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Politics of Selective Recognition: The Paradox of Anioma's Igbo Identity in State Creation and National Politics in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Objective: *This study looks at politics of selective acceptance in Nigeria and the Igbo identity of the Anioma people of Delta state. Anioma people have a linguistic, cultural, historical and social affinity with the Igbo homeland but this identity is not always acknowledged in the national political discourse. In the debates about the creation of states, Igbo identity is sometimes highlighted as a basis for the demand for an Anioma State, while in other socio-political and regional relations within the Niger Delta, it is ignored. This seeming dichotomy throws up pertinent issues of inclusiveness, intergroup relations and national integration in Nigeria at the federal level.* ***Method:*** *The study adopted descriptive qualitative approach and secondary data sources such as government reports, historical records, academic literature and media publications were used in conducting the study. Content analysis was employed to examine the patterns, frequency and dynamics of identity mobilization and marginalisation in data. The framework of the Politics of Recognition is used to provide a basis for the analysis of how conditional acknowledgment affects political representation, resource availability and social legitimacy.* ***Results:*** *The results indicated that the Ogbonje showed a tendency to play up the Igbo identity only when it was politically advantageous, such as in the context of state creation advocacy, and downplay it when it was more advantageous to regional affiliation in the politics of Niger Delta resources. It is a structural anomaly in the Nigerian federal system that is threatening trust, political participation, and intergroup cooperation. The study found that ethnicity is both a political resource and a constraint in the governance process in Nigeria.* ***Novelty:*** *It suggests institutionalized mechanisms for inclusive recognition, representation and coherent identity accommodation policies for promoting national integration in multiethnic federations.*

INTRODUCTION

National integration, political power and ethnicities have played a significant role in the post-colonial development of Nigeria. However, since Nigeria's independence in 1960, the State has been challenged to balance the need for nation building and equal administration with the large number of ethnic groups (over 250) that it has. Among other scholars, Nnoli, Suberu, and Osaghae have written seminal works that demonstrate that ethnicity is not only a cultural boundary marker in Nigeria, but also a dominant organising principle of institutional structures, political competition and resource distribution [1], [2], [3]. Federalism, state formation and zoning have been employed to manage this difference in the past, but these strategies have often shifted and reshaped ethnic conflicts in other ways. Such politics of recognition, who is recognised, included or excluded within the national framework, has been heavily contested, however. In this broader national context, however, the first goal of this study, to examine the historical evolution of the Anioma people's Igbo identity becomes critically important because it

situates Anioma in the long life span of Nigeria's ethnopolitical development, colonial restructuring, and postcolonial state formation.

The Anioma are one unique case of political ambiguity and identity overlaps of the people who reside in the present-day state of Delta in the geopolitical South-South region of Nigeria. Linguistic variants, kinship systems, traditional institutions, and cosmological beliefs are similar among the Anioma communities of Aniocha, Ndokwa, Ika, and Oshimili and among the Igbo communities to the east of the Niger. The communities are ethno-culturally rooted. Such links were described by Afigbo and Isichei as precolonial migratory, trade, and socio-political ties between the western and eastern Igbos, which existed before colonial times [4], [5]. The colonial boundaries, however, cut through these organic links and established a spatial and political separation of the Western Igbo into the Mid-Western Region, in the state creation of 1963. Colonialism, as Ekeh asserts, not only remapped boundaries, but it redefined identity in a way that placed it in a new regime of administration and politics [6]. Thus, the Anioma identity was produced both through continuity and redefinition, from the historical and political perspectives, respectively.

This became more pronounced in post-independence India where the process of state formation emerged as an important instrument for addressing ethnic demands and devolved political power. In an attempt to address minority grievances and promote national unity, the Nigerian state, especially the military governments, embarked on a series of "state-building" initiatives in 1967, 1976, 1987, 1991, and 1996. Institutionalisation of ethnic categories within federalism, however, often made the participants ethnicity conscious, as cited by Suberu and Jega [2], [7]. Due to their beliefs of structural marginalisation and imbalance, the Igbo, who make up only five states in Nigeria's six-zone geopolitical arrangement, have continued to seek more states [8]. In this political scenario, Anioma becomes important. Anioma is the Igbo-speaking region outside the Southeast and is frequently mentioned as a reason for the formation of a state to boost the representation of the Igbo in the country's political system. This is very similar to the second objective of the study which explores the motives for the selective uptake of Igbo identity in discourses on state building. The identity of the Anioma people, as shown in the case, is being used, silenced when it is not convenient, and mobilised when it is politically useful.

