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Peaceful Co-Existence of the Peoples of Nigeria: The Contending Issues

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Abstract: This study is an expository one. It is believed that, Nigeria is the only country in the world with about 480 ethnic nationalities. Nigeria has a unique problem not experienced by any state in the world, past or present. The problem is that of achieving solidarity in action and purpose in the midst of hundreds of ethnic nationalities, each exerting both centrifugal and centripetal forces on the central issues of one nation, bound in freedom, peace and unity where justice reigns. This study will attempt to demonstrate that, sociologically, Nigeria has a hyper multi-ethnic nationality society and structurally suffers from a major chronic malady of instability syndrome at the political level. This study concludes that, the solution to this chronic malady is the problem that will always task democratic governance in Nigeria.

Key words: Peaceful, co-existence, contending issues, centrifugal, centripetal

INTRODUCTION

Despite the levels of social, political and economic development of Nigeria, inter and intra ethnic feuds have been reoccurring. Since the end of the Nigerian civil war in 1970, many ethnic groups have fought each other over a piece of land, the site of a market, religious issues, protests against the siting of local government headquarters or police station, or inclusion in a state or local government area they do not like.

In some cases, as well, ethnic nationalities have fought each other because of mere hatred for each other, especially in some semi-cosmopolitan societies, for instance, the Tivs and Jukuns in Taraba, Nasarawa and Benue States, the Zango Kataf and Hausa groups in Southern Kaduna, the Aguleri-Umuleri-Umoba-Anam in Anambra State, the Hausa-Yoruba groups in Shagamu, Ogun State, to mention a few.

All these inter and intra ethnic conflicts have contributed immensely to the very low rate at which the states where they abound are developing. Therefore, this study shall focus on the socio-cultural causes of these conflicts and possible solutions so as to achieve the desired stability in Nigeria which are the basic ingredients for economic growth and development.

CONCEPTUALIZING INTER AND INTRA ETHNIC CONFLICT

Conflict refers to situations of disagreement between groups or individuals over some collective goals, means of achieving such goals, or the distribution and allocation of collectively owned resources (Abada, 2004). In his view (Zartman, 1991) opines that, conflict is an inevitable aspect of human interaction, an unavoidable concomitant of choices and decisions. This view indicates that, once there is human interaction, conflict is inevitable.

Conflict breeds conflict is a self-generating theory of conflict process within social groups. Ethnicity, whether inter or intra in nature is contemporary history of Nigeria is synonymous with conflict. These various conflicts occur when there is competition for scarce resources, afterness in value system and interests.

The relative deprivation theory asserts that a psychological variable, relative deprivation is the basic pre-condition for conflict of any kind. The more widespread and intense deprivation is among members of a population, the greater is the magnitude of violence in one form or the other.

The underlying assumptions are that societies and social groups have characteristic patterns of conflict behaviour which exists in complex interaction with one another and that these patterns tend to persist over time. Hence, the conflict process is endemic to society, follows its own internal logic and is largely self-contained and self-generating.Therefore, inter and intra ethnic conflicts are caused by a number of factors-unhealthy competition for scarce resources; struggle for influence and control of certain positions; mutually exclusive and/or mutually incompatible values; mutually opposed actions and counter-actions; border or boundary disagreement, unequal socio-economic development among others.

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LOCATIONS OF NIGERIAN ETHNIC NATIONALITIES: SOME ISSUES

The research by the British between 1914 and 1935 put the number of Nigerian ethnic nationalities at 200. One thing was clear to them-using language criterion alone, it was up to 300 (Onwuejeogwu, 2003). But of these, they concentrated on the main ones with large populations. They adopted the lumping system whereby the main ethnic nationalities such as Hausa, Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba, Kanuri, Nupe, Tiv, Idoa, Igala, Gwari, Angas, Jukun, Edo, Urhobo, Itsekiri, Izon, Efik and Ibibio were regarded as the big groups around which other smaller neighbouring ones revolve.

In line with the British policy of divide and rule, the division line has been always along the line of ethnic cleavage between the north/south, north-central/north-west, north-central/middle-belt, east/west, east-central/south-east and west/mid-west. All these cleavages are based on ethnic nationalities expressed in the deceptive forms of territoriality with deep cultural connotations, which have disruptive and divisive political consequences.

The problems of plotting the positions of the ethnic nationalities on a map of Nigeria are numerous. Among them are acceptable definitions of ethnic groups, the operationalization of the definitions into chartable entities, the identification of the ethnic groups in time and space and the determination of its dynamic past in name and territoriality.

