RETHINKING ETHNIC IDENTITY THROUGH THE MEDIA FOR SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN A MULTI-ETHNIC SOCIETY

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Abstract

What is ethnic identity? What is the implication of mass media promotion and portrayal of ethnic identity on national development in Nigeria? What lessons can multi-ethnic nation like Nigeria learn from wide application of ethnic identity to sustainable development generally? These are some of the questions addressed in this paper which provides broad and specific definitions of ethnic identity and its influence on development. In doing this, extant examples were drawn from Nigeria's political history, with specific references to noteworthy events of the pre-colonial, colonial, independence, military and recent democratic political experiences of the nation. The final picture that emerges shows that ethnic identity appears to have played a dual function in the quest for sustainable national development in Nigeria and Africa at large- depending on how it is being conceived, communicated, promoted and sustained through the various media and lived out by the ethnic constituents of the country.

Keywords: Ethnic identity, Mass media, Multi-ethnic society, National development, Identity formation.

INTRODUCTION

That Nigeria and other Sub-Sahara African countries are underdeveloped is no longer news. Available literatures have reiterated in several ways the disheartening development score cards of African countries like Nigeria over the years in spite of the abundance human and natural resources that abound in the continent. For instance, Suberu (2007, p. 96) reports that Nigeria 'earned around US$500 billion in oil revenues since the 1970s, yet remains mired in poverty, unemployment, a bourgeoning domestic debt, infrastructural squalor, abysmal health and educational services, and attendant social frustration and unrest'. Nigeria's economic crises appear most pronounced in the field of social welfare, poverty and in standards of living, infant mortality, school enrolment and life expectancy (Hassan 1997). In the view of Thirlwall (2003), developing countries, including Nigeria can simply be identified by their low level of capital accumulation, the dominance of agriculture and petty services, rapid population growth, exports dominated by primary commodities, unemployment, poor national income distribution, poverty weighted growth rate, lack of basic welfare needs among others.

Although, Nigerians and indeed Africans are always quick to attribute these socio-political and economic woes of the continent to the protracted slave trade and colonial rule that pervaded the African continent (Rodney, 1972) and or the ongoing neo-colonialism that compels Africa continent to remain dependent on their colonial masters and other developed countries of the worlds; recent scholarship has started interrogating with other internal factors that had continued to hold African countries down development wise decades after political independence. In the words of (Noyoo, 2000, p. 56), 'right-minded Africans are now more cautious about attributing Africa's woes wholly to colonialism or neo-colonialism.' This is because an analysis of Africa's political and economic catastrophes according to him has always pointed towards a 'self inflicted misery' caused by a whole lot of factors including negative application of ethnic identity across the continent including Nigeria. To this end, much of Nigerian and indeed, sub-Saharan Africa, is on the verge of imploding as civil wars ravage families and communities while poverty-related problems continue to escalate (Noyoo, 2000). Even though available literature has demonstrated that ethnic identity has been put to more negative use than positives in the context of development in Africa, it remains a social force that could serve as catalyst in the mobilization for national development. It is in view of this that this paper was conceived to rethink a positive ways for greater involvement of ethnic identity towards the achievement of national development in Nigeria and elsewhere in Africa.

WHAT IS ETHNIC IDENTITY?

Although the word ethnicity represents a gamut of social relations to different people at different times and climes, the word shall be taken to mean shared culture of a social group which gives its members a common identity in some ways different from other social groups. Ethnicity also refers to some form of group identity and applies to a group of persons who accept and define themselves by a consciousness of common descent or origin, shared historical memories and connections (Chazan *et al.* 1988; Noyoo 2000). A more detailed and useful definition of ethnicity as it relates to this paper is the one offered by Osaghae, 1995, p. 11) which sees ethnicity as 'the employment or mobilization of ethnic identity and difference to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict or cooperation' (Osaghae, 1995, p.11). The importance of this specific definition is its identification of two key issues that underline ethnicity: that ethnicity is neither natural nor accidental, but is the product of a conscious effort by social actors; and that ethnicity is not only manifesting in conflictive or competitive

relations but also in the contexts of cooperation. A corollary to the second point according to Ukiwo (2005) is that ethnic conflict manifests itself in various forms, including voting, community service and violence. Thus, it need not always have negative consequences.

