Ethnicity, Political Leadership and National Development in Nigeria: The Contradictions and the Local Government Nexus

Remi Chukwudi Okeke[1,a], Adeline Nnenna Idike[2,b]

[1]Department of Public Administration and Local Government University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria

[2]Department of Political Science, Federal University Ndufu-Alike Ikwo, Ebonyi State, Nigeria

[a,b]E-mail address: remiokeke@gmail.com , ojeleogbu@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This study fundamentally highlights that ethnicity (as a non-pejorative concept) has indeed once contributed remarkably to the leadership highpoints of Nigeria. The current national position however is that ethnicity has been generally sidelined in the open leadership configurations of the country but without definitive positive replacements. Ethnicity (by populist consent) has thus become immensely abhorrent in the national developmental thoughts of the Nigerian nation. Consequently, the paradoxes that mark ethnicity and the Nigerian leadership narrative are greatly deep-rooted and intriguing. Development, which ethnicity was claimed to have stunted, nonetheless currently remains highly elusive. National developmental strides have in this regard also, continued to gravely border on national experimentation. The study adopts logical argumentation as its methodology and the elite theory as theoretical framework to postulate that the country's political class should see as its most critical function, the creation of an enabling template for the emergence of a truly, ethnically myopic leadership that would eliminate the current contradictions and urgently engender the requisite and self-evident form of national development. The foundation of this new focus the paper concludes should be the local government environment.

Keywords: Ethnicity; Political Leadership; National Development; Local Government

1. INTRODUCTION

Ethnicity has remained a central question in Nigeria's leadership narrative. This same Nigerian chronicle is also filled with worrisome contradictions. This study accordingly focuses on the tripartite issues of ethnicity, political leadership and national development in Nigeria. It identifies certain contradictions, in the relationship among these variables, in the national developmental equations of the country. The study views the local government level as the commencement strata of governance for the untangling of the central issues in the matrixes of questions that inhibit the process of engendering self-evident national development in the Nigerian nation. The research questions of the study are accordingly as follows: (i) how has ethnicity contributed to the Nigerian leadership narrative (ii) what is the current position of ethnicity in the national leadership equation in Nigeria (iii) what is the nature of the contradictions that characterize ethnicity and the leadership question in Nigeria? (iv) How have these variables impacted on national development in the country and (v) how may local government contribute to the resolution of the current contradictions in the relationship among ethnicity, political leadership and national development in Nigeria? The general objective of this study therefore is to examine this issue of ethnicity, political leadership and national development in Nigeria.

The specific objectives are to: (i) examine how ethnicity has contributed to the Nigerian leadership narrative (ii) determine the current position of ethnicity in the leadership question in Nigeria (iii) study the nature of the contradictions that characterize ethnicity and the leadership question in Nigeria (iv) examine how the variables of ethnicity and political leadership have impacted on national development in the country and (v) make recommendations on how local government may contribute to the resolution of the current contradictions in the relationship among ethnicity, political leadership and national development in Nigeria. The study adopts logical argumentation as its methodology and the elite theory as theoretical framework.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The elite theory seeks to describe and explain the power relationships in contemporary society [1]. The theory suggests that society is stratified into two, the masses at the bottom and the ruling elite at the top. The elite are the rich, well-educated and politically influential groups, who share common beliefs and use their influence to dictate public policies [1]. Vilfredo Pareto presented the theory systematically in his work, *The Mind and Society*. In addition, Gaetano Mosca in his work, *The Ruling Class*, highlighted the concept of elite, which subsequently became a key concept of new social science. Robert Michels also is unarguably among the classical elite theorists. The term, elite in its most general sense however refers to those positions in society which are the summits of key social structures, i.e. the higher positions in government, economy, politics, religion, etc [2,3]. The elite are accordingly the most advantaged members of any society. The elite position is consequently synonymous with power and influence. The elite tentacles are also usually extensive, reaching even to the military echelons of the polities. The complex web of elite influence in given environments may therefore build or destroy but the elite are invariably protective of their advantaged zones.

