

ETHNIC POLITICS AND THE CHALLENGES OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

Nigeria is a heterogeneous country with a population of about 170 million people, over 500 ethnic groups and over 1,300 dialects practicing different socio-cultural beliefs of their choice. There is no doubt that in one way or the other these various groups constitute serious challenges to the federal government and its component units. It is on this backdrop that the paper examines ethnic politics in relation to party politics, ethnic gang-up, ethnicity and ethnic formation vis-a-vis its challenges on national integration in Nigeria. It is observed that unabated struggle and agitation by various diverse groups in the country has led to wanton destruction of lives and properties. Likewise, the incessant clashes between and/or among these ethnic groups have the capability to hinder political and socio-economic advancement in the country. The paper therefore concludes that in spite of these structural imbalances and other numerous challenges facing the country's national integration, the country still holds better prospects of greatness in the world if these challenges are adequately addressed through the recommendations made.

Keywords: *Ethnicity, Politics, Threat, National Integration.*

Introduction

Nigeria is a country with diverse ethnic groups existing side-by-side, struggling for survival, identification and recognition in the country. Feelings of suspicion of one ethnic group's domination over another become inevitable. The incessant agitation and struggle to have control of the nation's resources remain the bone of contention and sources of threat to peaceful co-existence, national unity and national integration in the country.

Thus, federalism as a system of government has been adopted as a way of ensuring peaceful coexistence in heterogeneous societies and Nigeria is no exception. Being federal implies having a system of government in which the individual states of a country have no control over their own affairs, but are controlled by central government for national decisions (Olayiwola, 2012 cited in Fakanbi and Raji, 2013). Unfortunately, the peaceful coexistence as one of the fundamental factors for adopting federal

system of government in Nigeria has always been confronted by a lot of challenges since the inception of the country and most of these challenges are products of ethnic politics and sentiments.

The amalgamation of Nigeria which came about for administrative convenience by the colonialists was followed by protest from different people who were forced to live together without taking into consideration their differences in languages, cultures, beliefs and traditions. Among various ethnic groups that were fused together as Nigeria incongruously were the Kanuri, Hausa, Fulani, Nupe, Igala, Idoma, Jukun, Yoruba, Igbo, Tiv, Edo, etc. The Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo established their domination in the Northern, Southern and Eastern regions of Nigeria respectively. At independence in 1960, these three dominant groups' in their regions led to minority ethnic groups' agitation for the creation of more states. The country which had only three regions at independence in 1960 has now metamorphosed into thirty-six States and separate Federal Capital Territory (Okotoni, 2006, Ekpo, 2010 cited in Adeleke and Charles, 2015).

Ethnic virus has been a dangerous cancer causing social crisis, political instability and threat to peaceful coexistence, unity and national integration of Nigeria as a nation. Ethnic politics and regional sentiments are responsible for Nigeria's slow spate and pace of political advancement and democratic process. It is against this background that the study examines the heterogeneous composition of Nigerian state in respect to ethnic politics vis-a-vis its challenges on national integration in Nigeria.

Conceptual Clarification

Ethnic Politics

The practice of ethnic politics as it is known today has its history rooted in the colonial period in Nigeria. Conceptions of ethnic group and ethnicity by various scholars will be useful here in order to shape our understanding of the true meaning of ethnic politics as the name implies. In our contemporary Nigeria, nearly all conflicts found within our communities, states and the centre are attributable to ethnic groups competing for the control of political power of their different groups, regions and backgrounds. Hence, ethnic politics can therefore be seen as an organisation and formation of groups of societal elites whose aims and objectives are strategically achieved through mobilization of ethnic groups which are coordinated on sentimental basis and illusive emotional sympathy to gain the group's support against the perceived majority oppressors.

In discussing ethnic politics, theorists of nationalism like Kohn 1939; Hecter 1975; Brevilly 1993; and Earnest 2006 cited in Rahana and Gulshan, 2015 agreed that, nationalism is a political principle and politics is about power. In this way, the political perspective of the nationalism leads to the mobilization

of ethnic groups where pursuance of political power becomes the main objective. Under this approach, ethnic politics is also viewed as a political group which also operates as political actors having desire to have political rights. These political rights might be described as increased representation in administrative and political institutions, share and control over local resources and use of specific languages (an identity mark) as medium of instruction and communication. In case of denial of these demands from state authorities, conflict develops and ultimately, ethnic groups politicised (Rahana and Gulshan, 2015:320).

In the colonial and post-colonial Nigeria, political party is always based on ethnic scheming and gang-up with the intention of dominating the political atmosphere of the nation. Thus, it is not surprising that most of the political parties so emerged to contest for political power since Nigeria's independence rely so much on 'mobilizing primordial ethnic/religious sentiments to capture the power at the centre' (Uka, n.d.).