Writing further, Ukiwo (2005) opines that ethnicity also encompasses the behaviour of ethnic groups. Ethnic groups are groups with ascribed membership, usually but not always based on claims or myths of common history, ancestry, language, race, religion, culture and territory. While all these variables need not be present before a group is so defined, the important thing is that such a group is classified or categorized as having a common identity that distinguishes it from others. It is this classification by powerful agencies such as the state, religious institutions and the intelligentsia such as local ethnic historians that objectifies the ethnic group, often setting in motion processes of self-identification or affirmation and recognition by others. Thus, ethnicity is not so much a matter of 'shared traits or cultural commonalities', but the result of the interplay between external categorization and self-identification (Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov 2004, p. 31-32).

Akerlof and Kranton (2000) define identity as a person's sense of self or self image, and his or her identity is bound to social categories; individuals identify with people in some categories and differentiate themselves from those in others. Ethnic identity is therefore a measurement of the feeling of belonging to a particular ethnic group. An ethnic identity is also a process where individuals assert their identity primarily in terms of the ethnic group and culture to which they belong, including values, beliefs, traditions, language, diet, dress and religious ideas. It is this that gives them meaning and a sense of belonging with others like themselves. An ethnic group is therefore seen as a segment of a larger society whose members are thought by themselves and/or others to have a common origin and to share important segments of a common culture and who in addition participate in shared activities in which the common origin and culture are significant ingredients. Esman (1977) identifies two attributes to ethnic group. These are: objective attributes which are cultural properties expressed in language, religion, historical experiences, as common institutions; and the subjective attributes which include the individual's awareness of identity, the sense of belonging, emotional solidarity, and common interests. Though it does have an objective base, ethnicity is also contextual in its manifestations. Ethnic boundaries, intensities and issues for any group may shift over time in response to changing experiences and problems.

Ethnicity is therefore just one identity, and individuals can adopt more than one identity depending on the social context in which they find themselves. For instance, Nigerians may have multiple identities, adopting an Igala identity at home, a 'Northerner' identity (adopting the features of and supporting Northern agenda) at political forum or in other situations, and seeing themselves as Christians in other context. These multiple identities, sometimes merging into 'hybrid' identities help them to fit into the different communities and social groups in which they find themselves. Aronson, Wilson & Akert (2010) argue that human beings are not born with identity, but are actively involved in identity construction. The self-concept, which is the knowledge of who one is, combines with self-awareness to develop a cognitive representation of the self, called identity. People's source of meaning and experience on who they are, what they do, and where they come from, form part of their identity, which obviously changes as their experiences and growth in life and society changes. This is a clear show that people are influenced by both external and internal factors (Karitu, 2015).

Identities therefore emerge from social interactions (Constant and Zimmermann, 2012). This means ethnic identity is a social construct fuelled and transmitted from one generation to the next by agencies of socialization, such as the family, religious institutions, and the mass media. Communication is a channel of identity as it conveys aspects on gender, race, and nationality that in return define who people are. Communication helps build, sustain and modify identity and is thus also expressed and performed through communication. People often categorize other people deductively from information communicated about and by them (Karitu, 2015). According to Hecht, Jackson & Ribeau (2003), identity formation and organisation is an ongoing process of communication with the self and with others rather than as a simple product of communication or basis for producing communication. Among the agents of socialization that help in the formation and transmission of identity, the mass media stands out because of its ability to reach a wider spectrum of people within the country at a relatively shorter time with identity laden messages.

MASS MEDIA AND ETHNIC IDENTITY FORMATION, PROMOTION AND SUSTENANCE

Concisely, the term mass media simply translates to the modern means of giving news, opinion, education, entertainment and agenda-setting to large numbers of people, especially through radio, television, newspapers, magazines, films, and lately, the internet. The role of mass media in the formation, promotion and sustenance of ethnic identity or consciousness cannot be overemphasized. Scholarship has shown that the representations media makes about people and societies impact how these people and societies see themselves and how outsiders view them. People rely on mass media, traditional and new, to get news about what is happening around them; locally and internationally. Media transmits these images, and they have some influencing factors on individual. In such instance, media acts as an important way of communication and passing of information among people on a daily basis and therefore it can influence social identities based on the representations of people and societies it makes and how frequent it makes these representations. Brooks & Hebert (2006) assert that in the consumption-oriented, mediated society, much of what happens as important is based often on the stories produced and disseminated by media institutions. Jaspal & Cinnirela (2010), also assert that when people are constantly exposed to dominant media representations, it can have important implications for identity principles.