In this study, the otherwise natural phenomenon of ethnicity is seen to have been manipulated by different generations of the Nigerian elite to give rise to the contradictions that characterize the country's leadership story, which also impedes the process of national development. Between 1966 and 1999 for instance, the military elite continued to make intermittent incursions into the political leadership activities in the country. But behind these intrusions, were actually some ethno-elite impulsions. The resort to claims of acting in the national interest by such military interventionists was mere subterfuges. Political leadership development in the country accordingly remained stunted. Elite insensitivity was behind such diminution. Even at the local government level where the elite influence in the negative regard would be expected to be least pronounced, the Nigerian scenario is completely contradictory. Politics and other affairs at this level are also dominated by the elite factor (the godfather syndrome). In the process, the ethno-elite card is also usually played at this level. This study's framework of analysis is therefore situated in the foregoing elite theory templates.

3. CONCEPTUAL EXPLICATION

3. 1. The Concept of Ethnicity

Nnoli [4] in Salawu & Hassan [5] defines ethnicity as interactions among members of many diverse groups. These diverse groups are in this study easily understood to be ethnic groups. Consequently, ethnic groups are social formations, which are distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries [4]. In an explanation of the idea above, Nnoli emphasized that the most important or crucial variable in ethnic identity is language. This then means that an ethnic group consists of those who are themselves alike by virtue of their common ancestry, language and culture, and who are so-regarded by others [5]. Ebegbulem [6] opines that members of an ethnic group must share a common culture, language and custom, and occupy the same territory. Mair [7] in Ebegbulem [6] sees an ethnic group as a people sharing the same historical experience, having the same culture, speaking the same language and sharing the belief about the future together. Ebegbulem further deposes:

> The liberal theorists believe that an ethnic group has as its members, people who share a conviction that they have common interests and fate, and they tend to propound a cultural symbolism expressing their cohesiveness. Ethnic groups differ from other groups in their composition because they include persons from every stage of life and social class. It is suggested that the insignia of ethnicity is inescapable.

Hence, ethnicity does not strictly imply the pejorative implications that are often ascribed to it. Actually, the mix-ups in ascription usually arise whenever ethnicity is mistaken for ethnocentrism, which simply denotes differentiation according to origin. It is a kind of behaviour, where a group of people looks down on others and discriminates against them. Thus, one can see ethnocentrism as a belief in the unique value and rightness of one's own group [5]. In some instances, as in when Nnabuihe, Aghemalo, & Nwosu [8] contend that ethnocentrism can be said to be the harmless stage or the budding stage of ethnicity, the web of mix-ups become further beclouded by conceptual ambiguities. However, according to Otteh and Ezeh [9]:

> The concept of ethnicity refers to a social identity formation that rests upon culturally specific practices and a unique set of symbols and cosmology. A belief in common origins and a broadly agreed common history provide an inheritance of symbols, heroes, events, values and hierarchies, and conform (sic) social identities of both insiders and outsiders.

Ukiwo [10] agrees that ethnicity need not always have negative consequences, as it also encompasses the behaviour of ethnic groups. Ethnic groups he further opined are groups with ascribed membership, usually but not always based on claims or myths of common history, ancestry, language, race, religion, culture and territory. And while all these variables need not be present before a group is so defined, the important thing is that such a group is classified or categorized as having a common identity that distinguishes it from others [10]. It is this classification by powerful agencies such as the state, religious institutions and the intelligentsia, such as local ethnic historians that objectifies the ethnic group, often setting in motion, processes of self-identification or affirmation and recognition by others.

Thus, ethnicity is not so much a matter of shared traits or cultural commonalities, but the result of the interplay between external categorization and self-identification (Brubaker, Loveman and Stamatov [11] in Ukiwo [10]. It is centrally argued in this study that in the Nigerian case, an additional variable to these issues is elite ambivalence, which endorses the external categorization, deprecates self-identification and produces leadership illegitimacies. It is consequently difficult to fathom (although not out of place to suggest) why an ethnic group must jettison the common identity that distinguishes it from others. It is partly the ambivalent elite endorsement of these suggestions that account for the contradictions in Nigeria's leadership experience.