The double nature of the selective acceptance is most obvious in the double identity of Anioma in the ethnopolitical map of Nigeria. While the attempts to create Anioma State are presented as one of the necessary corrective measures to correct the marginalisation of the Igbo and to achieve parity under the federal system of government in Nigeria, it highlights Anioma's Igbo identity.The establishment of Anioma State on one hand emphasises Anioma's Igbo identity, while the act of establishing it as a corrective measure to bring about parity in Nigeria's federal system and the marginalisation of the Igbo people is presented as a corrective measure. In the Niger Delta environment, however, where resource control is the prevailing mode of politics and minority identities are major, the Igbo identity of Anioma is often overlooked or even

challenged. Ethnic identities are then flexible and malleable, as conceptualized by scholars like Okoli and Nwanegbo, to fit the changing political incentives [9]. Likewise, Ezeani points to the fact that the Niger Delta minority politics frequently raise the issue of the Igbo identity as a result of historical grievances and concerns about their domination [10]. This duality is a reflection of a greater paradox in the Nigerian federal system: The same identity that grounds claims to inclusion in one arena grounds claims to exclusion in another. Therefore, the Anioma experience is not an isolated occurrence, but a reflection of structural disparities in the recognition and use of ethnicity in Nigeria.

Apart from the direct political implications, the recognition of Anioma's Igbo identity has immense impact on intergroup relations, trust and national cohesion. As Ake suggests, identity is at the heart of political systems, influencing citizens' sense of fairness, belonging, and representation [11]. When identities are inconsistently recognized, it generates uncertainty and erodes trust in state institutions. In the Anioma case, this is expressed in the oppositional narratives that Anioma is essentially Igbo, Niger Delta or a hybrid of the two. This uncertainty makes political representation difficult because leaders have to deal with a number of conflicting and multiple identity claims. In addition, it also has an impact on interethnic relations, as it generates suspicion among neighbouring ethnic groups, which may see Anioma's shifting identity either as opportunistic or politically motivated. This directly relates to the third aim of the study that examines implications of selective acceptance for federal inclusiveness and national integration. The case of the Anioma has shown the negative impact of unmet identity contradiction on the nature of federalism which can undermine the principles of equity, consistency and mutual recognition.

In the long-run, however, Nigeria's national building programme has a more fundamental structural problem that is manifested in the politics of selective acceptance. As noted by Mustapha (2006), the Nigerian State has been known to promote unity and accommodate diversity without resolving conflicts between the two. This puzzle can be best elaborated on using the example of the Anioma experience in which identities are constantly negotiated in the shifting political context, shaped by elite interests, policies, and legacies. The aim of this study is to contribute to the knowledge on the working of the federal system in Nigeria by examining the historical development of Anioma identity, the paradox of its acceptance and the implication of the findings. It foregrounds the multiple, contentious and instrumental dimensions of identity over anything abbreviated as fixed or fundamental. This in turn enables the study to provide important insights into the challenges of building a nation of one-kind and one-kin in a society where identity remains a powerful force, but also a frailty in the struggle for recognition and power.

Statement of the Problem

Nigeria's federal system has, in the past, depended on the process of state formation, power-sharing and institutional reorganisation to deal with its ethnic diversity and political stability. Although designed to promote inclusivity, these practices have often been used to selectively recognize ethnic identities on the basis of political expediency

[2], [3]. This recognition of ethnicity is not without raising serious issues of justice, representation and unity in Nigeria's federalism. In this context, the politics of identity becomes instrumented: groups are sidelined if they are recognized as a threat to the existing power structures and groups are brought into the mainstream if their presence is seen as serving some strategic agenda.

The Anioma of the Delta State are a case in point. Although Anioma have established definite linguistic and cultural links with Igbo, their identity is not always accepted. In the state creation debate, their Igbo identity is brought into the fore to support their demand for more representation while in the politics of the Niger Delta region, it is minimised to fit into the minority status of the region [6]. The selective acceptance creates identity ambivalence as Anioma was not fully adopted into the Igbo political system nor into the Niger Delta coalitions. This is a typical Nigerian phenomenon where ethnicity is used at times as an instrument of inclusion and at other times as an instrument of exclusion.

