

ETHNICITY-MILITARISM IN NIGERIA DEMOCRATIZATION: A TYPOLOGY AND AN ASSESSMENT

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Abstract: Democratic governance and politics in Nigeria appear to be problematic due to ethnic consciousness and militarism in democratic practice. Ethnicity is the soldiering slogan or concept employed by the elites in Nigeria to mobilize and unify a category of people who have a common culture, myth of common origin and inhabit a particular territory who speak the same language. The objective indicator of oneness especially the myth of common origin and common language were manipulated by the elites particularly the petit bourgeoisie to ensure a monolithic support in politics. Political party formation to say the least is based on ethnicity. The paper adopted content analysis technique. It is the opinion of the paper that the economy of Nigeria should be organized to make it more productive and also to devise a vision of society within which each person can reasonably perceive that equity and social justice are firmly on the national agenda. Furthermore development of national political education and making it part of school curriculum, is also a panacea to end ethnic politics and ethnic consciousness in Nigeria.

Keywords: Democratization, Ethnicity, Military, Politics, Party

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria gained her flag independence by October 1, 1960, and by 1963, she became a Republic. The first indigenous elections in 1964/65 were marred by bloody incidences and these torpedoed the civil rule by giving military the opportunity to execute a coup by January 15, 1966 (Anyanwu, 2003). This ended the Nigerian 1st Republic. The January 15, 1966 coup brought about

counter coups, which eventually culminated in the 1967-1970 Nigerian civil war fought between Nigeria and Biafra. Biafra consisted primarily people of Igbo extractions. They fought to resist untoward reactions of their brothers of Northern extractions as depicted by the brutal murder of Igbos in the North.

The military continued in power up till May, 1999 because Nigeria was unable to nurture an enduring democracy. More so the political parties, associations and of course the entire polity are not strong. Political parties are also formed on ethnic basis; irregular political practices have eaten deeper and deeper into the body polity of Nigeria. Procedures for transfer of power are not also strong; the procedures are not orderly as to be compared with what obtains in western capitalist nations and even most new states like Philippines, India etc. Furthermore, the messiah ship euphoria and sycophancy that follow any new regime in power leaves nothing to be desired. The meddlesome manner about Nigerian democracy is overtly awful and unhealthy to sustain development. If the practice of democracy in Nigeria fails to agree with the principles of ideal democracy conceived and nurtured by Aristotle, then Aristotle must have labored in vain. The Greek Philosopher, Aristotle identified and conceived three principal forms of government which are desirable and attainable. The first one is "kingship" which he defines as government by a man with preeminent virtue; a god among men. The second one is "aristocracy" which he calls government formed by the best men in society. This is a system of government in which citizens at large govern for the common good. It involves the attempt to unite the freedom of the poor with the wealth of the rich. When the poor are in the

minority and seize power it becomes a democracy (Appadorai, 1981).

Aristotle believes that these three forms of government can be perverted. When kingship is perverted, it becomes self serving and tyranny is the end product. When aristocracy becomes self-serving it is transformed into mob rule. Aristotle was realistic enough to believe that desirable as they may be, kingship and aristocracy are unviable (Uzochukwu, 1997; Ugwu and Chukwuemeka, 1997)s.

DEMOCRACY – ETYMOLOGICAL AND THEORETICAL DISCOURSE

The Dictionary of politics defines ‘democracy’ as a derivation from the Greek words ‘people and power’ originally referring to the right of the citizens of the Greek City –states to participate directly in the act of governance. There is alliteration in form of a definition of democracy “the government of the people, for the people and by the people”. However, the term ‘democracy’ has been perceived and defined in various other ways by different political scientists. Some of such definitions could be found in Umez (2002) who used the word ‘democracy’ to mean, a statement about ‘sovereignty’ and nothing else. He contends that ‘sovereignty’ in the adult population is established and it is nurtured when a representative government permits and maintains certain basic principles. He identifies these principles as (a) universal political participation (b) political equality (c) majority rule (with substantive recognition of minority right(s), (d) rule of law (e) government responsiveness to public opinion and (f) the basic freedom of speech, press, assembly, religion and organization (Uchechukwu, 2005).

