Identity Politics and Economic Effects of the Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) In the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria.

By

M.C. Uzorka, PhD
Department of Sociology,
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,
Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

&
Patrick Chika Omeh
Department of Sociology,
Ignatius Ajuru University of Education,
Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

Abstract

One area of the actual obstacles to sustenance of stable peace and security in the middle belt of Nigeria is the existence and alarming rate in proliferation of small arms and light weapons (SALW). Small arms and light weapons proliferation over time has become a reason of annihilation to human lives and property and has led to inter-communal clashes, resulting to serious violence. Most of the Nigerian borders are porous, therefore, giving room for easy influx, movement and exit of arms, human trafficking and drugs. However, high level of corruption in Nigeria constitutes the various security risks bedevilling the state. This study examines the threats posed by small arms and light weapons proliferation to the middle belt security; it assesses the concerted efforts of the Nigerian government in combating the menace with a plan to proffer solutions on how to resolve the disheartening phenomenon. The study concludes that, the failing economy, insecurity, high rate of unemployment, poverty, failure of government to provide basic necessities of life and corruption stand as a cog in the wheel to appreciable efforts and policies at arresting the menace in the middle belt region of Nigeria.

Introduction

The end of the Cold War and the collapse of the former Soviet Union brought about easy access to highly lethal weaponry ranging from assault rifles to rocket launchers, facilitated by the opening of borders and the rapid expansion of free trade. Such weapons are increasingly falling into wrong hands and all categories of fighters, including children who eventually turn them against those whom humanitarian law is designed to protect.

Research findings have revealed that death toll from small arms and light weapons exceed the atomic bombs that devastated Hiroshima and Nagasaki during the Second World War. Small arms are now be referred to as "weapons of mass destruction" because of the carnage

they cause in the "trouble spots" all over the world. One of the major efforts to preserve international peace and security in the 21st century has been to control or limit the number of weapons and ways in which weapons can be used.

The inner sense of dignity seeks recognition. It is not enough that I have a sense of my own worth if other people do not publicly acknowledge it or, worse yet, if they denigrate me or don't acknowledge my existence. Self-esteem arises out of esteem by others. Because human beings naturally crave recognition, the modern sense of identity evolves quickly into identity politics, in which individuals demand public recognition of their worth. Identity politics thus encompasses a large part of the political struggles of the contemporary world, from democratic revolutions to new social movements, from nationalism and Islamism to the politics on contemporary societies. Indeed, the philosopher, Hegel argued that the struggle for recognition was the ultimate driver of human history. According to Hegel, human history was driven by a struggle for recognition. He argued that the only rational solution to the desire for recognition was universal recognition, in which the dignity of every human being will be recognized. Universal recognition has been challenged ever since by other partial forms of recognition based on nation, religion, sect, race, ethnicity, or gender, or by individuals wanting to be recognized as superior . The rise of identity politics in modern liberal democracies is one of the chief threats that they face, and unless we can work our way back to more universal understandings of human dignity, we will doom ourselves to continuing conflict"

Identity Politics

The notion of identity politics derives from the combination of two words, identity and politics. Identity means the state or quality of being identical, or the same. It follows that a group of persons may have certain traits, features, cultural realities, economic status etc. that bind them together. These distinguish a group from other groups and place that group on a different pedestal depending on how it asserts its identity in its relationship with other groups. The assertion of the group's identity may not be a wishful thinking, it finds expression within the context of the group's identifiable interest and it is concretized and actualized by not only the availability of resources at the group's disposal, but also the effective and efficient mechanism of resource distribution.

On the other hand, politics is the allocation of resources through institutionalized means for the harmonization and protection of the various interests in a social formation. Thus, each group strives for the available resources in order to protect its interests and assert its identity. The social formation is characterized by competition among the various groups which, when not properly and fairly regulated, can destabilize the political system and threaten the corporate existence of the various interest groups. Therefore, identity politics refers to the conscious efforts made by a group to protect its interest

and assert its identity. It also means that political arguments that focus upon the self-interest and the perspectives of social minorities or self-identified social interest groups and the way in which people's politics are shaped by certain aspects of their identity such as race, class, religion, sexual orientation, or traditional dominance.