Nigeria's political scenario of ethnic politics was captured by Nwosu and was quoted by Uka cited in Adeleke and Charles (2015:63) as follows:

“Our party system from its inception in the late 1940s and early 1950s reflected the injection of ethnicity into our political system. In due course, the major political parties and minor ones became vehicles for the presentation, protection and aggregation of ethnic interests. Our political leaders, by and large, exploited ethnic ties and symbols to promote their selfish interests and to consolidate themselves in power in their regional enclaves. The regionalization of politics, which our early experiment with quasi-federal government in the early 1950s represented, also fed and encouraged ethnicization of our party system. The failure of our pioneer political class was their inability to rise above ethnic questions a time when the dynamic of our federalization was paradoxically moving towards the federalisation of our party system”.

The dimension of ethnic politics in contemporary Nigeria is worrisome and calls for lasting solution. The fragility of Nigeria as a nation is threatened by incessant and unabated activities of ethnic base politics in the 21st century. The politicization of ethnic groups in Nigeria indicates that the country is currently sitting on the keg of a gun powder. The idea of national unity and integration is no more active and it has been further suppressed by the petitions that followed the ministerial lists submitted by President

Mohammadu Buhari to the Senate of the National Assembly for screening and confirmation as ministers of the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Nigeria comprised of about 166 million people as at 2012 (National Bureau of Statistics, 2012 in trading economics, 2014 cited in Adeleke and Charles, 2015:61) practicing different religions, different beliefs and cultures. These perhaps, are some of the reasons for the adoption of federal system of government. Nigeria's ethnic groups could be broadly divided into "ethnic majorities and ethnic minorities". The majority ethnic groups are the Hausa/Fulani of the North, Yoruba of the Southwest and Igbo of the Southeast of which their numerical and hegemonic strength within the nation gave Nigeria the tripodal ethnic structures of the nation (Mustapha, 2007 cited in Adeleke and Charles, 2015).

There are also ethnic minorities in the country who at times with the intention of to have their share of national cake form alliance to have formidable force and enough respite against the three dominant ethnic groups. These always generate conflicts as the three hegemonic groups also fortify themselves to ensure its dominance in governmental activities. Considering the complexities of Nigeria nation, (Mustapha, 2007 cited in Adeleke and Charles, 2015:61) identified eight major cleavages in which Nigeria could be classified as follows:

"The interplay between this tripodal ethnic structure on the one hand, and administrative divisions and communal identities on the other, has led to eight cleavages in the Nigerian political life..., the most important of which are: the cleavages between the three majority groups; between three majority ethnic groups on the one hand and the 350-odd minority ethnic groups on the other; between the north and the south; between the 36 states of the federation and 6 zones-three in the north and three in the south-into which they are grouped; and finally, between different religious affiliations. Some of these cleavages overlap: for example, the southeast zone overlaps with Igbo ethnicity and Christian religious affiliation, while the north central overlaps with northern ethnic minorities. The ethnic, regional and the religious cleavages in the Nigerian society are made more problematic by systematic and overlapping patterns of inequalities that correspond to the cleavages" (Mustapha, 2007:3-4 cited in Adeleke and Charles, 2015:61).

According to their analysis of these eight cleavages identified by Mustapha, these eight cleavages grouping could be seen as the seed of discord sown, which had germinated into hydra headed monster

tormenting and straining the nation's socio-economic activities which has also constituted a nuisance to the political development of the nation. For instance, most of the conflicts in Nigeria were so much attributed to religious, economic and ethnic factors. The deepest problem Nigeria is facing is internal conflict within the same ethnic group. Among Yoruba for instance, there are Ijebus, Ijeshas, Aworis, Ekitis, etc, who constantly contest among themselves for position and power in political as well as in the economic wealth of the nation. As it is among Yoruba, so it is among Hausa/Fulani and Igbos. Recently, some ethnic groups among Hausa/Fulani have expressed their dissatisfactions toward the way they are being marginalized and sidelined in the northern parts of the nation. These groups claimed that, the powerful elites in the region had marginalized them and they have been robbed off of their rights and participation in governance (Owete, 2014 cited in Adeleke & Charles, 2015).

Ethnic Groups and Gang-up

Alliances and coalitions is one of the features of politics in most of the multi-ethnic nations of the world. Due to the fact that ethnic formation and rivalry for the control of government activities has constantly undermined the emergence of political parties with national outlook as well as overall acceptable national leaders, there is therefore the need for coalition. Ethnic group in Nigeria is therefore regarded as a legitimate means of identity for the purpose of allying for a formidable political party through which those who feel have been victims of marginalisation to voice out their intentions to have control or partial control of the nation's resources.

