

Traditions of Origin of Selected Ethnic Groups in Nigeria: A Panacea for National Integration Peace and Security

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Abstract

The search for national integration, peace and security has continued to occupy the front burner in any meaningful discourse on national development. In Nigeria, this is largely informed by the nexus between ethnic identity and competition in distribution of national resources and power. This has further spurred tensed arguments, disputes and violence among the over three hundred ethnic identities in the country, thus posing overwhelming security and development challenges. A great majority of scholars often suggest solutions to these challenges in resource allocation, federal character, devolution of power, just to mention a few. This paper interrogates the traditions of origin of selected ethnic identities with a view to resolving major identity crisis. This would thus, engender peace, national integration and development. It is a position of this paper that the traditions of origin of Nigerian ethnic identities such as the Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, Bini, Kanuri, Igala, Nupe, Itsekiri and many others present a platform for peace, unity and national integration. This is discernible from the high degree of interconnectivity or similarity among these groups as reflected in their traditions of origin. This would undoubtedly address myriads of security and development challenges facing Nigeria in the twenty-first century. This research gap would be addressed from an historical point of view using both primary and secondary sources.

Key words: Ethnic identity, development, traditions of origin, security, integration

Introduction

At independence, many African countries were engulfed in internal conflicts, which largely had ethnic undertones. Ethnic rivalry and conflicts have resulted in destruction of lives and properties, as well as underdevelopment of many states. Examples include Somalia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Uganda, Chad, Niger Republic and Nigeria.¹

Ethnic identity is one of the key issues that have continued to impinge on Nigeria's quest for national integration, peace and security. The numerous development challenges facing the country are inextricably linked to ethnicity, religion and politics.² The multi-ethnic structure of the country has often given rise to conflicting and competitive relationships in which different communities struggle to control political power and economic resources of the state. This portends a great deal of negative effects on peace, national integration and development in Nigeria.³ Thus, different ethnic groups that have co-existed or lived peacefully for decades or centuries have been pitched against one another as enemies. Examples of such ethnic tensions include Zango-Kataf in southern Kaduna, Tigno-Waduku in Adamawa, Tiv-Jukun in Wukari and Jukun-Kuteb in Taraba.⁴ These ethnic have often turned the affected areas into killing fields leading to massive loss of lives and destruction of properties. Two important issues are discernible from this view; first, there is a connection between ethnicity and competition for power and resources in Nigeria. Secondly, this has led to unhealthy rivalries and conflicts among diverse ethnic groups. Thus, any meaningful measure towards achieving national development cannot ignore the issue of ethnicity.

¹Iruonagbe T. C. and George Tayo, "Conflicts and Inter-Group Relations in Nigeria: What Way Forward", *Biudiscourse, Journal of Arts and Education*, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2007, 165-180

²Aghogho K. E. and Ugo C. O., "Ethnicity, Religion, Politics and the Challenges of National Development in Nigeria", *Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law*, Issue 18/2020, 28

³Aghogho K. E. and Ugo C. O., "Ethnicity, Religion, Politics and the Challenges of National Development in Nigeria"..., 40

⁴Sam Egwu, "The Political Economy of Ethnic and Religious Conflicts in Nigeria", in Festus Okoye Esq (ed), *Ethnic and Religious Rights in Nigeria*, Kaduna: Human Rights Monitor, 1998, 15-16

Suggestions have been offered on the solutions to the above challenges. These include Federalism, creation of regions and states, the shift from parliamentary to presidential system, the quota system or federal character, creation of political parties with national outlook and national dialogue or conference. Evidence suggests that these solutions have been inadequate or in some cases have failed completely. Yet, in other cases, ethnic differences intensified. It therefore, becomes imperative that we look in another direction for solutions to problems caused by ethnic consciousness in Nigeria. A possible area is the traditions of origin as related by the people themselves. As we shall see later these traditions seem to link the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria in such a way that many of them probably have common descent or root. The task of national integration peace and security would be easier when peoples' consciousness is drawn to a common root, brotherhood and nationhood.

Methodology

A study of origin of ethnic groups is a complex one involving a number of disciplines including anthropology, sociology, linguistics, archaeology, political science and history. Most of these works were either based on oral or written sources. This paper relied on primary and secondary sources. The primary sources include reports of Commission of Enquiry into the fears of some minority ethnic groups in Nigeria at the eve of independence, while the secondary sources include textbooks, journals and internet materials. These were analysed through the expository method with the view to providing a solution to persistent ethnic related challenges facing the Nigerian nation.

