variants could emerge within or without this classification. The defining principle of these variants is its central focus on ethno cultural or economic agitation and struggles either of majority or minority sort. The rest of the paper is structured as follows; theoretical framework, towards a typology of ethnicity in Nigeria, variants of ethnicity in Nigeria and conclusion.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Nnoli (1978, p.8) contends that "ethnicity is a very complex phenomenon. Its complexity is not always adequately reflected in socio-political thought". The methodological difficulties of studying it may be traced to this complexity. "Like any other social phenomenon, ethnicity is not immutable. It alters its form, its place and its role in the life of society. New elements appear in its content…in our time for example ethnicity poses such a threat to the national revolutionary process that special importance ought to be attached to the elucidation of the relationship between the class element and the ethnic element" (Nnoli,1978, p.8).

In analyzing ethnicity in Africa, a political economy perspective provides a suitable theoretical framework. This is beyond the fact that ethnicity in Africa assumes an elitist character (Nnoli 1978; Ake, 1985; Osaghae, 1998; Obi,2001)rather to have a fundamental grasp of the analysis which according to Nnoli (1978, p.8) cannot be fruitful unless it is based on a method which is "objective, comprehensive, historical, concrete and which defines the most essential connections".

One of such "concrete methodologies' in studying ethnicity is the political economy approach which underscores the interface of historical production of material wealth the basis of life of man and how such material wealth is shared among disparate contending groups.

In the eighteenth century Europe, political economy was an established area of study. It looked at how wealth was created and distributed and at the role of the government in the process, thus, displaying the acute sensitivity towards the interdependence of State and market. Infact this idea of interdependence had been the general understanding of the relationship between economy and politics since ancient times (Howllet and Ramesh, 1992, p.18) and this understanding informed the early development of the two general theories of political economy namely Liberalism and Socialism. Barth(1969), Glazer and Moynihan (1975) argued that in Africa where poverty and deprivation are becoming endemic, mostly as a result of distributive injustice, ethnicity remains an effective means of survival and mobilization. In this context ethnic groups struggle on economic reasons for their survival. Benedict Anderson (1991, p.5-7) in his influential treatise argued that ethnicity is "a construct" rather than a constant. Thus, within this social construct, various ethnic interests and agenda are pursued.

The political economy as a framework in this study, seeks to understand the dynamics of this interaction within the political and economic milieu and in particular, examines the countervailing forces of production and distribution in a multi-ethnic State like Nigeria and the emergent relationship in the cause of distribution of this material wealth. Nigeria's plural and diverse ethnic, regional and religious character provides a key defining context for this analysis, such as the contention between the marginalized oil bearing minority areas of the Niger Delta and non- oil bearing majority areas who control the oil economy.

Again, the variations in population, geographic spread, history, culture, language and religion, illuminate the plausibility to investigate and understand the contest, struggle and context of the ethnic identity in Nigeria within the purview of power and material wealth acquisition. It also informs and underpins the tendency for the political elite to politicize and exploit these identities. Ake (1985) summarized this scenario in analyzing State in contemporary Africa ,as he observed that "state is a specific modality of class domination ,one in which class domination is mediated by commodity exchange so that the system of institutional mechanisms of domination is differentiated and dissociated from the ruling class and even the society and appears as an objective force alongside society". The state form of domination as he argued is the modality in which the system of mechanisms of class domination is largely independent of social class, including the hegemonic social class (Ake, 1985).Nnoli (1978, p72-3) provided useful examples linking socio-economic factors to ethnic conflict in Nigeria as he builds on J.S. Furnival, (1931) who contends that, "the working of economic forces makes for tension between groups with competing interests". This study will build on this framework to examine the three dominant variants of ethnicity in Nigeria and how the identified variants are linked to the struggle for survival, access and control of the state power and resources in the Nigerian state.