Ethnicity is a phenomenon limited to not only the developing world but can also be found in developed countries. This is because many villages, bands and isolated communities due to one reason or the other come together to form a nation and then maintained their cultural practices (Adeleke and Charles, 2015:60). These entities metamorphosed into ethnic groupings within a state with different degrees of cultural uniqueness and distinctiveness.

Cohen (1974) defines ethnic group as a collection of people who share some patterns of normative behaviour and form a part of larger population, interacting with people from other ethnic groups within the framework of social system. To this opinion, one of the characteristics of the people addressed by Cohen as ethnic groups is the "sharing of normative behaviour".

According to Mclean quoted in Adeleke and Charles (2015), ethnic group is the strongest sense of group feelings. From this simple definition, they aver that there are many groups to which men could belong. These groups include social, political, economic, religious and professional groups of which the ethnic

groups stimulates the greatest feelings especially among those who are biologically related. To this extent, primordialists have argued that ethnic groups are the outcome of biological process (Fearon and Laitin, 2000a cited in Charles and Adeleke, 2015). Thus, blood is the unifying factor in cementing the relationship among the ethnic groups as membership is not by choice but rather by descent. It is evident that, political demarcation which followed the eventual partitioning of African territories by the colonial powers is not a barrier to ethnic ties and relation (Adeleke and Charles, 2015:60).

In this respect, ethnic group is any group which is defined or set apart by race, religion, or defined origin or combination of some of these categories. For instance, an ethnic group like the Yoruba is said to be descendants of Oduduwa with its ancestral home in Ile-Ife. An ethnic group comprises people who share a unique social and cultural heritage which is passing from one generation to the other. Ethnic group is identified by distinctive patterns of family life, languages, recreation, religion and other customs which differentiate them from others.

Ethnic groups are social formation distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries and membership especially language, culture or both with language constituting the most crucial variable in Africa. An ethnic group is not necessarily linguistically or culturally homogeneous, it often subsumes sub-cultural, linguistic, dialectic, occupational and differences depending on the prevailing level of socio-economic development and cultural differentiation (Etang, 2004:45). Therefore, ethnicity is a continuum as its characteristics remained from generation to generation. Ethnic group(s) consists of interacting members who belong to a named or labelled social group whose interest they identify and which manifest certain aspect of a unique culture while constituting a part of a wider society (Gordon, 1964; Rose, 1965; and Sanda 1976 cited in Adeleke and Charless, 2015).

Considering the foregone definitions, ethnic group is therefore seen as an organised communal society where its objectives are predominantly determined by mutual or collective feelings of biological benefits of members who could only be achieved through regular demonstration of marginalisation against perceived dominant group.

Ethnicity

Azeez, (2004:329) sees ethnicity as a sense of peoplehood that has its foundation in the combined remembrance of part experience and common aspiration. This definition by Azeez clearly explains the recent incessant protest emanating from the Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), and Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger-Delta (MEND) in the Eastern and

Southern Nigeria respectively. These two groups have posed great challenge to national unity and integration in Nigeria.

Etang (2004) observed that ethnicity is a derivative of the ethnic group which forms the basis of its articulation. That is, it is the existence of the group that makes ethnicity possible. Ethnicity is looked upon as unreal, an artificial basis of identification and collective organisation, conjured up by outsiders looking for an efficient instrument of political and economic control (Enloe, 1978). It is therefore, considered a strategic weapon chosen by a disadvantaged group as a new mode of seeking political redress, or by a privileged group in order to protect its advantages (Enloe, 1987:33 cited in Azeez, 2009:2). Thus, Cox (1970), sees ethnicity or ethnic group as generally as socio-cultural entity “while inhabiting the same state, country or economic area, consider themselves biologically, culturally, linguistically or socially distinct from each other and most often view themselves or relate in actual or potentially antagonistic terms. This best described the action of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Igbos against President Muhammadu Buhari of his appointment into the ‘kitchen cabinet’ in Nigeria.

All the same, no authentic claim can be made for complete documentation and justification of ethnic groups in Nigeria. The fact that over three hundred identified language groups exist in Nigeria has created confusion as one may equate each language with an ethnic group thereby arrived at over three hundred ethnic groups (Adejuibe, 1983).

However, language and ethnic groups do not necessarily coincide. One language may be spoken by more than one ethnic group and one ethnic group may have linguistic variations of the same root language (Iwaloye and Ibeanu, 1997, Anugwon, 1997 cited in Edlyne, 2000:66). Moreover, while language may be one of the important factors, for defining an ethnic group, some ethnic groups in Nigeria may have lost their original linguistic roots, while retaining their identity, as a result of intense interactions, with larger socio-ethnic groups. And in the same vein, many ethnic groups may use the same language to ease communication, as in the case of smaller ethnic groups in the north of Nigeria, where Hausa has become more or less a lingua franca. Therefore, there is no direct relationship between language and ethnic group in Nigeria (Edlyne, 2000:66).