Literature Review

Emoghene and Okolie⁵ examined the effects of ethnicity, religion and politics on national development in Nigeria. According to them, despite the global necessity to employ these factors towards interdependence and national development, the Nigerian situation suggests to the contrary. Thus, Nigeria's multi-ethnic and cultural differences among other factors have rather undermined national development. They suggested entrenchment of a purposeful government as a solution to this negative trend.

⁵Emoghene A. K. and Okolie U. C., "Ethnicity, Religion, Politics and the Challenges of National Development in Nigeria", *Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law Issue 18/2020*

Omoregieet *al*⁶ discussed the multi-ethnic nature of Nigeria and the entrenchment of colonial policy of ethnic domination and marginalisation. This led to agitations among various ethnic groups and subsequently, the establishment of Federal Character principle. The Federal Character was put in place to address imbalance in access to political and economic resources of Nigeria. They believe that by strengthening the Federal Character, in terms of finance, enabling law, etc, the heat of ethnic tensions in the country would be adequately managed.

According to Audu N. G.,⁷ the Nigerian federal structure has failed in its responsibility to promote national cohesion, stability and development. This is evident in waves of violent conflicts along ethnic, religious and regional divides. Thus, federalism that would have been an instrument for integration of diverse ethnic groups has rather generated unhealthy competition for political power and economic resources. According to him, a solution to these would be to convene a national conference where all stake holders in nation state project would express their feelings grievances, reflect on the national question and proffer alternative measures to tackle it. Using the experience of the 1994/1995 National Conference, which was doubted as a credible platform for national dialogue, Gambo posited that the quest for an enduring and stable federal construct in Nigeria still remain “a far cry”.

In a study on ethnicity in Nigeria, Ukiwo U. stated that from the colonial period to independence, major issues confronting Nigeria were how to manage ethnicity, which had threatened the nation-building project. Some approaches were adopted towards addressing the challenge of ethnic divides. These include Federalism, the creation of regions and states and local governments, the shift from parliamentary to presidential system, the quota system or federal character, the prohibition of ethnic political parties. However, the reality on ground is that “while these initiatives have solved some old problems they have generated many unintended

⁶Omoregie E., Mohammed Lawal I. and Agazuma E. S., “Politics of Ethnicity and the Federal Character Question in Nigeria: A Theoretical Approach”, in *Journal of the Department of History and International Studies*, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, 2018, 112-121

⁷Audu N. G., “National Conference, Federalism and the National Question in Nigeria”. Retrieved from <http://dspace.unijos.edu.ng/handle/10485/355>. ISBN: 978-327820

consequences that have exacerbated ethnicity. What is more, they have been destabilizing for the Nigerian state system".⁸

Ogbaji J. O.⁹ examined the traditions of origin of the major and minor ethnic groups in Nigeria. These ethnic groups numbering over 250 have traced their origin either through myth of creation or through stories of migration, especially from the "East". Despite some limitations of these traditions of origin, especially inconsistency and multiple versions, they "seek to legitimise the existence of these ethnic groups and have served to enrich Nigeria's cultural heritage". However, this paper goes beyond the issues of legitimacy and credibility of traditions of origin or creation of enriched cultural heritage in Nigeria; it uses these traditions as a tool to identify areas of similarities and convergence among the various ethnic groups. This will create a sense of common ancestry and a common root.

From the above and other works consulted, there seems to be a common ground that managing the challenges of ethnicity is one of the major issues that have threatened the Nigerian state. These works largely focus on the role of leadership, fair distribution of power and resources or national dialogue for solutions to ethnic crisis. However, with consideration of various futile efforts made in this direction since independence, this paper suggests that we look in another direction, that is, towards traditions of origin as related by the people themselves for solutions to these challenges. These traditions of origin show that the various multi-ethnic groups probably have common descent or root. Recourse to this option would ignite peoples' consciousness on a common root, brotherhood and nationhood.

