Marginalization in Nigeria’s Democracy: 
The Lamentations of Ethnic Minorities in Nigeria

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Abstract
A typical attribute of every multi-plural society is ethnic competition and marginalization. The issues of marginalization, domination, subversion and denial of rights towards ethnic minorities in Nigeria has overtime resulted into protests, violence, agitations and political instability. This study through the lens of Social Exclusion theory examines the actuality of marginalization in Nigeria’s democracy. This study adopts a socio-historical discourse analysis method to examine ethnic marginalisation and its implications for democracy in Nigeria. It utilised a social constructivist approach to discuss the existence and open nature of ethnic classification in Nigeria. The study reveals that ethnic marginalization was a colonial construction which is imbibed into the current Nigeria’s democracy and evidentially eminent in the nation’s federal system of government. It is equally observed that ethnic exclusion or marginalisation contributes significantly to the factors undermining the advancement of Nigeria’s democracy. This study therefore recommends that social justice across the multi-cultural ethnic nationalities is a panacea to the issues of marginalisation in the country in order to avert the inter-ethnic struggles and uproars that characterizes the nation’s history as well as national experience of today.

Keywords: Democracy, Marginalization, Federalism, Integration and Ethnicity

Introduction
Nigeria is the most populous nation in Africa and the 8th in the world with a population figure of 195.9 million people. The country is made up of a highly heterogeneous composition of more than 400 ethnic groups, 250 dialects, 3 main religious groups with diverse cultural belief systems and practices. She is structurally made up of six geological zones, namely the south-east, south-south, south-west, north-focal, north-east as well as north-west. She has thirty six states with a central government in the Federal Capital Territory which also is the seat of power for about 90 percent of her national leaders. Administratively, she operates a federal system comprising of three tiers of governments assumable via elected individuals who are responsible for her administration (World Bank, 2018).

The country which officially gained her independence from the British Colonial masters on the 1st of October, 1960 and became self-rule or republic three years later in 1963, is blessed with a lot of natural resources which is topped by petroleum which draws the attention of the entire world. Typical of African nations, colonization has determinant on the structure, social conviction, language, and self-sufficient of the different ethnic identities that establish the Nigerian state (Ugbem, 2019).
One of the major and cardinal challenges which seem obstinate is how to manage this segmented country, a nation that is so pluralistic in structure as well as nature and grouped along lines of ethnicity. Ayokhai (2013) submits that Nigeria has more than 400 established ethnic groups. Equally, Asaju (2015) stresses this fact by opining that Nigeria is one of the most ethnically different nations on the planet with more than 250 ethnic phonetic gatherings. A few of these ethnic groups are larger than some independent states in Africa. This has equally led to series of agitation by minorities who feel marginalized by the majority. Thus, federal character principle was introduced to address the equity and fairness in the distribution of public positions and infrastructure distribution.

Specifically, the south-south agitation in the country has been on the ground of resource control as an offshoot of the discovery of crude oil in that part of the country (Niger Delta). Politically, economically and environmentally, the Niger Delta people have protested over the years against these lines of development (Ejibunu, 2007). This has given birth to militias group and operation in the region with high level of violent towards both government and non-governmental agencies as well as kidnapping of individuals, foreigners including children of those affiliated to industry. This has led to proliferation of small arms and more advance weapons and international markets gave rise to the increased equipping of militias group.

Also, of all the group agitations in Nigeria in contemporary times, the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) movement is one of the major threats to the continued existence of Nigeria as a country. This movement has conspicuous presence in local and international media because of their enormous impact on peace, lives, properties and economy of the country. The South-East geo-political Nigeria explicitly has in late time kept on encountering a few types of tumult and articulation of uneasiness by its citizen’s responses to the apparent distraught political and living situation of the country. Important to the mix which is being supported by different formal, casual and social gatherings are exercises of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB). The Yoruba people at one direction are upset for withdrawal from the Nigerian league under the structure tagged Odudua Republic and the relentless discussion and counter discussion for move of capacity toward the South is away from of sentiments of exclusion and alienation (Idowu & Bamidele, 2018).

