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INTRODUCTION

Tribalism or ethnicity, religion and corruption are popular clichés used to describe or analyze various forms of anomalies in Nigerian nation building. In this article, tribalism and ethnicity are used interchangeably, because of its varying use to different people, but refers to same subject in the discourse. According to Wikipedia, tribalism is the state of being organized in, or advocating for, a tribe or tribes. In terms of conformity, tribalism may also refer in popular cultural terms to a way of thinking or behaving in which people are more loyal to their tribe than to their friends, their country, or any other social group. This subject is crucial because, while tribal societies have been pushed to the edges of globalization, tribalism is arguably undiminished; because it is founded upon intense feelings of common identity that leads people to feel tribally connected. It is often more about “feeling” of commonality than actual commonality; and that is why it is as powerful as religion in Africa.

In Nigerian context, ethnicity or tribalism is defined as social phenomenon associated with the identity of members of a competing communal group(s) seeking to protect and advance their interest in a political system. The relevant communal factor may be language, culture, race, religion and/or common history. What is peculiar to ethnicity or tribalism is that “it involves demands by one group on other competing group(s)” (Nnoli; 2008). Chinua Achebe in his view describes ethnicity “as discrimination against a citizen because of his/her place of birth” (Achebe; 1997). In Nigeria today, tribalism has been elevated to dominate national discourse, controls how people think and talk, and determines what they oppose or support. It is promoted by the political elites, embraced by the young and the old, passed from generation to generation, and even has base in the constitution. This explains the assumption that conflicts in Nigeria is motivated by ethnic competition. Nigerians must ask, ‘How did we get here, what and who are responsible’? Why are other countries (India, Indonesia, Brazil, United States, Switzerland, Belgium, China, etc.) which are as diverse as Nigeria not half as obsessed with their diversity? The ethnic diversity of Nigeria has more or less been a threat rather than a source of national pride and development as countries above have experienced. Why? This article intends to address this question by looking at the role of Nigeria’s political history, impacts of tribal obsession and conflicts generated, and proffer ideas on the way forward.

Ethnicity has flourished because the Nigerian elites who inherited the colonial state have conceptualized development as transferring resources from civil public to primordial public. It is in this view that Cletus Umezinwa argued that Nigeria is a failed state, backing his opinion up with a number of factors that included cultural and value decadence, fragile political structure, poor leadership and frequent ethno-religious crisis. Conflicts in Nigeria most often link with religion or ethnicity, and mostly deplored to settle economic and political imbalances; breeding the evolution of ethnic militias such as the Bakkasi Boys; Movement for Actualization of Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB); Odua People’s Congress (OPC), Egbesu Boys; Movement for Emancipation of Niger Delta (MEND); Arewa Forum; Yandaba; Boko Haram; Ombatse group; etc.

The impacts of ethnicity include:

1. Inability to Fight Corruption: There is a tradition in Nigeria that forbids citizens from exposing or prosecuting fellow tribesmen for corrupt practices. Corrupt tendencies are exhibited and laws violated, yet such individuals invoke ethnic sentiment to get away from, or prevent prosecution. For example, recently, a private jet belonging to the president of the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) – Bishop Ayo Oritsajafor, was apprehended in South Africa over possession of $9.3 million allegedly meant for purchasing arms. Before the South African government could conclude investigation, his ethnic region and kinsmen were already in the media defending and exonerating him, and declaring war if their son is prosecuted.
2. Employment: Guarantee of employment or award of contract in public service is a function of one’s tribesperson in position of authority. The phrase “it is our turn was coined from this practise”. Merit and excellence are sacrificed on the altar of primordial thinking.
3. Politics of Division: Current political tension in the country is mainly as a result of avoidable clash between forces of democracy and that of tribal interests. The political power-play in the name of building consensus within political party structures have negatively influenced a tradition or emerging mentality of political office rotation between the North and the South. In fact, an analyst posits that this form the fulcrum of scaling of Boko Haram insurgency. That the ethnic elements in the North felt cheated when the seat of power didn’t returned to them in 2011 as agreed within the ruling party.
4. Distrust: A fundamental impact of tribalism in Nigeria is a culture of distrust amongst various ethnic groups in the country. Due to distrust, confidence on objective and legitimate issues of poverty and environmental pollution in the Niger Delta is trivialized as ‘Ijaw’ issues or as ‘Ogoni’ issues.

Promotion of mediocrity and suppression of justice: tribalism flourishes in Nigeria mainly because it is an effective tool that gives the user an edge in the eternal struggle to gain government patronage (i.e. political appointments). After getting the appointment, tribal sentiment is again used as a cover to abuse the office, and then to escape justice after leaving the office.

### To overcome the problems of ethnicity in Nigeria and reach the principle goal – national unity, it is necessary to unite people in as many aspects of life as it is possible. Here we are going to list five ways of solving the problems of ethnicity in Nigeria that can unite the nation on the governmental and social Nigeria that can unite the nation on the governmental and social level.

### **Economic cooperation**

It is necessary to provide the citizens with the universal system of goods and unite regions depending on the natural resources. For example, the Edo supply country with cocoa, but receive sugar cane from the Sokoto people. The same interaction can be introduced in the other sectors of the economy.

### **Political and state cooperation**

The creation of common political parties and the creation of road and railway transport connection between the lands of different ethnic groups must be taken into account. Besides, the government itself has to start thinking, how can ethnic conflict be resolved and the government has to be interested in solving the current problems of ethnicity. There must be representatives of all (and even minor) cultures in the parliament to satisfy the interests of all people of Nigeria.

### **Secular activities**

The organisation of national festivals, celebration, the introduction of traditional holidays and even religion will contribute to the possible solutions to ethnic conflicts. It is not easy to change or modify ethnic habits, but it is indispensable to do the best to find common traits in all cultures and assure people that they have to find a compromise and accept changes in favour of Nigeria's unity.