Ethnic Politics in Nigeria: A Threat to Peace and Educational Development

By

NWOSU JULIANA NGOZI

Abstract

The desire for democracy is of global interest especially to countries struggling to be out of dictatorial regimes. In Nigeria, the reverse is the case, ethnic politics has res urge the whole country in recent years, manifesting into negative inter-ethnic conflicts that has posed a threat to national peace and educational development as a result of rivalry amongst over 350 ethnic groups in Nigeria. This paper looks at Ethnic politics in Nigeria, how it started, considered the efforts the government has made to promote national unity and peace, the threat ethnic politics posses to national peace and education development. The paper drew conclusions and made recommendations.

Introduction

Nigerian is a multi-national nation of great complexity, and this is also its most distinctive feature. It is home to over 350 distinct languages and nationalities. Although, the nationalists; are often distinguishable by geographical location, languages, and specific cultural traits and patterns of life. There are overlaps in a good number of socio-cultural traits, and the country's cultural diversity has in fact become a major source of its strength and unity. Owing to increased social interaction and modernization, a good number of specific practices have become the shared patrimony of all Nigerians.

Since Nigerian independence, ethnicity played a role and is still playing latent roles in the body of Nigeria polities. As a sovereign nation, efforts have been made towards entrenching a stable democratic system to provide good governance. Unfortunately, this dream seems unrealizable owing to some challenging factors. Otite (1990), observed that ethnic virus has been one of the most important causes of social crises and political instability in Nigeria; and ethnicity has been perceived in general as a major obstacle to the overall political-economic development of the country. Indeed, it is no longer news that one of the most effective gimmicks that have worked very well for Nigerian politicians is the use of fears expressed about the future of the nation's fifty one (51) years after independence, however most threatening of the problem faced by the country is ethnicity which could affects all aspects of Nigerian's national life- federal and even local resources allocation, management of public institutions and youth development. (Dudlei 1973: Albert 2001: Nnoli 1978). The problem has fuelled several bloody clashes between ethnic neighbors across the country, destabilizing the country most especially at national level and even produce and civil war. At each of the locations, groups compete for the available economic, material and political resources and these are done in manner that threatens national peace and stability.

Conceptual clarification

Ethnicity

Ethnicity refers to a social identity formation that rest upon culturally specific practices and a unique set of symbols and cosmology. Nnoli, (1978): defined ethnicity as a social phenomenon associated with interaction among members of different group with some social formation distinguished by communal characteristic of boundary, language and culture. It refers to the relation between ethnic groups within the same political system. Ethnicity constitutes a way in which people think of themselves and others, and makes sense of world around them. Ethnicity as a social construct Nnoli, (1995) can also be regard as the employment of ethnic identity and difference to gain advantage in situation of competition, conflict and cooperation. Going by the above assertion by Nnoli, one deduces that Nigerian politics has presented an image of struggle among various ethnic groups for the sharing of national resources. Osaghae, (1995) defined ethnicity as "the employment of mobilization of ethnic identity and difference to gain advantage in situation of competition, conflict or co- operation" .

However, ethnicity can lead to conflicts which can negatively impact the growth of the economy. Series of violence in Nigeria have resulted in loss of lives and properties and threat to the unity of Nigeria. It is estimated that over hundred thousand Nigerians have lost their in ethno-religious crises that have engulfed the country since the enthronement of democracy in 1979. The number of those displaced are put at millions Yusuf, (2009). Photographs attached.

In most of the crises in Nigeria, the country suffers huge losses in both materials worth billows of naira, and human resources. Able bodied work force that could have contributed to the economic development of Nigeria are wasted in their prime ages especially the youth corps members serving their fatherland. Although, some analysts are of the opinion that poverty, ignorance, injustice, politics, overzealous religious leaders and fanaticism are some of the factors responsible for the spate of civil disturbances in Nigeria. However one cannot rule out the fact that some of the recurrent political and religious conflicts in Nigeria are fuelled at certain quarters and individuals who benefits at the expense of the state and citizens.

One of the major implications of persistent conflicts is the insecurity of lives and properties which tend to hinder foreign economic relations to jump start the economy Adeyemi (20 11).