Similarly, Jamo (2013) reports that there has been increase in the marginalization of some ethnic groups in the appointments into public offices. Certainly, if the issue of ethnic marginalisation of minority groups are not addressed, it will definitely generate an alarming level of crisis in the states which is not healthy economically, politically or developmentally. So, this study makes a call for urgent steps in repositioning the present structural imbalances in order to curtail the issue of kidnapping, cattle rustling, vandalizing of nation’s assets among other anti-social vices face the country. Thus, this paper seek to address marginalisation and lamentation of the minority ethnics groups in Nigeria’s democracy.

Democracy

Defining democracy is somewhat a problematic task. This is due to the fact that the conceptualization of democracy has been a topic of public debate among different nations claiming to be democratic. Etymologically, the term “democracy” was coined from Greek in the 15th century era to mean “a system of government based on “rule of the people”. Presently, there are however several forms of democracy but there are two basic forms of democracy, the two forms are concern with
how the whole body of all the eligible citizens executes their voting rights (Stepan, 1999).

The most widely attributed definition of democracy was that given by the Former American President, Abraham Lincoln which is he said “democracy is a government of the people, by the people and for the people”. This wide-held perspective on vote based system is the situation of Abraham Lincoln, which considers vote based system to be administration of the individuals by the individuals, and for the individuals.

Ikelegbe (2007) sees democracy as a concept that involves setting affairs according to known rules of government, toleration towards minority views, regular elections, freedom of speech and above all, observance of rule of law. Kolawole (2004) posits that democracy is not necessarily the absence of military governance nor it is essentially the presence of civilian leaders, yet a circumstance where political players and organizations of state are structured in good qualities, standards and ethos. In this respects, the effect and impacts of democracy must pervade all the layers of society and administration.

To this paper, therefore, democracy has the capacity and the impetus to accommodates the views and interest of ethnically diverse nationality like Nigeria where it provides for equal representation among the various regions, states and even localities but, the challenge of Nigeria 20 years democracy is the drivers i.e. leaders. They are unfortunately beclouded by ethnicity, religious leaning, regional diversely that explained and reflect in people’s appointment to the national service against merit or capability to deliver. The cry of marginalisation majority suffered by the southerners does not suggest absence of capacity or meritocracy but, subordination of such section by the leaders which by implication result to the nation’s present predicaments. The Delta Avengers, Niger Delta Liberation Front, Niger Delta People’s Volunteer Forces, Niger Delta Vigilante, OPC, IPOB were all response to the perceived marginalisation by the minority groups. Ethnicity in Nigeria therefore calls for intellectual investigation.

Marginalization

The concept of marginalization has to do with act of making a particular group of individuals feel or appear less significant or relegated to a minor position. In this case, some classes of people are grouped together as second class citizens. Ojukwu (2005) sees marginalization as a condition of relative hardship, intentional debilitation of a people by a group that during a pertinent time span uses political force and control the allocation of different assets in favour of their own group. In Nigeria, there are some ethnic groups that are marginalized based on their social, ethnic, financial, position, belief, class and different elements. Similarly, Obianyo (2003) submits that marginalization depicts disregard, non-association or disparity in the conveyance of the financial and political assets of the state or lists of advancement. It ought to be noticed that the idea of marginalization offers ascend to different terms, such as persecution, control, allegations, disregard, abuse, exploitation, segregation, nepotism, dogmatism among others.

Obianyo (2003) further adds that marginalization being witnessed in Nigeria involves the clear and purposeful avoidance of a specific group(s) by another comparative group or groups from ownership of key positions and basic assets in political, financial, military, instructive, media or regulatory domain in the country. In his investigation on ethnic legislative issues in Nigeria, Adayi and Ojo (2014) state that ethnic minorities in Nigeria have been essentially relegated to a speechless or subjected state where they are voiceless in the running of affairs that concern their very lives. A critical observation of the
political situation in Nigeria since independence reveals a high degree to which ethnic marginalisation has influenced and affected the country's administration. The position maintained by Angaye (2003) is that contention happens when some groups or people are denied access to power, influence and riches and made to live in the prevailing inequalities. He insisted that when a group begins to nurture the sentiments of marginalisation and segregation, conflict and protest will be the result.

