Ethnicity and resource allocation management: Practical consideration

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Abstract: - This paper analyses the theoretical issues underlying the problems of ethnicity and resource sharing, basing its discussion on recent continental developments (as in Sierra Leone, Liberia, Sudan, Rwanda and Nigeria). Arguing for ethnic identification and integration into national development matrix, it notes that smaller group domination by the larger ones (or the reverse) does not only trigger suspicion and governance tension but engender political independence agitation that could culminate in disintegration of nations (as found in the former Yugoslavia and Soviet Union). Why do we have ethnic conflicts in different parts of the world at a time there is tremendous growth in education and modernization? What accounts for intra-country civil disturbances? Why do countries disintegrate? What are the behavioural tendencies of the majority/minority ruling class and how acceptable are they to the other parties? How equitable is resource sharing in different counties and communities? How homogeneous is the world we live in today? The above questions capture the mood of the people in various countries where ethnic tension has overshadowed economic development, triggered civic disobedience, caused coup de'tat and engendered loss of lives and property. In both developed and developing countries, ethnicity has been a dividing line between people. All these are developmental issues that present a lot of implications for other countries including Nigeria where ethnicity has not only caused a civil war but has been an impediment to democratization. This paper is written to address them and offer some policy direction in the light of many democratic disruptions and the attendant confusions presently experience in the country and elsewhere.

Keywords: issues of ethnicity; ethnic identification and integration; group domination; resource sharing; development matrix

1. Introduction

Why do we have ethnic conflicts in different parts of the world at a time there is tremendous growth in education and modernization? What accounts for intra-country civil disturbances? Why do countries disintegrate? What are the behavioural tendencies of the majority/minority ruling class and how acceptable are they to the other parties? How equitable is resource sharing in different counties and communities? How homogeneous is the world we live in today?

The above questions capture the mood of the people in various countries where ethnic tension has overshadowed economic development, triggered civic disobedience, caused coup de'tat and engendered loss of lives and property (Bates et al, 2018). In both developed and developing countries, ethnicity has been a dividing line between people (Wimmer, 2008). For instance, in Rwanda, the Hutus and Tutsis, formerly amicable brothers and sisters, are now long drawn foes whose killings and lack of respect for each other have defied the interventions of mediating governments and organizations. In the former Yugoslavia, the unsettled issue of power sharing and resource management resulted in the breaking of the country into Bosna and Herzegovina. The dismembering of Soviet Union into independent republics was a follow-up to prolonged disenchantment of the people over neglect and poverty in the face of increased budgetary allocations to the military (Ghani & Lockhart, 2009). The problem in Liberia generated itself from the attempted

domination of the minority group over the majority segment of the country. In the United States of America (USA), the 1996 widespread burning of churches was indicative of the lingering issues of racial rivalry (Patterson, 1996). In Europe, recent racial discrimination, grouping from economic difficulties and increased unemployment, has opened a new chapter in the deliberations of the European Community (EC). And the world, often desired to be a global village, suffers intractable divisions caused by economic interest and resource sharing.

All these are developmental issues that present a lot of implications for other countries including Nigeria where ethnicity has not only caused a civil war but has been an impediment to democratization. This paper is written to address them and offer some policy direction in the light of many democratic disruptions and the attendant confusions presently experience in the country and elsewhere.

A number of writers including Conklin (1984), Coshen (1974), Stabbins (1987) and Osaghae (1991, 1995) have extensively conceptualized ethnicity, describing its role in the development matrices of societies. It is however, not the intention of this paper to belabor these conceptualizations, at least, in the context of definitions since, as it is hoped, eminent scholars in sociology and political science have had opportunities to give a compendium of such definitions. The theoretical concern of the paper is that of the relationship between ethnicity and resource allocation.

Writing for "World Development", Habibi (1994) noted that a number of economic and non-economic factors determine the fiscal behavior of a government. Imputed into the non-economic factors is the social value system of the people which, to a large extent, defines their ethnic linkages. In a typical pluralistic society, these linkages generate political groupings and shape structure of government. Lewis (1994: 439) aptly observed this when he stated that:

Affiliations of kingship, clan, ethnicity, region and Clique provide central lines of authority and cohesion. Patron-client relationships provide the foundation of the neo-patrimonial state. Personalized ties of reciprocity and obligation are the cement which sustains hierarchies, maintain factional and departmental cohesion and allocates resources and authority. The author did not fail to observe these features as being the principal tools employed by the major ethnic groups in Nigeria and that through factional alliance and ethnic accommodation, her resources are controlled by the seeming heterogeneous political class. While Lewis concentrated his discussion on what he called 'economic statism, writers like Morss et al (1967), Andic & Veverka (1964), Tanzi (1986) and Heller & Diamond (1990) explored the rapport between revenue allocation and political influence which, as we have seen, has enormous ethnicity content. It is such ethnic ignited political pressure that gives rise to sectional anxieties, distributive pressures, partisan conflicts and institutional dilemmas often interplayed to cause the relative volatility experienced in the process of agitating for political autonomy (Suberu, 1991).

