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## REVISITING PEACEFUL EXISTENCE IN MULTI-ETHNIC NIGERIA FOR POLITICAL STABILITY AND UNITY

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### Abstract

Several researches have related the Nigerian political instability to mis-governance, poor leadership potential, etc. that have decried its political system from realizing democratic values; the issues of national unity, integration and political stability have bordered so much on democratizing. The unfolded events in Nigeria since conglomeration has been sequenced on disunity elements responsible for primordial affiliates and cultural characters paraded by ethnic consciousness. This research therefore, critiques ethnic, cultural and others plurality vices facing Nigeria as an indivisible entity, as well as hampering on its existence as one nation. The work recommends promotion of social justice and equity, through accommodation of different cultural, political, social and economic differences in the state for national unity and political development.

### Introduction

Several academic discourses have been published on sustainable development, national unity, integration and related areas but with few understanding the diverse cultures of Nigerian state as major factors to such concepts as development, unity, stability, and so on. For instance, the ethnic, cultural and political differences of Nigeria can be seen as major ingredients responsible for its fragility and instability

over the years. Tolerance of these cultural differences in a multilingual state as Nigeria therefore, needs to be considered as intrinsic to its yearning development.

Successive administrations however, have failed to recognize the significance of harnessing these rich cultural differences for national unity and political stability. Indeed, the British's formula in the days of yore to impose warrant chiefs where it was not fitted were attempts towards nationhood. In furtherance of this, it can be surmised that formal adoption of the federal constitution by Sir Oliver Lyttleton in 1954 was towards national integration and political oneness. For instance, Osaghae (1987) submits to a catch-all formula as federalism, whenever events at reaching nationhood demand a compromise to accommodate the legitimate claims of sub-national groups is needed.

After political independence, there occurred several agenda by successive government towards ensuring peaceful existence among the ethnic groups. These include among others:

1. The introduction of the principle of National Integration by the 1979 constitution, which was a deliberate effort to tackle the problem facing the practice of a true federalism. The constitutional approach to national integration recognizes the diverse and plural nature of the Nigerian society. The constitution is, therefore, directed towards combating what has been described as the "parochialism of Ignorance" that breeds suspicion and distrust among the various ethnic groups.
2. Establishment of Unity Schools run by the federal government with the sole objective of promoting unity in diversity.
3. Introduction of a uniform Local Government system.

Besides, other symbols of national unity or integration by past Nigerian government as itemized by Tiamiyu (1999) include:

1. The Nigeria Coat of Arms (1960)
2. The National Flag (1960)
3. The National Pledge (1970), the civil war
4. The National Anthem (1960)
5. The Nigerian Currencies (1960), and as modified in 1978

However, series issues have emerged in relation to political instability and disintegration factors since the re-birth of democracy in Nigeria barely two decades back. At its best, the Nigerian state has carved a niche for a wantonly showcased representative government – ‘home-grown democracy’, – dominated by mannerisms of politicking on ethnic bias. In a short space of time, the erstwhile military reign had been caged. The propping challenge to our growing-democracy, therefore, comes with these disunity factors but largely manifesting as corruption in the public sector, insecurity, unemployment of larger portion of citizenry, kidnapping, vandalism, etc.

Of recent, however, the electronic and the print media became replete with innuendoes, and rhetoric relating to issues on Nigerian political instability. Yet, succinct answers proffering unity-oriented Nigeria have neither been raised nor come by from different quarters. Nonetheless, the conglomeration of Nigerian state with its attendant issues bordering on minority agitation, secession, etc. have raised relevant and responsive political questions for the democratic agenda, suffice for a scholarly study. For the wind of change to augur well under the present political dispensation therefore, these issues become prime factors to usher in change in our nascent democratizing polity.

Nonetheless, ethnicity, education, religion, economy, security, leadership, political stability itself, and several others have raised the concern of contemporary writers in relation to political matters on course. Undoubtedly, the nationhood of Nigeria is challenged with emblem of citizenship in a state portraying great potential in the world in terms of resources, but with significant internal issues, such as religious bigotry and Bokko Haram restiveness challenging its nation-state. These issues have not only shaped the direction of epochal events in the country before and after independence, it has also played dominant roles in the determination of what is, what would be perhaps what to expect in Nigeria over time. At times, these have generated conflicts and hullabaloo across the milieu, whereas at a time some have posed major obstacles to the unity of the country.

The inability of Nigerian state to use economic resources and human endowment judiciously for the improvement of the productive capacities and better life-quality of Nigerians has given rise to multiple

conflicting voices that we hear today. It is important to summarize here that the issue this paper attempts at addressing borders on a national question can be seen at the national assembly.

### Ethnicity and Peaceful Development: Conceptual and Theoretical Explanation

Ethnicity in the Nigerian context can be explained from the angle of multifarious and diverse nature of Nigeria vast territory-comprising of people of different backgrounds, ancestry, legacies and tradition. Olisa, according to Onifade and Imhonopi (2013), sees an ethnic group as consisting of those who regard themselves as being alike by virtue of their common ancestry, language, custom as well as tradition.

Ethnicity became a major force in Nigeria politics prior to political independence. Its origin may not be divulged from colonial policy of the British's "divide and rule." This policy was favoured by the use of different applications of colonial policies on the traditional institutions and structures of the various ethnic groups in the country.