It is common feature in media to highlight people's behaviour and characteristics based either on race, tribe, region, and or religion where they exist (Karitu, 2015). Terrorism for instance has become a common feature in media with the main perpetrators being Muslim groups in various parts of the world. Muslims all over the world have raised their voices in complaint that they are treated with suspicion due to the fact that the media mirrors Islam as a terror tolerant religion which to them is not a true reflection of their beliefs. Closer to home, the south easterners (Ibos) in Nigeria have in many instances been characterized as a materialistic money minded community and diabolical; the Northerners (Hausa/Fulanis especially) as illiterate and lovers of power, violent and domineering; the south westerners (Yorubas) as deceptive and cunning even though highly educated among many other stereotypes. Still in Nigeria and on religion ground, the Muslims are depicted and seen as terrorist, Christians as materialistic and money conscious, and traditionalists as barbaric and backward.

Brooks & Hebert (2006) are of the opinion that media crafts representations that in return shape how people construct their social identities as they try to understand what it takes to belong to a certain gender, race, religion, or social class. The media people consume influences their perceived identities. Jaspal & Cinnirela (2010) also argue that the frequency and consistency

of media representations will determine their eventual transformation into social representation, since the more these representations are reproduced in the media, the more firmly they become ingrained in the social and psychological context. These social identities could revolve around different ethnic communities such as seen by the common stereotypes representations by popular comedians in the mainstream media.

In a nutshell, the media have the potential to exert enormous influence on ethnic identity and other spheres of human lives. In this light, Kellner (1995) as cited in Simeunovic (n.d), media culture provides the materials out of which many people construct their sense of class, of ethnicity and race, of nationality, of sexuality, of 'us' and 'them'. Media culture provides the materials to create identities whereby individuals insert themselves into contemporary techno-capitalist societies." The media does this through a complex process that includes the organization, selection, emphasis, and exclusion of certain aspects of reality through defining, framing, representing and using stereotypes.

It is clear to see that there are various ways the media constructs and represents identity. The identity could be a positive or negative one depending on the representation the media sends. Hill (1997) asserts that the media in general and television in particular tell people what to think about and also provide a sanctioned view of what everyone else is thinking. However, mass media's construction and promotion of ethnic identity does not come without implications which could be positive or negative depending on how people are motivated to act.

Problems associated with group identity can threaten the peace of a society. Therefore positive media has the potential to reinforce unity and acceptance of difference and diversity to strengthen a society. According to Nusseibeh (2014), education media can enable individuals as well as groups to become less vulnerable to manipulation. If there were more positive coverage of various groups there would be less negative stereotypes, suspicions and segregation and more integration and tolerance of the other which will invariably translate into national development for a multi-ethnic nation like Nigeria.

DEVELOPMENT – WHAT IT IS

Development is one of the many English words that have been faced with definitional pluralism. This is because of the multifarious nature of contextual usage of the concept. It is used and applied in almost every facets of human life. Taken in its simplest form however, Marcellus (2009) describes development as the' improvement or to become more advanced, more mature, more complete, more organized, more transformed etc' (p. 198). Rodney (1972), while relating development to the individual, explains that, "at the level of the individual it implies increased skills and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self-discipline, responsibility and material well-being." This is also in line with Biddle and Biddle's definition of development as cited in Uji (2015, p. 9). According to them, development is a "social and personal change that moves towards consciously chosen goals'

From a broader perspective however, Todaro (1982) sees development as a multi-dimensional process involving the reorganization and reorientation of the entire economic and social system. This involves in addition to improvement of income and output, radical changes in institutional, social and administrative structures as well as in popular attitudes, customs and belief. Little wonder why Uji (2015) opines that it is a value word that is always normative especially that it is usually directed towards the objectives that people desired. According to Adekoya and Ajilore (2012), development is the

socio-cultural, political, economic and the spiritual well being of a society. In a truly developed state there is assurance of good quality of life, exercise of all human rights, and freedom to participate in the democratic process. From the foregoing, development implies enhanced quality of life, equity and justice, as it takes into consideration the wellbeing, growth and advancement of individuals within the society.