In the opinion of Salawu & Hassan [5], it can be seen that ethnicity is a phenomenon, which involves interaction among various ethnic groups and which by itself does not pose any serious threat to either development or democracy. And in Osaghae [12], cited by Ukiwo [10], ethnicity is seen as the employment or mobilization of ethnic identity and difference, to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict or cooperation. This definition, Ukiwo opines, is preferred because, it identifies two issues that are central to discussions on ethnicity. The first is that ethnicity is neither natural nor accidental, but is the product of a conscious effort by social actors. The second is that ethnicity is not only manifest in conflictive or competitive relations but also in the contexts of cooperation. Therefore, ethnicity can be seen as interaction between culturally distinct groups operating within a common social context [13]. Must ethnicity always be a scornful concept? Contrary to popular thinking, an objective study of the leadership history of Nigeria does not suggest an affirmative answer to this question.

3. 2. The Leadership Concept (Political Leadership)

It is extremely difficult to state in specific terms, the meaning of leadership. However, no matter the angle from which the definition of leadership is viewed, scholars will generally agree that a leader is one who exerts unusual influence and considerable power [14]. Indeed, the very notion of leadership connotes the presence of a leader [15]. Hence, as a term, a leader is one who leads, plans, organizes, controls communication, delegates, accepts the responsibility for reaching societal goals [16]. In the context of this study therefore, leadership connotes the concept of a national leader. It is also extendable to the notion of national leaders, a unity of persons and a probable abstraction, which undeniably creates and controls

the national vision. Thus, it is the far-sightedness of this vision, which accounts for the superior quality of the imaginations, which translate into leadership. Ozumba, Okafor and Udom [14], also cite Olusoji [17] in declaring as follows:

> Leadership in its simplest form can be depicted as the ability to inspire, direct, motivate and encourage others, positively to targeted end. Also leadership is about rising up to the occasion by organizing and adequately coordinating the resources of time, relationship, skills, expertise and finances, to achieve a goal for the common good of all. Leadership is the ability to lead others and not necessarily availability to lead because, certain qualities are normally expected of any person who wishes to attain a leadership position. Even though availability might at times lead to leadership position, it is not leadership itself.

House [18] in Ammeter et al [19] sees leadership as that behavior which gives purpose, meaning, and guidance to collectivities, by articulating a collective vision that appeals to ideological values, motives, and self-perceptions of followers. And immediately inherent in this viewpoint is the perception of collective leadership, which again raises controversies. But for the purposes of this study, the aspect of House's definition that touches on the guidance of collectivities is noteworthy. In other words, are ethnic groups in the Nigerian nation state not collectivities and is the composite Nigerian state not a collectivity? How does leadership go about the function of reconciling the competing interests of the integral and overall interests of these collectivities?

In the affairs of men, argues Ezeife [20], leadership, above all else, holds the greatest potential for being the source and driving spirit of any society, or it may be viewed potentially as the rallying point of the people's aspirations. For Oyedepo [21] in Folarin [22], leadership simply means service. The issue then is that the concept of leadership as a service rather than a status, has not yet been embraced or realized in Nigeria, ever since the country gained independence from Britain in October 1, 1960 [14]. And in fact, leadership implies positive tendencies. It is either present or non-existent. The concept of weak leadership accordingly becomes intolerable. Invariably, leadership (national leadership) is not hoisted on a nation from the apex. It fundamentally originates from one of the trajectories of the state. The ethnic component therefore, is one of these possible origins of national leadership in a nation-state. This national leadership is coterminous with political leadership. And what is political leadership?

According to Dion [23] political leadership represents but one of the many categories of leadership, and it is a most elusive one at that. Teles [24] also add that political leadership is a complex concept with no universal definition and that political scientists usually define leadership accordingly to their own perceptions of the issue and depending on the aspects they are more interested in. The complexity of the definition is aggravated by the multi-arena context of actions in which leaders move around. Hence, the exercise of political leadership is done in one or more different environments and often done simultaneously [24]. In the Nigerian environment for instance, the multi-arena context includes the ethnic-arena multiplicities. Then to Dickson [25], one key function of political leadership is to facilitate coordinated action by "followers". Then according to Lord and Maher [26] in Teles [24], the essence of leadership is being perceived as a leader by others.