The victims of these conflicts are forced to abandon their economic activities to take refuge in refugee camp for a long period before they could find a new conducive place to settle. A 5 a result of this President Obasanjo in justifying the declaration of the state of emergency in Plateau State stated that "violence has reached unprecedented levels and hundreds have been killed with much more hundred or displaced from their homes on account of the ethnic or religious identification. Schooling for children has been disrupted and interrupted, business lost billions of naira and property worth much more destroyed Obasanjo (2004).

Obasanjo went further to observed that visitors and inventors have fled or are fleeing plateau state and neighboring states have their economies and social life disrupted and dislocated by influx of internally displace persons Obasanjo, (2004). The federal government and the neighboring states of Plateau State are incurring huge expenses in managing the socio-political and economic consequences of the hear collapse of state authority and the breakdown of law and order in some parts of plateau state. Be that as it may the growing incidences of ethnic conflict are not stemmed now and completely. The operation vengeance slogan which became a catch word before the 2010 Jos crisis indicates that memories from such conflict could create future conflicts solution.

Politics

The study of politics has generated a lot of interest among scholars and practioners, and many assumptions have been made to what it is all about. There has been such expression as politics is a dirty game". The contemporary ideas of politics have its origin from the Greeks, even though it is derived from the Greek word "polis" meaning the city state". "Polis" - was used to describe governmental activities which took place within the confines of the city state such as those which revolve around the reconciliation of conflicts.

According to the oxford advanced learners dictionary (6th edition) politics can be defined as the activities involved in getting and using power in public life and being able to influence decision that affect a country or a society. On the other hand, politics is a political system that deals with the system of interaction in any society through which binding decisions are made, from this perspective politics is a set of human interactions concerned primarily with decisions about resource allocations are made within a state. It is also a struggle for power, possession of popular, and use of power. Finally, it is the science or art of political government or profession of conducting a political affair.

The history of ethnic politics in Nigeria

The practice of ethnic politics in Nigeria got rooted during the colonial politics of divide and rule. This brought about the quest for control of national resource and politicization. In Nigeria between 1914 and 1915, British colonial administers created three regional territories that explain ethno-genesis and later ethnic tension, the Northern region occupied by Hausa/Fulani, the eastern region inhabited by the Igbo, and the Western region ofYoruba.1t is also pertinent to mention that before 1914 there was no single political entity called Nigeria. Instead, there existed numerous nationality groups and communities were varying cultural and linguistic, background with each claiming different ancestral historical origin. But by far, the Hausa, the Fulani the Igbo and the Yoruba are the most dominant groups in Nigeria. Bow colonial tripartite division of Nigeria prevented a Nigerian' nationalistic movement, manipulating geographical boundaries to reinforce separation between ethnic groups and transforming ethnicity into an identity by which to gain political power. This structure along with other administrative decision emphasized ethnic nationalism and regional politics, resulting from significant uneven development within each region.

The colonial division of Nigeria that reinforce ethnic groups, the rise of ethno-political consciousness, and the development ethnic/regional political parties demonstrated that the British administration internationally prevented the rise and success of Nigerianalism instead promoting regionalism as a means to gain political power. The hyper-federalism of the Nigerian state by British colonial official highlighted ethno-genesis and the tensions between majority ethnic groups. Furthermore, the minority ethnic problem which is common all over Africa exists in Northern Nigeria and indeed in parts of Nigeria. For instance, the Nupe the Igala, the Tiv, the Jukun and the Idoma in the midst of constant harassment by the conquering armies of neighboring Hausa, Kanuri and Fulani maintained their ground and built up nation states. They eventually guarded their independence very jealously against invaders.

Causes of ethnic crises in Nigeria

It is obvious that Nigeria's social structure is inherently prone to generate conflicts from its ethnic/cultural: interest and goals. It comes from the political and economic necessities of survival, as' individuals and as identifiable autonomous social groups struggle for advantages. These factors are:

1. Political instability: Nigeria has been characterized by perpetuating socio-political instability right from the first three years 'of her dependence. This is consequent upon Nigeria's ethnic multiplixicity and its associated political oddities. There are crises here and there. Incidences of communal clashes between ethnic groups have been on the increase even in recent years. Most of the time what is described as harmonious co- existence because groups is often very fragile and this snaps as soon ,1S there is any slight provocation. What follows? Afterwards are violent clashes in which lives are lost, school activities paralyzed and valuable properties were destroyed. For examples there were series of inter and intra-communal crisis and ethnic clashes in 1997 arising from either deliberate marginalization, differential opportunities of employment, education government appointments and so on. The level of damage, the degree of loss of lives and properties, the disruption of social activities are pointers to the fact that ethnic clashes are doping more damage to the nation rather than building it.