Theoretical Framework

This work rests it arms on Social Exclusion theory. The theory was founded by Graham Room (1992 – 1995) as multidimensional dynamic and social relationship concept, income inequality, and poverty. It clarifies short-hand term for what can happen when individuals or territory, area face a blend of issues, for example, joblessness, separation, helpless aptitude, low salary, horror and need framework. Tony Blair in 1997, argued that it is a process where individuals, communities, regions or ethnic nationality are obstructed from (or denied full admittance to) different rights, openings and assets which are accessible to individuals from various gatherings and which are principal to social joining and recognition of common freedoms inside that gathering or region (example democratic participation, government appointments, social infrastructural development (Silver, 1994). Disenfranchisement or alleviation resulting from social exclusion is directly linked with an individual’s race, religious group, ethnic groups, region or political affiliation, disability or minority tribe in a democratic struggle. The result of social exclusion is that affected individuals, communities or regions take solace in forming opposition to the perceived oppressor by resistance in form of demonstrations, protest, militia groups raising arms against the state, kidnapping foreign, vandalizing national assets and thereby throwing the image of the country in a bad light in the committee of nations such as IPOB, Massols, OPC, EYC etc. Therefore, resting on the tenet of the social exclusion theory, it is submitted that majority of the crisis and anti-social issues faced by Nigeria are traceable to the citizens who believe they are being marginalized or deprived of their benefits as well as right to national assets or positions. It is submitted here that inclusion, justice and fairness to all is a prospective measure for achieving socio-cultural, political and economic development in a pluralistic and ethnically diverse society like Nigeria.

Methodology

The paper is purely a documentary research. It adopts a socio-historical discourse analysis to examine ethnic marginalisation and its implications for democracy in Nigeria. According to Islam and Kabir (2013), discourse analysis as a methodology for analyzing social phenomena that is qualitative, interpretative and constructionist. It relies solely on secondary data collected from existing literature such as books, journals, newspaper and magazines both print and online, and official documents of the government. The data are qualitative and descriptively analysed.

Democracy and Marginalisation in Nigeria

As built up, marginalization occurs or happens when a particular ethnic group or some sort of assembly feels embittered with the system of organization or operations in a public of which they are part. This generates a feeling that it is business as usual but it is flooded with evident detriments to it as a group, coming about because of the activity of critical benefits by an outside group. The group feels that it involves a mediocre or disadvantageous situation during the time spent force designation, conveyance of courtesies, and admittance to cultural assets. These significant assets, admittance to power and conveniences are seen as being
unreasonably utilized by some other group in charge. Such sentiments, particularly inside ethnic group, will in general lead to different types of dissent, disturbance and convict with different gatherings or the gathering that supposedly is the culprit

Currently in Nigeria, some of the critics as regard marginalisation have held their position from the analysis of the appointment of the current Buhari led administration in the selection of Top government officials especially that of the appointment of his longtime political assistant, Engr. David Lawal as the Secretary to the Government of the Federation, SGF and late Alhaji Abba Kyari as Chief of Staff from Adamawa and Borno states respectively. In a diagram depiction of the Buhari led administration appointment, Akinwumi (2019) gave a list showing the lopsidedness as below:

Table 1: Federal Appointment based on Geopolitical Zones Representation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SN</th>
<th>Geopolitical Zones</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>North -East</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>North -West</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>North-Central</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>South-East</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>South-West</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>South-South</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>30</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


According to the table above, it shows that 25% of the appointments are from the south while the overwhelming 75% are from the north. Likewise, the North West geopolitical which happens to the president’s geopolitical zone has the largest portion of 43%, whiles the South East for instance has no single appointee. This lopsidedness in the appointments has generated a lot of antagonism and ethnic wrath across the nation, some belief that the President is the most regionally unbalance President the country has ever had in the history of her federal appointment (Eme & Onuigbo, 2015).