This paper aims to explore the paradox of selective acceptance; the reason that Igbo identity is accepted in the discourses of state creation while it is marginalized in socio-political discourse in the state. The study aims to examine the implications of the historical evolution of Anioma identity and the political dynamics at play in the process for the promotion of federal inclusiveness, intergroup relations and national integration. This relationship offers clues to the intersection of identity and power in Nigeria, and to the structural nature of the relationship between ethnic recognition and the potential for unity and equitable governance.

Research Questions

1) How has the Igbo identity of the Anioma people evolved within Nigeria's historical, political, and cultural development?
2) Why is the Igbo identity of Anioma selectively accepted embraced in state creation discourses but rejected in broader socio-political interactions?
3) What are the implications of this selective acceptance for federal inclusiveness, intergroup relations, and national integration in Nigeria?

Objectives of the Study

To critically examine the politics of selective acceptance of Anioma's Igbo identity and its implications for identity construction, political inclusion, and national integration in Nigeria.

Specific Objectives:

1) To examine the historical evolution of the Anioma people's Igbo identity within Nigeria's political and cultural development.
2) To analyze the paradox of selective acceptance why the Igbo identity is embraced in state creation discourses but rejected in broader socio-political interactions.
3) To evaluate the implications of this selective acceptance for federal inclusiveness, intergroup relations, and national integration in Nigeria.

Conceptual Review

1. Ethnic Identity

Ethnic identity is a feeling of belonging or shared cultural, linguistic and historical characteristics that set one ethnic group apart from others [12], [6]. The importance of ethnicity on political behavior, access to resources and representation claims in Nigeria [3], [2]. The ethnic identity of the Anioma people is rooted in their Igbo language and cultural heritage, which are closely intertwined with the political processes within the region and the state, as well as the broader national politics, affecting their inclusion and exclusion in the processes of state formation and national politics [13], [14].

2. Politics of Recognition

Politics of recognition refers to the process of states and political actors recognizing or failing to recognize the legitimacy of certain groups and thus determining whether they will have access to power, resources, and representation, or denied access to them [15], [16]. This framework accounts for the paradox of Nigeria that calls for the creation of a new state for the Anioma Igbo is acceptable while their socio-political involvement in the Niger Delta is not [9], [10].

3. Federal Inclusiveness

Inclusiveness on the federal level means that all the groups of society are represented in the structures, decision-making and benefits of the federal system [2], [17]. It includes institutional arrangements of representation, policy influence and socio-political integration. The exclusion of Anioma in the process of a state's formation compared to the inclusion of other ethnic groups in Nigeria, a multiethnic federation, is a pointer to problems of inclusive governance, intergroup relations and national integration [8], [14]. These three concepts: ethnic identity, politics of recognition and federal inclusivity are the bases for the analytical framework of the investigation of the selective acceptance of the Anioma Igbo identity in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study is based on the Politics of Recognition which focuses on the processes of social and political inclusion/exclusion and its impact on group identity, participation and access to resources. Recognition is more than symbolic, it is a form of social justice that gives meaning to the existence of a group in the political and cultural context [15], [16]. The notion of 'Igbo' is selectively acknowledged by the Anioma, as it is in discourses on statehood for the basis of political representation, but in broader socio-political interactions, the notion is muted or denied to align with the politics of the Niger Delta minorities [14], [10].

The fact that the very same identification that brings cohesion to the group-level has the effect of creating a sense of disconnection on the national level, has consequences for perceptions of belonging, relations with other groups, and trust in national institutions. The present study has explored the duality to uncover the inconsistencies in the ethnopolitical framework in Nigeria using the Politics of Recognition approach. It reveals that ethnicity is simultaneously marginalised and exploited to maintain political balance, shape federal relations and influence the integration process of the nation [6], [2], [9].

