An Overview of Ethnicity as a Leading Cause of Conflict in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is a forced marriage which did not receive the approval of the couples involved. Because of that whatever is done in Nigeria always has an ethnic undertone be it, politics, employment and provision of social amenities. Tribal affiliations are always very strong and visible. These conflicts cannot be ignored. It is therefore patently clear that realistic measures to solve these problems are needed. This paper, therefore, relies on content analysis as its methodology to examine ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. It also examines the effects of ethnic conflicts on the country's search for unity and identifies the possible issues for resolution. The study employed qualitative method. Through the analytic method the researcher found out that what we see as ethnic conflict is too ubiquitously. Secondly the researcher found out that we confuse our abuse of ethnicity with its inherent abusiveness. Based on the above analysis and findings recommendations were made.

Keywords: Retirement, Adjustment, Civil Servant

INTRODUCTION

Is there indeed a problem of ethnicity? Is it a leading cause of conflict in Nigeria? Conventional wisdom suggests that ethnicity is phenomenally problematic in Nigeria. It is held partly responsible for the 'irrationalities' of the development project, for political instability and weak national identity [1,2,3]. It has been blamed for outmoded values and regressive consciousness, for fostering corruption and destructive conflict and now there is some concern that the ongoing process of democratization in Nigeria may release the politically disintegrative potentialities of ethnicity. Is ethnicity really all this? The term "ethnicity" as used today arose in the beginning of 21th century, replacing the terminology of "races" or "nations" used for the concept in the 19th century [4,5]. Ethnicity results from interethnic relations, whenever two different groups or societies come into contact and establish various modes of spatial, political-economic, cultural and social relations. Throughout history, ethnic conflicts have long been a component of international politics [6]. Even today, ethnic wars continue to be the most common form of armed conflicts around the world [7]. In the recent past for example, there have been numerous instances of ethnic conflict including ethnic war in Somalia, Kurdish struggle for autonomy in Iraq and Turkey, guerilla wars in El Salvador and Nicaragua, insurrection in Chechnya, and the conflict between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda to name a few [8]. However, it is apparent that certain places and states are more prone to ethnic conflicts, while others experience essentially none. It has been generally agreed that ethnicity is one of the leading cause of conflict in the world and Nigeria is not an exemption. Hence, the study is aimed at exposing ethnicity as a leading cause of conflict in Nigeria [9,10].

The Problems of Ethnicity in Nigeria

Nigeria is a federal constitutional republic comprising of 36states and its federal capital, Abuja. Nigeria as a nation is a constituent of several nationalities. There are over 250 ethnic groups and the major ones are Yoruba, Igbo and Hausa. It is however very disturbing that Nigerians have become slaves to their ethnic origins instead of harnessing these diversities towards national development. Nigerians

