

ETHNICITY: A THREAT TO NIGERIA'S SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

NWEKE, J. O

Department of Sociology and Anthropology,
Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki

&

OKORONKWO, E.

Department of Political Science/Psychology/Sociology,
Federal University Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo, Ebonyi State

Abstract

The negative implications of ethnicity to national security and development are enormous. This paper interrogates ethnicity as the major hindrance to Nigeria's security and development. The paper unveils the role of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria in strengthening ethnicity and calls for a constitutional review. This, it offers as alternative to the question of federal character, quota system and zonalization of national issues in which merit could take its course.

Keywords: constitution, corruption, ethnicity, insecurity and tribalism.

Introduction

Of all the multi-faceted problems plaguing Nigeria, the crisis of values is the country's biggest problem (Ameh, 2008). In the life time of many Nigerians who still enjoy an active public career, Nigeria was called "a mere geographical expression" not only by the British who had an interest in keeping it so, but even by our "nationalists" when it suited them to retreat into tribe to check their more successful rivals from other parts of the country (Achebe 1998). This paper highlights ethnicity as the major hindrance to national security and development. The paper sees the notion of one-Nigeria as a process that can only be realized when concepts like tribe, ethnic group, federal character, quota system and their tikes are abolished from the national constitution. It reveals the intricacies inherent in nation building and recommends a more proactive review of the constitution to capture the essence of oneness in a multi ethnic nation state like Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Structural functionalism theory is adopted in this work. It is an approach in Sociology which was developed at the wake of 19 century's industrial revolution. This theory was sociologically developed as an adequate tool for dealing with the interrelatedness of various traits, institutions, groups, and so forth, within the social system. Structural functionalism is as old as the history of sociology. This is evident in the

works of the founding fathers of the discipline like Auguste Comte (1798-1857) and Herbert Spencer (1820-1903). Coser (1976) attempts a definition of structural functionalism. They saw structure as referring to a set of relatively stable and patterned relationships of social units, while they perceived as referring function to the consequences of social activities which make for adaptation or adjustment of a given structure or its component parts.

The functional approach in Sociology was borrowed from the analogy of organism in the biological sciences in which it is known that all the body organs, in any living organism, have a kind of interconnectivity which links them together. Each of these organs plays a certain role for the survival of the organism. In any situation where any of the organs malfunctions, it is believed that this malfunctioning might affect the life of the organism. The functionalists, therefore, argue that the society is made up of groups and institutions which constitute the whole society. They state further that each of these institutions that form the society plays a part for the survival of the system (Onyeneke 1996).

From the foregoing, therefore, functionalists view society as a system, a set of interconnected parts which, together, form a whole. This makes society the primary unit of functional analysis. The focus of attention is how the basic parts of the society, that is, the various institutions, such as the military, religious, family, political, economic, legal, and educational institutions co-relate together and function for the survival of the society. In Nigeria for instance, all the ethnic groups that make up the nation have roles they play for the survival of the nation. It therefore means that no ethnic group should experience marginalization or exploitation. None should be made to be dysfunctional since this will affect the entire polity.

The main interest of the functionalists is the question of order. That is, how social order would be achieved and sustained for the smooth running of the society. The functional approach to the study of society tends to be conservative in nature because it seems, to a large extent, is against the theory of social change. Functional ideology believes that there are basic needs of a society, which must be met, for social life to go on.

These basic needs or necessary conditions of existence are known as functional prerequisites of society. Functional prerequisites refer to the fulfillments of the broadest conditions which are necessary for a system's existence and which, therefore, prevent its termination. To the functionalist school of thought, what constitute the basic needs of society must be identified and met before a society can survive.

The Nigeria We Believe

I believe that Nigeria is a nation favoured by providence. I believe there are individuals as well as nations who, on account of peculiar gifts and circumstances, are commandeered by history to facilitate make into advancement. Nigeria is such a nation (Achebe 1998:3).