Essentially, this definition, full blown, has not ignored the important features of an ideal democracy. Harris (1979), Okibe (2000) and Ugo (2005) define democracy as the control by the vast majority of the inhabitants of a country or popular control’ The central theme in this definition is that ‘democracy’ is rule of the people. In which every way we look at these definitions, one thing is clear, that democracy is the rule by the majority through representation. It involves popular participation and popular opinion. Since democracy in Nigeria falls short of the underling standard, democracy has not started well in Nigeria. ‘Nigerian democracy’ is synonymous with ‘Marxian democracy’. Disciples of Karl Marx see democracy as the governance by the minority, the privileged minority who ascend the reigns of governance and use power for the improvement of the living conditions of their supporters and sycophants. They are therefore always striving to create avenues for the acquisition and consolidation of more power at the expense of the majority. Democracy to them does not serve the interest of the

masses. The oppressors merely seize state power to loot government treasury (Ndibe, 2009). To an extent democracy in praetorian polity like Nigeria is not far from this assumption.

Democracy in Nigeria no doubt is also at variant with Aristotle’s vision. Between 6th and 4th century B.C. Aristotle inculcated in the people of Athens, the need for democracy as the best form of government which will suit the needs of their people. According to him kingship and aristocracy do not encourage mass participation in governance (Fords, 2000). The Masses ought to participate in governance. Ruler ship should be open to all and sundry, even though everyman would not rule at the same time, hence representative democracy. Representative democracy or government contends Oji (1998), is accepted as a way of ensuring the actual participation of the generality of the people in politics, by instituting a government in proxy. The people were then governed under a framework which ensured the principle of ‘one man one vote’ in elections and which guaranteed that the custodians of the people’s mandate ruled in accordance with the general will (Adesina, 2006).

We reiterate the fact that what is practiced in Nigeria today is not ideal democracy. It is suicidal to call it one. Superfluous as the allegations may be, the truism was that rigging, thugery and flagrant falsification of figures were rampantly witnessed in the various elections conducted in Nigeria from 1963 till date. The only point of contention was which party was not engaged in rigging? The salient point of concern and consequent complaints was the issue of degree of rigging. Suffice to say that some parties were only interested in rigging a particular election.

The type of democracy practiced in Nigeria falls short of the following principles as enunciated by Jones (2006)

(a) Equality – equalitarian status for all persons in the polity (b) Alternative choices – the masses should be able to decipher the type of political ideology, party or interest which suits their desires. (c) Regular consultations – people should be consulted over debatable issues, to air their views and discuss with the elected representatives when necessary. Government should avoid taking decisions arbitrarily. (d) Regular elections – ideal democracy should be devoid of absolutism, despotism and ‘sit-tight’ leadership/tenure elongation. Regular election should be held to elect new candidates from the masses. Even if the incumbents should continue on the demand of the majority, elections should be conducted to test their candidacy. (e) Majority rule – ideal democracy should adopt populist programmes which should be in the interest of the masses. (f)

Enlightened electorates – citizenry ought to be educated and awareness created in the workings of government. Political socialization should also be inculcated in the electorates to avoid anti-democratic electoral practices

In the present political dispensation in Nigeria, one wonders whether what is practiced in the name of democracy is agreeable to these principles. If the answer is in the affirmative, good but if ‘No’ is the answer one could simply brand the present democracy in Nigeria ‘civilian rule’. However, there is hope that from civilian rule Nigeria may advance to democratic rule. It is a process. From colonialism to military rule, from military rule to civilian rule, from civilian rule to democratic rule. The stage of freedom from self serving, ethnicity, looting of public treasury and oppression.

A passable understanding of the term democracy contend Oji (1998), Howardl (1995), Jones (2006) stands out as a positive movement which elicits a feeling of acceptance from the generality of the people. It is the catalyst to political, economic, technological and social development and change which emphasizes majoritarian rule. There is no gainsaying that democracy is government by representation of a majority of the people for their mutual benefit.

THE MILITARY IN NIGERIAN DEMOCRATIZATION

One could not discuss Nigerian democratization without devoting a large portion to the military. Evidently, the military meddled with the Nigerian polity over a long time with their usual prolonged pseudo democratic transition programmes. Political instability has taken root in Nigeria’s political equation during the successive military regimes (Chukwuemeka, 2008).

The transition to democratic rule oftentimes embarked by the successive despotic military oligarchy was oftentimes shifted or it ended up not coming to realization at all. A case in point was that of General Babangida’s regime. The regime embarked on a prolonged transition to civil rule programme which a tacit approval was given for it to start in 1986 to end in 1990, but to the greatest chagrin of the populace the date was shifted to 1993. Finally the programme overtly beclouded by unpredicted inertia was aborted in 1993 when the presidential election was annulled at the point of announcing the result of the elections. General Abacha started another one, which every arrangement had been completed for him to succeed himself, however his mysterious demise closed the case.

