



ETHNICITY: THE QUAGMIRE OF NIGERIA'S DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

This paper logically examined the extent ethnicity has contributed to Nigeria's developmental stupor. It defined ethnicity as the social classification that is based on an individual's identification with/membership of an ethnic group, which is more of a behavioural quality (way of life) than a mark. Perennialism explained the existence of ethnic nationalities ever before colonization, the instrumentalist variety explained the reason for continued ethnic stratification, and the constructivist view helps to understand the political elites' clinch on ethnic nationalism. Using deductive argument, it was established that the Government and political elite fuel ethnicity because of personal gains that includes corruption. From the forensic psychological stand point, ethnicity is outlawed in Nigeria hence Heads of Governments could be prosecuted for felony. The paper recommends that Nigeria should not deny her multi ethnic reality, but should harness its strong points by evoking the law of comparative advantage to plan sustainable developmental strategy(ies).

Key words: *Ethnicity, Nigeria's Development, Amalgamation, Felony, Corruption.*

Introduction

Since the creation of Nigeria in 1914 in what was called a forced wedlock between 'the Gentleman and the Lady of Means', the worst crises experienced by, and in the Country are traceable to ethnicity. In terms of frequency, magnitude of violence, number of casualties, economic loss, and social and political disruptions, ethnically motivated/sustained conflicts have dealt more devastating blows to Nigeria and Nigerians than conflicts traceable to all other sources put together. Indeed, the one most formidable problem that has almost ruined the Country which is corruption is so deep rooted because of ethnicity; or could there be a better explanation for selective, and vacillating fights against corruption in the Country, or why persons from some ethnic groups have never headed empowered anti-corruption agencies if not the 'we' and 'they' attitude inherent in ethnicity?

When the late sage; Obafemi Awolowo described Nigeria as a mere geographical expression, he must have been convinced that the amalgamation which had been done with military fiat and impunity, without consultation and consent of the

amalgamated independent political entities, created a 'land' instead of creating a people. These politically independent entities were previously only connecting to each other through trade, and perhaps wars of expansion. Conversely, the amalgamation brought them together into one political group while retaining divergent beliefs and world views, as well as prejudices against one another. Nigeria thus became a loose amalgam of multi ethno-linguistic groups with multi-cultural diversities; hence this persisting hedge formation and other in-group self defence/preservation behaviour that manifest themselves in the transactions/relationships that exist between and among these diverse ethno-linguistic groups in the Country. Thus, in their effort to establish reasonable control over economic and political power, the ethnic groups accentuate the 'we and they' attitude, which translate to disruptive competition and attendant crises.

Cogitation on the foregoing promptly raises the questions of 'what then... and how? What are the options open to Nigeria? Which ones are the most viable; indeed, is there a most viable option in terms of operationalism and positive outcomes? Ostensible then is the urgency to interrogate ethnicity as a phenomenon, in relation to the search for paradigm(s) to make Nigeria work.

Ethnicity is the social classification that is based on an individual's identification with/membership of an ethnic group. It is the character; the characteristics that portray or marks one out because of his / her belongingness to an ethnic group: it is more of a behavioural quality or preferred way of life of a group of people (the ethnic group) than a mark. APA (2007) explains that the word ethnic is an adjective that refers to a group of people having a shared social, cultural, linguistic, religious, and usually racial background. Ethnic identity; the sense of being defined by the characteristics of a particular ethnic group differs from ethnicity to the extent that the former is self-defined, and perhaps offers a personal sense of satisfaction. While the later defines 'other' categorisation. Essentially, the words 'identify, and identification' in the context of ethnicity may best be appreciated from the mathematical perspective: a mathematical equation that remains valid irrespective of values that are taken by its variables. Ethnicity is therefore an enduring quality capable of near irresistible manifestation across situations.

Furthermore, ethnic identity as defined above must not be confused with ethnic affinity: a construct that measures the extent of ties maintained by members of an ethnic group. Ethnic affinity defines the 'fellow feeling', attraction, and liking behaviour that exist within an ethnic group; the bonding strength, and group cohesion. Affinity level differs between, and among ethnic groups.



In the words of People, James, Bailey, and Garrick (2010),

'.. an ethnic group is a named social category of people based on perceptions of shared social experience or one's ancestors' experiences. Members of the ethnic group see themselves as sharing cultural traditions and history that distinguish them from other groups. Ethnic group identity has a strong psychological or emotional component that divides the people of the world into opposing categories of "us" and "them." In contrast to social stratification, which divides and unifies people along a series of horizontal axes on the basis of socioeconomic factors, ethnic identities divide and unify people along a series of vertical axes. Thus, ethnic groups, at least theoretically, cut across socioeconomic class differences, drawing members from all strata of the population'. p. 389.