One particularly difficult issue on the question of political leadership is its bearing with democracy. While the former may call for prompt and decisive action, the later usually requires popular opinions and consensus building. In Teles [24 we encounter the point that leadership may be considered as the capacity and possibility to exercise power over others and situations. And in the same work of Teles, political leadership is seen essentially as the exercise of seeking consent rather than imposing coercion. To conceptualize political leadership therefore entails immense disputations. But in this study, political leadership is simply conceived as that strand of leadership that is provided by elected politicians, entrusted with the task of national development. It is consequently suggested in this paper that a key function of political leadership, in the context of a nation state, is to continuously reconcile competing ethnic interests and ethnic contentions.

3. 3. The Concept of National Development

Development as a concept has aptly been described as a victim of definitional pluralism [27]. But according to Gboyega [28] development implies improvement in material well being of all citizens, not the most powerful and the rich alone, in a sustainable way, such that today's consumption does not imperil the future; it also demands that poverty and inequality of access to the good things of life be removed or drastically reduced, it seeks to improve personal physical security and livelihoods, and expansion of life chances. Then to Onyukwu [29], no matter whether reference is made to societies, regions or individuals, there is an underlying association of development with positive change. National Development therefore refers to nationwide development in a nation-state. It implies the well being of a covert majority of the citizens in material terms, it implies decreases in inequality levels. Above all, national development implies the guarantee of security of lives and property in the nation-state [30]. It is further posited in the current study that national development implies the elimination of inter-ethnic bitterness and antagonisms in the inter-group and interpersonal relationships in a nation-state.

National development is accordingly not synonymous with economic development in a country, even where the two terminologies may interrelate. There is obviously an absence of national development in a nation state of various ethnic nationalities where ethnic harmony is invariably absent. National development cannot be equated to the prosperity of the individual members of some of the component nationalities while citizens of the given state who hail from the other ethnic backgrounds are evidently disadvantaged, with regards to access to national opportunities. National development therefore entails inter-ethnic harmony in such polities. But national development does not also imply the dearth of socio-political conflicts in plural societies. It conceptually and empirically denotes on the other hand, the availability of some institutional mechanisms for the resolution of such inter-ethnic and other conflicts as they are bound to arise.

In addition, national development has an infrastructure trajectory. It is interpretable as the availability of critical infrastructure for the engendering of further positive changes in the given nation state. National development is therefore not a static condition. The availability that it indicates necessarily leads to some other ends, in a continuing dimension. National development is accordingly "work in progress". Whenever a nation state reaches the conclusion that it has attained a condition of national development, it increasingly becomes confronted by the possibilities of national atrophy. Its positions begin to be weakened and her potentials become progressively questionable. On the other hand, emergent states/emerging

economies/democracies where national development is conceived as developmental destinations usually also portray national development as rocket science.

4. ETHNICITY AND THE LEADERSHIP QUESTION IN NIGERIA

Ethnic diversity is not peculiarly Nigerian [31]. The socio-economic and political development of any country depends largely on the ability of its leadership to facilitate, entrench and sustain good governance [32]. Governance deficiency is accordingly a product of inept leadership. Ebegbulem [33] depicts inept leadership as a fact of life in Nigeria. But this is a highly frightening characterization. It is suggestive of finality of tendencies - an issue beyond redemption. Then Ebegbulem continues:

> Nigeria's leadership is characterized by such negative features as lack of direction, neglect and drift, fraud and insensitivity to the plight of the citizens. It is no longer news that while the poor in Nigeria are languishing in abject poverty and hunger, squalor, disease and destitution, Nigerian leaders are only after working out strategies on how to enrich and perpetuate themselves in office. The major problem that the country is facing today is the insincerity and insensitivity of her leaders to the needs of the ordinary people whom they have been elected to serve. Today, at the national, state and local government levels, the Nigerian people have as their leaders, a hardcore, small, selfish, money-minded, few individuals, who wage political and economic war against the vast masses of exploited and oppressed people.

According to Ebegbulem [33], an analysis of the plethora of leaders on Nigeria's political landscape would reveal selfish, mediocre, tribal leaders and opportunistic small money-minded (sic) people masquerading as leaders. A lingering paradox of the Nigerian leadership narrative therefore is that these same set of leaders were, particularly in Nigeria's First Republic, trailblazers in the development of their ethnic regions. It would be accordingly incorrect to wholly accuse them as in Ebegbulem [33] of lacking consciousness of development. Consequently, we argue that ethnicity has once contributed remarkably to the leadership highpoints of Nigeria. The current paradoxical position however is that ethnicity has been nationally, officially sidelined in the leadership and developmental configurations of the Nigerian state without a specific and legitimate replacement.