Dike (2005), Ezeani, (1998) Elaigwu and Zingale (1972) contend that the military cannot nurture a stable democracy. On the point of fair play predicated

on the noble premise of social justice and egalitarianism, the military lacked all the paraphernalia needed in running a stable nation. The military with its overt totalitarian and oligarchic orientation, need not participate to run a democratic government. Its involvement in democracy is an aberration and a disaster. An ideal democracy should be completely devoid of dictatorial, totalitarian and oligarchic tradition. Although what Nigeria and most praetorian polities have today is not far from being described as a blend of dictatorianism and totalitarianism.

Madiebo (1980) rather put it bitterly that: *A military government is a major set back for any nation and should be avoided at all costs. This is because military men are unqualified for the task of government and either lean heavily on advice may not always be in the best interest of either people or, worse still, attempt to rule without it.*

The military is the coercive arm of the state. The military is synonymous to security management. The traditional duty is to protect the state from external aggression. Its role is more pronounced in times of wars and upheavals. Therefore, concerted effort should be made by the governing elites to keep the army away from further meddlesome of the state power. Today the army is not totally out of politics in Nigeria and other African nations.

A situation where a retired army general seizes political power through a perceived electoral process is not healthy. That an army general has retired does not remove the military orientation in him. Retired General Obasanjo governed Nigeria between 1999 and 2007. The experience could be likened to quasi military rule. Today there are too many retired army officers in politics in Africa especially Nigeria.

Dinkins (2000) sees Nigerian military as over politicized and ambitious. Their long stay in Nigerian politics and their current interest in democratic process have overtly abused democratic practice in Nigeria. The economic crises, financial quagmire in Nigeria and other African nations today is one of the ugly manifestations of military rule. Okibe (2000) arguing in the same direction contends that the General Gowon dictatorial regime pitifully mismanaged the buoyant economy of Nigeria which accrued from oil boom and most grievously, created economic disability which the successive administrations have not been able to correct.

“Diarchy!” Diarchy is an aberration. Most elites oftentimes prefer diarchy as a solution to end military incursion in politics in Africa. Diarchy is government shared by two joint authorities or rulers. It is not practiced as alternative to democracy and cannot suffice ideal democracy.

FAILURE OF POLITICAL MOBILIZATION ORGANS IN INCULCATING IDEAL DEMOCRATIC HABITS IN THE PEOPLE

Three political mobilization organs are selected for discussion in this section of the paper. They are the National Orientation Agency (formerly MAMSER) established by the despotic Babangida military junta, the press and the Ministry of Women Affairs (former Commission for Women). Yet another outfit of the Babangida's totalitarian and oligarchic regime.

The National Orientation Agency's mandate is to promote the cultivation of positive mental attitudes towards the National quest for economic recovery and development and inculcate in the people a new social and political order devoid of ethnicity (Ugwueze, 2005). The Agency's role in political mobilization contends Oji (1997) is a process by which programmes are designed and undertaken to create awareness in the people for understanding and support of governmental policies and actions, to inculcate in the masses positive values, habits, orientation without coercion, to create awareness of the resources at their disposal as well as their ability to transform their socio-economic, political and cultural lives.

National Orientation Agency organized workshops, seminars and rallies from time to time, all aimed at mobilizing the citizenry on positive political habits. The big question is this – "is the organization actually doing its work? If yes, how successful were the campaigns and how have they affected the political habits of the masses? Why is it that ethnic consciousness is still very high in Nigeria politics?"

The inevitable collapse of the second republic brought about by gross mismanagement and lawlessness appears to have no historical significance in view of what is happening now. The senate, the house of representative keep changing headship. Most state houses of assembly have changed headship for more than four times within two years (Uzoamaka, 2007). In the house of representative the last change was predicated by corrupt enrichment by a woman lawmaker, Mrs Patricia Ete. A cursory look at the National Orientation Agency indicates that either that it has not done its duties well or that it has lost its focus. Little wonder, writers have criticized the organization on grounds of ideological crisis. Its birth was as a result of the political Bureau's recommendation that it be the political orientation arm of the socialist ideology it opposed (Ogbenna, 1998). Babangida rejected socialism but went ahead to create NOA. Okolo (1998), Chukwuemeka, Aba and Eze (1998) and Ezeani (1986) contend that the mobilization campaigns began without a clearly defined and thoroughly articulated set of objectives but only a loud media event. The programme could