The central theme of the relationship between ethnicity and resource allocation is the "fear of domination". Naturally, every ethnic group0 has a sense of identity and would want to be recognized and treated fairly. Failure to get fair treatment normally always results in dissenting reactions. Reviewing the ethnic revelry in Djibouti, Schreoder (1993), identified fear of domination (of the Issas by the minority government of the Affairs as being responsible for the boiling ethnic tensions of 1991. Similar dominance-related ethnic insurgency was earlier reported by El-Affendi (1990) on the religious divide between the North and South of Sudan. Ekpo (1994), in an extended study of Nigeria's fiscal federalism, reviewed the various revenue allocation commissions set up by government and observed fear of domination (in his words equitable distribution of resources) to be an essential element of their recommendations.

Ethnic dominance is a varied phenomenon. It could be exerted by a majority group on a minority group, or could take the reverse when a minority group dominates a majority group. in both cases, there is always disenchantment. Depending on the level of political awareness of the group dominated, such disenchantment often culminates in suspicion and governance tension (Caterphores, 1989). A dominated ethnic group can react in several ways. It might withdraw and migrate to a more accommodating environment in order to avoid discrimination; it could accept the dominance and live; it could hate itself and blame nature; or it could resort to collective action to change the status quo (Conklin 1984). The collective action may take the form of peaceful protests or demonstrations;

sometimes, it may assume a violent dimension that seeks to institute a major reformation of the social/political system. Cases of political independence, agitation and disintegration of nations are often traced to violent ethnic disturbances. The dominated group, systematically cheated in terms of revenue sharing and provision of infrastructural facilities, is forced to take the laws into its hand and seek emancipation.

2. Results and Discussions

Frustrations that are instigated by ethnic conflicts and domination are ubiquitous. In Africa, pockets of factional fighting on account of ethnic dominance have presented themselves in many countries including Liberia, Rwanda, Zaire, Burundi, Sudan, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Nigeria. In Liberia, the minority government of Samuel Doe was accused of high handed oppression of the other segment of the country, the result of which was the emergence of guerilla fighting under the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and the Ulimo Party. The protracted war that left thousands of people dead, disrupted the country's economy, destroyed infrastructures and housing, did not cease with the death of Doe. It went on wrong. The 1996 cease-fire and preparedness to conduct a general election might have been seen as a diplomatic victory even though the real reason could have been the natural law that whatever has a beginning has an end when it was observed that continuous fighting to terminate lives did not benefit anybody after all and that there was no gain from unwarranted loss of security and basic needs of life suffered by those who executed the war.

The Liberian experience was a case of a minority government that attempted to perpetuate itself, metamorphosing from military into civilian political arrangement, winning all and controlling economic resources. This native and shortsighted leadership also explains the problems in Rwanda. Here, the minority Tutsis took over power in 1994 after its Patriotic Front Rebels overthrew the majority Hutu government in a civil war in which about one million people died. The survivors of the war, as we know, were not at peace. They adopted the withdrawal, reactionary strategy mentioned earlier, migrating into a wrong environment. Eastern Zairre, where an insurgency group staged a similar war against the government of ZAIRE. The Zairean crisis is yet another case of ethnic conflict resulting from group dominance and cheating. The many years of military ethnic dominance and cheating. The many years of military ethnic domination by the Mobutu Government was finally resisted in 1997 by the rebel forces of Laurent Kabila in the Eastern part of the country on grounds of the need for a system of power sharing that will ensure equal opportunities for all. Today, the Kabila government is itself attacked by the very 'hand' that gave it support to oust Mobutu because of unequitable resources management and accommodation.

In Sudan, the story is familiar and long standing. It is a case of religious confrontation instituted since the colonial days (El-Affendi, 1990). Attempt to introduce Christianity in the South brought about what has become one of the most protracted conflicts in the continent. The north-south dichotomy characterized by Islamic government has found an enemy in John Garang's Sudanese Peoples' Liberation Army (SPLA). The question now, as observers believe, is not really that of religion but of ethnic domination which underlying premise is the lack of equal economic and political opportunities in the country after many years political independence.

The factional legacy left over by the colonial government in Sierra Leone has continued to generate ethnic consciousness and rivalry in the country (Sibonda, 1979). The colonially instituted faction between the north-west and the south-east of the country has brought sporadic contention between the two regions. Coups and counter coups have been staged and the economy has remained as fragile and under-developed as ever.