The incessant political instability and civil unrest in the Fourth Republic in Nigeria is precipitated by consistent feelings of being marginalised among various ethnic groups. As such, upon realization by these smaller ethnic groups that the language they speak do not reflect their ethnic identities in the larger society, hence, the need to identify and gain recognition in the sharing (allocation and control of

resources) of the society resulted in the continuous agitation which forms the basis for the current political instability, civil unrest in the south-east and disintegration among varying interest groups in Nigeria.

Ethnic Politics and Party Politics in Nigeria

Ethnic politics and party politics had long been a known disturbing phenomenon since the colonial days of Nigeria and had since then continued even in the post colonial days. The idea of ethnic politics and party politics has not only succeeded in creating enmities among various ethnic members and their perceived ethnic rivalries and oppressors, but it had also succeeded in creating an unending feeling of marginalization by the majority ethnic groups and further deepening the threat to national unity and integration in the Fourth Republic.

Ethnic politics and rivalry can be linked to colonial imperialists who adopted the method of divide and rule to govern. The ethnic groups were played against one another for economic gain from the British imperialists. Thus, the initial politics of separation by the British imperialists is the bedrock of the continued conflict among the major ethnic groups in Nigeria even after independence (Ako-Nai, 2008). Some of the factors responsible for continuous struggle for supremacy among ethnic groups in Nigeria emanated from the colonial imperialists and native authority administrations' policies. For example, the colonial policy of *Sabon Gari* which sought to separate Nigeria's internal immigrants from one another, and the native authority system instituted to create ethnic citizenship from the civil citizenship of the urban areas by allowing each ethnic group to sustain its particular heritage in accordance with colonial interests. These colonial policies were vital in creating new symbolic focus on ethnicity because it gave members of ethnic groups in urban areas a viable reference points for their ethnic identities (Nnoli, 2008 cited in Duruji, 2010:97).

Similarly, the principle of federalism introduced in 1954 by the Littleton constitution was a response to ethnic politics. It was initially meant to create centre for the three major ethnic groups (Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo) to ventilate their particularistic issues within self-contained regional governments, but the minority ethnic groups which were present within these three regions persistently complained of marginalisation. To satisfy those agitations as well as weaken these regions to prevent reoccurrence of Biafra, the military administration of General Yakubu Gowon arbitrarily divided these regions into twelve states. This arbitrary creation of twelve states by military government only succeeded in preventing the structure of the Nigerian federalism and making it a source of tension (Asia, 2001 cited in Duruji, 2010:97)

From independence also, the dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria (Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo) had been engaged in the activities of controlling the political power of the nation, with the primary aim of controlling the resources of the state. The sole ambition of controlling the economic activities of the nation has led to 'keen hurt', for political power especially at the centre by various ethnic groups in Nigeria. The political calculation and permutation of who gets what, when and how of political cum economic potentialities of the nation are the main sources of hostility and conflicts. This has continued to threaten the political stability and advancement of Nigeria as a nation. The incessant struggle for power is always heating-up the nation's polity. Apart from the fact that this action has continued to polarize the nation along ethnic groups divide, the degree of human losses every political violence associates with power struggle is unquantifiable (Adeleke and Charles, 2015:62).

Democracy in Nigeria has been characterised by ethnic based politics since independence when the set of political parties were founded; the scenario then was aptly captured by Azeez (2009) as follows;

In pre-independence Nigeria, party politics and party formation assumed an ethnic completion, even as it metamorphosed into the post independent First Republic. The Action Group developed from the political wing of the cultural associations of Yoruba educated elite, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa; the NCNC was closely allied with the Igbo state union and played significant role in the internal affairs of the party, while NPC was formed by the Fulani aristocracy.... and more significantly, the division of the country into three regions for administrative conveniences by Richard's constitution of 1946 led to the development of strong regional feelings. The consequence of this was such that, by 1953, the major political parties in Nigeria-NCNC, AG and NPC were associated with major ethnic groups and the three regions (Azeez, 2009:3)

Azeez further argued that the formation of political parties during this period was tripod in nature such that the party formation was based on three major ethnic groups with three major ethnic leaders piloting the political activities to strengthen their respective regions. In Azeez's words;

"To further crystallise the tripartite ethnic cleavages, the party leadership were structured accordingly, viz: the Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello led the NPC of the North; Dr Nnamdi Azikwe held the ace of Igbo's NCNC in the East while Chief Obafemi Awolowo led the

AG of Yoruba in the West, each representing their ethnic/regional divides” (Adeleke and Charles, 2015:62).