   Another factor is disputed jurisdiction of certain tradition rulers and chief: when a king of one ethnic or sub-ethnic group claims ruler ship over peoples belonging to another ethnic group, his action often generates conflicts. The town of Warri in Delta state is a good example of ethnic war. This crisis which started in the month of six months. The crisis broke out two of the three major ethnic groups two groups have regarded each other with mutual suspicions. The crisis led to the sack of several villages while properties worth several millions of naira were wantonly destroyed. Sophisticated weapons including grenades and other explosives were freely employed. In this kind of situation, nation building processes cannot be possible.

   Another factor is local government councils and the location of the headquarters.

This was evident in the case of Warri and Ife. The creation of the local government council in their respective areas was the responsibility of the federal government, but conflict arises when sections of the areas oppose such creation or their inclusion in the "wrong" council. Also, government location and shifting of the headquarters from one place to another, contributed to the conflict in the area. Similarly, ethnic group claims over new headquarter and markets are source of conflicts, for example Zango Kataf and Tafawa-Balewa town in Kaduna and Bauchi states respectively.

Other factors responsible for ethnic crises in Nigeria include the following the micro and macro social structures in Nigeria for example differences in religion, the other persons look down on the other person's religion as a stranger. Population I growth and expansionist tendencies to sustain ethnic bound occupations. Disregards' for cultural symbols and the population of cultural practices etc.

Ethnic politics as a threat to national peace and unity

It is a historical fact and a current reality that most Nigerian districts are haunted by actual or potential ethnic conflicts. This partly because of the fact that different common unities continue to consciously or unconsciously rely on ethnicity to perpetuate their dominance and hegemony in an atmosphere characterized by scare resources from recent experience as well as studies carried out on ethnic conflicts in Nigeria there is increasing evidence to suggest that even where it has been brought under control psychological trauma (i.e. fear and suspicion) left behind are seldom healed, especially among children and women. And this poses a threat national peace and unity since nobody is free with one another for the fear of explosives (Boko Haram) etc in places of worship. The wanton destruction of lives and properties worth of millions of naira from ethnically motivated crises has continued to destroy virile nationhood in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, ethnic crises in Nigeria have presented many challenges that border on security and the fundamental existence of the country which the fundamental reason for the adoption of s federal system. What we are witnessing through this crisis is a transfer of aggression from one grievance to the innocent Nigerians. That is why we should call upon the religious institutions, individuals and faith based organizations can now play a constructive and important roles, not only as a source of conflict but also as a tool for conflict resolution and peace building, providing early warning of conflicts, good offices once conflict has erupted and contributing to advocacy, mediation reconciliation. Again there are some countries that are developed but have religion as their sources of peace, out of such countries which because of their unshaken religious conviction are: America which has "in God we trust" as her motto and to Affirm that, even their buildings, currencies, and coins, " in God we trust" is also written. Other nations followed the same path like Persia has Zoroastrianism, China has Confucianism, and Rome has Jupiter and Mercury and so. Finally let all Nigerians evolve in peace keeping.

Ethnic politics as a threat to educational development

Education is the most powerful weapon which can use to change the world. Perhaps this explains that education determines who will be able to face persisting challenges in a constructive and positive way. It also helps to organize and interpret their collective and individual experiences to provide the understanding of the present and a guide for the future. It should be noted that the word education is derived from the Latin word "educate" meaning "to rise", "to train", to bring up". This implies that education ought to be understood as a lifelong process, leading to bringing out the best in every human being. Education is indeed a tool for transformation, upliftment and development of an individual Okafor, (2010).

Furthermore, education is seen as a veritable tool in its developmental process is very important as it seeks to bring to the fore light the innate, knowledge, virtues and powers of the recipient intellectually, physical and morally. This goes in line with the view that man is born with innate abilities and experiences, he is therefore to be assisted and directed to make these potentialities more functional Musa, (2012).