In Nigeria, ethnicity was responsible for the 1967 civil war that caused not less than one million people to lose their lives. It is also the cause of the present protracted democratic process. Its relationship with resource sharing has seen the adoption of not less than five revenue allocation formulas both before and after independence, all of which have proved unsatisfactory (Ekpo, 1994), there are continuous calls for their review mostly by the minority groups who feel inadequately compensated. The agitation has come in spite of the institution of the federal character clause in her constitution and the purported equal representation of every segment of the country in her polity. In Lewis (1994) views, the case of Nigeria could be summarized in the following words.

A form of moral economy obtains, contentious sectional elites do not expect equity but they do hold a claim on fair opportunity in the struggle for resources. Historically, the violation of this implicit compact has eroded the legitimacy of régimes and incited *cuvuk cibfkuct*.

The dominance conflict is by no means limited to the major ethnic grup0s in Nigeria. Intra-community and intra-state ethnic clashes are frequently set up sometime at a fatal scale that leaves a number of people dead. Cases of security forces cordoning off disputed parcels of land, of balancing government adjusting and readjusting boundaries, and of negotiations for balancing of political and economic powers of numerous, the last evolving mostly from unequitable distributing of resources by the ruling class. Osaghae (1995) pointed out this concern, believing that concerted efforts should be made by government to give fair hearing and share of resources to specific areas where revenue is derived.

Outside Africa, the experiences of the former Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, Turkey, the United States of America and recently Belgium are a ready illustration. The Soviet Republics broke away at the wake of the so-called perestroika (openness) on account of long rooted deprivations, neglect and domination by the Russian's rulling-class (the republics claim these as their reasons for independence agitations). There are still cases of military confrontations between Russia and some of the republics.

The disintegration of Yugoslavia, in the words of the Punch (1995:6), teaches a lesson that "Injustice by one group against another, if not challenged today, will surely be challenged someday". Clearly, the dismembering of the country in the face of a destructive civil war was probably not in the minds of her forefathers.

In Germany, the immigrant nationals of Turkey have been on the receiving end particularly after the unification of the two Germanies (East and West). Unemployment, following the amalgamation, raised racial anxiety and prompted the deportation of the Turks. In the United States, racial tension in 1996 between the whites and the blacks climaxed in the destruction of black churches, causing the government to express urgent concern.

Indeed, the problem of ethnicity and the associated mail-allocation of resources, apart from causing suspicion, governance tension, war and disintegration of countries, has inflicted tremendous damage on the economies and welfare of the victims. People are tortured, displaced by wars and made to become refugees in camps, waiting for humanitarian help.

They have lost their jobs, businesses, farms, house, etc. their children are withdrawn from schools. The future of the people is better imagined than told against the background of the fact that no one knows when the suffering will end and what shall become of their fate in a world where new problems set in no sooner than old ones are resolved.

3. Conclusion

Going through the cross-country ethnic realities, one worry which is likely to generate in the mind of a concerned observer (or listener in this discourse) is whether or not those who oppress or intend to oppress others ever pause to reason, learn from the mistakes of others and take the right steps to avoid the sad experiences. If they should do this, then ethnic conflict would have been eliminated. The fact that we still have new developments with more potential for destruction means that the perpetrators of the problem take delight in the illusion that "the longer the injustice persists, the more enduring it seems". Punch (1995), forgetting that the consequences could be catastrophic when the reaction of the oppressed is finally released.

A number of calls have been made for the identification and integration of ethnicity into the political arrangement of the state or society where ethnic rivalry causes anxiety and stifles equitable resource sharing (Ewuruigwe 1988; Ihonvbere, 1988). The time to act is now and government must listen to the dissenting voices. They are crucial for its workability and economic development.
Appropriate formula for resource allocation and indeed real development need be put in place to accommodate ethnic diversity particularly as it affects the minorities. We suggest for Nigeria, urgent increase in the amount of resources allocated to the minority areas with genuine agitations (we should not take for granted the continuous conflicts, violence, arson, killing and destruction of property in these areas). What we have in mind is the restructuring of those institutions established

by government to cater for their interests in order to make them (the institutions) efficient and effective.

An institution such as the Petroleum Trust Fund (PTF) presently wears a national character that makes it diversify its activities in a way that calls to question its name and resource base. We do not intend to sound alarmist, that the areas that generate the resources from which it derives its strength have cause to complain and sometimes take the laws into their hands. Its sister organization, Oil Producing Areas Development Commission (OMPADEC), appears to have lost its touch and strength. Government should resuscitate it without delay.

Generally, we urge the Federal Government to address itself to the clamour by various groups and individuals for the review of the country's revenue allocation formula to ensure equity and a United Polity. It is our contention that if more resources are channeled to the local government areas and deployed in providing the basic needs of the people, the frequent protests in parts of the country will be ameliorated. This is a challenge to the civilian administration, which as a matter of immediacy, should deliberate on.

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