Although the formation of political parties in the Fourth Republic has gone beyond ethnic based politics and party divides. What remained the same despite the changes in ideologies and formation patterns is the voting attitude among various ethnic groups across the country. The voting pattern has remained indifferent consistently by the outcome of election results in most cases. No matter how popular a political party may be within a region, its national candidate determined the voting pattern in most cases. Popularity and acceptability of political party among ethnic groups in the fourth republic is largely based on the number of members of a particular ethnic group in that party viz-a-vis the voting pattern and supports.

For example, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) was the ruling party before 2015 general elections in Nigeria, the party had majority control of governmental activities both at the states and national levels while All Progressive Congress (APC) was the major opposition party then, but the result of the 2015 elections shows clearly that the voting pattern was based on ethnic and regional sentiments. For instance, the APC presidential candidate for the 2015 general elections Gen Mohammadu Buhari and his Vice Prof Yemi Osinbajo came from Northern and Western regions respectively while PDP’s presidential candidate and his vice Dr Goodluck Jonathan and Arc Namadi Sambo from Southern and Northern regions as well. APC lost in all the states in the south-south and south-East zones with the exception of Edo state, while PDP only won in one state of the South-West zone and three other states in the Northern region including FCT regardless of the population PDP had across every states in the north.

Party Politics and Ethnic Formation

Simply stated, party politics are activities of political parties in a democratic environment to seek for the control of political offices through the stated norms of elections (Olaniyi, 2001:99 cited in Azeez, 2009:2). To this extent, party politics exist when elective principles are present in the state and by implication under democratic regime which recognizes the legitimate choice of the citizens to select or elect those to represent them in government offices. For example, in the pre-independence Nigeria, party politics was not in existence until 1922, when the Clifford constitution introduced for the first time in the country for elective position (Azeez, 2009:2).

According to Okoye (1982) cited in Azeez (2009), party politics are therefore, the activities of formal structure, institutions or organisations which compete through electoral process to control the personnel

and policies of government with the aim of allocating the scarce resources in a state through an institutionalised means or procedures. Hence, the primary and major objective of party politics is to create opportunity for members to jostle for power of controlling and allocating state's scarce resources through regulated processes by the law of a given state.

However, despite the fact that party politics serve some other numerous purposes outside the primary objective, such as integrative mechanism, feedback mechanism, aggregative machinery or tool, regulatory and promotional roles, its roles are punctured or truncated by various negative activities such as polarizing and widening gap between and among ethnic groups, unhealthy rivalry, marginalization tool, exploitative mechanism and expropriators role, apart from undemocratic rule (Azeez, 2009: 2).

Ethnicity is no longer a new thing in this paper. We have defined and discussed what ethnicity is all about from the beginning of this work. According to Nnoli (1978), conflict as an aspect of ethnicity is more pronounced in societies where inter-ethnic competition for scarce resources is the rule, particularly when inequality is accepted as the given and wealth is greatly esteemed. In this type of set-up, no group wants to be concerned about the bottom of the ladder. Hence, groups exploit every means to remain at the top. In a democratic society where the flight to choose is the guiding principle, ethnic groups may show undue interest in who gets what, how and when. In another word, democratic traditions in ethnically plural societies may be influenced by keen competition, ethnic rivalry and jostling for power and resources. These societies therefore, may witness social protest which often takes the form of ethnic conflicts (Nnoli, 1978; Ismaglova 1978 cited in Edlyne, 2006:67).

This social protest as is the case in contemporary Nigeria is often motivated by aggrieved political parties. In most cases, those who were rejected by the electorate at the poll mobilised their supporters and take protest to the streets on the claim that their mandate were stolen. Sometimes, court judgements are also seen as manipulation of the judges by their political opponents even when the validity of such judgements is obvious.

Activities of political parties in pre-independence Nigeria were basically on ethnic divides. These ethnic ideology based activities has continued even in the post independence Nigeria. From the First republic to the current republic, many political parties were formed and alliances were made for the purpose of taking the control of the nation's power and resources. However, the 1979 constitution that ushered in the Second Republic made regulations which were intended to make political parties national in outlook, even including their operations. But party politics and formation defying all hindrances were seen to follow ethnic dimension, even in line with their operations in the first republic. The new political parties

that were registered had their leaders replicated as it were. Ahmadu Bello of NPC, Obafemi Awolowo retained the leadership of the AG while Nnamdi Azikwe maintained the control of the Igbo nation by leading the NPP, an affiliate of the old NCNC. The remaining two minority parties, GNPP, PRP and later NAP were not different as they also took on their ethnic coloration and affiliation.