ETHNIC GROUPS IN NIGERIA

Abuja: Bassa-Kwomu, Gade, Gwari, Nupe.

Akwaibom state: Anang andoni, Eket, Ibeno, Ibibio, Okobo (Okkobor), Oron, Obolo.

Anambra/Enugu states: Northern Igbo.

Bauchi state: Angas, Awak, Barawa, Barke, Bolewa, Burak, Buta-Ningi, Cham-Mwana, Dadiya, Deud, Dera (Derewa), Dirya, Dulbu, Daguza, Fulani (Fulbe), Galambi, Gera, Geruma, Gubi, Gwa, Gurumtum, Gyema, Hausa, Izarek, Jaku, Jara, Jarawa, Jera, Jimbim, Jimi, Jukun, Kamo, Karekare, Kariya, Kirfi, Kubi, Kudachammo, Kupto, Kushi, Kwami (Kwom), Kwanka, Lame, Longuda, Luri, Mangas, Ngamo, Pa'a, Pero, Sanga, Siri, Tala, Tangale, Tera, Tula, Waja, Warj, Zangwal.

Edo/Delta states: Bini, Ebu, Esan (Ishan), Etsako, Etuno (Akoko Edo), Igbo(Aniocha, Ika, Ukwuani, Oshimili), Itsekiri, Isoko, Izon (Ijaw), Owan, Uneme, Urhobo, Okpameri.

Benue state: Basa, Etolu (Etilo), Idoma, Igala, Jukun, Tiv, Nupe, Ufia, Yalla

Borno/Yobe states: Affade, Bade, Bole (Bolewa), Buduma, Buru(Bura), Chibok/Kyibabu, Dghwede, Fulani, Gomergu-Mulgwa, Glaida, Guduf, Hausa, Kilba, Kanuri, Karekare, Kirawa, Kyibabu, Laamang, Lungu, Matarkam, Mobber, Ngamo, Ngizim, Ngirosha, Nggwahyi, Shuwa.

Cross river state: Abayom, Agwagwuna, Alepe, Agoi, Akpet-ghom, Anyima, Bacheve, Bahumono, Bekwawa, Bette, Boki (Nki), Efilo, Efutop, Ejagham, Ekajuk, Evant, Ikom, Iyala, Mbembe, Mbube, Nde-Nsele-Nta, Nkum, Nkukoli, Obut, Obanliku, Otark, Qua, Kukele, Uyanga, Yache, Yakurr (Yaka).

Taraba/Adamawa states: Abun, Bachama, Bakulung, Bali, Bambuka, Bandawa-Minda, Barawa, Batu, Baya, Betso(Bete), Bilei, Bitare, Burah, Burak, Chamba-Dara, Chamba-Leko, Cham-Mwamma, Chomb-Karim, Dadiya, Dera, Dirim, Dong, Falli, Fulani(Fulbe), Ga'anda, Gengle, Gongla, Gudu, Gwomu, Hwana, Icen, Jango, Junkun, Jarawa, Kaka, Kam, Kamwa, Kanuri, Kilbe, Koma, Kotopo, Kugama, Kumba, Kushi, Kuteb, Kutiri, Kwa, Kpan, Lakka, Lamang, Lamja, Lau/Lo, Lelau, Libbo, Longuda, Lotsu-Piri, Mambilla, Magu, Margi, Mbembe-Tiging, Mbol, Mbula, Mbute, Mumuye, Munga, Ndoro, Ngwelise(Ngoshe-Ndaiwig), Nyamjom, Nyandang, Nzangi, Panyam, Passam, Rero, Roba, Sukur, Tarok, Togon, Tikar, Teme, Tiv, Tula, Verre, Vimtim, Waka, Warji, Wom, Yandang, Yukuben, Yungur.

Imo/Abia states: Southern Igbo.

Kaduna/Katsina states: Ama, Ayen, Ayu, Bassa-Kasuwa, Bina, Chanwai, Fula, Dungi, Fulani, Gure, Gwari, Hausa, Hyam, Idon, Iku-Guralanwa, Kadara, Kangona, Kaje, Kambari, Kamaku, Kanufi-Kaningkon-Nindem, Katab, Kagoro, Alakat, Shello, Ka-Chichere, Kafanchan, Kiballo, Kinuku, Kitimi, Kono, Koro, Kurama, Kuturmi, Lumgu, Mada, Ninzam(Ninzo), Nunku-Numana-Gwantu, Piti, Rumada, Surubu, Yeskwa.