are fanatics when it comes to ethnicity. It is therefore not surprising for a Nigerian to get angry because he/she is wrongly associated with another tribe. This is not the true reflection of a federal nation. "One of the sociological problems hindering the growth of the nation is in multi-ethnicity" [6]. In addition, before the coming of the white man, the various ethnic groups were inter- dependent but they did not constitute themselves into one society. It was in 1914 that they were amalgamated. Nigeria is a British creation by uniting the various entities into a single country called the federal republic of Nigeria. Some Nigerians are of the view that ''Nigeria is a forced marriage which did not receive the approval of the couples involved'' [7]. Furthermore, whatever is done in Nigeria always has an ethnic undertone be It, politics, employment and provision of social amenities. Tribal affiliations are always very strong and visible. Over the years, since independence there have been cases of ethnic violence resulting from allegiance to one's ethnic group and this has not worked well for the development of the country [5]. It is very common in Nigeria for an ''Igbo landlord'' to turn down a would-be tenant simply because he is ''Hausa''. Buhari on his own part supports the fulani herdsmen attack without remorse. The problem former president Jonathan faced within and outside his party, is ethnicity otherwise known as zoning. Most northern elites have said times without number that it is the time of the north to govern the affairs of the country. When politicians lose elections, or are in one political crisis or the other, they tend to devise strategies which will appeal to their people. For example, the recent statement made by a former Niger Delta militant, Asari Dokubo, who has threatened fire and brimstone if Jonathan loses the 2015 elections. Worst still, political parties in the pre-independence era, were based on ethnic factors. The Action Group was established from a Yoruba cultural association, Egbe Omo Oduduwa, the NCNC from an Igbo group and the NPC from Jamiyyar Arewa. The Action Group was led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, the NCNC by Nnamdi Azikiwe, the NPC by Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto. Ethnicity played a major role in the politics of Nigeria. Party politics was based on ethnic factors. Even in the present day politics, there are still traces of tribalism in the political parties. Parties like APGA is regarded as an Igbo party, ACN as a re-incarnation of the Action Group, CPC that regenerated to APC is seen as a party of the Hausa Fulanis. Only the PDP has a national outlook. Citing Nigeria as a case study with over 300 ethnic groups, the various competition and rivalry among these various ethnic groups has been seen as a product of colonial contact. The ethnic factor, however, did not diminish with the advent of independence; rather, it became a yardstick for measuring contribution to the national development effort and especially for allocating and distributing power and national resources [8]. With the current trend of Nigeria's exercise which aimed at establishing a sustainable form of democracy, there is urgent need to look into perceived factors that may work against the success of this endeavour. Most developing countries are ethnically diverse. For many years, social sciences preferred to ignore the brute fact of ethnic identity. More recently, evidence is accumulating that is detrimental to economic performance. Journalistic accounts of wars in Rwanda, Somalia, Sudan, and several other countries of sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s have raised concern that ethnic cleavages and overlapping affiliations of religion and race may undermine prospects for economic and political development in much of Africa. [8], In some certain view, the annulment of the democratic transition programme by the military in 1993 at the conclusion of the presidential polls, is believed to have been motivated by ethnic sentiments. On a similar note, the 30-month senseless killing occasioned by the Nigeria Civil War from 1967-1970 was anchored on ethnic rivalry. This was due to the efforts on the part of the predominantly Igbo peoples in the South-eastern region to carve out an independence nation for themselves.

Ethnic diversity may lead to increased civil strife. This perception is fostered both by some graphic individual scenes of inter-ethnic violence, and by an aggregate correlation: Africa has not only the highest ethnic diversity, but also the highest incidence of civil war. In Nigeria, the colonial masters provided urban setting, which constitutes the cradle of contemporary ethnicity [4]. Subsequently, ethnic conflicts in Nigeria arise as result of scarcity of political resources, multi-culturalism, religion, militarisation of ethnicity among others. These conflicts cannot be ignored. It is therefore patently clear that realistic measures to solve these problems are needed. This paper, therefore, relies on content analysis as its methodology to examine ethnic conflicts in Nigeria. It also examines the effects of ethnic conflicts on the country's search for unity and identifies the possible issues for resolution.

Cases of Ethnicity in Nigeria

The ancient oil town of Warri had exploded in violence between hitherto co-existing communities. This explosion has left scars, visible and invisible. Some of the visible scars were corpses, burnt out houses that were no more than hollow shells. The streets had a desolate look as business closed down and people fled the town in panic. This was the outcome of clashes between the three ethnic groups that makeup Warri - the Ijaws and Urhobos on one hand and the Itsekiris on the other. The scale and ferocity of the destruction are quite alarming-with hundreds of lives and properties lost. The antagonism among these ethnic groups is not new; it is a festering sore; it is merely increasing in frequency. In Ondo State, it was a replay of the Warri mayhem as the Ijaws and Ilajes, went for each other,s throat with the consequent loss of hundreds of lives and property. In most cases, whole villages were razed. Even in the riverine areas like the farming communities of Aguleri and Umuleri in Anambra State, the story is the same. The conflict, over land, is not new. It happened in 1933, 1964 and 1995. But, this recent one in 1999 assumed dangerous proportions with thousands of lives and properties destroyed, as more sophisticated weapons were used. All across Nigeria there is an ever-lengthening thread of ethnic violence: Ife/Modakeke, Ogoni and Andonis, Sagamu, Kano, Zango-Kataf, Jukuns/Tivs, etc. These are not isolated events but are interconnected. Powerful social and economic factors gave rise to them.