3. TOWARDS A TYPOLOGY OF ETHNICITY IN NIGERIA

Where-as dominant typology of ethnic action set in Nigeria centers on ethnic majority and minority analysis, delineating a distinct typology of ethnicity is both challenging and difficult. For instance, Nnoli(1978, p.8) argued that ethnicity does not exist in a pure form it is always closely associated with political, juridical, religious and other social views which constitute its important ingredient as well. It also tends to change its specific historical content and to assume many different forms. Understanding ethnicity in a multiethnic society is instructive of the contradictions and challenges. Ted Gurr (1993) made significant distinctions between five types of ethnic minority groups, this include, ethno nationalities, indigenous peoples, ethno-classes, militant or politicized sects, and communal contenders.

1. *Ethnonationalities:* These are relatively large, regionally concentrated peoples who historically were autonomous and who have pursued separatist objectives at some time during the last half-century. Examples of ethno-nationalist include the Quebecois of Canada, the Kurds of Iraq, Turkey and Iran and the Basques, Bretons and Corsicans of Spain and /or France (Gurr, 1993).

2. *Indigenous Peoples:* These are conquered inhabitants of the original descendants of a region who typically live a pre industrial existence in periphery regions, practice subsistence agriculture or herding and have cultures that are sharply distinct from those of dominant groups(Gurr,1993). Examples of indigenous peoples include native Americans, Australian aborigines, the Masai and San of Africa, Nagas and Santals in India, and Dayaks in Northern Borneo. Some other indigenous peoples, such as the Kurds, may also be cross-classified as ethno-nationalists because

they have developed a sense of nationhood and could have supported separatist movements during the past half century (Gurr,1993).

3. *Ethno-classes* according to Gurr, (1993) are ethnically or culturally distinct peoples usually descended from slaves or immigrants, with special economic roles, usually of an inferior status. Ethno-classes in the advanced industrial societies include the Muslim minority in France, blacks in Britain and the United states, Koreans in Japan, and many Afro-American groups in Latin America. In the Third World, however, ethno--classes sometimes are economically advantaged but politically restricted merchants and professionals, like the Chinese of Malaysia and the residual European and Asian minorities in Eastern and Southern Africa. Common to most ethno-classes is the demand for more economic opportunities or public services, and greater political participation.

4. *Militant or politicized* sects are communal groups whose political status and activities are centered on the defense of their religious beliefs (Gurr,1993). Militants sects include in his classification include Islamic minorities in societies dominated by other religious traditions (such as the Turks of Germany, the Muslim Albanians of the former Yugoslavia, Arabs in Israel, and Malay Muslims in Thailand), the antagonistic Sunni, Shi'I and Druze communities in Lebanon, the Shii group in Sunni dominated Iraq and Saudi Arabia, Copts in Egypt, Baha'is in Iran, Catholics of Northern Ireland, the Central Asian Sikhs in India. Virtually all of these politicized religious communities can be cross-classified as indigenous peoples, non-nationalists, ethno-classes or even communal contenders (Gurr, 1993).

5. *Communal contenders:* These are culturally distinct groups in heterogeneous societies in which no single group constitutes a demographic majority of the population and virtually all groups hold or seek a share in state power. Gurr,(1993)argued that communal contenders are of two types:

a) Advantaged communal contenders: These are culturally distinct groups with political or economic advantages over other groups in a heterogeneous society.

b) Disadvantaged communal contenders: These are groups who are subject to political or economic discrimination or both.

However scholars have advanced critiques on Gurr's analysis which is not the focus of this study (see for instance Suberu, 1996).