It appears to be more glaring that a group tends to assert its identity when in most cases there is an oppressive mechanism usually in the form of a political structure designed to oppress, subjugate, exploit, and relegate it to the background. This view was succinctly captured by (Young 1990), when he said that identity politics, as a mode of organizing, is intimately connected to the idea that some social groups are oppressed. Consequently, it can be seen as the politics of group based movement claiming to request the interests and identity of a particular group, rather than policy issues relating to all members of the community.

In most cases, identity politics can be deceptive. This is because instead of being seen as the politics of recognition since it demands recognition on the basis of the very grounds on which recognition has previously been derived, most leaders of certain groups hide under the guise of identity politics to exploit and marginalize members of their own group for their selfish interests. Unfortunately, this makes the group more susceptible to exploitation, oppression, and marginalization by other groups. Given this circumstance, the group becomes entangled in what may be referred to as victim politics - a situation where a group identifies itself as oppressed and seek either to end that oppression, or to use that oppression to justify their actions in other spheres. Thus, they constantly struggle to extricate themselves from the clutches of supremacist politics - a situation where groups seek to dominate other groups for what they see as the "legitimate" reason (Watts 2008).

The emergence of modern concerns with ethnicity and social movement led to anthropological postulations about identity. Notable in this regard is the Eriksonian understanding of identity which focused on the uniqueness of individuality which makes a person distinct from others. It refers to the qualities of sameness in relation to a person's direction to others and to a particular group of people. This view was reinforced by the trend in sociological thought which explains the manner in which the individual is affected by and contributes to the overall social context. The above view according to (Young, 1990) led to the crystallization of two approaches of interpreting the concept of identity. The first is known as essentialism, also referred to as primordial approach, which holds that identification with a particular group is a natural and fixed thing, defined by objective criteria such as common ancestry and common biological characteristics e.g. Sexuality. Whereas, the second is the social constructionist theory which holds the position that identity is formed by a predominantly political choice of certain characteristics. Therefore, it questions the idea that identity is a natural thing characterized by fixed, supposedly objective criteria (Young, 1990). Granted that

people with different backgrounds can join an interest group to protect their own interest, it is also evident that people with the same physical or biological features gravitate around avowed interests which pull them together. Thus, it is not necessarily because one is a black man that one joins a movement for black nationalism, more importantly is the consideration of the interest of the blacks vis-à-vis other races. The moment the interest fritter away such categorization or movement becomes superfluous. For instance, how can one explain the situation in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria where the over celebrated case of marginalization, oppression, and exploitation of the people has given rise to a plethora of movements or groups claiming to represent the interest of the people of Niger Delta when it is obvious that these movements/groups lack the norms of univocality as they sing with discordant tunes. Most of these movements sometimes inflict harm on their people as a result of their struggle for supremacy. They also kidnap their own people for ransom all in the name of resource control. Again, due to their overbearing influence, they bunker oil and use the proceeds for ostentatious consumption while a good number of people are still wallowing in a seemingly abysmal poverty and underdevelopment. Worse is the fact that a part of the political elite diverts the revenue meant for the development of the area into private pockets and also squander the revenue in frivolous projects and programs which have no direct bearing on people's lives

Another reference point is the feudal tango in the Hausa-Fulani axis of Northern Nigeria where some indigenes of the area are subjected to life of servitude and perpetual dependency. The above instances and other related cases cast doubt in the minds of many people regarding the potency of identity politics in actually protecting the interest of a group and at the same time asserting their identity. Rather, it reinforces the temptation to believe that identity politics is simply deceptive and that it is a game for ethnic chauvinists or religious bigots who hide under the cloak of ethnicity, religious belief, or other forms of identity to protect their selfish and parochial interests. This scenario can be likened to the proverb stating that the "dog has chewed the bone that is hung on its neck". Also, there is a temptation to believe that identity politics has the "voice of Jacob and at the same time the hand of Esau"

Middle Belt Region of Nigeria

Minorities in Nigeria tend to be dominated by the three largest ethnic groups, the Hausa of the North, the Yoruba of the Southwest and Igbo of the Southeast. Surrounded by divergent religious, economic, and cultural histories, the middle belt has been the melting pot of small and large ethno-religious groups in Nigeria where they have also increasingly collided over land, resources, identity and political power. The result is a mixture of recurring conflicts and occasional political unity and solidarity amongst these highly differentiated peoples.