Ethnic crisis and the challenges of peace, national integration and development

Ethnicity, which refers to "a social identity formation that rests upon culturally specific practices and a unique set of symbols and cosmology"¹⁰, has continued to impinge on peaceful co-existence, national integration and development in

⁸Ukoha Ukiwo, "On the Study of Ethnicity in Nigeria", Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE) Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford, Working Paper No. 12, 2005, 12. www.crise.ox.ac.uk

⁹Ogbaji J. O., "An Assessment of Traditions of Origin of some Ethnic Groups in Nigeria", in *Kaduna Journal of Historical Studies*, Vol. 7, 2015, 170-186

¹⁰*Democracy in Nigeria, Continuing Dialogue (s) for Nation-Building*, A Publication of the International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA), 2000, 91

Nigeria. Mere co-existence of different ethnic groups in an environment does not often lead to conflicts. It should be noted that considerable interrelations and interdependence existed among the different ethnic entities in the area now known as Nigeria. The Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Kanuri, Tiv, etc had relatively peaceful relations and interdependence. The “we-feelings” only emerged through different policies put in place by the colonial administration.¹¹Cultural diversity or multi ethnicity is not peculiar to Nigeria, and cannot be a ground to doubt the possibility of peaceful co-existence and national integration. Countries such as the United States of America, India, Pakistan and Singapore have recorded successful integration and peace building processes among diverse ethnic groups.¹²

The convergence of diverse ethnic groups, languages and belief system following the amalgamation of 1914 created an atmosphere of “separatedness” and competition as well as the desire of one group to dominate the other.¹³ This has often been pursued either peacefully or violently using the instrumentality of ethnicity. The objectives of such group rivalry and competition are often to gain access to power and resources of the country. By this, the interest of their group is placed above that of the country, thus jeopardising national cohesion, peace and security. The colonial administration acknowledged that it was a challenge for them to reconcile the various elements that comprised Nigeria, especially as from 1914.¹⁴ At the approach of independence, these fears started to manifest through formation of tribal and local organisations that later began to have political affiliations. The first cultural association to emerge was the Ibo State Union, which associated with the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons; the Egbe Omo Oduduwa was formed by the Yoruba in 1948 and it visibly aligned with the Action Group party.¹⁵

¹¹Salawu B., Mohammed I. S. and Mohammed A. Y., “The Myth of Ethnicity and its Implication for Democracy”, in Hassan A. S. (ed), *Nigeria Under Democratic Rule (1999-2003)*, Vol. 2, Ibadan: University Press PLC, 2005, 7

¹²Akhakpe I., Ajumjum D. and Ize-Iyamu B., “Democracy, Governance and the Quest for Nationhood in Nigeria”, in Ukase P. I., Akubor E. O. and Onoja A. I. (eds), *Urbanization, Security and Development Issues in Nigeria, 1914-2014*, Festschrift in Honour of Professor Enoch Oyedele, Kaduna: ABU Press, 2016, 755

¹³Olatunji E. A. Ethno-Religious Mobilization, Militarization and the Rhetoric of Unity in Nigeria’s Hundred Years of Nationhood (1914-2014), *AIPGG Journal of Humanities and Peace Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2020, 25

¹⁴*Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Fears of Minorities and the Means of Allaying them*, London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1958, 1-2

¹⁵*Report of the Commission Appointed to Enquire into the Fears of Minorities and the Means of Allaying them....*, 9

After independence, the challenges that continued to face Nigeria in this regard are:(1) how to harness the similarities of about 374 ethnic groups in the country for national development and (2) how to manage their differences to ensure peace and national integration.¹⁶ The implication of this is that ordinarily, a group perception of themselves and the world around them should not have resulted to conflicts with others. Ethnic conflicts are largely as a result of manipulation and mishandling by some elites in order to score certain economic and political gains.

Manipulation of ethnicity as against pan-Nigerian identity is rooted in the colonial divide and rule policies, which emphasized differences rather than similarities. An example is the Land and Native Rights Ordinance of 1910, which discouraged free immigration of southerners to the north. This was reinforced by a policy of separate settlements (sabongari) for southern migrants.¹⁷In addition, ethnic consciousness and mobilisation is rooted in the creation of three Regions (Eastern, Northern and Western) by the Richards' Constitution of 1946.¹⁸Creation of three Regions dominated by the three major ethnic groups in the country spurred unhealthy rivalry, disharmony and distrust, especially among the three major groups.It was this consciousness that led each group to form separate cultural organisations. As earlier stated, the Igbo formed the Igbo State Union, the Yoruba formed the Egbe Omo Oduduwa while the Hausa formed the Jamiyyar Mutanen Arewa¹⁹ By this, ethnic nationalism took visible shape among the Hausa, Igbo and the Yoruba. This trend continued up to 1999 when it assumed another dimension with militarization of ethnic mobilisation, agitation, competition and sometimes secession. Examples include the formation of the Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC), Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) and Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People.²⁰