In the context of this study, politicized ethnicity has been detrimental to national unity and socio-economic development of Nigeria. It is important to note that most of these ethnic antagonisms were colonial legacies, which compounded inter-ethnic conflict by capitalizing on the isolation of ethnic groups. This divide-and-conquer method was used to pit ethnicities against each other, thus keeping the people from rising up against the colonizers. Distribution of economic resources was often skewed to favor a particular group, pushing marginalized groups to use their ethnicity to mobilize for equality. These are the seeds of conflict (Irobi, 2005).A number of variables have been linked to ethnicity, Ukiwo(2005,p.4) argued that analysts interested in such diverse issues as nationalism, decolonization, national integration, political parties, military intervention, corruption, economic development, structural adjustment, democratization and violent conflict have all considered the 'ethnicity' variable.

This paper argues that the understanding of the variants of ethnicity in Nigeria has been less clear, the identified variants would be linked to the elucidation of the ethnic behavior of Nigeria .What follows is the analysis of variants of ethnicity in Nigeria.

4. VARIANTS OF ETHNICITY IN NIGERIA

The Majority/Majority Variant

This variant explains inter-ethnic competition, fears and mistrust among the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria namely Hausa /Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. What is important to note is that oil in the post-1970 period became a central mediating factor among the majority ethnic nationalities including elite relations which took several colorations; conflictual, collaborative, and potentially destructive (Obi, 2001, p.12). The variant examines the nature of struggle and relationship among the "big three" in Nigerian politics. It takes "inter" and "intra" ethnic dimensions. Nigeria is dominated by three major ethnic groups, namely; the Hausa/Fulani in the North, the Yoruba in the West and the Igbo in the East, each struggling to outwit the other in access to major economic and political offices in the country. These are the centers of large population concentrations which constituted 57.8% of the national population in the 1963 census (Afolayan, 1983). That census has the Hausa at 11,653,000 (20.9%),

the Yoruba at 11,321,000 (20.3%), and the Igbo at 9,246,000 (16.6) (Jibril, 1991), others are the minorities though there are large and small ethnic minorities.

Recent studies in Nigeria reveal the crucial realities of ethnic politics that calls for urgent policy redress such as poor fiscal federalism, unequal state structure, poverty etc (Nnoli, 1978; Osaghae, 1989; Suberu, 1996; Obi, 2001). Nnoli argued that ethnicity does not exist in a pure form, that it is always closely associated with political, juridical, religious and other social views which constitute its important ingredient as well. He recounts that "It also tends to change its specific historical content and to assume many different forms" (Nnoli, 1978, p.8). Kirk-Greene (1975,p. 19) contends that fear has been constant in every tension and confrontation in political Nigeria. Not the physical fear of violence, not the spiritual fear of retribution, but the psychological fear of discrimination, of domination. It is the fear of not getting one's fair share, one's dessert.

Early colonial rule in Nigeria was therefore based on the implicit concept of one country, many peoples, and very little was done to create unifying institutions and processes for these peoples (Mustapha, 2005). At independence, Nigeria with some 250 ethnic groups was divided into three regions: the northern Region, the Eastern Region and the Western Region .In addition there was the relatively tiny Federal Capital Territory. The "northern region alone was bigger in terms of surface and in terms of population than the three other components put together" (Graf, 1978, p.49).

The return to democracy reveals that ethnic consciousness and attachment seems engrained in the political behavior of Nigerians. There are several ethnic blocs formed as ethno- socio cultural groups between 1999 and 2000. Such as the Arewa Consultative Forum for the Hausa/Fulani ethnic extraction of the Northern Nigeria, the OhanezeNdigbo of the Igbo ethnic extraction of South-Eastern Nigeria, the Afenifere of the Yoruba ethnic extraction of South-Western Nigeria.

The numerical and political preponderance of the three majority ethnic groups, resulted in the tendency of many minority groups to cluster – politically, linguistically and culturally - around the big three, which gives Nigeria a tripolar ethnic structure and forms the main context for ethnic mobilization and contestation (Mustapha,2005).

The legitimization of the power of number as instrument of superiority in holding key political posts has repeatedly impeded the emergence of a true and accurate census figures in Nigeria. The percentage of each ethnic group in the national population is the subject of intense political contestation, particularly amongst the majority groups and some of the large minorities (Mustapha, 2005).

