

ETHNIC IDENTITY AND THE CRISES OF DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA

Olufayo Olu – Olu, PhD

Department of Sociology, University of Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

Abstract

This paper takes a cursory look at the crises of confidence acting as a bane to the overall development of the nation. These crises were deeply rooted in government lackadaisical attitude toward the issues of marginalization raised by the ethnic minorities especially those producing the wealth of the Nation. The re-awakening of ethnic identity and class-consciousness has led to a situation where the oppressed have resolved to be or not to be. The government appears a weakling at taking the bull by the horns having failed to achieve desired results with all its antidotes. This paper made recommendations towards achieving this.

Keywords: Ethnic Identity, ethnic militia, class consciousness, national question

Introduction

Historical panorama

The overriding interest of Europe to boost home economy even at the detriment of all other human species warranted, first, the obnoxious trade in slaves which dehumanized Africans and second, the scrambling for and the partitioning of African nations for which Britain took very inglorious part. The end-product of this inordinate ambition is the fusion of several nations of different cultural backgrounds into one nation, an exercise credited to Nigeria first Governor – General Lord F. Lugard. The amalgamation of 1914, which was done, albeit not in the spirit of oneness but for administrative convenience of the colonial masters, marked the starting point in what is today known as ethnic identity coupled with its militia operations in nearly all the nooks and crannies of Nigeria.

This no doubt has rendered impotent the overall development of the nation in spite of its abundant natural resources spreading over its vast land mass of over 924,000sq.km. As at present, the Nigeria state comprises over 500 ethnic groups with only three dominating viz: the Hausa/Fulani's in the North, the Yoruba's in the West and the Igbos in the east. Competitions for

political and economic power have engulfed the three dominant ethnic groups such that the others are seen not to be in existence or are presumed to be mere appendages of each of the three rival groups; their colossal contribution to the overall development of the nation, notwithstanding.

The continuous marginalizations of the minorities have created a sort of social identity within and between ethnic groups across the country which has witnessed our present state of predicament.

It is no gain saying the fact that crude oil which forms the bulk of the sources if not a major source of our foreign earnings is extracted from the minority group areas. According to Ovwasa (1999) two communities which has contributed greatly to the wealth of the nation are the Ogoni's and the Urhobo as Ovwasa; quoting Etteng (1996) and Naanem (1995) reported the Ogoni's land to have contributed a whopping sum of 40 billion naira to the nations wealth in about 34 years while the urhobos contribution was approximated to 2.2 trillion naira yet they were the worst for it as their land becomes degraded through oil exploration, and oil and gas spillage which has rendered the land impotent and the water as well as fishery unsable.

Just like in the riverine communities, it is the same story of woes in other parts of the country. In the middle belt the peaceful coexistence of the middle beltters (such as the Tiv, Idoma, Agatu, Erulo, Nyifon) to mention a few were thwarted by the infiltration of the British and its installation of the Hausa hegemonic rule (Makar 1994, Tyroden 1993. Nvediga, Simbine and Galadima 2001). All these brought about a social identity where the minorities as well as the majority identify themselves as having some distinct features which separate them psychologically from other groups. This informs one's group (in-group) of the perception it has of the other group (out-group). The wrong impression manifest in our reaction to the 'others' especially in the allocation of scarce resources (Oтите 1990 and Owolabi 2003). The agitation for a fair share of the nation's resources coupled with a betrayer of trust imposed on the dominant group often informed the resentment of the minority group. This usually culminates into unwanton destruction of life and property thereby causing a general retardation in the country political development (Duddley 1968, James 2000). Noticeable among these crises are the Ife/Modakeke bloody clash of 1990 which lasted months and left the whole community deserted for years after, the OgoniMasscre of 1994, the violence at Oburu in 1989, the tragedy of 1995 at Ubima (Eteng 1996) and the various dangerous explosions caused by the militants in the delta region resulting in hostage taking, vandalization of pipelines and destruction of life and property (The News 2007).