A major part of this paradox is in the fact that the First Republic Nigerian leaders who have been usually accused of ethnic jingoism have also left behind (for all time) critical developmental infrastructure and some seminal thinking that their successors have either been unable to maintain or even build upon. The three most prominent of these leaders were Sir Ahmadu Bello, Premier of Nigeria's former Northern Region (from 1952 to 1966), Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Premier of the old Western Region, from 1952 to 1960 and Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe, as Premier of the then Eastern Region (1952 to 1959). According to Isaiah [34]:

> Available records have shown that some of the enviable legacies established by the late premier of the northern region included the New Nigeria Development Company (NNDC) that had control over all the Arewa Hotels, Arewa Textiles, Ahmadu Bello University, New Nigeria Newspapers,

Kaduna Polytechnic, among several others. These and other legacies of the late Sardauna were the pride of the northern region in those days, while they greatly improved the economy of the north. They made the north a place that every investor would not only want to visit but to also invest in. The story of some of these enviable legacies in the past is virtually nothing to write home about today. It is no longer news that such legacies left behind by the Sardauna, like the New Nigeria Newspaper, an avenue through which the north was being heard, has completely packed up. The Arewa Textiles that was also a source of major investment and employment has not only packed up too, but some of its workers have died due to unpaid entitlements, while those still alive are unable to make ends meet.

Obafemi Awolowo first introduced free health care until the age of 18 in the Western Region and free and mandatory primary education in Western Nigeria. Awolowo is remembered for building the first stadium, Liberty Stadium, Ibadan, in West Africa, first television station (WNTV) in Africa, running the best civil service in Africa at the time (in the Western Region). He was also the author of several publications on the political structure and future prospects of Nigeria. And these works include: *Path to Nigerian Freedom, Thoughts on the Nigerian Constitution, and Strategies and Tactics of the Peoples' Republic of Nigeria* [35]. In the case of Dr Azikiwe, and within a specific context of education Igwe [36], citing Obasanjo [37] posits:

> The dream for the establishment of a University of Nigeria later materialized when he was the Premier of the Eastern Region of Nigeria. The birth of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka can be traced to 1954, when an Economic Mission of the Government of Eastern Region of Nigeria led by the Premier, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe embarked on an economic mission to Europe and America. A major result of the mission, which lasted from May 5 to July 11, 1954, was the clear articulation of the idea for a genuinely African university charged with the responsibility of freeing the African intellect and serving as a bulwark against colonial mentality, which Zik felt was a major impediment to genuine development. That mission gave birth to the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, the first truly indigenous university in Nigeria, the handiwork of Zik, inaugurated on October 7, 1960. The motto of the University of Nigeria founded by Zik is "to restore the dignity of man". This summarizes Zik's view on education that it should be used to uplift man and his worldview.

Therefore, elite intransigence is at the centre of this leadership paradox. The successors to the First Republic elite it seems, have remained more in love with the glamour of power. The critical question then becomes: How has ethnicity prevented the current political class in the country from executing legacy projects in their ethnic regions? Oppositely framed, where are the key projects that have been "ethnically" executed by the current class of political elite in their regions of ethnic origin? In the alternative, where are the national monuments that have been erected, as a new class of political leaders has replaced the aboriginal ethnic jingoists? It is consequently suggested in this study that ethnicity has little or nothing to do with the present developmental impasse in the country. The subsisting issue is the failure of the elite in the country to rise to the challenge of sustainable development. It has indeed

continued to seem as if the Nigerian elite perceives his position in the country as that of a benevolent tourist, whose stake in the Nigerian project is fundamentally impermanent.