This has eroded Nigeria's federal arrangement, reinforces a glaring asymmetrical development of the federating units. This has been the crux of ethnic "contention" in Nigeria with the tragedy of inequitable development in a purported federal system. In particular, there are evidence of intra-ethnic mistrust and agitation. In analyzing this phenomenon, William Graf recounts that among the "Yoruba, there are manifest antagonisms existing between Ondo and Oyo Yoruba, between the Ijebu Yoruba and the Egba Yoruba. In a similar vein there are tendencies of ethnic differences being expressed between the Wawa Ibo versus the Onitsha Ibo, the Owerri Ibo(sic) vis-a,vis the Bendel Ibo(sic), the northern Hausa-Fulani versus the south Zaria Hausa. Right to the bottom of society from the same tribe there are also problems which often surface between communities in a particular area" (Graf,1978,p.47).

In the broader arena of Yoruba politics, however, and particularly in Oyo State, anti-Ijebu feeling were more overt. The Ijebu were often accused of being economically aggressive, especially in the acquisition of land in Ibadan, of having-together with the Ekitis of what became Ondo State- monopolized civil service in the former Western state, and finally, of being the ethnic group to which Obafemi Awolowo belonged(Joseph,1992,p.114). Again, was ideological differences between Chief Awolowo and Chief S.L Akintola which led to the Western Region crisis of 1962.

In the north there are dissent between the Hausa/Fulanis, the Birom,Nupe, the Jukun, the Kanuris etc. The introduction of regionalism by the Richards constitution in 1946, brought change in the political culture of the country, transforming the three regions into three political entities. Thus, the struggle for independence was reduced to the quest for ethnic dominance as ethnic and sub-ethnic loyalties threatened the survival of both East and West, while the North was divided religiously between Christianity and Islam. It marked a period of politicized ethnicity and competition for resources,

which severed the relationships between ethnic groups with pervasive corruption, nepotism and tribalism (Irobi, 2005).

At the inter- ethnic level, the First Republic experienced worsened relationship among the founding fathers, namely Dr NnamdiAzikiwe the father of Nigeria's nationalism(Igbo),Chief Obafemi Awolowo another nationalist (Yoruba) and AlhajiAhmadu Bello the Sadauna of Sokoto (Hausa /Fulani).

Professor Eme Awa had noted that Westerners in 1956 were asked to reject the NCNC because to give it electoral support will lead to its taking money out of the region to the poor Igbos in the Eastern region.(This was a period when cocoa the basic commodity of the West was selling well at the international market and that region was relatively better off than the Eastern Region)(Awa, 1964 ; Ekekwe,1986,p.120).

And in the Eastern region, candidates other than those of the NCNC were portrayed as friends of Yorubas and therefore enemy of Igbos. The North was no different. There the NCNC was seen as party of " unbelievers" whose chief support came from the hated Ibos (Awa, 1964 ; Ekekwe, 1986,p.120).To vitiate the political influence of DrAzikiwe (an Igbo)in the Western Region, Chief Awolowo (a Yoruba)adopted the ethnic card, this was portrayed in the views of Nigeria's internationally acclaimed author Chinua Achebe, this way;

> As a student in Ibadan I was an eye witness to that momentous occasion when Chief Obafemi Awolowo "stole" the leadership of Western Nigeria from Dr. NnamdiAzikiwe in broad daylight on the floor of Western House of Assembly and sent the great Zik scampering back to Niger "whence (he) came." Someday when we shall have outgrown tribal politics, or when our children shall have done so, sober historians of the Nigerian nation will see that event as the abortion of a pan-Nigeria vision which, however inept, the NCNC tried to have and to hold. No matter how any one attempts to explain away that event in retrospect it was the death of a dream –Nigeria in which a citizen could live and in a place of his choice anywhere, and pursue any legitimate goal open to his fellows; a Nigeria in which as Easterner might aspire to be premier in the West and a northerner become Mayor of Enugu. That dream-Nigeria suffered a death-blow from Awolowo's "success" in the Western House of Assembly in 1951(Achebe, 1983, p.5).