Kano/Jigawa states: Badi, Fulani (Fulbe), Galambi, Hausa, Kanuri.

Katsina state: Fulani (Fulbe), Hausa.

Kwara/Kogi states: Baruba (Barba), Bade, Bassa, Boko (Bussawa) (Borgawa), Bunu, Ebirra(Igbirra), Fulani(Fulbe), Gbedde, Hausa, Igala, Ijumu, Kambari, Laaru(Larawa), Lopa(Lupa), Nupe, Ogori, Owe, Oworo, Reshe, Yagba, Yoruba, Yumu, Zabarma.

-Lagos state: Awori, Egun (Gu), Yoruba.

Niger state: Bassa, Baushi, Duka, Fulani (Fulbe), Gurmana, Gwari, Hausa, Kadara, Kambari, Kamaku, Koro, Ngwei, Nupe, Pongo(Pongu), Ura(Ula)

Ogun state: Yoruba.

Ondo/Ekiti states: Ebirra, Izon (Ijo), Yoruba.

Oyo/Oshun states: Yoruba.

Plateau/Nasarawa states: Afizere, Afo, Ake, Alago(Arago), Amo, Anaguta, Angas, Alen, Ankwei, Abum-Chessu, Ayu, Banga, Bashar, Bassa, Baghom, Birom(Berom), Bokkos, Burma, Challa, Chakpem-Mushere, Chip, Chokobo, Daffo-Batura, Ebirra, Eggon, Ejagham, Eloyi, Fulani, Fyam, Fyer, Gade, Ganawuri, Goemai, Gwandara(Gwarri), Horom, Idoma, Irigwe, Izarek, Janji, Jara(Jarawa), Jere(Jerewa), Jidda-Abu, Jukun, Karfa, Kantana, Kenem, Kitimi, Kulere, Kurama, Kwanka, Kofyar, Lemoro, Mabo-Barkul, Mada, Mama, Miligili, Montol, Mundat, Ninzam, Nokere, Nungu, Numana-Nunku-Kwantu, Ryapun, Rindire, Ron, Rukuba, Ruuama, Sanga, Sha, Shagamu, Sura, Tal, Tamas, Tarok, Tapshin, tiv, Warj, Washi, Yergam(Yergum), Yeskwa, Yuom.

Rivers/Bayelsa states: Abua(Odual) andoni, Degema, Engenni(Ngene), Epie, Gokana(Kana), River Igbo, Izon, Ogoja-Kugbo, Odual, Ogbogolo.

Sokoto/Kebbi states: Bange, dakarkari, Denda(Dandawa), Duka (Dukawa), Fulani (Fulbe), Hausa, Kamaku, Kambari, Kyenga, Lele, Kupu-Keri-Wipsi, Reshe, Shanga (Shangawa), Zarma(Zarmawa)

The contending issues: Any one interested in the mechanism of ethnicity will be interested in the following questions:

- Why are ethnic differences so often associated with tension and conflict?
- What accounts for ethnic prejudice and discrimination?
- Why do ethnic antagonism often center upon "social" differences such as wealth, land, property, religion, skin colour?
- Are societies marked by a high degree of pluralism bound to remain equal?
- How do tensions, conflicts, prejudices and discriminations promote or demote governance?

In the light of the above, since Nigeria has 445 ethnic nationalities between large and small, through medium, so it has 445×3 tensions and conflicts to resolve, because ethnic conflicts on a general level are manifested as: ethnocentrism, group closure, resource allocation etc. Each generates its conflict.

- Ethnocentrism, which is the suspicion of outsiders, combined with a tendency to evaluate the culture of others in terms of one's own culture. This combines with stereotypes infused with attitudes of hostility or hatred towards another group, thus, generating conflict like when an Hausa person refers to Igbo as Kafri or Inyamiri and an Igbo refers to an Hausa as Onye Igwu or a Yoruba man refers to Igbo as Kobokobo and an Igbo man calls him Ofe Mmanu or Benin refers to Igbo as Ofigbo. These terms are stereotypical thinking rooted in some hidden hostility which in time past resulted to open hostilities in other levels of interactions such as economic, religious or political.

Group closure: This has to do with the process whereby groups maintain boundaries separating themselves from others by limiting and prohibiting intermarriage between groups, restrictions on social contract or economic relationships like trading and the physical separating of groups.