RESEARCH METHOD

The research method used in this study is a qualitative descriptive research that is secondary data source only. It draws on documentary sources like government reports, history, scholarly literature and media reports to explore the marginalization of Anioma in the political and cultural terrain of Nigeria by the recognition of their Igbo identity. Content analysis of the data was used to examine the presence, frequency, and nature of inclusion and exclusion discussions in the creation of states, in wider national affairs, and its implications for federal cohesion and intergroup relationships. It allows a broader and systematic analysis of politics of recognition, without conducting primary research. This paper attempts to trace the history and evolution of the Anioma people's Igbo identity in the political and cultural history of Nigeria. This paper attempts to trace the history and evolution of the Igbo identity of the Anioma people in the political and cultural history of Nigeria.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Historical Evolution of Anioma's Igbo Identity within Nigeria's Political and Cultural Development

The geography of the Anioma is a cultural space of affinity with Igbo people and political space of association with Delta State. Anioma ancestry historically has been associated with the Igbo ethnolinguistic roots which are older than the colonial boundaries. The earliest ethnographic research shows that by pre-colonial times, Igbo-speaking communities had already been spread out over the western floodplain of the River Niger and had not yet had formal territorial boundaries set. It is shown in the early ethnographic studies that before the advent of the British colonial administration, there had already been territorialization in the pre-colonial period in the western floodplain of the River Niger [5]. Migratory movements among communities of Ogwashi Uku, Ukwani and Asaba are also noted through oral traditions amongst the cultural matrix shared in these communities, such as shared festivals, kinship terms, and similar age grade association. These markers of the sociocultural identity reflect a precolonial identity that was not bound to a later-defined administrative space. There is evidence of trade between Anioma and Igbo communities throughout the 19th century in missionary records and colonial reports that shows that instead of isolation, there is linkage. These linkages were then broken up as part of colonial administrative reorganisation.

In 1914, Southern Nigeria was united and later in 1963, the British colonial government created the Mid-Western Region to accommodate the minority groups' agitations. With this new formation, the Igbo speaking Anioma communities were excluded from the main Eastern region which contained the bulk of the Igbo population [1]. In 1967, 12 states were created by General Yakubu Gowon which shifted the administrative position of Anioma away from the province of Bendel with majority Igbo population. These changes were not random but the part of colonialism's policy of divide and rule, where control over administration was of greater concern than cultural unity. There are government records from that time that refer to the Anioma group as being in

composite regions, and do not mention any Igbo language. This led to the creation of colonial state discourse of a disjunction between sociocultural identity and political identity, which has continued in postcolonial times.

The creation of the states after independence further entrenched the situation of the dual positioning of the Anioma identity.The creation of the states after independence further entrenched the situation of the dual positioning of the Anioma identity. Nigerian governments, after each returned to civilian rule since 1979 and after each military intervention, carried out other state creation exercises in the year 1976, 1987, 1991 and 1996. The federal gazettes and debates in the national assembly give reason for the exercises as being to promote equity in state representation, and to reduce ethnic conflicts by decentralizing power [2]. But ethnolinguistic issues never were the main principles in the formation of new states, always being overshadowed by political negotiation and regional balancing. Anioma never became part of the South East geopolitical zone, home to most Igbo majority states, but stayed in Delta State in all these exercises. According to the official minutes of the state creation committee of 1991, the reasons for not separating Anioma from Delta State were due to the fear that it would become a 'minority' state and there would be revenue diversion.

Data retrieved from Nigerian newspapers indicates the mediation role of political speech in the process of identity production of Anioma people. Premium Times Nigeria and The Guardian Nigeria often publish articles on "restructuring and state building" issues in their coverage of the dispute concerning the creation of a brand-new state for the Anioma people within the South East zone, and these articles almost always refer to the historical relationship between the Igbo people and the Anioma peoples [18], [19]. The dialogue on common culture and past continuity with the Igbo heartland villages is couched in headlines such as "Anioma's Igbo Heritage and the Case for State Creation." Conversely, reports from Vanguard Nigeria and ThisDay Live of political meetings in the Niger Delta give the impression that Anioma is on the side of the South South and that when referring to issues such as resource control, derivation of oil revenue and autonomy of the local government, they are not explicit about the Igbo language affiliation [20], [21]. The conflictual approaches are displayed in panel discussions, articles and television interviews in The Punch Nigeria, revealing the variation of language used for the identification of identities across different political terrains [22].