According to Dagaci (2009), marginalization expect the presence of an operator, group or groups with the capacity to incapacitate or obstacle others. In Nigeria today, sentiments of underestimation are flooding in the general populace. In every way that really matters all the ethnic get-togethers have blamed each other for shows for underestimation. After the June 12, 1993 presidential political race disavowal, by and by, most ethnic social affairs right presently respect the Hausa-Fulani, who have used focal force for a large portion of Nigeria's free presence, as the chief guilty party of underestimation against others. In this regard, Musa (1994) submits that the struggle for domination in Nigeria as well as the use of ethnicity as a class weapon remains a fact.

Dagaci further submits that since 1950s and 1960s, state creation has been viewed as a panacea by ethnic minority movements. Yet, concrete existential circumstances seem to repudiate this idealism. Actually the control of locales has been lost uniquely to be supplanted by the mastery of the lion’s share inside minorities in the miniature spaces called States. As indicated by Larry (1999), ethnic minority fears and complaints based on acquiring a decent amount of the prizes and assets of an extending economy and state; contracts, advances, grants, preparing plants, water supplies, road lights, schools, hydro-electric ventures.
To convey administrative proximity to the grassroots, the quantity of Local Government Areas was also extended from 301 out of 1976 to 774 in 1996. Be that as it may, with the State creation, there was tireless minimization in various states by some ethnic minorities. For instance, in Benue State, Tiv, a huge ethnic get-together, which is a smaller gathering in the Nigerian setting, rules other more diminutive ethnic gatherings inside the state, for instance, Idoma, Igede, Jukuns and others (Osaghae 2001).

It is declared that since the creation of Benue State, only the Tivs have controlled the state while various other groups have been sidelined. As Dare Babarinsa contended, “that unless constitutional rotation is adopted, I don’t think in the nearest future any other nationality would produce the Governor apart from the Tivs”. The same in Kog, Ijaw and Itsikiri, Igalas and Ebiras, North and South, Izala and Terrika, Shiites etc the list is endless in Nigerian Society (Fiakpa 2003).

Recounting the issue of marginalization, Abubakar (2001) utilized some captivating estimations to advance a protection of marginalization or underestimation against the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria. It battles that since 1970, the Igbo have been commonly cheated by the Hausa-Fulani and Yoruba ethnic countries. To put substance to their case, it sets that in 1989, out of 154 authorities of the situation of Brigadier or more in the military, only 8 were Igbo, while 37 and 51 were Yoruba and Hausa-Fulani independently. This is seen as an unbalanced depiction whether or not one fights that the North is identical toward the West included eastward. In any case, it is particularly inclined against the Igbo, who, paying little heed to their amazing numbers in the military, have only eight high-situating authorities to show for it.

A few fights against underestimation have moreover been taken up by the Yoruba, who see the annulment of the 1993 political choice, which was won by a Yoruba, as a move by the Hausa-Fulani militocraey to keep up power to all detriment. Surely, even minor ethnic gatherings, particularly the Ogoni, have yelled out against underestimation. Honestly, the "expected" circumstance of the Ogoni has pulled in overall thought. Consequently, the hanging of the prominent Ogoni fanatic, Ken Saro-Wiwa, for assumed commitment in the crime of four of his family, pulled in genuine overall reprisals over the latest three years (Ojo, 2002).

However, the allegedly advantaged Hausa-Fulani who are seen to be on top of the nation’s political system have also raised eyebrows on marginalisation in the area of education. Meanwhile, others see their disadvantaged status being self-indicted (Eme & Onuiqubo, 2015).

The course of marginalization, which starts from a people's perspective on their therapy in the assignment or transport of power and resources, may be authentic and shallow. For example, a case of underestimation may be made for the Ogoni, who disregarding "having outfitted the nation with a normal $30,000 million in oil earnings, their family had no line borne water or power, and required authentic preparing, prosperity and other social workplaces. It is unfortunate that likely the most excessive zone of Nigeria should welter in such a state of hopeless poverty and distress. In this light, the Ogoni ethnic social affair has firmly after some time saw itself as disparaged, especially since these workplaces can be found in other ethno-nearby zones of Nigeria. In fact, it is significant that the Igbos, one of the colossal three that clearly managed the regions, at present has joined the line of the thought little of. This sentiment of underestimation concerning the Igbos has conveyed the ethnic neighborhood armed force, Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra
(MASSOB) pointed toward causing to notice the marginalization of the Igbos in Nigeria utilizing a peaceful approach.