Party politics had its worst experience witnessed in the Third Republic in Nigeria. Gen Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida and Gen Sani Abacha had during their times masterminded all manipulations and decided the formation of political parties. Hence, by the time the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC) were registered by Babangida's government, the formation and establishment was for a particular personal agenda of the self-acclaimed president. The annulment of the acclaimed freest and fairest elections of June 12, 1993 attested to the General's personal ambition. Yet ethno-religious cleavages were visible in the membership and composition of the two parties. While the SDP favoured Southerners, NRC was a party for the Hausa/Fulani Northerners. The five parties of the Abacha regime; Congress for National Consensus (CNC), Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), National Centre Party of Nigeria (NCPN) and United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP) were formed only to adopt their sole benefactor General Sani Abacha as their consensus presidential candidate, for him to actualise his transformation from the military 'khaki to civilian babanriga' as did by his friend Blaise Campaore in Burkina-Faso among others. No wonder the parties were referred to as "five fingers of a leprous hand" by Late Bola Ige (Herald, 1998:9; Nwankwo, 2001 cited in Azeez, 2009:4).

No doubt, the demise of Gen Sani Abacha on June 8, 1998 marked the end of the transition programme of self-succession which the five fingers of leprous hand political parties were formed to serve. Thus, marking the beginning for the emergence of Fourth Republic through Gen Abdulsalam Abubakar led short transition programme. In no different processes from the previous republics, alignment and realignment as well as merger, 26 political associations sought for provisional registration, only nine parties were provisionally registered. After the local government elections, only three political parties among them were well registered to contest the election. They are the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), All People's Party later known as All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP) and the Alliance for Democracy (AD). After democratic process was fully installed in the Fourth Republic on 29th May, 1999, which Chief Olusegun Obasanjo of the PDP emerged as the executive president of the federal republic of Nigeria, the ethnic colouration of the past experiment in the previous republics is still visible. With ANPP considered predominantly occupied by the Hausa/Fulani and AD as the direct successor to the late Chief Obafemi Awolowo's Action Group and Unity Party of Nigeria, and as a result, dominated the six Yoruba speaking states; Lagos, Ekiti, Ogun, Osun, Ondo and Oyo until 2003 when it lost all the states to PDP except,

Lagos. PDP was seen to have deviated a bit from the usual ethno-religious dominated party politics of the past with their membership and formation cutting across the clime of the nation (Azeez, 2009).

PDP continued to retain power at the centre due to its strong control of majority of the 36 states of the federation since 1999 until 2015. After the general elections in 2011 and as the people prepared for the next general elections in 2015, alignment and realignment was palpable and the three political parties then, All Nigerian Peoples Party (ANPP), Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) and Congress for Progressive Change (CPC) and the factions of other parties like the new PDP and APGA all merged together and formed All Progressive Congress (APC) which saw the end of PDP in 2015, the all time ruling party since 1999. However, to what extent has these alliances and affiliations of political parties since 1999 served as an instrument of unity, national integration and consolidation of democracy to the extent that ethnic sentiment that was witnessed severally since independence will not reoccur again?

Ethnic Politics beyond Nigeria in Africa

In our contemporary time, nearly all political conflicts found in Africa are attributable to ethnic groups competing for the control of political powers of their different nations (Aguiline, 2008, Nzongola-Ntalaja, 1999 cited in Adeleke and Charles, 2015). Nation such as Angola, Sudan, Kenya, Nigeria, Sierra Leone Burundi, Burkina-Faso, etc are seriously enmeshed in the politics of ethnicity (Aguiline, 2008). In many African nations, the struggle for political power from time to time, brought different ethnic groups into conflicts in such that, each ethnic group advocates interest in different ways in order to secure a place in a political leadership with the intention of having access to the nation's economy. Thus, ethnic groups could also be seen as interest groups whose members share some common economic and political interest (Robert, 1983, cited in Charles and Adeleke, 2015:64). In similar vein, Eifert, et'al (2010, cited in Adeleke and Charles, Ibid), argued that ethnic identities in Africa are strengthened by exposure to political competition. Different reasons have been adjudged for the flourishing of ethnicity in Africa. For instance, ethnicity is useful in the competition for political power; it is a powerful reason of behaviour; it is a tool for mobilizing people; and it is an instrument of coalitions force for wrestling for the nation's economy power.

Ethnic politics in Africa is contagious. Considering the historical and cultural background of African nations, the tendency to easily emulate the behaviour, particularly the success of conflicts based record of one neighbouring country can invariably influence others.

In the present day Africa, ethnicity played a vital role in shaping African political system. Ethnicity preceded African nation's independence, the colonial leaders are not interested in stamping out ethnicity, but to stem the expression of nationalism they produced; European imperialists play Africans against themselves through selection of their African loyalists without involving the majority of the African population. Thus, to a large extent, the colonizers planted and promoted ethnicity which was later germinated into democratic and governance misadventure that cost most post-colonial African nations (Olaiya, 2014).

Chogugudza (2008) observes that some of the colonial officers planted ethnic rivalries amongst indigenous population by employing strategy of divide and rule in the various colonized places. The divide and rule strategy adopted, generated mutual suspicions among different ethnic groups in many African nations, a situation which persists even now. Many political leaders used ethnicity to their advantages. They make use of ethnicity in establishing themselves perpetually in power and dealt decisively with perceived political opponents.