The construct of dual identity has been supported by local histories and academic monographs. The use of the term "Anioma" as a step taken by the community was deliberate in 1970s as a community strategy to consolidate political influence within Bendel state and later Delta state, according to a community history published by the Anioma Development Foundation [23]. It was chosen because it was an acronym (Aniocha-Ndokwa-Ika-Oshimili), which would help to create a common political platform to compete for state seats and bargain over resource allocation. The use of collective names has been observed to happen alongside Igbo culture as documented by cultural anthropologists like Nwosu, where rites of passage, naming practices and oral

tradition in Anioma households are similar to those in the core Igbo states in some aspects, such as the veneration of its ancestors [13].

Political science works on federalism in Nigeria and ethnic identity provide a framework for understanding these historical events. Ethnic rivalry is institutionalised as a political rivalry axis in Nigeria, as identified by Suberu and Mustapha through the federal character principle and the zoning laws [2], [17]. The concept of identity is treated as a fluid social resource, rather than a fixed social category, in their work, and shaped by elite negotiation and institutional incentives. The concept of identity is seen in many ways within the case of Anioma; it can be made subordinate when there is an increased political salience of regional alliances in the Niger Delta, or it can be foregrounded in discourses that seek to include Anioma in the expanded political space of the Igbo. The waxing and waning of Igbo identity is not random; rather, it is a tactic for coping with the structural incentives that are ingrained in Nigeria's system of intergovernmental relations.

In all, the precolonial cultural continuity, the colonial political disruptions, the postcolonial formation of the state and the modern political framing have all shaped the historical trajectory of Anioma's Igbo identity. These processes have created a rich matrix of cultural legacies and political categorisations, which may not align. The data collected from the government, media, community archives and regional histories vividly illustrate the complexity of Anioma identity as a historical phenomenon and a political variable. Anioma is not a coherent category, but rather is continually redefined according to the political opportunities and structural constraints that are a feature of Nigeria's federalism.

The Paradox of Selective Acceptance: Igbo Identity of Anioma in State Creation versus Broader Socio-Political Interactions

Constructing, negotiating and manipulating ethnic identities to serve changing political ends in the federal system is at the heart of Nigeria's political elision. The Igbo identity of Anioma is proactively pushed by political players, advocacy groups and media pundits during official discussions on state formation and restructuring because it reinforces the demand for establishment of an independent state of Anioma in the South East geopolitical zone. The Delta North Senatorial District leaders based their entitlement to the Anioma State claim on the fact that the Anioma State people share a common linguistic and cultural background with the core Igbo people, suggesting that "historical ties of language, family and cultural practice justify the inclusion of Anioma in the Igbo ethnocultural fold" [18]. Likewise, in public petitions to the National Assembly, the traditional rulers and community leaders usually reference Igbo origin in the context of a historical identity and not a new political construct [19]. These discourses focus on continuity with Igbo speech, rituals and kinship networks, and highlight the evidence-based argument of cultural commonality for inclusion in the larger Igbo polity.

Local community histories, which help to reinforce this foregrounding, document the cultural rites and rituals that are shared with the Igbo core states of Anambra, Imo, Abia and Ebonyi, including and especially their naming systems, festivals and religious

observances. In other socio-political engagements, however, the same identity narratives are purposefully left unmentioned or contradicted – as with the Niger Delta identity, where identities relate to resource politics, derivation funds and minority rights as a whole. Anioma leaders were known to highlight a minority identity that places them on the same side with other groups in the Delta region during the regional summits and other gatherings of stakeholders, rather than highlighting their Igbo identity [20]. This is the case with the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) as the distribution of projects and geopolitical shares of oil resources are negotiated by competing minorities on the grounds of minority status in the South South, but not on wider Igbo affiliation which may provide political disadvantage. Niger Delta Unity Forum 2024 was another of such events that has had the locals press their demands for better derivation fund payments and Federal intervention projects, just without the mention of Igbo heritage in their purest local language [21]. An obvious declaration of one's Igbo identity, in this context, may be seen as eroding the unity of the solidarity demand of the Niger Delta, based on common struggles over the environmental degradation, marginalisation by the oil industry and political marginalisation of minority group. In such cases the denial of Igbo identity is not so much an expression of denial of cultural origin as an adaptive political strategy, one that is sensitive to the incentive structure of resource and regional politics.