In particular, Jos city in Plateau State has been a centre for ethno-religious disputes and violence since the 1990s. The Jos Forum Inter-Communal Dialogue process spanned 16 months from August 2013 - December 2014, and refers to a peace process undertaken by communities living in Jos that concluded in a "Declaration of Commitment to Peace". In 2018 violence escalated, with battles for scarce resources leading to over 500 deaths and 50 towns being destroyed. The clashes were largely between Muslim Fulani pastoralists and Christian Berom farmers. Over 300,000 people have been displaced by the violence.

These zones were created not entirely based on geopolitical location. They were created rather based on cultural similarities, shared history, and ethnicity. But the Middle Belt Nigeria region which is loosely known as North Central is a region which is a mixture of minor and major ethnic groups coexisting together. This region is mapped at the center of Nigeria and stretches longitudinally from one end of the map to the other that is from west to east. Although the Middle Belt is also referred to as North Central, some groups from this region have claimed that they are not part of Northern Nigeria. So the question now is how many states are Middle Belt in Nigeria. States of Nigeria which are generally referred to as belong to the Middle Belt are:

BENUE, PLATEAU, TARABA, NIGER, KOGI, NASSARWA, KWARA, ADAMWA, and the FEDERAL CAPITAL TERRITORY. The definition of the Middle Belt areas are subject to great debate due to the presence of significant number of ethnic Hausa, Fulani and Kanuri groups. In addition, the Yoruba who are the predominant ethnic group in Kwara and Kogi have a strong affinity with the larger Yoruba body and frequently prefer not to be associated with the Middle Belt identity.

The population of the middle belt is estimated to be over 35 million or more who are predominantly Christians and some few Muslims converts. The area also has a very large significant number of the Hausa-Fulanis who are roughly 20% percent of the population. The Christians make about 70-75% of the population while the Muslims constitute 25-30% of the population.

Sources and Proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons in the Midle Belt Region of Nigeria

According to United Nations General Assembly on 8 December 2005, defines small arms and light weapons as follows:

any man-portable lethal weapon that expels or launches, is designed to expel or launch, or may be readily converted to expel or launch a shot, bullet or projectile by the action of an explosive, excluding antique small arms and light weapons or their replicas. Antique small arms and light weapons and their replicas will be defined in accordance with domestic law. In no case will antique small arms and light weapons include those manufactured after 1899

A. "Small arms" are, broadly speaking, weapons designed for individual use. They include, inter alia, revolvers and self-loading pistols, rifles and carbines, sub-machine guns, assault rifles and light machine guns.
B. Light weapons" are, broadly speaking, weapons designed for use by two or three persons serving as a crew, although some may be carried and used by a single person. They include, inter alia, general purpose or universal machine guns, medium machine guns, heavy machine guns, rifle grenades, under-barrel grenade launchers and mounted grenade launchers, portable anti-aircraft guns, portable anti-tank guns, recoilless rifles, man portable launchers of anti-tank missile and rocket systems, man portable launchers of anti-aircraft missile systems, and mortars of a calibre of less than 100 millimetres.

ECOWAS10 Convention on Small Arms and Light Weapons, their Ammunition and other Related Materials of 2006,11 which is the West African sub-regional benchmark for regulating SALW provides the following definitions.