As this ethnic animosity pervades, military intervention culminated in the gruesome genocide against the Igbo at the post 1966 military coup which was a prelude to a civil war from 1967 to 1970.

The immediate post- civil war marked a critical epoch in analyzing this variant of ethnicity as the Igbo were discriminated and marginalized. A scenario which lingers this date. "The civil war gave Nigeria a perfect and legitimate excuse to cast the Igbo in the role of treasonable felon, a wrecker of the nation but thanks to Gowon's moderating influence overt vengeance was not visited on them when their secessionist Biafra was defeated in January 1970"(Achebe,1983,p.46).

Achebe showed that " hard-liners in Gowon's cabinet who wanted their pound of flesh" such as Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Federal Commissioner for Finance in whose "guidance a banking policy was evolved which nullified any bank account which had been operated during the civil War"(Achebe,1983, p.46). This pauperized the Igbo middle class and earned a profit of £4million for the Federal Government treasury (Achebe,1983, p. 46).

In 1992 following the annulment of the June 12 Presidential election by the Babangida administration, ethnic agitation was played out following the emergence of the pan Yoruba association Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC) whose leader Ganivu Adams propagated a pro Yoruba sentiment resulting in post annulment national tension particularly between Yoruba and the Hausa /Fulani.

In 1999 at the aftermath of the ethnic agitations was the election of another Yoruba as President namely Olusegun Obasanjo, although without popular Yoruba majority support.

In 2011, the death of the secessionist leader Odumegwu Ojukwu , strengthened the Igbo radical agitation with Ralph Uwazuruike leader of its pro- revolutionary group Movement for the Actualization of a Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and in the 2000s the more radical activist Nnamdi Kanu Director of the Radio Biafra and leader of IPOB. The resurrection of the Biafra agitation has been presently intense with popular uprising and hoisting of "Biafra flag" across the

region that belonged to the defunct Biafra. Their agitation stems from their alleged claim that the Igbo has been the most marginalized among the three major ethnic groups since the end of the civil war in 1970 (Achebe, 1983; Mustapha, 2005).

The Majority/Minority Variant

This variant explains inter- ethnic competition and dissonance between the majority and minority ethnic groups in Nigeria. While ethnic groups such as the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba are considered the majority by virtue of their large demographic size (they allegedly account for roughly 60% of the populace), those like the Ijaw, Urhobo, Isoko, Andoni, Ogoni, Ndoni, Itsekiri, Kalabari, Ikwere, Ibibio, etc. (out of several hundreds of small groups) are referred to as ethnic minorities because of their smaller demographic size (Obi, 2001). There are 'large minorities' like the Ijaw, Kanuri, Edo, Ibibio, Nupe, and the Tiv. Eleven of such large minorities constituted 27.9% of the population in the 1963 census (Afolayan, 1983).

There is increasing evidence of fears, mistrust and alienation as central vectors within the majority and minority ethnic groups in Nigeria since political independence in 1960. Between 1960 till approximately the 1970s ,Graf(1978) recounts that in spite of the existence of some 250 ethnic groups ,each of the regions seem dominated by one ethnic group; the Yoruba in the West, the Ibo in the East, and the Hausa /Fulani in the North"(Graf, 1978,p.50). The other ethnic groups were not clearly happy with this state of affairs which has been characterized as "internal colonialism" (Graf, 1978, p.50).