Today, education is more vital than ever before in determining how well people adjust to the realities of an increasing interdependent world. Perhaps, like other nations of the world, Nigeria considers education as an indispensable tool for achieve its national aspirations and objectives and also for, national development.

These aspirations includes

- The building of a free and democratic society
- A just equalitarian society
- A united, strong and self reliant nation
- A land of bright and full opportunities for all.

The realization of these objectives depends greatly on educational level of the citizen. Human beings are the creative agents who accumulate and exploit national resources, they build social, economic and political organizations and carry forward national development without which natural resources and capital will remain untapped and unused Agada, (20 1 0).

Recommendations

Social decadence is daily increasing at an alarming proportion. This is a serious situation we have to face indeed. These are no easy answer or solution to this problem. However, some is employed as follows:

First and for most, Nigeria Government should as a matter of national emergency create citizenship education and centre for the study of ethics in each state, defined in terms of standards of right and wrong, the moral principle that compel one to reinforcing from indecent acts such as deceit, stealing, bribery, murder, slander, fraud, the moral code of compassion, honesty and loyalty.

Mass media, churches, schools and other agents of social mobilization should also join in the efforts to re-educate Nigeria children and the public civic studies and extra-murals laws, disdain for corruption, respect for authority figures, and patriotism, should be given high status.

- Social studies educators are therefore urged to redirect some of their teaching to multi-ethnic studies.

In teaching multi-ethnic issues, the four major approaches which have potential for multi-ethnic instructions should be implored and they are assimilation, cultural pluralism, multi-ethnilism and critical pedagogy.

Nigeria leaders and their lies must immediately get rid of inferiority and commitment to the Nigeria affairs.

Finally, it is hoped that if multi-ethnic education is properly addressed in our institutions right from the primary schools, much of the multi-ethnic vices, which are debarring the process of nation building will be drastically reduced if not totally eradicated.

Conclusions

The point in this paper is that the Nigerian society is divided by the factors of ethnic and religions and this works against national peace and smooth running of education institutions in the country especially students' admissions. It is obvious that most Nigerians ill a political era are ready to sacrifice merit and performance on the alter of such sentimental issue as ethnic and religious afflictions, all these limit, the extent to which these institutions could effectively develop from recent experiences as well as studies carried out, ethnic politics have created conflicts in Nigeria that even where it has been brought under control psychological trauma (i.e. fear and suspicion) still exist especially among children and women. This cannot take us to any developmental step.

References

Adeyemi, O.L. (2011) *Ethno-religious conflict and the avails of integration in Nigeria's Fourth Republic* P.Z, Dawodu.com (an internet blog)

Agada, B.A. (2010). *Teaching Economics in Post - Primary school a guide for Teachers.* Nigeria: Amilvo publishers.

Albert 1.0. (ed 2001). *Building Peace, Advancing Democracy: third party intervention in Nigeria's conflicts*. Ibadan: PEETRAF/John Archer Books.

Dudlei B J (1973), *Instability and Political order; Politics and Crisis in Nigeria.* Ibadan: University Press Ltd.

Musa, D.D. (2012). *Language Education for National transformation.* A paper Presented at the 2nd Annual national conference organized by the Association of women in colleges of Education, F.C.E (T) Gusau Chapter.

Nnoli, O. (1978) *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*, Enugu Forth Dimension Publisher.

Nnoli, O. (1995) *Ethnicity and Development in Nigeria*, Alder short, England: Avesbury for UNRISD.

Obasanjo, O. (2004) *Text of Broadcast to the Nation on the declaration of a State of Emergency in Plateau state* on TUESDAY May 18, 2004 in Daily trust Newspaper, Abuja, and Wednesday, May 9, 2004,

Okafor, LA. (2010) *Women Empowerment for Wealth creation through Education*. zamwice vol. (1)m Gusau: CI- faith prints.

Osaghae, E.E (1995) *Structural Adjustment and Ethnicity in Nigeria*. Nordic Africa Institute.

Otite, O. (1990), *Ethnics pluralism and Ethnicity in Nigeria.* Ibadan Shaneson C. I. Ltd.

Oxford Advanced learner's Dictionary 6th Edition.

Yusuf, U. (2009): *Ethno-religions crisis: the North and the rest of Nigeria*. Vanguard, August 8, 2008.