This is aptly summarized in the table below:

Table 1: Some of the Ethnic Crises in Nigeria

Name	Year	Casualties
<u>Oburu Violence</u>	1989	Loss of Lives and Properties
<u>Ife/Modakeke bloody clash</u>	1990	Loss of Lives and Properties
<u>Katafs& Hausa clash in Kaduna State</u>	1994	Destruction of Lives and Properties <u>and</u> a halt to economic activities
<u>Ogoni Massacre</u>	1994	Killings of able bodies, youth and <u>Innocent citizens</u> . Destruction of <u>properties</u> especially of oil refineries. Hostage taking and the self <u>evacuation</u> of expatriates <u>from Nigeria</u> .
The <u>Ubima</u> Tragedy	1995	<u>Unwanton</u> destruction of lives and <u>properties</u> .
Ife/ <u>Modakeke</u> Re-eruption	1997	Destruction of lives, properties and <u>disruption</u> of social and economic <u>activities</u> .
OPC and Hausa Settlers <u>Clash in Shagamu</u>	1999	<u>Loss of lives and properties</u> .
The Jos crises	2001 2002 2008	Destruction of lives and properties and the forceful migration of <u>to date Southerners from Jos</u> .
The <u>Egbesu</u> Boys Menace	2011	Loss of lives and properties <u>Vandalization</u> of oil refineries, Hostage taking
Census Crises	1962	Always resulting in the mistrust if <u>each</u> of the three dominant groups <u>against</u> each other, with its Legal <u>battles</u> and other attendant <u>consequences</u> .
The 2000 Election Southern	2009	Killing of innocent youths of <u>extraction</u> in the North especially the YouthCorp Members who were meant to serve as the symbols of Unity in the country. <u>Destruction of lives and properties</u> .
The Independence Anniversary Tragedy in Abuja	2000	Killing and <u>Maiming</u> of innocent Nigerians and destruction of <u>properties</u> .
Bombing of the United Nations house in Abuja	2011	Destruction of lives and properties <u>Including those of expatriates</u> .
Series of Bombing Operations in the Northern parts of the 2009 to date <u>Country (BokoHarram)</u>		<u>Colosus</u> loss of lives, Innocent killing of the young and <u>women and insecurity of lives</u> .
Bornu, Kano, Kaduna, <u>Bauchi etc</u>		
Hausa/Ekiti clash in Ado-Ekiti	2012	Untimely death of many Hausa <u>and Yorubas</u> and disruption of <u>Economic activities</u> .

It must also be noted that there are series of unreported cases of ethnic violence across the country. These are cases of clashes that are considered not significant enough to carry the banner stories of some newspapers in Nigeria. They are also underreported so as not to lead to ethnic eruptions from other parts of the country. The above has more than ever before led to the re-awakening of ethnic consciousness and an overall allegiance to ones tribal group over that of the nation. Several ethnic formation continue to flourish in the interest of their local communities unabated. Among such are the Oodua Peoples Congress (OPC), the militant Yoruba group saddled with the task of defending the interest of the Yoruba ethnic group. The Ijaw national council represents the Ijaw ethnic group, the Arewa Peoples Congress representing the interest of the Northerners, the Movement for the survival of Ogoni People (MOSOPO) serving the interest of the Ogoni minority and others in the Niger Delta, The Movement for the actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) has been very vociferous in their demand for the Independence of the Biafra nation, which has been the unfinished task of their warlord, Chief Emeka Ojukwu which started in 1967 and lasted years.

Many of these ethnic militants especially from the Southern parts had in their utterances and actions sent warning signals of secession and the collapse of the Nigerians State. Those others in the North had also threatened a bloody civil war from which the country may never recover. Their reason for this is not far fetch. Their ethnic group has benefited immensely more than others especially those producing the wealth of the nation, from the national cake. This they stand to defend.

The various ethnic violence eruptions from the various parts of the country could therefore be seen as arising from two major factors viz: economic and political. The feeling of marginalization by some ethnic groups (minority groups) in the fair share of the nations resources is the major economic reasons advanced for inter-ethnic crises in the country. The minorities are often neglected in the scheme of things inspite of their countries economic exploitations by the multi-national companies which albeit has caused them lots of hardship due to the environmental degradation of the area (Ibrahim Adebayo 2010).

On the political terrain, it was equally argued that political power has tilted towards a section of the country particularly the north who were credited to have dominated the political scene for more than half of the country's independence whether military or civilian. Such was the romance with power that one of such state set herself the motto: 'Born to rule'.