Available literature on development has tried to conceptualize the term as a process depicting an action or efforts made towards better living (Ohagwu, 2010; Gboyega, 2003; Nwanegbo and Odigbo, 2013; Chrisman, 1984; Joseph, 2014); and also as a product/state of humanity (lsiugo-Abanihe, lsamah and Adesina, 2002; Adekoya and Ajilore, 2012) as a result of deliberate human effort to better his/her lots in life; or as both process and state of humanity in relation to his/her environment (Gboyega, 2003). Naomi (1995) believes that development is usually taken to involve not only economic growth, but also some notion of equitable distribution, provision of health care, education, housing and other essential services all with a view to improving the individual and collective quality of life. This means one could look at development beyond economic indicators (like GDP, GNP, per capita income and others) to non-economic indices such as the democratic imperatives of political governance and social indicators (Jhingan, 2007, p. 5-12).

Because of the multi-dimensional nature of development therefore, the term is often attached with other adjectives to refer to the aspect of development being talked about. For instance, one could talk of economic development, political development, academic development, social development, technological development, and so on. However, when referring to a collective improvement in the state of things in a particular country, many prefer to call it national development.

NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The term national development is often applied in many contexts to mean a sustainable growth and development of a nation from an existing state to a more desirable one. It is people oriented and its success is evaluated in terms of the impact it has had in improving the lot of the masses (Adekoya and Ajilore, 2012, p. 64). In line with this, Enahoro, cited in Onabajo and M'Bayo (2009) opines that national development should be man oriented and not institution oriented, that is, individually in collectiveness and not individual. But national development to Elugbe, (1994) means more than that. It refers, among other things, to the growth of the nation in terms of unity, education, economic well-being and mass participation in government- the capacity of nation state to pull all its resources both human and material to achieve set objectives for the good of the state and the citizenry.

Most African countries, Nigeria inclusive, are still on the part of struggle to attain the desired level of national development and this is why they have been tagged third world, undeveloped, underdeveloped, or developing nations in most development literatures. This is because the country has remained largely underdeveloped despite the presence of huge mineral and human resources. Several decades after the end of colonialism, Nigeria is still fighting with problems such as high poverty rate, lack of basic infrastructural facilities in all sectors of the economy, unemployment, high mortality rate, political instability and insecurity of lives and property (Ikena, 2009). However, across the world, development has been enhanced or hampered by the nature and degree of ethnic identity in different climes and time.

SUSTAINABLE NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

It was the Bruntland Commission who popularizes the idea of 'sustainable development' which calls for consideration for future's welfare while meeting today's needs. In the words of The Bruntland Commission, (1987), sustainable Development is "the development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of the future generations to meet their own needs." When applied to a nation, Munasinghe's (2004) definition becomes handy. According to him, sustainable national Development is a process of improving the range of opportunities that will enable individual humans and communities to achieve their aspirations and full potential over a sustained period of time while maintaining the resilience of economic, social and environmental systems. The basic objectives every sustainable national development is expected to achieve according to Age (2005, p.85) are: increasing capital income and employment, promoting human welfare, satisfying basic needs; and protecting the environment. Considering the path of future generation, achieving equity between rich and poor and participation on a broad basis in development and decision making is also important. From the above definitions, there are common phenomenona which they all shared; that is prioritizing the development of the present generation without compromising the future generation.' Therefore, the concept of sustainable national Development remains the modern parameter of measuring development (Boyi, 2014).

ETHNIC IDENTITY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT – SOME EXAMPLES FROM AFRICAN EXPERIENCES

Many scholars and experts have repeatedly pointed out that political and social instability are some of the major causes of slow pace of development in Africa and indeed, Nigeria (Paglia, n.d). And one may be prone to ask, what factors cause or fuel instability so as to possibly develop better strategies for handling underdevelopment challenges in Nigeria and Africa at large. In an attempt to resolve the puzzle, this paper thrives to dissect the role of ethnic identity in the course of national development and how best to harness same for a greater development results. Even though some scholars will argue that ethnic identity is not the remote cause of most political and social instability that had undermined national development efforts in Nigeria and other African countries over the years and which this paper also agree to some degree, eliminating ethnic identity from the scene entirely could as well be deceptive.