Development or rather sustainable development is impossible without sustainable peace among folks that make the Nigerian state. Peace, in the conception of Francis (2006), explains it as the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering and violence. Peace in relation with development would be none of these paraphernalia of Francis' definition without its primary attachment with creating and maintaining a just order in the State. Peaceful development is possible in Nigeria looking in the direction of justice, respect for one another's culture, tolerance in all its ramifications, love among different ethnic groups, and so on. Ensuring peace through change of agenda, however, requires instilling non-violence culture on citizenry via peaceful co-existence of all ethnic groups. Thus, abrupt removal of all forms of violence, tribal sentiment, cultural and religious bigotry among others can guarantee peaceful nationality. It is only a culture of peaceful co-existence that can make possible sustainable development and quell the task of nation-building as Nigeria yearns for in political governance of 21st century.

The present political dispensation can only be supported with possible change in fostering peace if all and sundry come together as brothers and sisters and move the 'nation-Nigeria' forward.

Development under the unfolding current political (change doo le) dispensation would draw all enabling factors of peace in the nation. It is expected that all efforts at sustaining peace can be building bridges in building national unity, promoting peace and fostering national development. Nigerians under the change government can foster development by exposing to all the understanding of conflict, conflict resolution and what to contribute as citizens to peaceful nationality, amidst all security challenges that threaten our nationhood.

In theory, political stability and national unity are possible within a political entity when multiple ethnicities reached consensus of interest in benefits and representation to keep the polity/political system (i.e. social structure) functions, responsive and peaceful (social order). This submission is from the position of structural functionalism which explains the relationships and functions between the units or parts of a society. According to Macionis (1997), structural functionalism sees the society as a complex system (whole) with parts (units) working together to promote unity and stability. Structural functionalism also explains that social lives are shaped by social structure within the society. In relation to peaceful existence, stability and unity in multi-ethnic polity, structural functionalism asks pertinent questions such as what holds society together. In the face of the present democratic Nigeria, what unifying roles would different ethnic groups play that can guarantee unending stability and mostly bring development to Nigeria?

Emerging Issues for Peace, National Unity and Political Correctness  
Expressing Graf's view on consolidating democratic transition, Osaghae (1992) submits that stability and unity are possible in an enduring and continuous polity if accommodation of ethnic diversity is ensured amidst facilitation of integration, effecting equitable distribution, reduction of regional disparities in socio-economic development and creation of permanent political institutions. In this light also, the vision 20:2020 (FGN, 1999), outlines among its aims for sustainable national development yardsticks peace and security at any cost.

Change, as popular parlance in the present dispensation would go is a public axiom and will suffice with ideal political correction

adrift of past democratic agenda. The slogan becomes necessary after the sixteen years of political domination of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) has proven to be bedeviled with corruption in all facets of Nigerian political system. The trend with which the party became permissive to all the ills of democracy got to climax with the advent of President Jonathan administration. His phantom transformation agenda could thrive only with the colossus of corruption abounding at every facet of the economy. Thus, the administration was overwhelmed with failed administration, mis-governance and treasury impropriety that turned out to be monsters lurking around Jonathan's administration during re-electioneering programmes.

Political office holders were not only enriched more at the expense of the State, the extent to which politician pressed hard on looting the state treasury assumed alarming. Change, therefore, becomes inevitable as the administration had been defeated on the ground of failed economic policies before it drew curtain for Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN). ACN as winning party triumphed with the pressing spirit of fighting corruption which has become the bane of the Nigerian nascent democracy at its initiation May 29, 1999.

Yet, the challenge of nation building has gone critical, in the wake of Buhari's democratic ascendancy with the huge intimidation of Boko Haram uprising, crude oil theft and pipeline vandalism—all tending towards tearing the State apart. Efforts to stabilize and ameliorate all these manifestations therefore become so demanding for present governance. The Nigeria legislature is enjoined, as a matter of urgency, to initiate the funding of comprehensive research into various problems of national unity. This should go beyond issues of ethnic and cultural diversity to include problems such as the fate and welfare of identified minority and under-privileged groups, policies that threaten unity and national interest, and the detection of emerging problems which may require urgent government attention.

### Conclusion and Recommendation

Although the damage done by colonialists using ethnicity for imperial political strategies and social-economic gains cannot be overemphasized, attempts at solidifying unity in Nigeria has always being a mirage. Achieving political stability and unity in a multi-

ethnic polity as Nigeria entails harmonious and guided interests of all backgrounds, traditions and cultures within Nigeria. The country's democratic agenda is therefore expected to be sacrosanct on unifying apparatus that will put to total end all divisive and conflicting forces against fairness, equity and justice to every ethnic group. Political office holders are hereby charged to chart a new course, possibly via a negotiation of give-and-take discussion for Nigeria, which will propel amiable existence and better development for the entity.

It is pertinent, at this juncture, to propose different culture-aware mechanisms as the best approach to 'unity-in-diversity with the aim of putting into consideration the infinite wealth of Nigeria ethnic/cultural values, because peaceful existence of all entities is not only a condition for political stability and unity but an integral part of sustainable development.

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