This of course has gotten itself into the psychic of others especially those that considered themselves marginalized to redress their problems. The last election in Nigeria was an eye opener to this. Out of the fifty

political parties that contested the election, the Igbo's, as if on oath decided not to play second fiddle to any party no matter its nationalistic outlook. This was unlike what options in the past when the Igbo's were considered best fit for Vice-Presidency position or ceremonial head. That the minority won election to the number one position for the first time in the history of Nigeria sparked off chains of reaction from the northern States considered to have the exclusive preserve to rule. Even members of the Youth Corps, our 'symbol' of unity especially those of the southern extraction were made the sacrificial lambs. The dangerous signal this sent across to the entire citizenry is the slogan earlier echoed during the first republic politics of "North for the Northerners, West for the Westerners and East for the Easterners". Nigeria therefore could be nothing but a mere geographical expression as Earlier asserted by the sage 'ObafemiAwolowo".

In all of these crises, religion remains the tool at least as it appears on the surface. What this author could deduce after examining the various clashes across the nation especially those in the Northern part of the country is that 'ethnic clashes in most cases was only wearing a garment of religion'. The Jos situation could be cited as a good example of this. Like Lagos, the former Federal Capital, Jos has witnesses lots of immigrants because of its weather, cosmopolitan nature and its almost forgotten mining industry.

It has almost therefore turned to a 'no man's land' where the indigenes have been converted to the Christian religion. The muslimfaithfuls also have a free hand to operate but the politics of today's appears to favour those of the christian faith. Religion therefore rather than ethnic politics or ethnic identity became the celebrated cause of Jos crises (Hignzi 2011) Greedy and power conscious political leaders have discovered a hideout in religion and are sponsoring what now looks like a religious crises termed 'Jihad' to shift attention from the major problem at the detriment of the innocent and highly illiterate muslimfaithfuls being used to forment trouble (SeeEmeagwal at <http://emeagwali.com/interviews>). This was what Obianyo (2007) quoting Jega (1996) referred to as 'reactionary ethnicity' meant only for the cultivation of group (ethnic) solidarity.

This again is based on the belief that only their member of ethnic origin can give them serious consideration in government which forms the basis of our 'politics of inclusion and exclusion' as Nnoli (1976) puts it. An indigene no matter how idiotic and intellectually deserted about the intrinsic norms and values of administration would still be preferred by his people being 'Son of the soil' or replaced in the popular saying of 'Omo wan i, e je o se'. When such candidate wins he use the state apparatus to entrenched himself in office (sit-down Syndrome) while the opposition whip up Sentiments among other group members (ethnic militia) to remove him. Ake

(1996) was of this view when he said ‘Nothing can be better than winning election and nothing worse than losing.

The danger the above portends for the stability of the nation has raised serious questions relating to the weakness of the Nigeria state to handle the issue of ethnicity and how to manage the relations between the various component units so as to bring about a strong Nigerian – State. It must be noted that due to the circumstances of its coming together which has already been discussed, the component units owes allegiance to its cultural groups (regions) rather than the Nigeria government, not minding its federal structure. Hence according to Oyeonzi (2002). There is a ‘lost sense of nationalism’ for the nation as a whole.

Regionalism therefore rather than helping drawing the people nearer to the government was breeding individuality thereby making the centre very weak. This must be have informed Nwabueze (1986) when he defined regionalism as that principle which attributes a distinct individuality to each unit within a federal state each claiming its loyalty from its inhabitants, a loyalty which should excel that of the individual to the state. Hence the embers of ethnicity was fanned and reinforced by policies mis-directed towards solving the problem. Such policies include the quota system, federal character, state creation and derivation principles (Ige 1999).

Ethnicity, Class Consciousness and the crises of Confidence among Tribal Groups in Nigeria

Bath (1969) defines ethnicity as a unit of people perceiving themselves are sharing common characteristics which distinguish them from others. The definition equally connotes that there must be a general acceptance that these people are different from others. Such features may include, skin colour or complexion, language, height or body built, dietary condition, habitat etc. This group must see themselves as having a kind of cultural background which is genuinely superior to those of others and judging others on the basis of the standard of judgment in ones own in-group (Levine and Campbell 1978).