For instance, Sriskandarajah (2005, p.63) opines that 'ethnically diverse developing countries feature prominently on the list of countries that have suffered from civil war and insurgency in recent decades'. Also Horowitz (2000) considers tensions arising from ethnic diversity to have been the principal trigger of genocide in Rwanda, violent riots in the Democratic Republic of Congo, civilian mass killings in Burundi, army killings in Uganda and repeated hostilities in Chad - that have occurred during the last two decades of the 20th century. Most literature on the causes of Sudanese civil conflicts also depicts these conflicts as an Arab, Muslim North versus an African, and Christian/Animist South. The distinction is made according to the perceived origins of the two groups, where the Arabs are said to come from Saudi Arabia, and the Africans from African groups, the most ancient of which is the Nubian ethnicity. In the Darfur conflict, the ethnic division between Arab militias and African tribes has been described as the primary cause for conflict (Paglia, n.d).

Ethnicity therefore remains one of the means through which conflicts in many African countries are conducted and a powerful tool for political mass mobilization. Conflicts in Sudan, as well as in many other African countries for instance,

were not devoid of ethnic colouration, as they were usually fought by contending ethnic groups or "tribes." The Rwandan genocide, for instance, was fought between the Hutus and Tutsis; the first and second civil wars in Sudan were fought between an Arab Muslim North and an African Christian/Animist South; the Darfur crisis presents itself as a fight between Arab militia, the *Janjaweed,* and African tribes; and Somalia has been depicted as a conflict between different clans (Paglia, n.d). According to Venkatasawmy (2015), the incessant ethnic conflict has inevitably influenced many scholars - such as Easterly & Levine (1997), Lian & Oneal (1997) and Alesina, Baqir & Easterly (1999) - to hypothesize that ethnic divisions suppress public goods and cooperation and, as such, constitute a major obstacle to development and growth as seen in the following specific examples from Nigeria.

ETHNIC IDENTITY AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE 1914 TO 2016

Nigeria has been described by many as plural society with over 374 ethnic groups, 3 major religions groups, many languages, varying cultures and institutional arrangements divided into three regions, six geo-political zones, thirty-six state and Federal Capital Territory (FCT) which interact with one another in competition for power, dominance and wealth. To this end, the country's development continued to be hampered by regional/ethnic chauvinism, religion bigotry, and political intolerance that could be traced to the foundation of the country in 1914. Between 1914 and 1915, the British administration forcefully amalgamated the three distinct regional territories: The Northern region which was occupied by Hausa/Fulani and a host of other tribes like Igala, Tiv, Idoma, Nupe, Gwari, Kanuri, and so on; the Eastern region inhabited by the Igbos and a host other tribes like Ijaw, Isohko, Ibibio and so on and the Western region by the Yorubas, to give birth to the modern day Nigeria.

The colonial master manipulated geographical boundaries and religion differences to reinforce separation between ethnic groups and transformed ethnicity into an identity by which to gain political power. Within this divisive colonial structure and the indirect rule that emphasize divide and rule tactic, ethnic tensions emerged among these groups. In Nnoli's words, "*…indirect rule widened the social distance among the communal groups in Nigeria, thereby reinforcing the ethnocentric factor in the emergence of ethnicity*" (Nnoli 1978). As such, the fault lines of ethnicity became the bane of Nigerian political and socio-economic development even many decades after independence. Virtually every part of the country has an institutionalized memory of injury or feelings of injustice, which they often feel will be best addressed if one of their own wields power at the center, preferably as the president. Similarly, there is a pervasive fear that the president of the country will abuse the powers of his office to privilege his ethnic group—if not to punish or deliberately disadvantage others (Adibe, n.d). A look at a few cases in the Nigerian political history will drive home this point clearer.