Indeed Nigeria is a nation blessed with abundant human and material resources. It's unfortunate that these resources are not properly utilized. These resources are stolen and salted away by people in power and their accomplices. They are squandered in uncontrolled importation of all kinds of useless consumer merchandise from every corner of the globe. They are embezzled through inflated contracts to an increasing army of party loyalists who have neither the desire nor the competence to execute their contracts consumed in the escalating salaries of a grossly over –staffed and unproductive public service (Achebe 1998). Available records reveal that corruption has been the bane of Nigeria public administration. There is no administration in Nigeria (both Military and civilian) that is free from corruption (Nweke 2010). This has serious negative influence on Nigerian security and development. It has great influence on nation's socio-institutional structures. This affects political development, educational and health service provisions. The military, paramilitary, religion, communication and legal sectors are not left out. The worse hit is the economic institution which is the driving force of other sectors.

Without economy, the survival of other institution is not guaranteed. This is also functional in the family and other sectors. It is the major determinant for the survival of the nation state and the very factor which the question of tribalism/ethnicity rests upon.

Why Tribalism in Nigeria?

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation. It is made up of people from differing socio-cultural background. The British colonial government amalgamated both northern and southern protectorates in 1914 without prejudice to the multi-cultural entities that make up the polity (Nweke 2004). The fundamental basis for Nigeria existence is built on tribalism. From 1914 episode till 1960 when Nigeria gained her independence, the structural component of the nation is not devoid of tribalism. Tribalism is the basis for sharing the national wealth. Tribalism is enshrined into the nation's constitution when we talk about the quota system as a sharing formula. In the first stanza of the first national anthem composed for us by Flora Lugard, it took cognizance of the tribal composition of the national structure. The composer new that, as days unveil themselves, citizens would continue to strengthen their tribal ties. She wrote for us in our hymn of deliverance from British colonial bondage that "though tribe and tongue may differ, in brotherhood we stand". The differing nature of tribe and tongue is the hallmark of the problems Nigeria is facing today. The challenges posed by terrorists, power tussle, prejudice, sentiments, discrimination and so forth are products of tribalism.

Thus it is imperative to admit that the major cause of crisis in our societies, nations and continents of the world is the struggle to exercise control over resources. Political power struggle at all levels is a prelude to the acquisition of economic power /resources. In this perspective, eco-political and religious insurgence in the world today and Nigeria in particular is note devoid from attempt of persons or group to work their way to exercise control over the wealth of their nation state.

Ethnicity in the Nigerian Polity

Ethnicity is not devoid of the Nigerian state. It is part and parcel of the Nigerian polity. One may ask what is ethnicity? It is the employment or mobilization of ethnic identity and differences to gain advantage in situations of competition, conflict, or cooperation. Ethnicity is not always conflict driven. It can also involve cooperation between members of different ethnic groups. Also it is not always the awareness of ethnic differences that produces ethnicity, but the consciousness of the purpose to which the differences could be put (Osaghae 1995). Very vital in the definition of ethnicity is the ethnic differentiations that arise from the multi ethnic groupings. Osaghae (1995) opines that ethnicity can be viewed at three levels: inter group, intra-group and interpersonal. Inter group level of ethnicity involves the mobilization of the most generic ethnic identities and other bloc identities with which they are often closely related. For instance, religion and religious groups, deferent religious bodies as are found domicile in different tribes or ethnic group see the tribe or ethnic group of domicile as integral to them. Most of such religions become built into the culture of the people hence the question of state religion. In this light, we can see that in Nigeria it is clear that in the northern region Islam is domicile while in the East, Christianity is domicile in the western region. In the West about 70% are Christians while 30% are non Christians. It is an indication that Christians are domicile. The implication is that since Igbo ethnic group occupy the East, Christianity becomes their ethnic religion. Same is applicable to northern Nigeria. This informs the position of Osaghae (1995) that in Nigeria, certainly ethnicity at this level involves in addition to the real ethnic groups, the geopolitical regions (North, South, East and west and the religious cleavages principally that between Christians and Muslims) which have been the historical contexts within which ethnic identities have been articulated and rein-forced.

Intra –group ethnicity involves sub groups whose members speak dialects of generic language group or sub-groups separated from their kith and kin by administrative structuring and natural barriers. For instance the Igbo ethnic group is a composite of Owerri, Awka, Onisha, Ikwo, Mgbo Nsukka, Abakaliki, Okposi, Afikpo etc. The Yoruba ethnic group comprises the Egba, Ekiti, Ondo, Oyo, Ijesha, Iiaje etc. while the Ogoni is made up of Gokana, Khana and Tai-Ejeme. Thus, each ethnic group has a composition of other sub-groups that make up the whole.