5. THE CONTRADICTIONS: A FURTHER ILLUSTRATION

Hence, a current major contradiction on the issue of ethnicity and the leadership challenge in Nigeria is that the ethnic factor is assumed to be receding but the leadership question has remained unanswered. For instance, currently in each of the two major political parties in the country, there is arguably, the absence of ethnic dominance. But has such lack of ethnic dominance engendered the desired brand of national leadership in the political parties? Ebegbulem [33] further declares that the democracy embraced by Nigerians in 1999 has produced leaders who have blighted the lives of Nigerians, who now wallow in poverty, illiteracy, hunger and unemployment, as these leaders are corrupt and have criminally mismanaged the country's resources. Most Nigerian leaders are believed to be caught in the web of corruption and thus, lack the courage to pursue vigorously, the campaign against corruption in the public and private sectors of the country [38]. Nigeria has accordingly remained a country where things have failed to work [39].

A further issue of contradiction and challenge borders on the fact that the more policies of ethnic tolerance that are proclaimed by the Nigerian system, the wider the gap in purposeful national leadership. In this regard, can it be safely argued that the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme or the Federal Character vision have led to the emergence of strong national-leadership-tendencies in the country? Furthermore, according to Babatola [40], the total systemic collapse in Nigeria's socio-economic and political environment can be attributed to the federal character practice. This policy was enunciated as a death nail on the head of the ethnic monster in the country. Osimen, Akinyemi, & Samuel [41] therefore opine that the outcome of integration policies and programs in Nigeria have fallen far below expectation, as primordial ethnic loyalties are still deep seated. Above all, Ebegbulem [33] insists:

> The Nigerian society has never been well governed since independence from the British in 1960 because "good, strong leaders" have never been in charge. Leaders who are selfish and corrupt have managed the Nigerian state, from the first democratic experiment in 1960 to military regimes and back to democracy as practiced today. They accumulate wealth at the expense of national development without devotion to the cause of the people… Nigeria's political leaders, during electioneering campaigns, make fantastic promises in order to win elections, but as soon as they secure the people's mandate, the people are shortchanged of the dividends of democracy.

In the third place, whereas the Nigerian local governments are at the base of the tripartite tiers of government, when it comes to ethnicity and the leadership question in the country, the search for solutions usually sideline the base and commence at the upper echelons. This theme will be explored further in the sub-section of this work that is entitled the local government nexus.

It is strongly argued for now in this study that the challenges and contradictions that mark ethnicity and the political leadership issue in the country are merely elite-hinged. Indeed, it is postulated in this study that the Nigerian political elite has never truly prepared for national political leadership. When Barrack Obama emerged as a national political personality in the United States, despite his ethnic background, he was a fully prepared candidate. The modern Nigerian national political leader on the other hand is usually a product of curious political opportunism. He usually plays only the ethnic card. He would claim that his ethnic region is being marginalized and on such basis, his political group would threaten the other regions of the nation with violence, until power is acceded to him. The Nigerian political elite never advocates ethnic consensus except when his selfish interest is at stake. The truth accordingly is that such political characters can never transform into strong national political leaders. Hence, according to Imhonopi & Ugochukwu [42]:

> Since gaining political independence, Nigeria has continued to meander the path befitting failed, weak and "juvenile" states. A state that had very great prospects at independence and was touted to lead Africa out of the backwoods of underdevelopment and economic dependency, Nigeria is still stuck in the league of very poor, corrupt, underdeveloped, infrastructural decaying, crisis-ridden, morally bankrupt and leadership-deficient countries of the South. Rather than become an exemplar for transformational leadership, modern bureaucracy, national development, national integration and innovation, Nigeria seems to be infamous for whatever is mediocre, corrupt, insanely violent and morally untoward.

6. THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT NEXUS

Positioned as conceptual constructs, local government and national development are seemingly irreconcilable. This is principally because, while local government suggests localism, national development suggests an extensive developmental spread. As empirical processes however, local government and national development are fully interrelated [43]. In this section of the paper, the dual possible nuances of local government as an activity or process and as a territorial demarcation or jurisdiction in a state shall be in focus. The concept of local government as a process has to do with what local government councils do or fail to do, what local government areas achieve or fail to achieve and how the inhabitants of the various local government areas in the Nigerian state for instance are recognized or not recognized in national developmental drafts [30].

But local government in Nigeria has indeed been conceived and operated as a process that should be of benefit to only the indigenous people of the particular territories where the local government areas are located. Contrary to this orthodoxy, local government opportunities, services and benefits should be for all the residents of the specific territory, irrespective of their ethnic ancestry. Do residents of the local government areas who are of other ethnic derivations not pay the applicable rates and fees in these their places of trade and domicile? If they do so, they are in view of that entitled for instance, to employment opportunities, as staff of the applicable local government councils.