Party Formation and Political Stability

The political struggle to secure ethnic supremacy and dominance through non-traditional government became so strong especially as early as mid 1940s that the major ethnic groups of Nigeria had to form such ethno centric associations as the Igbo Federation; the Egbe omo Oduduwa (Society of descendants of Oduduwa), a Yoruba cultural movement; and the Northern people's Congress (NPC) of Northern Nigeria (Oluniyi, 2014). While writing on the formation of Nigerian state, Oluniyi (2014, p. 1) observes that:

> The traditional African state that transformed into Modern Nigeria states no doubt grows out of political pursuit of political supremacy among the dominant ethnic groups. This of course has led to domination of minority groups, and fear of domination by the latter has unleashed political pressures and destroyed the peaceful co-existence of the amalgamated entities of 1914. Various ethnic groups that constitute the traditional states of Nigeria had strong ethnic identities, effective traditional system of governance and strong passion against any domination by other social groups.

Ebegbulem (n.d) lends credence to the above assertion when he pointed out that '…the colonial division of Nigeria that reinforced ethnic groups, the rise of ethno-political consciousness, and the development of ethnic/regional political parties demonstrated that the British administration intentionally prevented the rise and success of Nigerian nationalism' (p.76). The formation of political parties in Nigeria right from the onset has always been skewed along ethnic line. In each region, a party dominated by members of the majority ethnic group obtained office and provided services and patronage for the group (Cooper, 2002). The Hausa/Fulani (Muslims) led the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) and the Northern Elements Progressive Union (NEPU); In the East, the Igbos (Christians) formed the National Council for Nigerian Citizens (NCNC); the Yorubas formed the Action Group (AG), a regional political party dedicated to strengthening ethnic politics in the west (Coleman, 1960). This trend has been a recurrent decimal in the political party formation in the nation up to the present except the People's Democratic Party (PDP) that enjoyed a relative national acceptance from 1999 to 2015 when it lost to a newly constituted party, All Progressive Congress (APC) (led by John Oyegun), that is still battling for national acceptance at the moment because it is still viewed as a northern party that is committed to the promotion of the interest of the northern Muslims.

That the mass media contributed to the pro-ethnic-party politics and formation in the country's political history cannot be overemphasized. For instance, in the campaigns for the 1953 elections, newspapers were identified as falling into three groups: the Pro-NNDP, exemplified by the *Record;* anti-NNDP, exemplified by the *Advocate.* The *Tribune* was the campaign forum for the Action Group, while the NCNC had the *Pilot.* According to Olayiwola (1991), this was possible looking at the ownership structure of the Nigerian mass media. The ethnic ideology of media ownership was largely reflected in their coverage of various political parties and their activities. The leading political party newspapers were not only locked in vicious combat but also all the media provided remarkable examples of over-zealous, irresponsible partisanship and recklessness. The seeds of mutual distrust, running battles and unending confrontations between regional media and the federal media, on the one hand, and between different regional media and political party newspapers, on the other hand, sown during the colonial, independence and first republic periods, are still traumatizing the nation till date (Olayiwola, 1991). The build-up to the controversial 1964 federal elections and the attendant constitutional stalemate and the eventual violent collapse of the First Republic could also be partly blamed on the mass media promotion of ethnic division across the country.

The 1966 Coup and the other Coups

Not long into independence of the country did the impact of ethnicity became negatively pronounced so much so that it resulted to the military adventure into the political affairs of the country to right the wrong which it eventually ended up compounding. The military stripped the first republic of power in 1966 after a bloody coup that saw the death of many Northern political elites (mostly Muslims) with the exemption of the easterners (Christians) and assumption of general Aguyi

Ironsi (Eastern Christian) as the head of state; a move that was interpreted as a calculation to get rid of the Northern/Muslim leaders from their visibility in national politics. This led to a counter coup six months after that brought General Yakubu Gowon (a Northern Christian) to power the same year. In that tensed political environment, the eastern Nigeria declared the state of Biafara which led to the 30 months of civil war with its attendant consequences on the nation.

On July 29, 1975, another coup was staged which terminated Gowon's regime and brought in General Murtala Mohammed. Though Gowon could be generally classified as a Northerner, his status as a Middle-Belt Christian, according to Ejoor (1993, p. 14) attracted "opposition from a group of powerful Northern Muslims who saw him as representing the interest of the minority Middle-Belt". Even Mohammed's assassination in the February 13, 1976 abortive coup by a group of Middle-Belt army officers led by Lt. Col. Buka Dimka further strengthens the argument that at least, the first three coups had ethnic colouration (Emenyeonu, 1997).