have been successful in a socialist economy than under crude capitalist society like Nigeria (Edeani, 1986). The objectives of the Agency are too burdensome and far – flung. Again it has failed to re-orient the nation's leadership towards change in attitude and practice for example, the "grab-it-all syndrome", "settlement culture", thuggery, election maneuvering, bribery and corruption and all other forms of leadership vices and anti- democratic practices still exist among the ruling class. Lately the anti-graft agencies were established by Olusegun Obasanjo (Independent Corrupt Practices Commission and Economic and Financial Crime Commission), yet corruption has even increased among political officer holders.

The press which supposed to be a powerful vehicle for political mobilization has turned to be mouth piece of the despotic leaders. The press is rather used for political sycophancy. As an agent of the political mobilization, the press is expected to explain national issues to the citizenry, present the feelings of the citizenry to such issues, and provide unbiased assessment of governmental sections and act as society's watch dog on national policies (Ogbenna, 1998). It is the duty of the press to inform the citizenry or sound an alarm when stated objectives or ideal political norms are deviated from.

The Commission for Women which was in association with the Better Life for Rural Women also lost its objectivity. The Organization was primarily charged with the responsibility of mobilizing the Nigerian women politically and the development of their individual and as well as collective capabilities. Instead of the programme filtering into the grassroots to create awareness among the rural illiterate women, it was rather hijacked by wives of the governing elites who scarcely interacted with the rural poor and illiterate women. This ugly trend has left the rural populace especially women apolitical.

This discourse could not be complete without making reference to the role of the Electoral Commission. It was first called Federal Electoral Commission, later it was changed to National Electoral Commission by Babangida. General Abacha rechristened it Independent Electoral Commission. The truth is that there is nothing "independent" "about the Commission.

The Electoral Commission which is in charge of conducting credible elections always play the chicken hearted role by playing into the hands of politicians who wield so much influence at the grassroots. To secure an Electoral Commission job, one needed nothing apart from being conversant with the area where one intended to conduct the elections. The implications of this worse provisions in appointment

or recruiting electoral officers, was that mainly school teachers were recruited and put in the ultimate position of king makers especially so when they had the powers of producing election results. By nature teachers are the most familiar workers to the villagers. One could say that after all the electoral officers are no longer allowed to work in their areas. That is not true. The truth is that the Electoral Commission, electoral officers and the so called new breed politicians are corrupt to their ears (Chukwu, 2007).

THE INFLUENCE OF ETHNICITY ON NIGERIAN DEMOCRATIZATION

Ake (1991), Bola (1998) and Dike (2005) argue that nothing is inherently conflictual about ethnic differences. They lead to strife only when they are politicized, and it is elites who politicize ethnicity in their quest for power and political support. The foregoing argument is not out of place. It is the political elites that manipulate ethnicity for their selfish desires. In the words of Momo (1997) "ethnicity serves the interest of the ruling class that replaced the departed colonialists, even though it is a colonial creation".

The link between ethnicity and politics appears both obvious and automatic in relatively new states with the effect of ethnicity so prevalent and the consequences of their inter-ethnic conflicts so evident and transparent, it is little wonder that it has come to be seen Nigeria as a serious obstacle to liberal and ideal democracy.

Ethnicity is undoubtedly a very powerful weapon for the production of political leaders in Nigeria argues Nweke (1996). As tension and ethnic consciousness become very high, people with political motives gradually emerge and insist on fanning members of ethnic identification, these politicians sooner or later gang along ethnic lines to gain cheap popularity. Before the Nigerian civil war, most politicians and political parties were formed on ethnic basis, e.g, the defunct National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon (NCNC) with its taproot in the then Eastern Region led by Chief Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Action Group with its stronghold in the then Western Region led by late Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Nigerian Peoples Congress (NPC) with its stronghold in the then Northern Region led by late Alhaji Ahmadu Bello. These leaders used intensive ethnic propaganda coupled with intimidation to win fierce loyalty and support from followers. They were even regarded as "small gods" by many ethnic subjects. Different myths surrounded and protected these leaders..