It is within this context that many scholars have equated ethnicity with racism (Appiah 1986, Mundibe 1988, Owolabi, 2003). To them ethnicity is mere fiction invented by the Western world to divide and rule Africa. The invention of ethnicity no doubt wiped out the much needed unity and the cohesion to fight colonialism as one. It is therefore an ideological instrument just as racism to exploit and oppress the Africans (Michels 1958, Buhlam 1942, Mills 1956 Foucault 1980 and Ekeh 1975). No wonder why Miller (1987) described it aptly as a ‘concept’ of composition, decomposition and recomposition’. Going by the foregoing analysis, it becomes imperative that for colonialism to survive, ethnicity must be fully

entrenched so as to engender the separation between the components units making-up the whole. This argument was much similar to that provided for racism which justifies them to exploit and dehumanized the Africans. By racism, it was meant that there exist fundamental differences between groups which no doubt makes for the inequality between them. The superior race therefore is justified to initiate the inferior into its own culture (Mundibe 1998). This was the justification for the entrenchment of the policy of assimilation in some parts of Africa. The hierarchy of the races was fashioned out in this naivety that some blood composition are more original (Appiah 1986).

Having debunked the fallacy of the biological determinism of races, but that long years of historical and sociological experiences' makes for such differences (Appiah 1986), it becomes imperative that both racism and ethnicity are mere mental construct of the whites to justify their repressive policies in Africa. A glaring example was provided by the infiltration of the colonial masters into the harmonious communities of the Hutus and the Tutsi in present day Rwanda. The two communities were made to see themselves as distinct from each other by the colonial masters hence setting a seed of discord; propelled by ethnicity. Using their respective occupations which informed their diet, they were separated based on the archaic belief that one is superior (Tutsi) because they had a Caucasian look while the Hutus were to play subordinated roles because they were farmers, stocky and dark complexioned.

The colonialist were able to excel in this game by wooing some African elites to imbibe this culture of ethnic segregation. Of course, they could not have disagreed because of the inherent benefit of ethnic politics to them. Other agencies of ethnic politics are the missionaries and even scientists (Owolabi 2003, Foucault 1980).

This situation is virtually the same in Nigeria where the three major ethnic groups were played against each other so as to make colonialism survive for so long. This explains why the three could not speak with one voice on the attainment of self-rule. While the Hausa Fulani have the acculture believe that they were born to rule and therefore should hold on to political power, the Yoruba's were of the opinion that power belong to the educated while the Igbos believe that they should control commerce. Each belief was however strengthened by ethnocentric ideas branding the out-going as inferior. This further weakens the Nigeria federalism as the people exhibits strong emotional attachment to the regions than the centre. The sense of nation was quickly replaced by the political slogan, North for the Northerners, West for the Westerners and the east for the Easterners.

This was reflected in the activities of political parties that emerged just before independence and after (Tryden 2000). With the building of class

consciousness, road map to development appears to have been blocked with increased distrust among the people (Anifowose 1982). The minority groups were mere onlookers in the scrambling for political power game. Some minority groups were left with no option than to align with each of the major ethnic groups who lords it over them. Frequent Skirmishes do occur as the minorities protest their unfair treatments but these were not taken seriously until of recent. Example of such revolts were the Tiv uprising of 1964 (Tseayo 1975), the Beron versus Hausa/Fulani settlers crises of 1994, and 1995 where several lives were lost and the Gero-commercial clash of 1997 in Jos etc. (Nvendiga, Simbine and Galadima 2001).

Government responses to some to these clashes had been taken with a pinch of salt. The re-awakened consciousness of the minority group as a social class who are always exploited for the benefit of the dominant group to their detriment, led to more sinister crises after all other forms of tactics failed to yield fruitful results. This class consciousness, if for only opening eyes to their disadvantageous positions in a clientelistic relationship with the dominant group is enough empowerment to make them realize their vision.

Thus according to Eteng (1996); a minority group is a 'social category, a collectivity and a social class which may be large or small with a distinct characteristics from that of the majority'. These groups for reasons of these characteristics are excluded from the socio-economic and political participation of the social culture of which they are a part. They are thus the object of, as Ovwasa (1999) puts it, 'discriminatory practices, exploitation, isolation, marginalization, expropriation and disempowerment.