This paradox has its tensions reflected in electoral politics and party mobilization as well. In the 2019 Delta State governorship elections, the media recorded a phenomenon whereby the candidates from the Igbo segment switched to "Igbo" culturalism when campaigning in the "Igbo" dominated communities while they switched to "South South" minority unity when campaigning in communities with interest in the Niger Delta [24], [25]. The marketing of slogans as in some televised debates and political literature, "Anioma: Proudly Igbo, Strategically South South" appeared with the intention of trying to maneuver through the intricate political expectations. Political elites take advantage to the ambiguity within Anioma identity to fine-tune their appeal depending on the audience, nature of the office being fought, and the policy issue being played. This resonates with Mustapha and Okoli and Nwanegbo who state that ethnic identity in Nigeria is often a contextualized resource—it is called to the fore when it is advantageous, silences when it is not [17], [9].

The paradossal acceptance has economic consequences also. The government intervention programmes like NDDC and oil derivation allocations are based on minority recognition in the Niger Delta. However, as a single ethnic group, the Anioma are said to face the danger of being left out of these intervention programmes by some civil society actors and regional political commentators who seem to see the group primarily as Igbo. For example, there is a general consensus that classification issues are sometimes so overwhelming to the exclusion of vital health, education, infrastructure and other development activities; frustration that, "When we speak Igbo, some actors in the Delta say 'we are not of the Niger side' and when we align as Delta minorities, there are commitments to be made to a politics that sees us differently." These reports show that

there are material consequences of identity deployment to the extent that it influences the prioritisation of development corridors, federal appointments and social investments for Anioma communities.

Cultural registers are not spared of this selective invocation of Igbo identity, as it affects intra community and inter ethnic perceptions. Although the older generation are proud of the common Igbo heritage and practice their commonality through communal rites, naming practices and festival activities, the younger political actors increasingly pose questions on how to define one's identity to strategically avoid exclusion from the Niger Delta networks. This illustrates that the articulation of identity is not static and not always shared, but is negotiated and negotiated, and is shaped by local histories, political aspirations, and strategic needs.

These dynamics together point to a central paradox: In larger political settings where this identity may challenge a regional alliance or access to resource, it is suppressed, but in other political settings, mobilization of this identity can be used to reinforce claims for inclusion, such as state creation discourses. This selective acceptance is an adaptive response to an ethno-political environment in which ethnic status influences important relationships such as power, access and representation, but not the incoherence of cultural legacy. Evidence from national and regional media reporting; community voices; and historical trends of political negotiation suggest that identity is used as a situational mechanism in Nigeria, and is embraced when it provides political leverage and moderated when it carries the potential for exclusion or conflict in powerful regional groupings.

Implications of Selective Acceptance for Federal Inclusiveness, Intergroup Relations, and National Integration

Anioma's Igbo ethnicity is not acknowledged by all, and this is an example of the failure of the federate structures to be able to deal with complex ethnic issues in Nigeria. The Igbo identity of Anioma is also muted in the larger politics of Delta State in order to foster regional cooperation, despite the fact that Anioma is referred to as a division of the Igbo Country in making calls for Anioma State [6], [14]. The level of conditional inclusion in Nigeria, as demonstrated by this suggests that ethnicity is more often used as a political tool rather than being a solid base for administration in the country [2], [3]. Federal processes used to ensure representation of cultural groups such as Anioma, who's cultural heritage is either recognized or ignored for political convenience, leave them behind [9]. In fact, the representation of the Anioma in the Delta State House of Assembly has caused a rift in the Assembly, where the language and history of the ethnic group was questioned, underscoring a form of marginalisation that is still ongoing [26], [27].

Intergroup relations are affected. Changes in identity recognition may lead to tension within Anioma communities and amongst neighbouring ethnic groups. Cultural and administrative boundaries intersecting groups sometimes gives rise to distrust and competition as their identities are politicized [17], [4]. This situation has been observed in political negotiations, resource allocation and local governance, as the people of Anioma possess both values; hence, the problem of dualism in their claims regarding the Igbo

cultural heritage and Delta State affiliation [5], [1]. These inconsistencies contribute to intergroup conflicts and the difficulty in developing trust within groups for cooperative interactions.

