Ethnic Prejudice and the Challenges of Nation Building in Contemporary Nigeria

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Abstract: - **Multi ethnic societies such as Nigeria have spent a better part of their existence trying to integrate various groups in a bid to foster the actualization of a supra-national identity. The inability of the state to manage diversity in amongst other factors, upholds the prevailing prejudice and antagonism that characterizes ethnic-groups interaction. Too often ethnic-based agitations have averted meaningful efforts at national integration thereby fostering favoritism, exclusion and discrimination to mention but a few. Hence, prevailing policies and institutions aimed fostering national integration should be reviewed in lieu of their inability to attain predetermined results.**

Keywords: **Ethnicity, Ethnic Prejudice, National Integration, Social Dominance and Resources.**

I. INTRODUCTION

Been the largest state in Africa South of the Sahara, contemporary Nigeria is made up of hundreds of ethnicities (henceforth groups). The relationship that characterizes underlying groups has largely remained uneasy. The unhealthy manner in which resources are competed for, political relevance and prominence has pitched one group against another, resulting in a highly fragmented and polarized society. As in numerous social organizations the tendency for one group or individual to dominate or at least attempt to dominate the other remains overbearingly viable. The perceived cum actual dominance of one group over the other has resulted in far reaching rivalry that has been passed down from generations through socialization and orientation. At extreme instances ethnic prejudice in Nigeria was a major determinant of the 1963 civil war, and in recent times it constitutes a central factor in the clamor for actualization of the People's Republic of Biafra.

Iwe ethnic prejudice denotes pejorative stereotype, often very resilient to change which is cherished by one ethnic group against the other[1]. It is further argued that ethnic prejudice has immense negative implications on peaceful co-existence in Nigeria, as it has also led to the escalation of inter-ethnic group conflicts in Nigeria. It is also thought to promote antagonism and tribalism, resulting in prevalence of organized or group selfishness[2].

Against this backdrop, it is of the opinion of this study that the negative implications of ethnic prejudice are multifaceted and complex to be exhaustively discussed in the context of this study. Hence, the study intends to theoretically ascertain the plausible existence of a negative interplay between ethnic prejudice and nation building in contemporary Nigeria.

II. OPERATIONALIZATION OF CONCEPTS

Owing to the fluidity of concepts in social science, this section is committed to operationalizing the parameters of ethnicity and nation building as employed in this literary endeavor. This is thought to be pertinent as it will aid in better understanding of the subject matter under interrogation.

Ethnicity as a concept has defied scholarly attempt at arriving at a universal consensus as to what it entails as well as its parameters, nonetheless it constitutes a defining attribute of the average postcolonial state in Africa. Accordingly, ethnicity has been conceived as an offshoot of ethnic groups, and possesses a habit of recurring in occasions involving copious ethnic groups or identity with articulate foundations of the us and them saga[3]. Relatedly, ethnic groups are argued to denote the idea informal groups, whose members are divergent from members of other groups, within a joint territorial boundary on the foundation of shared kinship, religious or linguistic ties[4]. In Nigeria the relative passiveness of class struggle re-affirms the role of ethnicity as an informer of individual cum group identity. Hence, it plays a centrifugal role in conditioning the norms, values and beliefs of a larger group.

The unremitting actuality of Nigeria as a single political community consisting of numerous groups is viable on the basis of integrating and unifying the various ethnicities and nationalities under the umbrella of nationalism[5]. The aforementioned process has been understood to mean nation building in a related instance. Accordingly, nation building as a process has also been defined as the progressive reduction of cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities in the process of creating a homogenous political community[6]. In a related instance ethnicity denotes the propensity at which smaller units (individual political actors) develop in the course of political interaction a pool of commonly accepted norms regarding political behaviour patterns legitimised by these norms[7].