Armed with the determination to succeed inspite of all odds, they employed some tactics to sensitize the public as well as the international communities to their plight. Such tactics include press conferences, mass rally, violent demonstrations, seizure of oil well operated by expatriates and of recent vandalization of oil pipelines, hostage taking and the demand for ransom with which they purchase arms and ammunition to execute their agenda.

Series of ethnic associations were formed with the intention of achieving their aims. Among these are, the movement for the survival of Ogoni people (MOSOP), the National Youth Council of Ogoni people (NYCOP), the Egbesu Boys, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) and the Federated Niger-Delta Ijaw Communities (FINDIC). The hostile reaction of government towards these protests which saw to the killing of some of the leaders of these associations; such as the late Ken SaroWiwa, the Massacre of Egbesu boys following the aftermath of Egbesu crises of 1991 and the draconian decrees aimed at checkmating and threatening them to coward submission was further viewed as adding salt upon injury. Other negative tactics employed by the government is the

divide and rule in which the leaders are bribed to scuttle protest in their respective communities and creating inter as well as intra community hostilities among the people. The minority group seems to have surmounted all these as they rage on in defiance of all antidotes. Not even the brutal killing of most Southern and Eastern agitators would stop them. Various separatist Movements continue to spring up on daily basis, all asking for a discontinued Nigeria. The ‘MASSOB’ in the east seems to be in the forefront of this with their resolve to clamour for the resuscitation of the Biafran security agencies as well as the effort at the declaration of the Biafran state as well as the hosting of the Biafran national flag both at home and abroad (Obianyo 2007). Others include the production of the Biafran currency and the establishment of both a newspaper outfit and the Radio Biafran (VOB) with the base in the United State of America (Obianyo 2007) as well as the naming of an embassy abroad (Obianyo quoting Akinterinwa 2001).

This was similar to the situation in the Western part of Nigeria shortly after the annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections where a Yoruba indigene; Alhaji Moshood Abiola was believed to have made a landmark victory. This section of the country also establish a radio station named ‘Radio Kudirat’ as well as establish a newspaper outfit christened ‘June 12’ as means of reaching to the vast majority of the people who also obeyed a call for protest agitation and workers strike in all the Yoruba states thus bringing economic activities to an abrupt halt.

The call of Nigeria leaders for business partners and other expatriates to invest in the country could only be likened to that of an empty barrel which makes the loudest noise. What development strategy would work in an atmosphere of insecurity of life and property?

On the National Question: A Panacea for Development

The uneven distribution of resources among the component units making up the federal especially the utter neglect of the minority group across the country have brought about the national question. Some political analyst feel that for the continuous peaceful co-existence of Nigeria as a geographical entity, there is the need to re-examine the poor managerial skill of the state over the relations between the different nationalities brought under the same political order and the Nigeria state as a whole (Ogwuazor-Momah 2002). Such a question would also help in solving the hostility arising between competing states over the allocation of scarce resources and ensure the stability of the country as a whole. This would be made possible by ascertaining the loyalty of the individual citizen to the country without sharing it with the regions since the centre would guarantee justice, equality and fair play to all irrespective of tribe or ethnic background.

The national questions has been on for some time now but the public outcry of some groups against it coupled with the federal government pretence on the burning issues of development raised by the national question signaled to the weakness of the centre to address the peoples plight. This would necessitate an attempt to define the national question in this paper.

Various Nigerian Scholars have come-up with different views on the national questions. These scholars include Ikime (1986) Albert (2001) and Eskor-Toyo (1993) among others. Ake (1986) summarized its view into addressing two germane issues of national concern. First is on how the different nationalities merged under a single political domination tends to show loyalty to member nation than the centre and secondly how and why their competition for power and resource allocation brought unhealthy rivalry and hostility. Both Ikime (1986) and Oyovbaire (1989) were of the same view; as they both hammered on the existence of regional consciousness among the multi-ethnic groups created in the very foundation of Nigeria State.