The political elites who took over power at independence continued similar manipulation of ethnicity to their advantage. Thus, at independence, a ground for

¹⁶*Democracy in Nigeria, Continuing Dialogue (s) for Nation-Building...*, 90

¹⁷*Democracy in Nigeria, Continuing Dialogue (s) for Nation-Building...*, 93

¹⁸Olatunji E. A. Ethno-Religious Mobilization, Militarization and the Rhetoric of Unity in Nigeria's Hundred Years of Nationhood (1914-2014)..., 28

¹⁹Olatunji E. A. Ethno-Religious Mobilization, Militarization and the Rhetoric of Unity in Nigeria's Hundred Years of Nationhood (1914-2014)..., 28

²⁰Olatunji E. A. Ethno-Religious Mobilization, Militarization and the Rhetoric of Unity in Nigeria's Hundred Years of Nationhood (1914-2014)..., 28-29

ethnic rivalry and conflicts had been laid for future Nigeria. The Nigerian state was turned to a contested arena where different ethnic groups struggle for power and economic resources. This becomes more tensed in the midst of different development challenges, leading to violent group conflicts. Conflicts and instability in Nigeria have thus, been attributed to the complex web of identities.²¹ This manifested in ethnic crises among Hausa-Kataf, Jukun-Tiv, Kuteb-Jukun, Urhobo-Ijaw-Itsekiri, Ijaw-Yoruba, Ogoni-Andoni, Ogoni-Okrika, Hausa/Fulani-Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani-Igbo. These and the spate of coups and counter-coups in the 1960s, the Civil War (1967-1970) and the annulment of the June 12 1993 election, claimed numerous lives and many properties were destroyed.²² The implication of this is that these crises reinforced the sense of suspicion, exclusion, marginalisation, deprivation and division among the numerous ethnic groups in the country, thus impeding national integration, peace and security.

Outbreak of the above crises does not suggest that there were no government efforts to prevent or minimise their occurrence. Some efforts made towards addressing the challenge of ethnic divides include Federalism, the creation of regions and states and local governments, the shift from parliamentary to presidential system, the quota system or federal character, as well as prohibition of ethnic political parties.²³

Furthermore, the enforcement of the sabongari settlement system, which was actually intended to minimise inter-ethnic contact only succeeded in creating more ethnic divisions. In addition, the Native Authority system, which was intended to encourage each ethnic group in Nigeria to create ethnic citizenship and sustain its heritage rather created more ethnic divisions in the country. Furthermore, the Federal Character principle was instituted to give representation to different ethnic groups at the national level. It was put in place to allay fears of political domination and assurance of equal access to federal power for every group, state and region. It represents the constitutional principle of proportional

²¹Noah Echa Attah, "Contesting Exclusion in Nigeria: Rethinking Ethnic Nationalism", in Vlastimil Fiala (ed), *Multiple Identities in Post-Colonial Africa*, University of Hradec Kralove Publishing House, Moneta-FM, 2012, 53

²²*Democracy in Nigeria, Continuing Dialogue (s) for Nation-Building...*, 93-94, 246: Noah Echa Attah, "Contesting Exclusion in Nigeria: Rethinking Ethnic Nationalism"...., 62

²³Ukoha Ukiwo, "On the Study of Ethnicity in Nigeria", Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE) Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford, Working Paper No. 12, 2005, 12. www.crise.ox.ac.uk

representation and quota system. It was to reflect in federal appointments. In fact, this principle was hailed as a solution to instability and division of the country.²⁴ However, since its inception in 1979, this has not proved to be a portentous tool to address ethnic tension. Lastly, the federal system, from three Regions to the current 36 states, was designed to decentralise and devolve state powers in favour of ethnic and regional entities. Unfortunately, this rather intensified ethnic problems.²⁵ Ukiwo²⁶ offered a similar position thus, “while these initiatives have solved some old problems they have generated many unintended consequences that have exacerbated ethnicity”. Thus, rather than solving ethnic problems, these initiatives largely destabilized the Nigerian project.

