Ethnicity and Nationalism in Nigeria: The Paradox of Dual Identities

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Abstract: The underlying literally endeavor sets out to investigate the resulting identity crisis that derives from the interplay between ethnic and nationalist ideologies. The search for identity has and continues to be of immeasurable significant in man's quest for significance and meaning, more so in Africa where self-consciousness remains in crisis having been assailed from of myriad of directions. The once enduring racial consciousness, shared faith of colonial subjugation and quest for self-actualization that propelled nationalist ideologies in Nigeria, has since waned off and regressed into ethno-consciousness based on shared languages and geographical proximity amongst other primordial factors. Exploring the interplay from the theoretical perspective of relative deprivation, the study concludes comparison and established or perceived feeling of superiority has pitched ethnicity groups against each other. The notion that one group is better than the other base on access or in-access to resources and political has driven the dual identity crisis in contemporary Nigeria. To address the unhealthy competition from power certain state policies need to be reviewed or enhance to reflect the foundations of the federal character principle in particular. Further claiming the near monocropic nature of the Nigerian state as a defining attribute of ethnic antagonism.
Keywords: Ethnicity, Nationalism, Ideology, Identity Crisis and Relative Deprivation.

Introduction

The search for identity has and continues to be of immeasurable significant in man's quest for significance and meaning, more so in Africa where self-consciousness remains in crisis having been assailed from of myriad of directions. If we are to agree that in Africa the single most uniting factor that spurred the rise of nationalist movement remains race consciousness, then we would also assent ethno-awareness as the greatest obstacle to nationhood.

The evident identity paradox manifest's across the continent in the persisting unhealthy competition and rivalry for access to resources and political authority across ethnic lines. Nigerians alike have come to identify and be identified by their ethnic decent as opposed to their national identity, it is not uncommon to hear phrases like 'I'm Hausa, he is Yoruba and so on. Mazrui (1982, p. 24) shares a similar view claiming contemporary African nationalism concieves and prospered on racial solidarity and shared blackness. Further arguing that

viability of modern nations continues to be detered by acute ethnic cleavages, often seperating the Bantu from the Nilotes. Relatedly Suberu (2002) argue the threatened foundations of Nigeria's multiethnic structure seem to be all too ostensible from the ethnic, regional, religious and political turbulence that has assailed the country (and claimed more than ten thousand lives) since returning to civil rule in May 1999. Consequently, Eriksen (1991) is of the view that ethnic ideologies are at loggerhead with prevailing nationalist dogmas, considering the latter upholds cultural correspondence and all-encompassing integration of inhabitants of a nation-state regardless of their ethnic descent. For Ake (1993) in the evident absence of class conciosness, elites who come from numerically large ethnic origins, could not help but exploit their substantial ethnic base politically. Against the seeming plethora of ethnic crisis rocking the continent, this study seeks out to examine the persisting intractability of ethno-conciousness and the national question in Nigeria spurring a series of questions, amongst which includes; the role of ethnicity in dettering the attainment of stable political system. With laid emphasis on the fourth republic, the study will further delve into the challenges of national integration via stable political systems in the wake of widespread ethno-conciousness.

Conceptual Framework

Owing to the fluid and relative nature of concepts in social science, this section is committed to clarifying pertient concepts central to better understanding the ongoing discussion. Amongst others they encompass identity, ethnicity, nationalism and political stability.

Identity

Identity as it obtains in the contemporary world entails who we are and what we represent relation to others. Accordingly Elebeke (2010) concieves identity as a process located in the core of the individual yet also in the core of his communal culture, further claining one's identity as who they are. While for Adeforiti (2018) identity entails a differentiating label that objectively exists, is instinctively felt, and allows its bearers to experience individually and collectively nous of camaraderie.

Conventionally, it remains a near impossible task for individuals to define themselves void of primordial affiliations of any sort, this is particularly thought to be so in communal societies like Nigeria. Againsst this backdrop Mbiti, (1969, p. 108) contends; customarily the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes this existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole. The community must therefore make, create, or produce the individual; for the individual depends on the corporate group. This he opines is central in the understanding of the African view of man.

Based on the foregoing it will suffice to say the idea of identity in itself encumbers communal elements that distinguishes an individual from another based on amongst other factors their ethnic descent. Hence, meaningful discussion of identity in Africa amounts to discussing shared faith, history, present and feature aspirations that gives meaning to and bounds individuals together. The underlying factors are more likely to be shared amongst members of ethnic groups than any other cleavage, making ethnicity a core determinant of individual and group identity.

Ethnicity

In basic terms ethnicity denotes a multitudunal composition of a myraid socio-cultural phenomena. For Eriksen (1991) ethnicity refers to the social reproduction of basic

classificatory dissimilarities between groupings of people and to aspects of gain and loss in social interaction. Ethnicity is fundamentally dual, encompassing aspects of both meaning and politics. For Alemika (2004) ethnicity derives from the existence of diversity of ethnic groups within a territory in which ethnic dissimilarities are employed for political and economic interests in relation to other groups. In extreme cases politicized ethnicity may result in extreme or ethno-nationalist movement, whereby an ethnic group may demand for secession and may even result to use of violence or terror as a means of actualizing their aspirations.

In the views of this study, ethnicity entails differentiation across groups based on shared historical fate, language, values, morals and territory, which distinguishes them from other groups. In multi-ethnic Nigeria, the underlying dissimilarities amongst groups serves most often as a platform for identification, in the sense those ethnic groups have assumed the single most important premise upon which individuals are identified. The outcome of ethnic antagonism has fueled the unending competition for individual identity between national and ethnic identity. In some quarters the primordial ascription to ethnicity as a means of identity has come to be referred to as ethno-nationalism. The interchanging, misconceptions and misappropriations have further deepened the paradox of dual identity.