Solution to the Problems of Ethnicity in Nigeria

If we think of ethnicity less in terms of boundaries and exclusivity and more in terms of a condensation of culture, it will be easier to understand ethnic identity which remains strong in Nigeria despite every attempt to wish it away. History has saddled many Nigerians with the problem of crystallizing a sense of who they are and where they belong socially. Nigerians are under pressure from the hegemonic homogenization of Westernization. This is a continuation of the colonial experience. Colonialism placed the highest priority on the deculturing of Nigerians in order to undermine their sense of purpose, their will to resist and to perfect their domination [9]. This technique of domination reached its peak in operation python dance *egwu eke* in the south eastern state which tried to reduce the Igbos to the Hobbesian simplicity of matter and motion, to the barbarians they deserve elimination. Perhaps the most salient feature of elimination is not the physical brutalization of the Igbos nor the ubiquitous signs of born to rule and inequality but the rigorous Islamization of the Igbos. Islamization confines them to settlements which are meticulously designed to prevent any possibility of culture - so much so that they are not even societies or economies, just labour reserves in the purest sense. Such drastic deculturing engenders resistance; its victims struggle to find for themselves a cultural identity and considering the likely options, it is not surprising if some of them find it in ethnicity. Perhaps better in emnicity than not at all. For a decultured society is an improbable

society as we have seen from the experience of post-colonial Africa. Societal incoherence, diffidence and dependence, anomie and alienation especially among the elite, aggression, conflict and violence arising partly from lack of confidence, are manifestations of deculturing. We have not seen all the problems of the drastic deculturing of Nigerian yet; we will not see them in clear relief if ethnicity finally goes. Seen against this background, the construction of ethnicity is not only political, but also cultural; it is not always cynical and opportunistic, it is sometimes a survival strategy of people struggling to affirm their humanity. If the tenacity by which some Nigerians cling to certain cultural symbols and a fabricated past seems surprising, one must consider the implications of lacking a sense of self and of being lost in a cultural wilderness. More and more people are finding this intolerable and are fighting determinedly not only to assert their cultural identity but also to claim self-determination for it And in making these claims they have brought into question the legitimacy of the present state system. We might be witnessing the beginning of a global political revolution which promises to be far more profound and far more dangerous than the present reconstitution of the world order. Nigerians will need to pay more attention to these developments. And a good place to begin is the rethinking of ethnicity which we would rather judge than understand. The usual easy judgments are a dangerous luxury at a time when long-established states are decomposing under pressure from ethnic and nationalist assertiveness and when the international community is shrugging off their demise. The implications of this for Nigerians where hundreds of ethnic groups and nationalities are squeezed chaotically and oppressively into some 36 states are easy enough to imagine in their enormity .The solutions to Ethnicity are: ability to tolerate; there is need to tolerate each other. There should be good government policies; public enlightenment that teach against ethnicity; inter-ethnic marriages; marrying from another tribes help to reduce conflicts.

Evaluation and Conclusion

To the question, 'ethnicity a leading cause of conflict in Nigeria. We see ethnic conflict too ubiquitously - in ethnic misrepresentations of survival strategies, in emancipatory projects and strategies of power. We confuse our abuse of ethnicity with its inherent abusiveness. Most importantly, we tend to forget that even though ethnicity might be constructed it is also a living presence, an important part of what many Nigerians are. Surely, part of what we are is people who must find themselves, most likely in the desperate act of inventing a cultural identity to assert a humanity and set ourselves on the path of becoming a going concern. How we are fabricated, cultural identity and all, cannot be a problem except in the context of some notion of how we might be. Even then, what can be appropriately problematized is not (the way we are but the process of 'becoming'. It cannot be desirable for Nigerians to return to the past or to stagnate in a present which promises no future. Nigeria must move on. But this forward movement has to be in the direction of self-development and self-fulfillment, not self-denial and alienation. It must begin with the crystallization of our identity and build on what we are, ethnic and all. For those who do not know who they are cannot really know where they are going.

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