Without politicization and manipulation of ethnicity, the concept itself is neutral and does not pose any danger to national integration, peace and security. Rather, it could serve as an instrument of national integration and development where there are healthy interactions.²⁷ In view of this, a possible option towards achieving national integration, peace and security is to go back to the root, origin or descent. This would place emphasis on pan-Nigerian identity rather than ethnic consciousness. This takes us to the relevance of traditions of origin in national integration, peace and security.

The relevance of Traditions of Origin to national integration, peace and security

Traditions of origin are accounts that tend to offer explanation on the root of a group of people. For example, all groups in Nigeria usually trace their origin to a divine ancestry in legends or myths, and these accounts are usually preserved in what is known as traditions of origin.²⁸ A good number of legends exist among Nigerian ethnic groups seeking to explain their roots or to trace their origins. These existed in oral traditions and later in Arabic and English. These attempts were inspired by the emergence of historical consciousness among these groups, it

²⁴ Osaghae E. E. *Crippled Giant, Nigeria Since Independence*, Ibadan: John Archers Publishers, 2002, 15

²⁵ *Democracy in Nigeria, Continuing Dialogue (s) for Nation-Building...*, 95-96

²⁶ Ukoha Ukiwo, “On the Study of Ethnicity in Nigeria”, Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity (CRISE) Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford, Working Paper No. 12, 2005, 12. www.crise.ox.ac.uk

²⁷ Emoghene A. K. and Okolie U. C., “Ethnicity, Religion, Politics and the Challenges of National Development in Nigeria”, *Journal of Public Administration, Finance and Law* Issue 18/2020

²⁸ Ogbaji J. O., “An Assessment of Traditions of Origin of some Ethnic Groups in Nigeria”, in *Kaduna Journal of Historical Studies*, Vol. 7, 2015, 170

should be stated at this point that these legends have certain features in common, including stories of creation, emphasis on migration and conquest or kingship.²⁹ As we shall demonstrate later, through stories of creation, some groups such as the Yoruba and the Edo have claimed that the world started from their areas before spreading elsewhere. Other groups such as the Igbo, Tiv and the Igala have legends that claim that they migrated from places outside their present settlements. Yet, others such as the Hausa trace their origin to some conquerors.

As earlier mentioned, traditions of origin of some ethnic groups contain stories of creation. They believe that they descended from heaven to their current settlement and that the world started from them. For example, the Yoruba claim to have descended from a legendary figure, Oduduwa who is believed to have been sent down from heaven by Olodumare, the Supreme God. Oduduwa was mandated to go and create the earth, which he did at Ile-Ife. Literally, Ile-Ife means “house of spreading”, and it was named as such because of the believe that the world started from there, and that it was from Ile-Ife that people spread to other parts of the world.³⁰ Details of this acclaimed process of creation are contained in Akinjogbin and Ayandele’s work “Yorubaland up to 1800”.³¹

Examples of stories of creation also exist among other groups. The Edo (also known as Benin or Bini) claim descent to Osanobua, the Supreme God. They have a legend that claim that Osanobua had seven children who were commissioned to perform different tasks, one of which was for the youngest one to create the world and this done at Benin.³² The Igbo’s claim in one of their traditions of origin that they originated from their current areas, particularly Nri, Awka and Orlu³³ suggests that they descended from heaven.

The import of the above claims is that these groups believe in the existence of the Supreme God from whom they believe that their progenitors came from. It is

²⁹Olusola Akinrinade, “Myths as History A Critique of the Traditions of Origin of Nigerian Ethnic Groups”, *Africa, Revista de Estudos Africanos de USP*, 8, 1985, 88-99

³⁰Olusola Akinrinade, “Myths as History A Critique of the Traditions of Origin of Nigerian Ethnic Groups”..., 89

³¹Akinjogbin A. I. and Ayandele E. A., “Yorubaland up to 1800”, in Obaro Ikime (ed), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nig.) PLC, 1980, 122

³²Olusola Akinrinade, “Myths as History A Critique of the Traditions of Origin of Nigerian Ethnic Groups”..., 89

³³Afigbo A. E., “Igboland Before 1800”, in Obaro Ikime (ed), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books (Nig.) PLC, 1980, 71

therefore on the basis of these claims that this work posits that these groups with similar stories of creation probably came from the same source, that is heaven. This further suggests a common origin and nationhood.