Approaches to understanding ethnicity

Scholars express different perspectives on the nature of ethnicity as a factor in human life and society. The main approaches are: primordialism, essentialism, perennialism, instrumentalism and constructivism - modernism.

Primordialism holds that ethnicity has existed immemorial, and that modern ethnic groups have historical continuity into the far past. Ethnicity is therefore closely linked to the idea of nations and is rooted in the understanding of humanity as being divided into primordially existing groups rooted by kinship and biological heritage.

Essentialist primordialism further believes that ethnicity is a self-evident fact of human existence, that ethnicity precedes any human social interaction and that it is basically unchanged by human interactions. This theory holds that ethnic groups are natural, not just historical. It also has problems dealing with the consequences of intermarriage, migration and colonization for the composition of contemporary multi-ethnic states

Kinship primordialism holds that ethnic groups are extensions of kinship units, mainly being derived by kinship or clan ties such that cultural signs (language, religion, traditions) are prepared exactly to show this biological affinity. In this way, the tradition of common biological ancestry that are a defining feature of ethnic communities are to be understood as representing actual biological history. However, it has been argued that ethnicity is not in itself primordial but humans perceive it as such because it is embedded in their experience of the world.

Perennialism, is an approach that is primarily concerned with nationhood but tends to see nations and ethnic communities as basically the same phenomenon, holds that the nation, as a type of social and political organisation, is of an immemorial or "perennial" character. Smith (1999) distinguishes two variants: "continuous perennialism", which claims that particular nations have existed for very long spans of time, and "recurrent perennialism", which focuses on the emergence, dissolution and reappearance of nations as a recurring aspect of human history.

There are other variants of perennialism, of which **instrumentalist** perennialism that sees ethnicity primarily as a versatile tool that identified different ethnics groups and limits through time, and explains ethnicity as a mechanism of social stratification: the basis for a hierarchical arrangement of individuals is rather appealing. According to Noel (1968), ethnic stratification is a system of stratification wherein some relatively fixed group membership (e.g., race, religion, or nationality) is utilized as a major criterion for assigning social positions. Accordingly, ethnic stratification will emerge only when specific ethnic groups are brought into contact with one another, and only when those groups are characterized by a high degree of ethnocentrism, competition, and differential power.

Constructivism is another approach to ethnicity. Proponents hold that ethnic groups are only products of human social interaction; upheld only to the extent they are maintained as valid social constructs in societies, and rejects the notion of ethnicity as a basic human condition. Modernist constructivism correlates the emergence of ethnicity with the movement towards nation states beginning in the early modern period. Proponents of this theory, such as Eric Hobsbawm, argue that ethnicity and notions of ethnic pride, such as nationalism, are purely modern inventions, appearing only in the modern period of world history. They hold that prior to this, ethnic homogeneity was not considered an ideal or necessary factor in the forging of large-scale societies (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nation_state).

From the foregoing expose`, it is persuasive that perennialism, especially the instrumentalist view, and aspects of constructivism explain ethnicity in Nigeria. Perennialism explains the existence of ethnic nationalities ever before colonization, the instrumentalist variety explains the reason for continued ethnic stratification, and the constructivist view helps to understand the political elites' clinch on ethnic nationalism. Although ethnicity is a fact of human existence, it is its capitalist transactional embodiment which characterizes its manifestation in Nigeria that has produced the Nigerian social malignancy: a condition in which



ethnic group members exploit the sentiments and ride on the back of fellows to appropriate the wealth of the country, and misappropriate same, then are recognized by the same exploited fellows as heroes 'for savaging Nigeria'. The same elites, in order to maintain their positions construct hatred, and build diamond shields against inter ethnic cooperation, and use vulnerable youths to market/implement same. Thus, instead of particular ethnic youths coming up against those people (their ethnic fellows) who have been exploiting them, they, in what may be likened to slave mentality accept the deceit designed by their elite, and wage all kinds of unnecessary inter ethnic wars thereby perpetuating the status quo that put them in poverty. This theoretical standpoint explains the sleaze in State Governments; where monies already allocated to a state, (therefore to particular ethnic nationality or a part of it) is misappropriated by state government officials over and over again, yet the people condone it and keep attacking other ethnic groups. Also, imagine that since independence, the Heads of State, Executive Presidents, Prime minister, Ministers, National Legislators, NNPC Managing Directors, oil block owners, and other Federal appointees had shared their 'loots' with their people; certainly the ethnic group that would have developed the most in Nigeria would be the one that has produced the largest number of these officials. Unfortunately, it is the opposite. These ethnic elites forget their ethnic people, who are the actual owners of the monies (after all they climbed on ethnic support as their group's representatives); they keep the unimaginable wealth to themselves, and turn around to ferment inter ethnic crises as diversionary bids for their youths. One may then inquire whether indeed ethnicity is paying off to the majority of Nigerians?

