Review Paper

Social dominance, ethnic prejudice and the challenges of nation building: the Nigerian Experience

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Abstract

The study set out to investigate how unbalanced hierarchal social dominance across underlying ethnic groups in Nigeria results in prejudice, thus affecting the probability of nation building in contemporary Nigeria. Conceiving ethnic prejudice as a pejorative stereotype, often very resilient to change which is cherished by one ethnic group against the other. Upon reviewing relevant primary and secondary data, the study is of the opinion that the widespread prevalence of prejudice is informed by the unhealthy competition across ethnic groups for limited scarce resources. Thus, concluding the inability of the groups to converge and come up with appropriate revenue sharing formula for resources, political office amongst other national resources has further affected the ability of ethnic groups to work harmoniously in building a nation. To address this trend the study proposes the need for reorientation on a mass level and re-evaluation of national policies and framework such as the federal character principle aimed at integrating underlying groups with a view to building a nation.

Keywords: Social dominance, ethnic prejudice, nation building, ethnic antagonism and ethnic identity.

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.

To 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 also thought to fuel the uneasy relationship that underpins inter-ethnic cohesion. 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.

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 is conceived as a continuous process that douses cross cultural and regional tensions with a view to fostering the sustenance of a consistent political community[6]. In a related instance ethnicity denotes the predisposition at which sub-units consisting indigenous political actors further political within the framework of creating universally adhered political behaviour patterns legitimised by these norms[7].

Resultantly, 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.

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,

Regardless of a institutional designs, the substances of its essential belief system, or the density of its socioeconomic structure, societies possess tendencies of organizing in group groups based social hierarchies, thus increasing the probability of domination and subordination amongst underlying groups. Hence, affiliates of principal social groups tend to enjoy a unequal stake of positive social value, or desirable material and fiscal resources, which includes amongst others access to political authority, 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 signifies an subjective set system, in which groups fashioned on ''arbitrary'' bases, have distinctive 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[8]. 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.

While for resource conflict theory, the underlying principle of the theory postulates that unhealthy contest for scarce resources fosters hostility and resentment between groups. Thus, it is the view of this study the inability to accord a level playing ground breeds not only resentment but also 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 reprobates to unhealthy engagement[2].

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 Chike A. et.al.[2], they claim that Nigerian youths attain their prejudices, through their parents, members of similar groups, peers and through mere assumption amongst other socializing agents. 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.

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 means of meting preferential treatments to particular groups. Buttressing the underlying claims, Pratto F. et. al.[8] are of the view that institutions can be classified as either hierarchy augmenting or hierarchy diminishing. Hierarchy sustaining institutions rouse and endure inequality by apportioning inexplicably supplementary progressive social value or less negative social value to principal groups in comparison to others. Consequently, discrimination effected by hierarchy-sustaining are predominantly potent cause of group hierarchy for several motives. First, institutions can aggregate and allot greater amounts of resources equated to individuals. Secondly, over reaching institutions, such as governments and large corporations, have a superior reach in organized influence across locales. Third, because institutions preserve themselves, the refinement they employ prevails through generations[8].

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, Yakubu, Y.[5] 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.

Ethnic Group Treated Unfairly

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

Table-1 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.

Table-1: Afrobarometer[10].

Category	% Total	Frequency
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

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. Accordingly, it is of the opinion of this study that the inability of the Nigerian state to integrate constituting federating unit to identify under a supra-identity as Nigerian's has furthered deepened the ethnic antagonism as obtained in Nigeria. In furtherance, ethnic groups in relatively classless societies such as Nigeria have assumed the role of an umbrella under which individuals identify with. Been a provider and source of identity, ethnicity occupies a central role in the life of an average Nigerian. The underlying assumptions are buttressed by studies such as that of[11] 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[12], on the other hand opines that ethnic ideologies are at loggerhead with predominant nationalist doctrines, considering the latter upholds cultural correspondence and all-encompassing integration of inhabitants of a nation-state regardless of their ethnic descent. Hence, it will suffice to argue that difference in ideological underpinnings constitutes the basis for ethnic antagonism; the inability to reconcile their difference cum the dominance of one group over the other has deepened the prevalence of ethnic prejudice in contemporary Nigeria.

Conclusion

The central role played by shared national consciousness in fostering nation building and integration is arguably absent in Nigeria. The situation is further complicated by the existential dominance in numerous spheres. The inability of underlying ethnic group to arrive at a consensus on the subject matter of revenue sharing formula, wealth redistribution and equitable allocation of political appointments has made any attempt at nation building less likely. In lieu, it is of the opinion of the study that the government must as a matter of utmost urgency

review integrating policies such as Federal Character Principle, National Youth Service Corp amongst others as they have largely failed to address the challenges that led to their creation. Furthermore, there is need for mass reorientation and sensitization on the pros of stable society fostered by social integration across ethnic groups.

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