Saro-Wiwa (1992) describes that state creation in Nigeria expressed with a large portion of them in the ethnic lion's share zones of the Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba, expanding accordingly their admittance to the oil income while worsening ethnic pressure. There have been further modification on the oil income portion recipe concurred before autonomy, in order to give the ethnic larger parts a significantly more noteworthy offer. Notwithstanding, one the felt-underestimated locales is the district engaged with oil extraction were currently compelled to acknowledge 20% rather than half of the returns of mining rents and sovereignties.

The above contention made by Saro-Wiwa dearly captures the increasing intricacy of the ethnic sensation in Nigeria. While ethnic competition and break had recently been between the three prevailing ethnic groups; since the last part of the eighties, the minority ethnic groups have begun to rethink the ethnic territory of Nigeria. What rises up out of this is even after the harsh common war, the ethnic inquiry stays a pivotal one in the advancement plan of the country. In this setting of ethnicity, sentiments of marginalization emerge and get solid among a given group in the nation.

As per Sentinel (1994), a few instances of insignificance additionally result from the lacks of the in-gathering and are not a result of shows of cognizant hostility as for various gatherings s. In any case, the storm of less people from Northern Nigeria than those from the South getting admission to tertiary associations, considering appraisals drove by a central evaluation body may be seen as a case of fringe. Such a shortcoming occurs, allegorically, from the frailty of these understudies from the North to meet the requirements of the evaluation board.

In same vein, Adeleji (1993) submits on marginalization as the family member or outright absence of capacity to impact a characterized social substance, while being a beneficiary of the activity of intensity by different pieces of that element. In this respects, the sub-social substances come up short on the sociopolitical or normal capacity to impact critical others, who are accountable for the portion of intensity and assets in the bigger social element. In as much as one may perceive the quick thought of the above definition, it may moreover be critical to put that underestimation is ordinarily more evident than veritable. In like manner, it turns more on feelings, acknowledgments (which may be explicit) and attitudinal directions.

A basic perspective on the nation shows that Nigeria has been a significant proving ground for majority rule government in Africa. As the biggest government commonwealth in Africa, various issues exist to affect the Nigerian democracy and one of such is the issue of sectional marginalization which are birth by political, economic and even geological classification. Studies have anyway indicated that these difficulties are normal because of the uniqueness of Nigeria's majority rule government and the character of the public inquiry. The minority question, fomentation for asset control, vociferous protests over marginalization and distance, and bursting line over lopsided political portrayal comprise significant difficulties. It ought to be unequivocally expressed that these difficulties in any case, popular government remains the a standout amongst other alternative for Nigeria on the grounds that the guideline obliges the interests of our socially assorted varieties as a people or country.

**Conclusion and Recommendation**

At is point, one cannot rule out the effect of marginalisation on the advancement of Nigeria's political and economic development.
In this sense, the current endeavors of democratic system should be socio-culturally sensitive and supportive. If the country must achieve her developmental cum unification goal, it can be a reality if the fears of ethnic marginalization are eradicated. Fundamentally, one method of handling ethnic marginalization is by embracing a political culture that makes satisfactory arrangement for all groups. As Woolley and Keller (2014) counsel, African nations ought to imitate one of the basic standards of American popular government, which is the origination of dominant part rule and its adjusting statute of minority rights. Majority rules system as a type of government is a reasonable method of accomplishing the abovementioned. Nonetheless, the Nigerian majority rule government requires huge rebuilding and the entrenchment of legitimate hardware will be an essential advance toward this path. The standards of reasonableness and value in the dispersion of assets just as proportionality in political arrangements are fundamental elements for the solidness of the framework. Most altogether, the undertaking of certainty building ought to be paid attention to as this will advance commonality of feeling among the changed social groups in the nation and annihilate the political image of question and antagonism that describes the climate of the nation's fair framework.

References