Nationalism
Historically, an important part played by nationalist ideologies in many contemporary nation-states has been to integrate an ever larger number of people culturally, politically and economically. Observed geopolitically, nationalism is an indefinite form of dogma. It can be aggressive and expansionist - within and outside state boundaries; and it can serve as a truly peace-keeping and culturally integrating force in a nation-state or a region. Accordingly, Erikson (1991, p. 266) is of the view that;

nationalism as a social association epitomizes a qualitative dive from earlier systems of integration. Within a national state, all men and women are citizens, and they partake in a system of relationships where they co-exist to further the persistence survival of a vast number of individuals whom they will never know personally. The leading social distinction appears as that between insiders and outsiders; between citizens and non-citizens. The total system appears abstract and impenetrable to the citizen, who must nevertheless trust that it serves his needs. The seeming contradiction between the individual's immediate concerns and the large-scale machinations of the nation-state is bridged through nationalist ideology proposing to accord each individual citizen particular value. The ideology simultaneously depicts the nation metaphorically as an enormous system of blood relatives or as a religious.

Rather than breeding metaphoric blood relatives as argued above, nationalism in Nigeria has been found wanting of integrating the underlying ethnicities makes it up. It will suffice to argue that, soon after colonialism, the single most uniting factor that rallied Nigerians against a mutual enemy, nationalism soon disintegrated into ethno-nationalism, regionalism amongst other social fragmentations.

Against this backdrop, it is of the views of this study that the inherent paradoxical identity crisis as abounds in nationalism versus ethnicity in Nigeria; has further deepened the state of social stability and political continuity in the country. Secondly, rather than making attempts at consolidating on integrating ethnic groups, too often the society is divided by ethnic antagonism. Hence, to better understand the interplay between ethnicity and nationalism, the study will examine the latter from a theoretical standpoint.

Theoretical Framework

Analyzing ethnicity and nationalism as social ideologies, the study employs the precepts and propositions of relative deprivation theory to account for the underlying identity crisis as obtained in contemporary Nigeria. The depth elucidating appeal of relative deprivation has led to its appropriation to account for a myriad of social phenomena across a vast array of multi-disciplines in the social science and psychology. Thus, the foremost task is the establishment of a consistent and abstract understanding of what relative deprivation denotes. Based on the claims of proponents of deprivation theorist, social movements emerge as a reaction to the feeling of exclusion, marginalization, in-access to services and resources amongst other. Against this backdrop, Pettigrew (1991) argues relative deprivation to connote a subjective state that conditions cognitive emotions and behaviour, which connects individuals with the interpersonal and intergroup. It melds easily with other social psychological processes to provide more integrative theory—a prime disciplinary need. Runciman (1966) conceives certain prerequisites of relative deprivation as follows (where Person A feels deprived of object X): Person A does not have X; Person A wants to have X; Person A knows of other people who have X; Person A believes obtaining X is realistic. Subsequently, Sen and AVCI (2016) conceived a pattern for relative deprivation which presupposes that;

Relative deprivation encompasses of three steps. First, there must be assessments made by an individual. Second, there must be a cerebral appraisal that leads the individual to identify that the individual or his/her in-group is at a disadvantage. Third, the perceived disadvantage must be viewed as unfair. The perceiver thinks the perceiver or his/her in-group deserves better, and this results in angry resentment.

In assent to these assertions and application to the identity crisis between nationalism and ethnicity, this study claims the paradox derives from one ethnic group feeling disadvantaged as compared to another. A classical illustration within the Nigerian political landscape is the political dominance of Northern Nigeria over the Eastern region, the failure of the east to present a president since the advent of the Nigerian republic has arguably fueled the feeling and notion of deprivation, further deepening the fragile union of federations that constitutes Nigeria.

Contextual Dynamics of Identity Crisis in Nigeria

Nigerians in general are acutely aware of and overly obsessed with a person's ethnic identity. Politicization of ethnic consciousness arguably emerged under colonial rule, resulting in an unhealthy ethnicity-based political competition. Ethnic groups engaged in competition for power to advance their group and parochial interests as against the national interest or public good. Perilously, ethnic identity defines and constrains daily living throughout contemporary Nigeria. A stance further resonated by official papers and public or state documents that identifies a individual based on state of origin, local government area and sometimes local dialect. Any forms that a person needs to fill out (e.g., applying for a driver's permit or university admission, opening a bank account, leasing a home, et cetera) requires them to indicate their place of birth, not where they currently live, regardless of how long they have lived there. Consequently, from individual birthplace information, conventions are made about that person's ethnicity, which then directly impacts their quality of life. Partisan treatment in all aspects of daily life including access to jobs, education, housing, and public services is given to individuals whose ethnicity is indigenous to the local area.   The underlying trends does not only re-enforces individual identity paradox, it also deters any attempts at meaningful socio-political instability and nation building at large.

Conclusion

The integral role played by nationalist consciousness in integrating nation states in the contemporary world has slowly waned off. Even the all-encompassing globalization has recorded little success in fostering supra-cosmopolitan identities, the notion of the other remains particularly pertinent in both domestic and international politics and policies. In Nigeria the unhealthy competition for power and access to resources across ethnic lines has created a state without a nation. While a number of multiple causalities can be identified as the bane of the persistence identity crisis, this study argues the existence of natural resources as the bane of ethnic chauvinism in Nigeria. Career politicians have also contributed immensely to the prevailing culture of ethno-politics as abound in Africa's most populous democracy. For this study, conscious attempts at addressing this challenge could include amongst other a remodification of public documents to dis-include options of birth place and language. Another could entail implementation of a non-partisan federal character principle as well as de-politicization of ethnic groups by political elites.

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