A. Small Arms: Arms destined for personal use and which include: firearms and other destructive arms or devices such as an exploding bomb, an incendiary bomb or a gas bomb, a grenade, a rocket launcher, a missile, a missile system or a mine. 1) Revolvers and pistols with automatic loading; 2) rifles and carbines; 3) machine guns; 4) assault rifles; 5) light machine guns.
B. Light Weapons The following portable arms designed to be used by several people working together in a team: 1) heavy machine guns; 2) portable grenade launchers, mobile or mounted; 3) portable anti-aircraft cannons; 4) portable antitank cannons, non-recoil guns; 5) portable anti-tank missile launchers or rocket launchers; 6) portable anti-aircraft missile launchers; 7) mortars with a calibre of less than 100 millimetres: (1) cartridges, munitions for small calibre weapons; 2) projectiles and missiles for small arms; 3) mobile containers with missiles or projectiles for anti-aircraft or anti-tank simple action systems

Gun possession by civilians in Nigeria is not new. Literature sources indicate that guns were first introduced by the Europeans before and during the colonial period and have for long been used as part of tradition and in hunting activities in the rural community. With time, guns and gun powder became symbols of strength and power, and were later transformed into ceremonial weapons displayed during death ceremonies and customary festivals across tribes and ethnic groups. They also became a symbol of individual and ethnic grandeur as they were believed to deter aggressors and invaders. Today, guns have transformed in terms of functionality, lethality, sophistication, ubiquity and motive for ownership. They have become more of weapons of criminality and instruments of the underworld than ornaments of prestige, Though, several reports have traced illicit trafficking and proliferation of guns to the failure of the Nigerian Government to execute a comprehensive disarmament and arms destruction programme after the end of the 1967-

70 civil war, there is evidence that the Country had cause to worry about SALW proliferation even before the civil war broke out and that this concern predates the 1959 Firearms Act.76 The phenomenon was however, aggravated by the civil war and has steadily increased owing to the interplay of a number of factors.

Characteristic of Small Arms and Light Weapons

i. **Simplicity and durability**: Compared to major weapons systems which requires regular upkeep and maintenance due to their complicated electronics, vionics and propulsion subsystems, small arms and light weapons have few movable parts, are extremely durable and require little upkeep or logistical support.

ii. **Portability and Concealebility**: Individuals or light vehicles can carry small arms and light weapons; they can easily be transported or smuggled into areas of conflict; and they can be concealed in shipments of legitimate cargo.

iii. **Military/police and civilian uses**: Small arms and light weapons often have legitimate uses for both military and police force. They may also be held legally or otherwise by individuals who are afraid of their own personal security. However, in the case of major conventional weapons, only the military force generally procures them.

iv. **Low cost and wide availability**: These weapons are usually supplied in large quantity or abundantly for military, police, and civilian use.

v. **Lethality:** The increase in sophistication of rapid-fire assault rifles, pistols and machine guns, and their widespread circulation among sub-state groups and civilians promotes or encourages availability of firepower that matches or exceeds that of national police or even the military of a state or country.

Causes of Arms Proliferation

- Undemocratic governance
- Undemocratic electoral process
- Weak economic base of most countries engulfed with crisis
- Uneven distribution of basic infrastructure
- Military coups
- Ethnicity
- Weak stockpile and management of national arms and armunitions
- Post-colonial or Cold War reminants
- Movement of refugees/dominant of refugees' camps by armed groups
- Failed state

Illicit Weapons and Their Sources

The proliferation of illicit SAWL in the Middle belt has external and internal sources.