In the 1980s,a similar line of argument was buttressed in the views of EghosaOsaghae as he argues that 'the Nigerian federation remains the majorities' paradise.. as the numerical minorities continue to be dominated ,even oppressed"(Osaghae, 1986,p.165).Although Nigeria adopted a presidential system in 1979 with a federal constitution including the federal character principle, presently, ethnic transformation remains at issue. The minority ethnic groups   have been on repeated agitation since the post Willink minority Commission report. The agitation has taken a novel turn which recently included militancy and insurgent activities in the oil rich Niger Delta, agitating for both self-determination and review of the structure of Nigeria's fiscal federalism.

John Burton (1990) in his basic human needs theory explains that ethnic groups fight because they are not only denied their biological needs, but also psychological needs that relate to growth and development. In Nigerian context this include the alleged marginalization of the economic needs of the minority oil bearing areas of the Niger Delta, including, human and environmental security, sustainable livelihoods, recognition of ethnic identity, inclusive participation in governance and decision making etc. This provides plausible explanation of ethnic minority conflicts in Nigeria, where the minority ethnic groups struggle against socio-economic marginalization by the majority.

The relationship of the majority and minority ethnic groups in Nigeria has been one of antagonism, both from the oil minority areas of the Niger Delta and the non- oil bearing Middle Belt minorities in the north central. Suberu(1996) buttressed this in studying the ZangoKatab a marginalized non Hausa-Fulani minority area in Southern Zaria in Kaduna State and the minority oil producing communities of Rivers State.

Despite the introduction of the "Federal Character" principle (and related power sharing arrangements under the Second Republic(1979-83),which suggests the removal of some of the more obnoxious sources and dimensions of the minorities' problem in Nigerian politics. Ethnic minority domination and oppression have persisted and even intensified in Nigeria in recent times (Suberu, 1996, p.13).

A major contention in minority/majority variant is the "oil politics" and marginalization of the minority oil rich Niger Delta. Within the Nigerian oil politics, Majority/Minority variant is discernible. While the dominant groups favored the centralized control of power (and resources), the minorities clamored for decentralization which would provide space for them to transcend the limitations of size in gaining access to power, and enjoying its benefits (Obi, 2001). To the ideologues of the "national unity project", minority agitation is inimical to stability and development, and by the same logic must not be allowed to "get out of hand", lest it "subverts" the march towards a homogenizing project of the Nigerian nation-state (Obi, 2001).

Mustapha (2005) recounts that at Independence in 1960 agriculture was the mainstay of Nigeria's economy. The revenue sharing formula was based on the principle of derivation. Two of Nigeria's major ethnic groups namely; the Yoruba in the West and Hausa in the North benefitted from the

derivative formula through the proceeds from the exportation of cocoa produced in the West and groundnuts in the North.

He argues that the Eastern Region was then less endowed, afterwards was the discovery of oil which subsequently became the mainstay of the economy. The derivative formula was changed and the prevailing system centers on the size of the population in an area, or on the basis of public expenditure deemed to be in the best interest of the nation as a whole (Mustapha,2005).

Thus, marginalization has resulted in militancy and hostage taking. Speaking about Nigeria after fifty years of independence, Chief Tony Enahoro who moved the motion for self- Government in 1956,who is from the Edo ethnic minority extraction has this to say;

> *One of the things we must appreciate is that Nigeria is not a natural country. We did not have a Nigeria until the British invaded this place, conquered it and decided to call it Nigeria. It is not really our peoples wish. The time now is bound to come when the people will think that this is not our thing. Can you really say we are now one Nigeria? What is it that makes us one country?. This is not the territory of our forefathers.. The bit that is coming out of people now is more of ethnicity. People see themselves more as Yoruba, Edo,Igbo etc. Now these things are coming out at the long last. Before now if you pointed this out,you were regarded as a tribalist, but time matches on If we want to be one people, truly Nigerians- not just what the British created because of they conquered us, a country we really wanted, we have a long way to go .There is language problem to begin with.Is it English just because we were conquered by the Englishman?.I think we are going to find some resistance to that.All these are matters that have to be seriously considered (Nigerian Newsworld Magazine, August 10,2009:26-27).*

Suberu (1996,p.2) identified some of the prominent ethnic associations established in the last six years to defend or advance minority rights such as the Middle Belt forum, the Southern Minorities Forum, the Association of Minority States, the Committee of oil Producing Areas, the Nigerian Chapter of the Ethnic Minority Rights protection Organization of Africa, the Ijaw Ethnic National Rights Propagation Retention Organization, the Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People(MOSOP)and the Movement for Reparation to Oloibiri (MORETO).