Ethnicity and its mismanagement in the Nigerian system therefore usually metamorphose into what we frequently classify as ethno-communal clashes. The truth

however is that elite-induced, relative deprivation is also accountable for these brutalities and their occasioning reciprocities. Are the theaters of these ethno-communal imbroglios not located in our local government areas? The germane issues in this case indeed go beyond the question of constitutionally assigned legislative lists. Ethnic questions, political leadership and national development are issues that evoke normative concerns and challenges. The focal point in their nexus therefore should border on the progress of society not on constitutionalism.

The extant framework for the supposed proactive intervention in inter-ethnic tensions in Nigeria appears to indeed to be elitist and esoteric, both in intent and their usual composition. Under such ostensive strategies, high-profile traditional and religious leaders are usually brought together, under one commission, committee or the other. But a more fundamental objective on ethnic tensions in the country should have bordered on how to deeply locate such interventions within the local government settings, where the feuding harbingers of mayhem reside. So that when the elite masterminds of these crises come to recruit foot soldiers, they would only encounter "born again" inhabitants.

Under Nigeria's federation-account, fiscal federalism, the local governments have been self-evidently left bereft of funds. Many of the council headquarters usually wear the look of ghost towns. In the absence of federally allocated funds and confronted by structural and constitutional incapacitations to internally generate revenue, the councils do not engender development in their assumed areas of jurisdiction. The citizens of these areas thus remain discontented and reeling with inter-ethnic animosities. They erroneously assume that the trouble with the national Nigerian system is ethnic domination by one ethnic group or the other. The critical issues however border on elite subterfuge, which negates every good-governance effort. And good governance at the local government level is immensely imbued with the advantage of mitigating the hardships of the downtrodden masses whose deplorable conditions add impetus to the so-called ethno-communal clashes in the country.

When the national atmosphere avails creative opportunities to citizens, it leads to immense national abundance and under such a setting, divisive, ethnic and racist tendencies take secondary positions [43]. The local government areas are veritable platforms for the location of such creative opportunities. They must not continue to exist as the appendages of state governments or irritants to the central government. As a matter of fact, one of the best ways of going about the overall development of the Nigerian state is to concentrate on the development of its local government segments [30]. This contention is also applicable to the current study. If ethnic accommodation is practiced and entrenched at the local government level who would then transplant ethnic belligerence to the other levels of state affairs in the country and for what purpose?

7. CONCLUSIONS

Actually therefore, the inadequacies of the elite as a class and the illegitimacies instigated by the elite group are at the center of ethnicity and the surrounding contradictions in the Nigerian leadership narrative. Moreover, the elite factor in all of this, translates to a deep-rooted problem. Consequently, although Nigeria is blessed with abundant natural and human resources, yet the country remains underdeveloped [44]. The elite on the other hand continue to misconceive the particularistic affluence of the members of this class as national

development. It is suggested (recommended) in this study that a major function of the political class in the country should be the creation of the enabling template for the emergence of an ethnically myopic leadership that would eliminate the current paradoxes in the country that border on debatable national development. It is strongly recommended that further researches be commissioned and truly conducted on ethnicity and the leadership challenge in the country. It is currently highly arguable that the ethnicity issue is receding. It however remains unarguable that the leadership trauma has remained unabated.

This study has consequently highlighted that the issue of ethnicity in the leadership experience and current leadership configurations of Nigeria still occasions immense challenges. And until the ethnicity issue is better understood, self-evident national development would continue to be unsubstantiated. The study's thesis is that the foundation of a new focus on ethnicity and the leadership challenge in Nigeria should be the local government environment. Local governments of Nigeria are indeed not some independent islands of certain consanguinity to the Federal Republic of Nigeria. We emphasize that even with the country's disputable federalism or in spite of that, the local government areas are constitutional and natural realities. Invariably, they corporately form the aboriginal sources of the eventual national problems of the country, inclusive of the ethnic and political leadership challenges. The solutions to these myriad of inhibitions, inclusive of the ethnicity component are accordingly also locatable within the jurisdictions of the local government areas.

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