At interpersonal level, ethnicity involves the employment of ethnic differentiation among individuals or small groups of individuals. It is at this level that the situationality of ethnicity is most clearly seen (Okamura 1981). In this regard, the individual has an array of identities to choose from; his/her class, gender, political party, professional body and so forth. The individual holds all these in addition to his/her ethnic identity.

The individual adopts any strategy of choice depending on the situation. Thus, situations determine individual's reactions especially while relating with others. In the main, it can happen that the individual identity may be dormant for a long time; as long as other identities and strategies based on them are sufficient to service his/her needs (Osaghae 1995). This does not mean that the individual cannot showcase his/her ethnic identities. It is a reflection of the fact that the individual has not found it necessary to employ the ethnic strategy. Ethnic identity is very significant. As a process, identity is located in core of the individual and yet also in the core of his/her communal culture, a process which establishes in fact, the identity of these two identities (Erikson 1968).

The intricacies of the linkage between individual and group ethnicity consist of the quest for belonging and self-esteem which are pursued through communal group affiliations. (Young 1976). It is significant to note that fear, anxiety and indemnity at the individual level can be reduced within the womb of the ethnic collectivity. In the same security of the group provide a mobilizing imperative for its members. Still it is clear that between the individual and group, ethnic identities can shift from one level to another. These shifts are usually between macro- identities have to do with the all – encompassing bloc identities and micro identities which involve sub group identities and find territorial anchor in village, clan, or community formations. These levels of identity can be further employed to classify ethnicity into micro-ethnicity which corresponds with intra-group and interpersonal ethnicity and macro-ethnicity which deals with inter-group relations. Ethnicity is built with dysfunctional elements which makes it injurious to the survival of the society, hence the Nigerian State. These dysfunctional elements are its exclusivist, discriminatory claims, and sentimental exhibition by group/members within the ethnic group. These elements are threat/hindrance to national integration and development in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Nigeria today is crisis driven. This as a fact is not unconnected with ethnicity and prejudice. Achebe (1998) declares that prejudice against "outsiders" or "strangers" is an attitude one finds everywhere. No modern state can lend its support to such prejudice without undermining its own progress and civilization. This is an indication that prejudice and or ethnicity is not in tandem to national security and development. The Nigerian situation is evidence to affirm that insecurity does not give way for development to thrive. For instance, in the northern region where threat to security of lives and properties is strengthened on daily basis, no one can think of even development. It is a fact since individual citizens who reside within the north are running for their dear lives while their properties are being burnt. Thus, their fundamental rights are at risk they cannot exercise their freedom of movement, association, religion and communications. They cannot exercise their rights to own properties and even their rights to life are not protected. No wonder President Goodluck Jonathan laments "as a nation we are facing attacks of terrorists (Taiwo-Obalonye 2014).

However, an understanding of the reason for the amalgamation of all ethnic groups in Nigeria into a-one nation state is essential. Even though the British colonial

masters did it on selfish reasons, we as Nigerians need to cultivate the spirit of oneness recognizing that we are all within the black race and in the same African continent. It is important to believe that since America with its multi- ethnic structure is one and indivisible entity, Nigeria should be one too. Apparently, America which we copy when it suits us should provide an excellent example to us in this connection: that although we may not be able to legislate prejudice and bigotry out of our hearts and minds of individual citizen, the state itself and all institutions must not practice, endorse or condone such habits (Achebe 1998).

Recommendations

This paper recommends as follows:

1. That there is need to review Nigeria's constitution to expunge articles, sections or clauses that promote sentiments, prejudice, tribalism, ethnicity or what is called federal character.
2. To ensure that the language of the three major ethnic groups: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are compulsorily taught in primary and secondary schools. Thus, candidates seeking admission into tertiary institutions must pass all the three languages as a condition for admission.
3. English which is the Nigerian linguafranca should be made compulsory in all fora. It should be the language of discussion in public offices and places.
4. A law should be made to mandate states to employ at least twenty non indigenes of corp-members that served in their states in each batch.
5. Recruitment of personnel in any government; boards commission, agencies, organization, institutions or parastatals should be transparent and on merit too.

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