1. Cross-State Smuggling: Nigeria procures arms from other countries for her legitimate use in connection with state security obligations. This constitutes a significant source of SALW proliferation. Additionally, Nigeria is vulnerable to illicit SALW infiltration from abroad because of her geographical location. She shares a long stretch of land border with the Republic of Niger and Chad in the North, Benin Republic in the West, and Cameroon in the East; in addition to a long stretch of Atlantic coastline. Each of these frontiers provides entry points for systematic smuggling of arms into the country. Reportedly, the three most notorious arms smuggling frontiers are IdiIroko and Seme in the South-Western States of Lagos and Ogun; the Niger Delta Region; and the border posts in the north-eastern region.
   Smuggling is also aided by the increased number of potential suppliers as a result of the end of the Cold War and weak international controls of armament flows. These factors have created opportunities for militant groups and other private actors to access sophisticated SALW previously accessible only by members of the armed forces
2. Security Sector Black-racketeering: A large portion of illicit firearms consist of leakages from members of the armed forces and the police both serving and retired. This includes the remnants from the Nigerian civil war and leakages from returnees of peace keeping operations
3. Local Manufacturing: Nigeria also has a significant local supply of legitimate and illicit SALW through local manufactures.98 Section 22 of the Firearms Act prohibits the manufacture of firearms. However, the government established Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria (DICON) set up in 1964 via the Defence Industries Corporation of Nigeria Act, is legally empowered to produce arms and ammunitions in the country mainly for use by the military and the police. Given the legal status of its mandate, this does not constitute a significant source of illicit small arms.
   However, this is not the case with the cluster of unlicensed local craftsmen located in different parts of the country, who produce on the aggregate, a substantial quantity of illicit guns99 in contravention of section 22 of the Firearms Act. The clandestine nature of their activities negates due diligence, transparency and regulation as required by international standards. It also makes their products difficult to trace and makes the SALW position of Nigeria opaque.

Motivations For Salw Possession And Proliferation

The demand for or need to possess small arms in Nigeria is motivated by a combination of factors which can be grouped under three major heads: activities of the military, multiplicity of conflicts and personal security arrangements:

Activities of the Military and Law Enforcement Agencies The role of the armed forces and the police involves use of arms and ammunitions. Thus, a large proportion of legally acquired SALW are for their requirements. Their increasing demand for arms and ammunitions to enable them successfully confront the equally increasing number of armed criminals has aggravated the proliferation of arms in the country.

Also, the legacy of protracted military rule is widely regarded as a major dynamic in the proliferation of illicit SALW in Nigeria. It is believed that this led to the entrenchment of the militarised psyche and a culture of violence predominant in the country today; and that it provided the essential dynamic for the particularly violent character of criminality in Nigeria and the increasing demand for small arms by non-state actors.

Furthermore, the culture of impunity that continues to undermine the rule of law to date was planted during the military era. This has contributed to the inefficacy of the provisions regulating SALW. The same goes for corruption and failed governance, a conundrum which has not only undermined the rule of law, but has also created the discontent and animosity fuelling the conflicts inundating the country, thus increasing the demand for SALW.

The Prevalence of Internecine Conflicts and Criminality

The desire to possess small arms and the unlawful use of same in Nigeria has also been attributed to the prevalence of organised armed conflicts and the increasing culture of violence which has become a defining character of the sociopolitical scene since 1999. Except for self-defence and other lawful purposes, the possession of illicit firearms usually follows a premeditation of mayhem, violence or criminal act. This correlation between crime and conflicts on one hand, and the demand for arms on the other has caused the multiplicity of conflicts and criminality to consequentially increase the demand for illicit SALW by civilians and non-state actors While criminals, militants and hoodlums require them to perform their nefarious acts, their activities create an arms race between rival gangs wanting to maintain an edge over each other; and also between the State security forces and the criminals. The conflicts in the Niger Delta and the emergence of the Niger Delta militias are very important dynamics in the SALW situation in Nigeria because of the amount of weapons they have at their disposal and their active involvement in gunrunning. The government recognized this fact when it initiated a number of disarmament programmes in the region in 1999 and 2004, and recently extended amnesty to the militants in the region in 2009.

Insecurity and the Privatization of Security

The failure of the Nigerian government to guarantee human security and freedom from fear has transformed security from a public service and necessity to be provided by the government to a private necessity which individuals and groups have to provide for themselves.

The government's inability to prosecute persons arrested in respect of the various religious and ethnic crises fans violence and its continuity; while the weakness of law enforcement exacerbates the culture of impunity and robs the criminal justice system of the deterrence role. The Nigeria Police Force suffers from poor training, lack of equipment, corruption and other inherent and extraneous handicaps. Criminals and dissidents are often better equipped than the police thereby making the police incapable of repelling their attacks and unable to defend the public from criminals. Most recorded incidents of armed violence occur without the intervention of the police, a situation which the public perceive as a lack of willingness on the part of the former to engage armed crime and willfully putting their lives in danger. Entities therefore rely on private security companies and vigilantes, possession of guns and installation of security gadgets, thereby increasing the demand for SALW.