For the next three decades therefore, Nigeria had to live with the reality of military interruption of political power in the country until May 29th, 1999 when the nation transited into a democratic civilian government that permits a civilian president to preside over the affairs of the country for four years of two terms. According to Emenyeonu (1997, p.5), 'Nigeria has so far experienced not less than ten coups d'etat. In five of these, the plotters successfully overthrew either a civilian or military regime. They include the July 1966, July 1975, December 1983, August 1985 and November 1993 coups. The rest were abortive attempts in which plotters, in some cases, eliminated key government leaders but failed to take over power, as exemplified by the January 1966, February 1976, December 1985, April 1990 and March 1995 failed coups'.

Surprisingly however, there is remarkable contention that Nigerian journalists had in most cases led the clarion call for military intervention in politics by amplifying ethnic differences or dwelling entirely on the shortcomings of those in power. For example, a political scientist, Oyewole (1991, p.12) alleges that "almost all journalists supported the coup that overthrew the Shagari administration." Similar opinions have also been offered by writers such as Abdullahi (1990) and Yakassai (1990). Elsewhere, journalists seem to share a similar characterisation. While addressing a forum of journalists, a political science lecturer and writer on Nigerian democratic reforms maintained that Nigerian journalists must accept some responsibility for military intervention in politics, a charge which rests on the claim that "almost all journalists supported the coup that overthrew the Shagari administration," and that "many journalists wrote as if they themselves realized that they were very much responsible for the change in government" (Oyewole, 1991, p.12). The supposition that the mass media framing of crises or characterization of government officials paves the way for military intervention is built upon the agenda function of the media.

Political Appointment and other National Policies
Even in democracy, Nigeria has witnessed a lot of ethnic disputes and conflicts over allocation and sharing of resources, power and position. Many political crises across the country have been attributed to the deepening ethnic and regional politics which continues to undermine the selection of responsible and responsive national leadership. By politicizing ethnicity and religion, Ebegbulem (n.d) observes, '*National leaders are recruited on the basis of ethnicity and region, rather than their ability, experience and vision, hence, Nigeria's political and economic performance falls below par in comparison*

with other countries of comparable size and resources' (p. 77). The primacy of ethnicity and religion also account for some of the periodic outbreaks of violence between different ethnic groups in Nigeria.

Even national activity like census enumeration that is necessary for economic planning and electoral representation has fallen victim to the same ethnic/religion politics as different ethnic/ region and religion groups claim bloated population numbers in order to secure more government funding and representation. It is also often the factor that determines the location of industries and development projects rather than feasibility studies or viability of the location (Ebegbulem, n.d). In a nutshell, politicized ethnic identity has been detrimental to national unity and socio-economic wellbeing of the country.

This idea was well encapsulated in Salawu and Hassan (2011) submission when they observed that ethnic and religious nationalism has had a lot of negative consequences for the nation's movement towards democratization to the extent that it remains an enduring threat to institutionalization of democracy in Nigeria. Among its resultant negative consequences as observed by Babangida (2002), are wastage of enormous human and material resources in ethnically/religion inspired violence, encounters, clashes and even battles, heightening of fragility of the economy and political process, threat to security of life and property and disinvestments of local and foreign components with continuous capital flight and loss of confidence in the economy; and increasing gaps in social relations among ethnic nationalities including structural suspicions and hate for one another.

CONCLUSION

From the above discussion, one can see that ethnic identity remains a viable part of every nation's socio-political life and has the capacity to serve as agent of socio-political mobilization, tool for healthy rivalry that can promote better living, nationalism and patriotism, among others. However, the analysis of Nigerian (and perhaps other African countries) past experience points to the fact that ethnic identity as promoted by the mass media and other agents of socialization has had more negative than positive impacts on national development. To this end, many civil wars, violent crimes, political crisis, lack of national cooperation and so on could be traced to negative application of ethnic identity in Nigeria among other possible factors. This therefore calls for a re-orientation, refocusing and re-engineering of ethnic identity for more positive use if the country must move forward in this era of globalization.

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