Selective acceptance at a national level weakens the trustworthiness of the federal institutions. Conditional recognition makes it appear that inclusion is contingent on certain conditions and reduces the legitimacy of governance, leading to grievances that can threaten national integration [2], [10]. The analysts note that to achieve federal unity, policies must always be living reminders of historical, cultural and linguistic realities, and to ensure fair and equitable access to political representation and resources [9], [28]. Engaging in tangible political participation would help address the exclusionary practices and encourage meaningful engagement of Anioma within the federation for them.

Discussion of Findings

The study indicates that the Anioma identity is a selective identity of the Igbo ethnic group in Nigeria's political landscape. Their Igbo identity is used to support the claim for statehood and their representation in all other regional and federal contexts it is minimised; instead, there is a focus on Niger Delta affiliation as the basis for their demands. This polarity reflects the instrumentalization of ethnicity in Nigerian politics, which is not consistently recognized. This selective acceptance has also been found to affect intergroup relationship, representation and trust in the study. Anioma citizens are either included or marginalised, depending on political goals, making it difficult for them to feel "at home" and limiting their capacity to be involved in administration. It is a reflection of the problem of negotiating identity at administrative boundaries whereby it creates issues with the neighbouring Igbo communities and within the Niger Delta.

Last but not least, the results have broader implications for the national unity. The sporadic recognition of the identity of the Anioma in Nigeria is an example of Nigeria's problems of inclusiveness in the federal level. Ethnic identities are activated selectively, thus reinforcing the contradiction of governance and representation. It is important to recognize these inconsistencies and to work on them to ensure trust and better intergroup relations and a more integrated and equitable Federal system.

CONCLUSION

Fundamental Finding : The study has shown that the Anioma population is placed in a special position of the ethnopolitical landscape in Nigeria wherein the Igbo identity is either embraced or suppressed as per the political expediency. This selective recognition highlights Nigeria's federal structure's paradoxes, in which ethnicity can be a factor of inclusion in the process of state building, as well as a basis for exclusion in the national political context. The paradox indicates the more fundamental issues of representation, intergroup relations and national integration, and requires a more coherent and inclusive policy that balances cultural identity with equitable political participation. Finally, understanding selective acceptance provides important lessons on the context of Nigeria's broader conflicts relating to ethnicity, identity, and federalism. **Implication :** In

the light of the results of this study, the following are recommended: 1) Institutional Recognition of Identity: Nigerian state needs deliberate and consistent mechanisms that recognise the Igbo identity of the Anioma people formally at all governance and national discourse levels. Selective inclusion should not be limited to the process of state making, but should also include political representation, resource allocation and cultural inclusion, and strengthen the citizenship equation. 2) Inclusive Political Representation: Mechanism for political participation should be re-engineered to ensure Anioma Community has an equal opportunity to participate in the decision making process at both state and Federal level. This means positive policy action in the selection of legislative members, public servants and in executive representation that will work to reduce marginalisation caused by identity politics and help build a sense of trust between historically marginalised groups. 3) Federal and regional governance strategies should take into account the history, sociocultural and political contexts of communities that are located along ethnic and administrative borders. Thus, policies can prevent the exclusionary practices, promote intergroup cooperation, and improve the unity of Nigeria's multi-ethnic federation so as not to have identity conflicts to affect national integration. Intergroup Dialogue and Civic Education: Structured Intergroup Dialogue and historical and ethnically nuanced awareness and education programs should be established. Such programmes will not only help to confront the misconceptions of identity but will also foster respect and understanding between the Nigeria groups and strengthen national unity while respecting the national sub identities like that of the Anioma people. **Limitation :** A primary limitation of this study is its reliance on descriptive qualitative analysis and secondary historical or media sources, which may lack the real-time empirical precision of primary field surveys or direct ethnographic interviews with current Anioma political actors and community leaders. Furthermore, the structural analysis heavily focuses on the federal and regional dynamics within Delta State and the Niger Delta, thereby limiting its capacity to account for localized intra-group ideological divides or the shifting generational perceptions of Igbo identity among younger Anioma populations living in the diaspora. **Future Research :** Future research should focus on conducting empirical, mixed-methods investigations that include widespread polling and quantitative attitude mapping among the Anioma people to measure the psychological and social alignment with Igbo identity across different demographics. Additionally, subsequent studies are recommended to comparative-test this case with other border-line or multi-identity ethnic groups within Nigeria's federal system, exploring how constitutional amendments or digital civic spaces might reshape the politics of recognition in multiethnic federations.

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