Ethnicity has continued to threaten the stability of South Africa, the unseating of President Thabo Mbeki by his deputy Jacob Zuma from the leadership of the African National Congress (ANC), the strongest political party in South Africa to have been influenced by ethnicity. In Sudan, the Darfur political crisis is traceable to ethnicity, the Northern Sudan over the years have been dominating the political activities of Sudan and have maltreated severely the ethnic groups of the southern Sudan as they (the ethnic groups of Southern Sudan) continued to groan under progressive rule of the ethnic groups of Sudan northern extractions (Chogugudza, 2008).

Ethnic identity manifestation has been one of the challenges tearing Kenya apart; and inability of Kenyan people to integrate ethnic identities into their nation's structure has worsened the situation. It is understandable that Kenya like many other African nations is a multi-ethnic society which has lived peacefully for many years. However, the recent happenings in Kenya has shown that the dominant ethnic groups constitute a major political problem within the nation (Aquiline, 2008).

According to Aquiline (2008:1), the role and activity of ethnic groups was captured below;

In recent years, however, the dominant ethnic groups have been on the forefront in fighting for political power. This situation has resulted into fighting to control the state. The relatively less dominant communities have been playing the card of opportunism... the situation has fomented

anger, resentment, lust for revenge, aggressive competitiveness that has overlooked the common good of the entire country. Frustration among the poor, both in urban and rural areas, has created a growing tendency to use violence as a viable means to correct the situation (Aquiline, 2008).

The above statements clearly explain the recent situation in Nigeria. The pro Biafra agitators based their protest on revenge, resentment and lust for aggressive competition. It further justified the assertion that ethnic politics in Africa is a contagious disease. It is possible to say that the ongoing protests persistently been carried out in Nigeria are fomented by similar protests across many African nations like Burundi, Ivory-Coast, South Africa, Sudan, Burkina-Faso, etc.

Ethno-political competition which started since Kenya's independence continued unabated and degenerated into ethno-political competition, discrimination and violence. After the December 2007 election for example, ethnic rivalry resulted into violence where hundreds of people were killed and many properties were destroyed (Aquiline, Ibid).

Loss of lives and destruction of properties in an ethno-political violence has become a major phenomenon with many African nations in recent times. Ethno-political crisis is one of the major problems confronting development of African countries. In the last five years, ethnic politics has been identified as the major factor responsible for political instability in many parts of Africa. For instance, after a long time of political unrest between Northern Sudan (the majority ethnic groups) and the Southern Sudan (the minority ethnic groups), the Southern Sudan got their independence on 9th July, 2011 by the referendum votes. Kenya has been engulfed by serious political crisis since 2007 general elections in that country. Burkina-Faso after a long time of political crisis resulting from ethnic violence degenerated into coup that destabilised political and democratic activities of that country in 2014. In the same vein, Burundi also experience a failed coup d'état in 2015 which was precipitated by agitation against President Pierre Nkurunziza.

Implications of Ethnic Politics on the National Development and Integration in Nigeria

Ethnic politics have constituted a major block in the cog-wheel of development in pre and post independence Nigeria. Fifty five years after independence, Nigeria is still confronted with the challenge of how to deal with her problem of ethnic politics. This problem of ethnic politics has retarded Nigeria

from having national leaders who are ready to serve with passion and commitment other than those who are sentimental and tribalised.

Politics of ethnicity has made it difficult for Nigeria to have the right leaders in its political journey of over fifty four years of independence, except, for a very few of her leaders who have demonstrated total commitment to the nation's development. Ethnic politics has been the clog in the wheel of political advancement of the nation such that, there has never been a leader with national outlook that has emerged in Nigeria. The election of candidates so far, has been based on where the candidate came from rather than on the right candidate for the election (Umezinwa, 2012).

The idea of ethnic politics was not limited to the central leaders alone, but also among component states and various ethnic groups within the same state. For example, in Kogi state, the dominant ethnic group has been dominating the political leadership of the state since 1999. Benue is also another state that has similar case where Tiv the dominant ethnic group has been at the helm of political activities of the state.

These so-called leaders are without the interest of the nation at heart. They emerged in the political limelight through ethnic sentiments, but end up in disappointing their so-called ethnic groups; this is evident in almost all parts of the world where none of the ethnic nations is developed. One expects that owing to the way many of these politicians came to power via ethnic sympathy, they would satisfy ethnic groups that supported them to power, but as soon as they emerge, they neglect their people. Many of them who are in Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) refused to go back to see their people at home again (Adeleke and Charles, 2015:65).