Oji (2000) also hypothesized that the higher the status position of a person, the greater the following: the tendency for that person to internalize

responsibility for an approved state of affairs, the tendency to attribute good intentions with respect to his positive actions relevant to the status dimension as justified. Ethnic attribution in Nigeria has direct relationship with status of the person concerned. To an average Yoruba man, whatever the late Awolowo did or said was good, constructive and well intentioned, "he was the father of the nation". The same is true of other ethnic groups and their leaders. Each leader is seen by his people as the founder of peace and "one Nigeria".

Ethnic attribution is often used by most Nigerian politicians for rationalizing failure and frustrating fate and for invasion of political opponents. As most politicians become increasingly successful, ethnic attribution decreases as source of anchor or explanation of fate. On the other hand, as these politicians are displaced from the centre or in high government positions, the higher the attribution of responsibility to ethnicity. These politicians often rally their subjects and explain failure in terms of ethnic victimization. These people are often used as instruments for retaliation, hostility, chaos, upheaval and protests. This attribution pattern is dangerous for the country Nigeria as a nation. Ministers, state commissioners, ambassadors, directors of public companies, heads of parastatals, governors, and political contractors rationalize their failures in this way.

In most cases religion is attached to ethnicity as a political tool. During the presidential election in April, 2011, the muslim North rallied round Retired General Muhammed Buhari as a consensus candidate while the incumbent President, Goodluck Jonathan garnered support from the Christian faithful who constitute the major population Ibo and Yoruba ethnic groups. Before the result of the said election was announced which was to be in favour of Goodluck Jonathan, the Northern youths in Kano, Kaduna, Maiduguri and Bauchi started rioting and killing innocent Christians from the western part of the Country.

Ethnicity has also played very vital role in the Nigerian first and second republics. It also made serious impact in the aborted third republic and presently, it is rearing its ugly head through elite manipulation (Ugwu and Chukwuemeka, 2000). Also during the second republics, the political parties were founded on ethnic interests and identification. The structure, leadership and membership of the parties equally manifested ethnic affiliation. In the present dispensation the three major reigning political parties have ethnic linings. The parties are Alliance for Democracy (AD), All Nigeria Peoples' Party (ANPP), the ruling party Peoples' Democratic Party (PDP). The AD which metamorphosed into Action

Congress of Nigeria (ACN), is predominantly the party of the western Nigeria. The ANPP for the Northern Nigeria while the PDP as the ruling party is dominated by the North and West.

The annulled June 12 1993 elections in Nigeria by Babangida were based on ethnicity. However when the election was annulled, ethnicity set in as southerners protested over the annulment which they saw as designed to scheme a southerner (M.K.O. Abiola) out from becoming the president of Nigeria.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The negative impact of ethnicity attribution to the status of internal and external security should not be taken as a simple problem. In fact it is the foundations of Nigeria's security question, thus having its negative and multiplier effects on other aspects of our developmental and security fronts such as political, social, economic educational, physical, geographical, historical, technological and defense sectors. The Federal Government has made several attempts to increase inter-ethnic interaction aimed at reducing ethnic prejudice, they include: (a) The introduction of National Youth Service Programme (NYSC) in which young graduates from higher institutions work outside their states of origin for one year. (b) Positing and transfer of federal workers indiscriminately to all the states of the federation. (c) Introduction of joint council of traditional and religious leaders of Nigeria. This provides a good forum for the Northern emirs, Ibo chiefs and 'igwes', Yoruba 'obas' and chiefs and other ethnic leaders to exchange visits, installation ceremonies and discuss matters of national interest. (d) The constitution of Nigeria made it difficult for an ethnic group to form a political party. It emphasized ethnic spread as a requirement for recognition of political party. But all these are paper work. Today political party formation is still based on ethnic factor.

It is the candid view of the paper that the pursuit of a genuine democratization requires:

(a) Organizing the economy to make it more productive and also to devise a vision of society within which each person can reasonably perceive that equity and social justice are firmly on the national agenda. (b) For eradication of ethnic politics in Nigeria, efforts should be made towards equitable distribution of social, political and economic gains of the polity. The political parties should not have ethnic oriented background. (c) Introduction of Muslim and Christian religions as compulsory subjects in all Nigerian primary and post primary schools. (d) Development of National political education and making it part of school curriculum. A Commission should be set up at federal and state levels to run this programme. Experts in various fields with national consciousness should be appointed into the

commission. (e) A law should be promulgated to restrict retired military officers from becoming members of political parties. They should also not stand for election into political offices.

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