Based on the foregoing, it will suffice to argue that ethnicity entails the idea of an individual identifying with other individuals based on shared or common dialect, close geographical proximity, kinship and religious ties amongst other social affiliations. The very idea of ethnicity emphasizes

existential cum constructed differences across different groups, which in turn defines their nature of cohesion. Resultantly, the unhealthy manner in which groups compete for resources and exert socio-economic and political dominance over one another likely creates volatile societies fragmented along ethnic lines. In Nigeria for instance the political dominance of the Hausa with recourse to occupying key public offices has resulted in conflicting relationship between the group and others, more so the Igbo's. Consequently, ethnic prejudice contravenes the very idea of nation building, which entails a process of unifying indigenous groups in a society, with the aim of creating or fostering the creation of a supra-identity.

III. ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

The study adopts the social dominance theory (SDT) as the primary framework upon which analysis will be made and the realistic conflict theory (RCT) as a completing theory. Through the lens of the aforementioned theory the study aims to literary establish the existence of a negative correlation between ethnic prejudice and nation building in contemporary Nigeria. The social dominance paradigm in abstract terms denotes the existence of hierarchy amongst group within any given society as it further elaborates the resultant effect of underlying hierarchical group interaction in such societies. In assent it has been argued that,

Irrespective of a society's form of government, the substances of its essential belief system, or the density of its social and economic framework, societies have a habit of organizing in groups based social hierarchies in which at least one group enjoys superior social eminence and power in relation to others. Hence, members of dominant social groups tend to enjoy a disparate stake of positive social value, or desirable material and emblematic resources such as political power, wealth, and protection and are more likely to receive preferential treatment under similar circumstances[8]. Similarly, SDT has also represents a literary attempt aimed at combining social behavioral theories of intergroup interactions with wider social process of ideology and the legitimization of social inequalities[9].

More explicitly, SDT upholds that societies with stable economic surplus contain three qualitatively distinct systems of group-based hierarchy: first is an age system, in which adults have disproportionate social power over children; the second is a gender system, in which men have disproportionate social, political, and military power compared to women; while the third denotes an arbitrary set system, in which groups constructed on ''arbitrary'' bases, that is, on bases not linked to the human life-cycle, have differential access to things of positive and negative social value. Arbitrary-set groups may be defined by social distinctions meaningfully related to power, such as (in various contexts) nationality, ''race'', ethnicity, class, estate, descent, religion, or clan[10]. This study is particularly interested in the notion of arbitrary set group, which according to the above

conception entails social dominance in relation to power across class, race, ethnicity or clan.

Furthermore, within the confines of SDT group-based social hierarchy is produced by the net implications of discrimination across various levels: institutions, individuals, and concerted intergroup processes. Discrimination across these levels is harmonized to favour principal groups over secondary groups by rationalizing and legitimising myths, or commonly shared and adhered social ideologies in a society[11].

While for resource conflict theory, the underlying principle of the theory upholds that direct competition for limited resources fosters hostility and antagonism between groups. Consequentially, it has been argued that; because all the groups will not fair equally in the competition. The groups that fare poorly become frustrated and resentful while those that fare better feel threatened and protective. This situation degenerates to conflict[12]. In lieu of the ongoing discussion, it will suffice to claim that the SDT and RCT are both of the view that socialization and inability to accept other groups as equal and also the inability to compete for resources without prejudice and antagonism has sustained the incidence of ethnic antagonism in Nigeria. Furthermore, this study also argue that the inability of underlying ethnic groups to coexist peacefully has also furthered societal division and fragmentation along ethnic lines, thus affecting the probability of integrating federating units that make up contemporary Nigeria.

In an empirical study conducted by[13], they claim that Nigerian youths acquire their prejudices, through their parents/guardians, members of their ethnic groups, their peers and through mere assumption amongst other socializing agents. Looking at the effects of the prejudices of the sample on their social relationship with Nigerians from other ethnic groups, the results they presented show that ethnic prejudice makes Nigerian youths to fear and doubt people from other ethnic groups; hence they tend to be overly protective and cautious when they socialize with persons from other group. In other times they go further by trying every possible means to avoid them.