Moreover, some vigilante groups often enjoy tacit support and encouragement from political establishments and public office holders. Thus protected, they commit flagrant and gross human rights violations against persons including extra-judicial executions of perceived criminals without been called to account for their actions. The scenario equally develops into a vicious circle where, civilians and various armed groups and criminals acquire more arms to outweigh each other.

This development represents failure on the part of the Nigerian State to fulfill the legal and due diligence obligation imposed by international human rights laws requiring her to "maximise human rights protection for the greater number of people". It depicts failure in the obligation to reduce small arms violence by private actors and consequently reduce the demand for small arms and the need for people to arm themselves.

The Economic Effects of Salw Proliferation in the Middle Belt Region of Nigeria

Under-development: Proliferation of arms has chain effects, it first affects violence and causes prolonged crisis. McNamara (1968) argues that security is development and development is security. From the above postulation it can be seen that with the presence of insecurity, political instability and crime, there can be no meaningful economic development in the society, no wonder the middle belt regions in Nigeria remain most undeveloped part of Nigeria. Majority of the citizens continue to wallow in abject poverty.

The middle belt region is endowed with rich agricultural land but many farmers are afraid to go into their farm. Violent conflicts between nomadic herders from northern Nigeria and sedentary agrarian communities in the central and southern zones have escalated in recent years and are spreading southward, threatening the country's security and stability. With an estimated death toll of approximately 2,500 people in 2016, these clashes are becoming as potentially dangerous as the Boko Haram insurgency in the north east. It was observed that youths have access to weapons that made this crisis an annual ugly events especially during farming season.

Strain on Resources: Government facilities are strained and national allocation to security has increase tremendously over the years in the middle belt states. Government facilities such as the armed forces and other security agencies have larger budgetary allocation due to the factor of prolonged violence in these states. Resources needed for the development and capital projects are being allocated to security and rebuilding conflict affected communities in these states. In an environment like this, economic activities will be vehemently affected, no normal investor will think of establishing an industry in such communities.

Political Instability: With the presence of illegal arms, there are high cases of electoral violence in these states. According to the sixth report on violence (2016) there over 180 electoral crisis death in 2016. Electioneering in these states is riddled with blood bath and instability. From 1966 up till 1999, there has been series of political instability and coup, till date democracy are threatened with high cases of insurgency, kidnapping, robbery etc . The economic activities of the people in these states will not see any light.

Injuries Fatalities: Increased number of firearms related deaths and injuries in our society. The proliferation of SALW has also led to higher combat and civilian casualties during conflicts as well as deaths from rising criminal activities. Thus Annan posited that „small arms are widely used in conflicts in which a high proportion of casualties are civilians and in which violence has been perpetrated in gross violation of international law. This has led to millions of deaths, injuries and suffering and insecurity around the world , Although, the accumulation of such weapons by themselves do not cause conflicts, the situation of their usage, their easy availability tends to exacerbate and increase the lethality of the conflicts and obstruct assistance efforts

Distortion of economic activities – it has been argued convincingly that the proliferation of small arms and light weapons has impacted negatively on economic development by discouraging investments, and had led to misallocation of economic resources to security instead of development as funds meant for development projects are wasted on security as against development. Where guns dominate, development suffers, schools close, shops close, commerce stops, and the local economy grinds to a halt. Buildings are destroyed, bridges are blown up, and whatever development there has been is gone. Private investment dries up and development organizations can't operate any longer. Even after the shootings stops, there is no security. People can't return to their homes or live a normal life.