After electioneering campaign has come and gone, these politicians who used ethnic and tribal sentiments to appeal to people by pointing out at the peculiar needs of these people will never be ready to listen to them anymore. Immediately after they won the positions, these supporters will be looked upon as 'noise-makers' while they use heavy armed security personnel to draw a line of demarcation between them and the electorate (supporters).

The issue of the federal character is another political arrangement that is troubling political advancement of this nation. Although, the motive behind the enshrinement of the principle is to enhance equality and fairness among the component ethnic groups in Nigeria, with a view to bringing sense of belonging to different citizens of Nigeria as well as to prevent fears of domination of one region or ethnic group over the others. The plausibility of the principle notwithstanding brings about the reigning of mediocrity into the governmental activities in the name of equity and fairness among the component units. Given the fact

that merit has been overruled as criterion for serving the nation, it is not surprising that all manners of people have been appointed to hold public offices in which they neither have the training nor experience.

Thus, in a situation like this, there is no way any progress could be achieved in the nation building and advancement (Umezina, 2012). Umezina further posits that ethnic politics and rivalry also leads to the emergence of incompetent president. For instance, Nigeria adopted the rotational presidency among the six geo-political zones, in order to defuse ethnic tension, the consequence of which was that the president is not elected based on merit but rather on the basis of where the aspirant comes from.

Similarly, ethnic politics has also created an avenue where corrupt leaders are being supported by their ethnic groups instead of the citizens to vehemently reject corrupt leaders and condemn their activities; they do support them due to ethnicity, thereby making these leaders to continue in the corrupt manner with impunity. Corruption without mincing words has been undermining Nigeria's political development. It has permeated all levels of government in Nigeria while ethnic groups of the corrupt politicians are always defending them.

The consequence of corruption on Nigerians is devastating. For instance, despite the enormous oil and gas deposit in Nigeria, the nation remains poor with over 90 million Nigerians living in abject poverty. Since the discovery of oil in large quantity in Nigeria, the nation has earned over \$300 billion from oil exports (Ribadu, 2004 Arowosaiye and Kulliyah, 2009). Corruption has cost Nigeria her whopping sum of £20 billion which has been stolen since independence by past leaders of the country. The money stolen could have made Nigeria six times better than Western Europe where many Nigerians are now running (Ribadu, 2009).

The resultant effects of ethnic politics were aptly summed by Babangida (2002) cited in Adeleke and Charles, (2015) as follows:

Wastage of enormous human and material resources in ethnically inspired violence, encounters, clashes and even battles, heightening of fragility of the economy and political process, threat to security of life and property and disinvestment of local and foreign components with continuous capital flight and loss of confidence in the economy; and increasing gaps in social relationship among ethnic nationalities including structural suspicions and hate for one another. Ethnic nationalism is equally responsible for uprising of ethnic militias across the country.

It is very important for scholars to consistently reflect the issue of ethnic identities on the educational curriculum. The loss of lives and properties subsequently has continued to render the nation incapacitated. It weakens the zeal to embrace peace and tolerate one another while it further deepens the threat to national unity and integration among component units and their corresponding ethnic groups.

Conclusion

The study has clearly shown that Nigeria is currently sitting on the keg of a gun powder. It brings to fore that Nigeria is a state on the brink of disintegration going by the recent event across the nation if nothing is done urgently to subvert the potential consequences of such situation. The recent action by a section of the South-East and South-South to host a flag of Biafra which signified secession, the ever constant conscientisation of their tribal men to have a nation of Biafra, ceaselessly portends doom on Nigeria's attempt to develop and consolidate national unity and integration of a multi-ethnic nation like ours. Federalism that is meant to put in place and harness the benefit of a cordial co-existence among the diverse ethnic groups within Nigerian federation has been subverted. Nigeria's pluralistic nature has made her susceptible to conflicts arising from the pursuit of divergent interests. The unabated struggle from the various ethnic groups for political position with a view to control economic wealth and other resources of the nation is invariably a threat to sustenance of peaceful co-existence, political development and democratic process.

Recommendations

After a critical evaluation and analysis of how ethnic politics and party politics have been major problems since the inception of Nigeria as a nation, it therefore becomes pertinent to make valuable recommendations.

First, in a multi-ethnic nation like Nigeria, a credible and responsible national centre is imperative where different ethnic groups across the nation should have their representative for dialogue and sense of belonging would be accorded to each regardless of the population.

Second, there should be an establishment that would respond promptly to the demands of the diverse groups for the purpose of ensuring adequate integration among ethnic groups in the country.

Moreover, Nigeria needs to imbibe the spirit of fairness and equity. Where there is equity, fairness and transparency in governance, such nations experience and enjoy national unity, integration and peace. For

Nigeria to enjoy this and forestall potential disintegration, these essential ingredients for nation's development, stability and growth must be strategically achieved.

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