Of course, ethnicity serves two basic needs: identity/ sense of belongingness, and protection/ security. Factors that sustain ethnicity in multiethnic societies therefore include discrimination/marginalisation, exploitation, and insecurity; if they must be separated. Otherwise, the one word factor that fuels ethnicity is insecurity. All other sub-factors are wittingly subsumed into it. In this context then, physical security, psychological security, and economic security, capture the possible motivating variables that not only sustain ethnicity, but also engender fights against perceived or actual threats to security.

Security of Lives and properties (Physical Security): Security in its broad sense connotes freedom from, or elimination of threat, not only to the physical existence of something but also its ability for self-protection and development, and the enhancement of the general well-being of all the people (Imobighe, 2001). In objective sense, it is the measure of vulnerability distance between a person, property, structure, an institution, or an organism, and threats to its

harm from all possible environmental forces while the subjective perspective holds security as the perception that a valuable has sufficient objective security (Obi-Nwosu, Oguegbe, Unachukwu, & Obiora, 2012). This word is also used to represent the apparatus, structure and processes that provide objective and subjective security. It is understandable that from time immemorial/before the advent of modern state nations, ethnic groups provided this kind of security to members: different peoples had their methods of crime control, and preservation of territorial integrity. Understandably then, once one group feels that the central Government in a multiethnic society, 'fails' to prioritize their security, then there could be a recourse to self help, which simply translates to inter ethnic conflict.

Psychological Security is here defined as a measure of vulnerability distance or freedom from emotional harm or psychological abuse. According to Taormina & Sun (2015), it is the perception of the world (the environment) as emotionally secure or free from emotional harm. This concept emerged from Maslow's thought (hierarchy of needs) when he argued that when lower-order (security) needs are not met, individuals become anxious and tense, and develop feelings of threat or harm, which translates to dissatisfaction with life. Maslow, Hirsh, Stein, & Honigmann (1945), had defined psychological security as a state in which the environment is perceived as safe, and free from threat and harm, and opined that psychological security confers people with high confidence and trust in themselves, trust in other people, and less feelings of anxiety. Such people readily engage in social relationships, and enjoy a wide range of activities involving contacts with others.

People who feel psychologically secure do not perceive the world and other people as a threat or believe that they can easily be hurt by other people's emotional behaviours; thus, they strive to undertake difficult tasks and take risks to attain higher goals in life. Feelings of psychological security engender pleasant interpersonal relationships (Afolabi & Balogun, 2017).

Psychological insecurity is associated therefore with feeling of isolation, anxiety, hostility, and conflicts in interpersonal engagement, and when this is endemic in an ethnic society, it defines inter ethnic distrust, suspicion, and avoidance or fight responses in inter-ethnic group relations. Drawing from Maslow's thoughts, psychological security is a function of socioeconomic wellbeing (not class). Education, creativity, openness to experience and conscientiousness are thus ineluctably tied to it. An ethnic group that measures low in these variables must feel psychologically insecure, and are the more likely to provoke inter ethnic conflicts. Negative education (counter productive education), here defined as the inculcation of ideas and beliefs that provoke ill feelings and self defeating



orientation in younger generations is a formidable impetus for inter ethnic distrust and conflicts.

Economic Security encompasses access to food (food security), shelter (housing), and health facilities. Economic security is here defined as one's 'safety distance' from the lack of these basic necessities of life: How readily are these available, and of what quality? Economic security can easily be measured by the ratio of average sustainable income versus expenditure on the basic necessities of life. Low income groups experience low economic security generally, wide spread unemployment also widens economic insecurity. However, socioeconomic support from family, religious groups, or other affiliations may make a momentous security difference between individuals on the same income status. In effect, availability or otherwise of formidable support (whether private, or public welfare scheme) is a significant determinant of economic security. Low economic security; otherwise economic insecurity as explained by Obi-Nwosu, Arimoro, Baleguel, & Nwafor, (2017), is a precursor of aggressiveness, and conflicts. It is therefore strongly convincing that poverty fuels inter ethnic conflicts: the more there are poor people in an ethnic group, the more the number of frustrated people who once primed, unleash terror on perceived enemy ethnic group.