Furthermore, majority of them claim to have migrated from places outside their current settlements. Claims of origin from elsewhere often point toward Egypt and the East. These claims cannot be ignored because of waves of mass migration from Egypt and the Middle, which followed the desecration of the Sahara and collapse of ancient Egypt in 341 BCE.³⁴

Among the Hausa for example, there seems to be a common account that seeks to explain their origin. The Bayajida legend is the most widely accepted oral tradition that attempts to explain the origin of the Hausa states. According to the legend, Bayajida is believed to be the founder of the Hausa states. He is also believed to have come from Baghdad to Kanem-Bornu and further to Daura in Hausaland. This legend further states that Bayajida married the daughter of the King, *Mai* of Bornu from whom he had a son. While in Daura, he displayed his dexterity by helping them to kill a snake, which had hindered the people from getting water from a well. This action impressed the queen of Daura and she offered to marry him, a marriage that later produced the six children who along with the first child at Bornu, founded the original seven Hausa states referred to as the "Hausa Bokwai."³⁵ This legend therefore, shows how Bayajida arrived in the future Hausaland, married into an existing ruling fathered the rulers of the seven Hausa states otherwise known as the *Hausa Bakwai*. These include Daura, Kano, Katsina, Gobir, Rano and Zaria, with Biram, forming the seventh. It is also believed that the name of the hero is Abi Yazid, another form of Bayajida who was 'an Arab of Sham', and a son or grandson of the king of Baghdad.³⁶

There is another legend on the origin of the Yoruba that is similar to that of the Hausa. Reverend Samuel Johnson, in reference to Sultan Bello's work, averred that the Yoruba migrated from the East (probably, Egypt, Arabia, Yemen or ancient

³⁴Uzoigwe G. N., "Nigeria to 1960: An Overview", in Nwachuku L. A. and Uzoigwe G. N., *Troubled Journey, Nigeria Since the Civil War*, America: Oxford, University Press, 2004,5-6

³⁵*Nigerian Peoples and Culture*, A Publication of the National Open University of Nigeria, 2008, 19. www.nou.edu.ng

³⁶Hallam W. K. R., The Bayajida Legend in Hausa Folklore, *Journal of African History*, VII, I, 1966, 48

Meroe). Along the way they established kingdoms such as Gogobir in Hausaland before they eventually got to Ile-Ife. The group that got to Ile-Ife was headed by Oduduwa.³⁷ The Igbo has another tradition of origin that claims that they migrated from Egypt of Israel, thus claiming Middle East Origin.³⁸ The view that they originated from either the Jews or the Hebrews is based on the claim that the names Uburu and Hebrew are related, and that the word, Igbo, is a “contraction and corruption” of Hebrew.³⁹ Disagreeing with these Jewish or Hebrew connection, Ojiaku pointed a probable origin based on archeological evidence.

Available archeological evidence suggests...that the Igbo are a branch of the Negro race which may have originated in the area along the latitude of Asselar and Khartoum: more or less in the northern fringe of the savanna. Therefore, the Igbo homeland cannot possibly lie north of this latitude, that is, as far north as Egypt, the Holy land or Yemen.⁴⁰

The above views suggest probable origin of the Igbo to be from the Jews, the Hebrew or a black origin from around Khartoum. In any case, this area encompasses the Nile, Egypt and Ethiopia up to the Red Sea.

In the same vein, the Jukun, Chamba and Banta claimed to have migrated from the East and entered Nigerian area through Mandara and Lake Chad. The Kilba, Higi and neighbouring groups trace their origin to the Mandara. Others such as the Tarok and Mumuye do not claim any origin distant from these mentioned groups.⁴¹ It could be deduced from the foregoing that these groups were probably of the same descent and must have been a united nation in their earliest history. This probably inspired them to migrate towards the same direction.