Ade-Ajayi (1992) and Eskor-Toyo (1993) appear elaborate and clearer in their analyses. This question according to Ade-Ajayi should address the age-long question of ordering the relations between different ‘ethnic’, linguistic and cultural groups’ so as to equip them with some rights and grant unto all an equitable share of the nations resources.

Eskor-Toyo (1993) was very point-blank in his explanation of the national question. The question according to him bothers on

“ *whether the relations among people conscious of their separate identities shall be based on hostility, domination or a programme of liquidation, or whether they shall be based on liberty, equality, and fraternity*”. He went further,

It basically has to do with issues related to why the component units in Nigeria finds it difficult to fuse into becoming a stable nation (Eskor-Toyo 1993).

The national question in summary deals with what becomes the fate of the minority groups as well as the powerless majority over their own fair share of the nation’s resources (i.e. political and economic resources), (Albert 2001). This is the question and the earlier a solution is found to this the better for the country. It must be noted that towards solving this national question, a federal government committee was set-up in Abuja over a decade ago (Onyeozuri 2002) which report has yet to see the light of day. The fear is that many want a Sovereign National Conference to be held where it should be decided on whether there is still the continuous need to stay together as one political entity or to revert back to our pre-colonial state. This in itself should not constitute any threat if the ruling majority are not

afraid of relinquishing power to the other autonomous units making the federation.

It should also be noted that it is not just the merger of the different national communities with a political system that constitute the problems rather than the ordering of the relationship between these component units (Onyeoziri 2002). Other countries of the world having similar background history are the United States of America (USA) as reported by (Skinenner 1986) and even Great Britain (Garvin 1986). In all of these countries, the concept of ethnicity and tribe never appeared in their political dictionary and this has helped built a virile national economy for these states. They were able to operate whatever system of government since they enjoyed the full loyalty of their people to the centre unlike Nigeria where allegiance is more to the component units.

Towards a Conclusion

Having allayed the fears of some sections of the country on the possible outcome of a sovereign national conference, the Obasanjo led administration organized a national conference where all the component units were represented a couple of years back. This is with a view to addressing these seemingly intractable problems facing the Nigerian society. It is rather unfortunate that the conference has not yielded the desired result due majorly to the unanswerable questions of derivations, power shift, etc.

The government in the past had embarked on some policies such as that of state creation to address the minority question but further agitation for creation of more states has pointed to the error of hasty conclusion that this would solve the problem. With 36 states, the problem seems to be compounding, at least than before. Other policies aimed at solving the minority question is that of quota system with its attending negative consequences of restricted favour in terms of University admission, allocation of contracts which only benefit a section of the population to the detriment of many others. The disenchantment which greeted these policies has landed us in our present state of chaos and ethnic disharmony.

It is in view of this that, this paper suggests that the country take urgent steps to address the population problem of the country. The last two censuses conducted in Nigeria has been a sham. While the 1991 census raise dust on whether females outnumbered males and whether Christians outnumbered the Muslims, the 2006 census removed the column for religion completely, yet it found difficulty answering other questions on the sudden reduction of the population of some states in view of available statistical evidences. The contradiction became glaring when voters registered outnumbered the total population of some states/communities. This must be seriously addressed so as to set out priorities right.

The democratization process in the country is also badly managed. No country jettisoning the ethics of democratic governance; can secure the cooperation and support of its populace. Political position should be seen as a public trust and people so opportuned to be called upon to serve should not turn it to opportunity to loot the nation as we are currently witnessing in Nigeria.

It is important that Nigeria should take its war against corruption more seriously. There should be no sacred cow. Using the agencies in-charge (Economic and Financial Crime, Commission EFCC) to harass and intimidate opposition member is to say the least embarrassing.

While the recent federal government road-map to developing the Niger Delta is a welcome development, the government should vote enough money to the execution of the viable projects early enough to make the people actually feel a sense of belonging.

The Nigerian constitution is already in a state of repeal. Such an amendment should be carried out in earnest to save Nigeria of possible political eruption capable of dislocating the democratic structure.

Given the above it is believed that the country would, with time, be able to enlist the support of both the minority and the weak majority thereby finding a lasting solution to the minority problems in this country. It is only after this that we can feel confident to woo foreign investors to help develop the economy.

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