Gurr (1993,p.123)examined conditions that have contributed to ethnic minority grievances since 1945,this include; (i)unequal treatment of minority communities by dominant or "mainstream" groups(ii)competition with other groups for access to power in new states;(iii)the contagious effect of ethno-political activism elsewhere; (iv)patterns of state building, political power and economic development that channel communal energies into either protest or rebellion;(v)the emergence of new ethnic minority elites who are willing to, and are adept at, mobilizing their constituent in response to changing political developments ,opportunities and resources.

The Minority/Minority Variant

This variant explores intra ethnic minority crisis. It contends that there is covert or overt crisis within the minority ethnic groups in Nigeria. Due largely to lack of coherent recognition of the rational and contextual character of the concept of ethnic minority (Suberu, 1996), scholars sought for broader illumination of the minority action set in plural society like Nigeria (Rotchild, 1963; Osaghae, 1991). Gurr (1993) makes a distinction between five types of ethnic minority groups, this include, ethno nationalities, indigenous peoples, ethno classes militant or politicized sects, and communal contenders.

This specifically finds footings in Nigeria's minority ethnic groups especially the "oil minority areas", striving for equality in resource allocation. The minority groups are under intense pressure either internally or externally. The infighting arising from access to the control of oil resources has resulted in persistent communal crisis in the region. In most communities like Kula and Bile in the riverine areas of Rivers State, traditional rulers and several youths have been repeatedly attacked on basis of oil rents. Same is applicable to virtually all such communities in the coastal minority regions of the Niger Delta. Perhaps the Ogoni infighting which led to the execution of Ogoni Environmental Rights activist, Ken SaroWiwa and nine others by the federal military government under the General Abacha administration in 1995, perhaps remains one the most outstanding analysis of minority/minority skirmishes.

Among the Middle Belt minorities, such as Benue State, the three main ethnic groups, in descending order of size and population are the Tiv, Igala and Idoma. The Tiv ethnic group has been producing governors since the creation of the state. In the second republic 1979 AperAku, was the governor, in the aborted Third Republic, it was Moses OrshioAdasu, in the Fourth Republic in 1999 it was George Akume, next was Gabriel Suswan. Presently, the Governor of the state is Samuel Ortom. The Idoma who is a minority has been politically marginalized since nascent democracy.

Similar ethnic marginalization is discernible in Kogi State North Central Nigeria, where the third least ethnic group is politically marginalized. In the Niger Delta, the Ijaw, the fourth largest ethnic group coming after the Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo wields some influence among the minorities. With a population of about ten million people, it has a substantial quantity of crude oil and gas deposits in Nigeria. The area is scattered among six states of Bayelsa, Rivers, Akwa Ibom, Delta, Edo and Ondo (Harry, 2010).The history of Ijaw nation goes back several hundreds of years of native clans in the Niger Delta area of present day Nigeria. It includes Kolokuma, Nembe, Kalabari, Atisa, Ibani, Arugbo, Epiye, Okirika and OboloAndonietc (Harry, 2010).