There are other traditions of origin that seem to knit many Nigerian ethnic groups. The traditions of origin of the Igala for instance, are contained in legends related

³⁷Akinjogbin A. I. and Ayandele E. A., “Yorubaland up to 1800”..., 122

³⁸Afigbo A. E., “Igboland Before 1800”..., 71

³⁹Mazi O. Ojiaku, *The Igbo People: Culture and Character*, 2015, 13. Excerpt retrieved from <http://www.booklocker.com/p/books/8047.html?s=pdf>

⁴⁰Mazi O. Ojiaku, *The Igbo People: Culture and Character*..., 13

⁴¹Saad Abubakar, “Peoples of the Upper Benue Basin and the Bauchi Plateau before 1800”, in Obaro Ikime (ed), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*..., 165-166

to personalities that influenced them in their early history. These include AbutuEje (a child raised by a leopard), a prince from Ado (Benin), a prince from Apa (Jukun) or a prince from Yorubaland. These are suggestions of origin and connection with the Benin, Jukun and the Yoruba. However, the most definite statement that can be made about the Igala is that had a common origin with the Yoruba.⁴² Traditions of origin of the Nupe People suggest that they either came from Egypt or from Idah the headquarters of Igala kingdom. The second view is premised on the fact that Tsoede or Edegi who is considered by some Nupe people as the founder of their State might have arrived in the early 16th century from Idah. It is also believed that he had an Igala father and a Nupe mother.⁴³

Ryder A. F. C. stated that the Benin Kingdom is believed to have been founded by a Yoruba prince and a grandson of Oduduwa, either Eweka or Oramiyan.⁴⁴ Similarly, there are claims of Benin and Igbo origin among the Isoko. The Itsekiri ethnic group claims a link with the Benin, Ijo, Urhobo and the Yoruba.⁴⁵ Alagoa⁴⁶ stated that there are claims among the Efik of origin from Arochukwu in the present Imo State. There are also claims among the Efik, Ibibio, Aros, Ejaghan and Yakur that they migrated from the Benue Valley. Finally, there are claims that the foundation of Kanem-Bornu was laid by an Arab, Saif bin Dhiyazan between the 9th and 10th centuries A.D. Saif is believed to have established the famous Saifawa dynasty in Kanem Borno.⁴⁷

Conclusion

The problems associated with ethnic plurality in Nigeria has been discussed, particularly negative manipulation of ethnic groups by some elites in order to score some economic and political gains. This situation has led to unhealthy and unwarranted rivalry, competition and conflicts. Unfortunately, administrative solutions have not been able to adequately address this negative trend in Nigeria's

⁴²Ade Obayemi, "States and Peoples of the Niger-Benue Confluence Area", in Obaro Ikime (ed), *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, 151

⁴³ Nigerian Peoples and Culture 22-23

⁴⁴Ryder A. F. C., "The Benin Kingdom", in Obaro Ikime (ed), *Groundwork of Nigerian History...*, 112

⁴⁵Obaro Ikime, "The Peoples and Kingdom of the Delta Province", in Obaro Ikime (ed), *Groundwork of Nigerian History...*, 90-93

⁴⁶Alagoa E. J., "Peoples of the Cross River Valley and the Eastern Niger Delta", in Obaro Ikime (ed), *Groundwork of Nigerian History...*, 59

⁴⁷ Nigerian Peoples and Culture, 20-21

journey to genuine nationhood. We have discussed traditions of origin of some selected ethnic groups in Nigeria. The list is inexhaustible. However, the examples provided imply a common origin or descent among the numerous Nigerian ethnic groups. It is therefore, our position that most of Nigerian peoples are naturally interrelated as implied by either their stories of creation or migration. This underscores linguists' position that many Nigerian peoples belong to the same language classification and the fact that there are substantial language similarities among many of them. Traditions of origin thus, reveal a common ancestry and brotherhood among most Nigerian groups. Considerable historical and geographical connections, as well as pre-colonial interrelations and interdependence were the basis upon which it is believed that "Nigerians have never lived in isolation of one another...if Nigeria was a historical accident, then, surely, it was an accident anxiously waiting to happen."⁴⁸ Using traditions of origin to establish ancestral connection and brotherhood would therefore, enable us to move beyond unsuccessful attempts to manage the challenges associated with ethnicity in the Nigeria. An examination of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria would reveal that their unity, interaction and interdependence is rooted in similarity of their history, geography and linguistic classification. The various ethnic groups are therefore enjoined to embrace dialogue, tolerance and respect for each other and to recognize the geographical and cultural features that bind them. If they are not "brothers who migrated from the same direction", they are certainly "brothers who descended from heaven" but landed in different places. Recourse to this option would be a potent way to achieve the desired national integration, development, peace, love and brotherhood. This is imperative in the circumstance when the government policies, actions and legal strategies overtly become inadequate or have failed to address these challenges.

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