- From colonial times (Onwuejeogwu, 2003) the British encouraged the physical separating of ethnic groups in Muslim Hausa culture area. In towns like Kano, Zaria, there are the city area where only the muslim Hausa and Fulani live, the marginal area where Hausa live with few other strangers; the Sabon-gari, the strangers area, where southerners and non-muslims live and the government reservation where Europeans live and later occupied by the African elites. These settlement patterns continued after independence. Today, these physical divisions sharpen the separation and deepen tension and becomes target areas of conflict.

Socio-economic status: The exhibition of superior socio-economic status by one group over others contributes to threats to peaceful co-existence of Nigerian people. In line with his argument, Goodies (1981) opined that, when two or more readily identified groups inhabit the same area, competition for scarce resources becomes inevitable. He went further to claim that resources include money and power which each group would want to acquire and exhibit at all times.

Abada (2004) identified envy and jealousy as the major factors that contributed to armed conflicts between Umuleri and Aguleri communities in Anambra State. To-him, what was evident was sheer exhibition of superior socio-economic status of certain elements in the communities.

Excessive militarization of Nigerian communities: Since after the Nigerian civil war in 1970, suspicion among many communities living together has led to massive acquisition of arms. This has been evident in many occasions for instance, the Kaduna riot of 1996 where the Igbo people used sophisticated weapons against the Hausa community, the Shagamu riot of 1999 between Yoruba and Hausa communities and so on.

The Aguleri-Umuleri conflict is another good example of excessive militarization of Nigerian communities on show. According to the government of Anambra State white paper (1995) the Aguleri community acquired arms after their war with Obele and used against Umuleri in 1995. Thus, excessive militarization of Nigeria communities and particularly those in Niger-Delta recently threatens peaceful co-existence of the Nigerian peoples.

THE WAY FORWARD

Good governance: Those governing multi-ethic nationalities should constantly be reminded that they are managing a system that is inherently unstable and should constantly be watchful for an upsurge of tensions and conflicts. Their external duty will be how to reduce areas of tensions and conflicts before it smoulders into open conflicts. This brings us to the area of knowledge. Each ethnic nationality has population, a territory, a culture, a language and a traditional religion. What do we know about these facts?. How many are educated? Where are they now living? What rate of migration takes them to the cities and state capitals? What is their major occupation? How many are their women and children? What are they doing now to cope with the problem of assimilation into the fifteen major ethnic groups? We have no answers to these questions.

In line with the above, let us take cases from Kwara State and ask who are the Ijumu ethnic group? How many are they in number? Who are the Reshe? What is their population? What roles are the Ijumu and the Reshe playing in the economic and political development of Kwara State? Let us move to Plateau State with about 79 ethnic groups. The land on which University of Jos is located belongs to the Anaguta ethnic nationality numbering about 5000 persons. They have their own language and culture and are also competing for scarce resources with major ethnic groups. Will they have a fair deal? Today they may be neutral but tomorrow one cannot predict.

Prompt response: Listeners to the Nigerian news would have heard that the Tiv and the Jukun are engaged in long-running communal violence. Hundreds of people have been killed and thousands uprooted from their rural homes.

A segment of the Tiv and the Jukun are now locking horns over farmland in Benue and Taraba States. Government must act promptly with speed to prevent the matter from spreading through the segmentary lineage principle of opposition and co-operation among the Tiv and even the Jukun.

In the first place, the Tiv-Jukun conflict would have been avoided and in the second place, it would have been checked on starting. But all these could not have been done without a thorough knowledge of who the Tiv and Jukun are as ethnic nationalities in Nigeria.

Democratic vigilance: The most excellent action is for government never to give room for any ethnic nationality to start any negative action. The solution to this problem is constant democratic vigilance, which is a careful and persistent watchfulness of the ethnic nationalities without infringing on the human rights of its individuals.

By now, every local government and every state should be able to identify the number of ethnic nationalities in their geo-political area. The simple criterion to employ is that an ethnic group has a name to identify itself in a given territory. The sociological details are the work of the anthropologists and sociologists who would be employed to do an extensive ethnographic work on the people. This information forms part of the dozier on each ethnic nationality. The dozier becomes part of the instrument employed for the democratic governance by local government members, Chairmen of local governments, governors, members of House of Assembly and House of Representatives and Senators. By this process, it will be easy to detect signs of new instabilities and immediately apply the necessary counter-balances. It will also enable administrators understand the rate of development in each ethnic group.

CONCLUSION

On the whole, this study has been able to identify the various threats to the peaceful co-existence of the peoples of Nigeria. Various options were given and it is our plea that governments at all levels should look into them seriously if the unity of Nigerians is desired.

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