Minority ethnic groups of non Ijaw extraction in the region include, Ikwere, Engene, Ogoni, Ekpeye, Eleme, Esan, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Ibibio, Anang, Efik etc. These groups often exhibit "fears" of internal domination. However among the Ijaw are internal dissonance. Such internal wrangling could best be represented with the dissatisfaction of an Ijaw son over the dissolution of the 2008 Exco of the Eastern Zone of Ijaw National Congress(INC) by the national body under the leadership of Professor KimseOkoko, expressed this way;

> I am not an inferior Ijaw to Okoko,I respect him as leader of our titular body, but respect is reciprocal. I am a leader of the eastern Zone and I will not allow my people to be reduced or taken for granted, no way. If not for my respect and appreciation of the Governor General there would have been dire consequences to pay for this act of deliberate and premeditated assault on our corporate sense of worth. let it be known loud and clear, the eastern zone, the Ibani's,Kalabari's, Okrikans, Obolo'setc are nobody's serfs and we cannot and will not be trifled with(Harry,2010;151).

Among the non Ijaw minorities are long standing crisis, for instance the Urhobo/Itshekiri ethnic crisis, the Ikwere/Okrika ethnic crisis, the Ogoni/Eleme crisis down to the Ibibio/Efik rivalry etc. Within WakirikeOkirika in Rivers State there has been long crisis. Another key strand of social dissonance in Rivers State is the riverine and upland dichotomy which affects social relations and ethnic political behavior virtually in all facets of the polity.

Ethnic minority politics in contemporary Nigeria seems to have taken a more radical dimension. Especially in the major oil producing areas with ethnic associations such as Middle Belt Forum(MBF) for the minority Middle Belt region other ethnic minority groups include Ijaw National Congress,(INC), Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Urhobo Peoples Assembly, Itsekri Development Movement, Ijaw Women Front, among others including the more radical youth wing namely, The Ugbesu Boys (Ijaw extraction)etc.

5. CONCLUSION

Ethnic identity has swept across Nigeria despite nascent democracy. Theoretical review of the identified variants of ethnicity in Nigeria suggests that ethnicity has been a colonial legacy and since 1960, ethnic action set had calcified within the polity. Among various ethnic groups, ethnic sentiments remain a key defining feature of Nigeria's social life.

The representation of this trend is evident in the three variants of ethnicity identified and discussed which constitute the institutional dynamics of inter and intra ethnic interaction and relationship, despite constitutionally entrenched patterns of ethnic relationship such as the federal character principle of 1979, the constitutional share of power between the center and the component unites etc, an ethnically emancipated Nigerian remains a rare phenomenon.

Thus, ethnicity is easily identified as a symbol of social life in Nigeria including partisan politics in which strong ethnic sentiments are attached, the composition of the national football team, the holding of political appointments, the structure of the Nigerian federal civil service and importantly, the dynamics of the country's fiscal federalism.

The analyzed variants further suggest that within the biggest three ethnic groups there is mutual suspicion particularly the Igbo ethnic extraction that expresses strong feeling of marginalization since the end of the civil war in 1970.

Similarly, there is fear of domination of the minority ethnic groups by the majority, particularly the oil minority areas of the Niger Delta .This has resulted in post amnesty resurgence of militancy and persistent vandalization of oil pipelines by militant youths despite the granting of amnesty in 2009 by the Yar'Adua administration.

The excessively perverse inter and intra ethnic agitations had taken novel turn undermining peaceful co-existence and socio economic development of the country. Including the more violent terrorist groups notably the Boko Haram insurgent group in the North east which had unleashed terror to the region including a significant number of internally displaced persons(IDPs),the Shiite ethnic sect in the North West ,the increasing attacks and killings by the herdsmen in parts of northern and southern Nigeria etc. Thus, issues of ethnic attachment and dissonance are central to the quest for democracy transformation and emancipation of Nigerians.

To foster ethnic tolerance is central to this study which suggests the deployment of more inclusive, equitable and participatory strategies in which the minority ethnic groups could be given a fair control of the natural resources from their soil as in the case of the oil bearing communities of the Niger Delta, access to political offices and equitable representation in governance and top political offices. Institutional reform and ethnic balancing are central to ethnic transformation.

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