Summary

National integration presupposes the fact that the political unit is pluralized since different component units compete for resources in other to protect their interest and assert their identities. This diversity, especially since it is expressed in the ethnic configuration of the society, negates the prospects for national integration. According

to (Weiner, 1971 as cited in Ibodje and Dode 2007:121), integration presupposes existence of some elements of pluralism, which may be ethnic, sociocultural, economic, language or political whereby each consciousness can hinder the process of creating a sense of territorial nationality. This could be likened to the biblical Tower of Babel where the builders were inflicted with different languages and as a result they were bereft of understanding, things fell apart and the center could no longer hold.

It may not be correct in all cases that ethnic identity politics protects selfish interest, but it is more glaring that ethnic identity politics have come to stay in Nigerian politics. This is mainly the result of the inequities in terms of power and resource distribution occasioned by the homogenizing effect of the post-colonial State. This was aptly captured by Obi, 2001:14 when he said that, in Nigeria, this homogenizing process has been problematic and is currently being undermined by authoritarianism, socioeconomic crisis, and the inequities embedded in the distribution of power in an ethnically plural oil renter context. These pressures have not only contributed to the resurgence of ethnicity, but have laced it with violence and conflict.

On the other hand, identity politics can be a stabilizing force in a plural society by creating the much-needed awareness and objective conditions necessary for national integration. National integration presupposes a condition whereby the different ethnic groups understand the strength and weakness of the groups and are prepared to tolerate one another in an atmosphere of "give and take". Therefore, national integration is the ability of the groups to remain committed to the ideals of unity by guaranteeing equal opportunities and assertion of the identities of the various group.

Recommendations

What follows is that there must be some objective conditions couched in democratic values for us to actualize the quest for national integration. First is that the different ethnic formations must be adequately represented in the decision-making process. However, there is a caveat in this regard. Those who represent the people must be the people who emerged from the crucible of the popular choice of the electorates. Thus, the electoral system must be orchestrated in such a way that people are not denied of their mandates. It is only when people are adequately represented by their leaders who are the products of a democratic electoral system that their interest can be built in the decision-making process.

Second is the fact that the transcendental government must be based on the concept of the rule of law. This will ensure that democratic values such as social justice, fair play, equality, tolerance, transparency, and accountability guide governmental activities, especially since it concerns the resource allocation

Finally, democratic culture must be a part of the life of not only the leaders but the entire strata of the civil society. People must uphold the tenets of democracy and demonstrate the culture of democracy in their everyday life through democratization process (Wonah, 2010; Ifeanacho and Nwagwu, 2009). However, these democratic cultures can succeed in an atmosphere of economic well-being, which means that poverty which creates alienation and socioeconomic insecurity, and which impel people to seek solace in primary group identity including ethnic or religious identity (IDEA 2000:97) must be eradicated, or at least curbed. Furthermore, poverty coupled with low level of literacy and civic awareness prevents people from fully understanding the intricacies of modern government and the real issues involved in it. As a result, they can be hoodwinked relatively easily by self-seeking ethnic demagogues who present ethnicity as a panacea for their economic woes (IDEA 2000).

In other words, to actualize the quest for national integration, the structural imbalances which can be expressed in the unequal composition of state, unfair distribution of state resources, draconian laws etc., must be restructured in order to give the various ethnic groups a sense of belonging on an equal pedestal.

Conclusion

It is evident from the foregoing that identity politics, apart from the fact that it generates the much-needed consciousness in redressing the chasm of sociopolitical and economic differences existing among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria arising from the dysfunctional structural imbalance of the political system, on the other hand, constitutes some internal and external contradictions which militate against the quest for national integration. The internal contradiction manifests itself when ethnic chauvinists appeal to ethnic sentiments only to protect their personal interest, thereby deepening the crises of identity politics. The external contradiction can be seen when the different ethnic groups, conscious of the structural imbalances, shrink into their "ethnic cocoons' by raising ethnic consciousness for the protection of their interest. This obviously places a knife on the 'chord' that binds them together. We must, in the course of our interaction and discharge of our responsibilities show kindness, be fair and considerate to people no matter the ethnic cleavages. Otherwise, the spirit and feeling of oneness would elude us and national integration would continue to be a mirage in Nigeria.

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