IV. ETHNIC PREJUDICE AT PLAY

To empirically substantiate the presuppositions of the ongoing discussions, which holds evident widespread intergroup prejudice adversely affects the probability of nation building, data will be obtained and analyzed from Afrobarometer using the online data analysis tool. Afrobarometer is a non-partisan research and public survey organization that carries out public survey opinionated based research on numerous social issues.

To begin with the study will explore the role of formal state institution is fostering prejudice by way of treating one group better compared to others. Buttressing the underlying claims, [14] are of the view that institutions can be classified as either hierarchy augmenting or hierarchy diminishing. Hierarchy-enhancing (HE) institutions stimulate and sustain inequality by allotting disproportionately more positive social value or

less negative social value to primary groups than to subordinate groups. Relatedly, it has also been argued that; discrimination perpetrated by hierarchy-enhancing institutions is a particularly potent cause of group hierarchy for numerous reasons. First, institutions can muster and allocate larger amounts of resources compared to individuals. Secondly, far reaching institutions, such as national governments and multinational corporations, have a larger reach in systematic influence across locales. Third, because institutions perpetuate themselves, the discrimination they engage in operates over generations, and when individuals or groups try to fight those practices, institutions typically defend their discriminatory practices as part of defending the institution itself[15].

With emphasis on the Nigerian government, perceived cum actual institutionalized favoritism and marginalization has led

to the enactment of the Federal Character Principle as an act of legislation and further constitution a commission to ensure that resources are allotted equitably, political office proportionally distributed equitably amongst various federating unit. By way of addressing ethnic prejudice in Nigeria,[16] is of the opinion that nation building elites constitutionally considered the principle of federal character aimed at amongst other purposes, ensue for equitable redistribution of wealth and facilitate for access to resources across the underlying ethnic tribes that make up Nigeria. Surprisingly, the policy has largely remained ineffective as political appointments, access or in-access to resources and other benefits as provided by the federal government continues to be determined and conditioned by ones ethnic origin or affiliation.

Afrobarometer

Ethnic group treated unfairly

Identifies with tribe or ethnic group
How often are [R's Ethnic Group] treated unfairly by the government?

Category	%/Total	Frequence
Never	28.0%	671
Sometimes	35.1%	841
Often	22.6%	542
Always	13.0%	311
Don't know	1.2%	29
(N)	(100%)	(2,394)

Data source: Afrobarometer

Table 1[17], set out to interrogate perceived extent to which the Nigerian populace feels the government treats ethnicities (tribes) unequally. A total of 2,394 participants were asked how often they are treated unfairly by the government because of their ethnic origin. Of the total number of respondents 28.0% totaling 671 respondents are of the view that person are not treated unfairly by the government base on their ethnic origin. While another 35.1% amounting to 841 are or the view that persons are sometimes treated unfairly based on their ethnic origin. Furthermore, 22.6% of respondents amounting to 542 persons believe that persons are often treated differently based on their ethnic origin; lastly 13.0 totaling 311 persons believe that persons are always treated unfairly because of their ethnic origin. Based on the aforementioned analysis it will suffice to claim that ethnicity in Africa is not

only existential but it constitutes a part and parcel of the society.

V. CONCLUSION

By and large, it will suffice to claim that the inability of the Nigerian government and by extension citizens, to manage diversity has resulted in unhealthy competition for access to resource and political power along ethnic lines. While the arbitrary colonial borders may have contributed to the prevailing ethnic prejudice, more than five decades after independence, national integration continues to top the agenda of state actors. The inherent prejudice in the opinion of this study is fostered by the social mobility properties obtained in societies with higher levels of ethnic consciousness. Beyond allocation of resources and compensation amongst incentives

given by the Nigerian government along ethnic lines, there is a need to step up and invest in integration. This can be done through the following strategies, mass sensitization at grass root levels, review of school curriculum to re-orientate on the benefits of diversity, encouraging appointment to public office based on merit as opposed to ethnic zoning formula and a review of the current structure of federalism in place.

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