Ethnicity and Development. Having got this far, the relationship between ethnicity and National development may seem rather obvious. However, this discourse will be incomplete without a sharp description of the nexus. Contextually, development encompasses higher level of attainment in positive education, healthcare, justice, leadership, science and technology, industrialization, infrastructure, poverty reduction, and care of the environment. The extent to which a country measures up in the adequacy of these parameters defines her level of development. In a simple sentence: development is the level of adequacy of economic, physical, and psychological security in a country. Ethnicity in Nigeria breeds and sustains the three arms of insecurity, it therefore frustrates development.

Deductions

From the foregoing paragraphs, it is abundantly clear that in its broadest sense, security represents availability of all factors and facilities that engender existence, productivity and sustenance of life and property, and consists of psychological, physical, and economic security. It is from this perspective that the provision of security is viewed by social scientists as the most fundamental function of government, after all Government allocates all factors of production directly or indirectly.

Indeed, section 14(2) (b) of the 1999 constitution (as amended) states that the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of Government. Minding the word primary in that definition of duty, it is explicit that any other function of Government is secondary; that unless Government is able to positively take care of the security and welfare of the governed, there is ineptitude, and breach of the social contract in a democracy.

From this standpoint, emanates the forensic question about the utility of the oath of office usually taken by elected and appointed Government officials. Section 191 (chap.18) of the criminal code "C38"; Laws of The Federation 2004 implies that any person who is required by statute to confirm his or her actions or intended actions by taking of an oath, or making a declaration, but willfully disregards same (false declaration) is guilty of felony. In the view of the forensic psychologist, office holders (as described above) who breach the provisions of the Constitution do so willfully, except they are psychopathological.

Paraphrasing the aforesaid; willful irregularities that negate the oath of office by Head of Government [which is felony at the least] directly impugn the security of the Country. Furthermore, by logical assay of Nigerian statute law, ethnicity is outlawed in Government. Unfortunately, the Government is the major facilitator of ethnicity in Nigeria since she fails to honour her Constitution through negating the oath of office. If Government willfully fuels ethnicity, who then will bell the cat?

Ethnicity could be harnessed for positive ends if Nigerian Government and elites stop the prevailing Machiavellian application of it, and invoke it's constructive perspective. In this case, even if the Country is structured along ethnically congruent lines, the principle of comparative advantage could be evoked in the mapping of development strategies and projects. Then, idleness will give way to healthy competition among the zones. Perhaps before long, hedge formation and prejudice may significantly abate.

Conclusion and recommendations

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view helps to understand the political elites' clinch on ethnic nationalism. Although ethnicity is a fact of human existence, it is its capitalist transactional embodiment in Nigeria that has produced the Nigerian social malignancy: a condition in which ethnic group members exploit the sentiments of, and ride on the back of fellows to appropriate the wealth of the Country, and misappropriate same, then are recognized by the same exploited fellows as heroes 'for savaging Nigeria'. Indeed, ethnicity is the spirit and soul of corruption, State criminality, and insecurity in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the ethnic elites who also constitute the Government construct inter ethnic hatred and sentiments to divert attention from their misdeeds, and perpetuate their hold on leadership.

Two broad approaches here recommended for saving the Country from this menace are Government Centric, and People Centric approaches. The government centric approach is only possible if people in Government, especially at the highest level repent, and have genuine intentions to develop the Country, and to keep the Country united in independence (not in colonization). Then the Constitution will be revised to ensure equity and egalitarianism: Then the rule of law must be made effectual.

The second option is mass education through the media, especially the social media.

The social media is a formidable modern source of education/campaign. Hate messages constructed by the elites (perhaps masterminded by the imperialists) handed over to naïve and vulnerable youths have been circulated through this media, because of its potency. Authentic information/knowledge that is properly articulated and presented will surely in no time wane the effects of irresponsible hate speeches and information. If concerted effort is made starting with all possible civil societies and youth organizations [including students], it is persuasive that before long, desirable outcomes will be achieved. Now is therefore the time to repent, and pull all resources together to dismantle the constructed dividing walls all around us, and to make our leaders become responsible enough to abide by their oaths of office.

What do you think?

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