

ETHNICITY AND PUBLIC SERVICE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper essentially examines the concept of ethnicity and public service in Nigeria. It posits that because of the monstrous proportion ethnicity assumed in Nigeria, it has remained a central turning point in the nation's history. Its impact has further exacerbated problems of growth and development of Nigerian Public service and organizations.

Introduction

Before the advent of colonialism, that various ethnic groups that make up Nigeria lived and related a district nations in their separate territories. They maintained their identities throughout the years of colonialism to the present. Their varying indigenous political structures and cultural organizations catered for their political **administrative** and social needs. They exercised full control over their lives and all their affairs (Orluwene, 2007: 91). Neither of these ethnic groups numbering more than 450 ethnic nationalities were consulted nor their consent sought before they were brought together to form Nigeria. This singular act and failure of the British colonial administration has remained a major turning point. This paper essentially therefore, examines the concept of ethnicity with particular reference to Nigeria public service. The major thesis is that while ethnicity has remanded a central turning point in Nigeria's history, its impact has further exacerbated problems in Nigerian public service, rather than ameliorating it. Thus, ethnicity would continue to have adverse impact on Nigeria until genuine efforts are initiated and implemented.

To give appropriate focus of this paper, it is necessary to first of all clarify the key concepts used. The concepts are "Ethnicity" and "Public Service". *Thus the Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* defines ethnicity (tribe) "as a social group consisting of people of the same race who have same beliefs, customs, language e.t.c. and usually live in one particular area ruled by their leader' (2072). Nnoli (1978), says that ethnicity "is a social phenomenon associated with the interaction among members of different ethnic groups. It is behavioural in form and conflictual in content"¹. Colonial masters injected this blood in different forms through divided and rule strategies. It exists only within "political society consisting of diverse ethnics groups, it is characterized by "common consciousness of being one in relation to the other relevant ethnic groups. It is characterized by "common consciousness of being one in relation to the other relevant ethnic groups, it has exclusiveness as an attribute.

While Igwe (2005:142-143), sees ethnicity in purely political terms (ethnic nationalism) as the practice of ethnic ideology or simply tribalism, each of which at some point necessities the exploitation of differences in nationality for any purposes. One consequences of ethnocentrism. itself an inward-looking and chauvinistic attitude towards one's nationality or cultural group with a correspondingly suspicious and hostile attitude towards others, especially those held to be in competitive relations with one's own.

Igwe, further opines that, ethnicity in everywhere, between the previously mutually antagonistic but now cooperation nation of Europe that have successfully built strong and patriotic societies; in Asia where various nationalities have to struggle for limited spaces and resources; in the Americans where remorseful ethnic cleansing of the native, slave trade against the African, Americans, and previous histories of continental hostilities and antagonisms between dominant migrant majorities, previously gave negative relation (Igwe, 2005:143).

Ethnicity has being a bane to Nigeria right from the colonial days. The struggle among ethnic groups delayed the country's independence due to fear of domination haboured by the Northern. In fact that was why they opposed Tony Enahoro's motion for self-government.

Right from this period, ethnic struggles and clusters have been very rampant in Nigeria. However, the most prominent negative effect of ethnicity was the 35th January, 1966 coup d'etat, it's return match in July, 1966 and thirty months of Nigeria-Biafra civil war, while the most recent ethnic motivated attempt to dismember the country was the 1990 Orkar military coup. This coupled with minority agitation have made ethnicity to occupy the centre stage in political discussion in Nigeria. Ethnic tension can now be seen as part of the nation's politics.

The other concept that deserves a close at tension is 'Public Service'. The Part V. Section 318 (!) of the 1999 constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria cited in Orluwene (2003:194), defined Public Service "as the service of the Federation/State in (he capacity in respect of the Government of

the Federation, and includes services as ___" It proceeds to list a number of offices: Clerk or other Staff of the National Assembly, Members or Staff of the Court of Judicature of the Federation and States, Members or Staff of arty Commission or Authority established for the Federation or State, Staff of any Company or Enterprise in which the Government or its agencies holds a controlling share or interest. Members of the Armed Forces and the Police, Staff of a Local Government Council, of a Statutory Corporation, Educational Institutions established or Principally financed by Government, etc.

The Fifth schedule, which prescribes a code of conduct for "Public Officers", defines a public officer in section 21 as "a person holding any of the offices specified in part II of this schedule"¹¹. The list in part II excludes from public office chairman and members of adhoc commissions, tribunals, committees; but it goes beyond the definitions of part V Section 318 (1) because it now includes elective as well as appointive political public office holders-the President (and the Vice-President), Governors and their Deputies, Ministers and Commissioners, Members and Staff of the Legislative Houses. Chairman, Directors of all Corporations, Companies in which the State has controlling interest.

The intention here is clear. The specified offices are governed by the Code of Conduct and therefore should extend the net wider than (he regular meaning of public office holder. The definitions in part V defined the public service for the purpose of running the offices of State while the fifth schedule refers to how these specified public officers should conduct themselves in public and in private. The fifth schedule thus provides a moral basis for judging (he performance of the public officers.

Part V Section 318 (1) also defines the civil service as the service of the Federation (State) in a civil capacity as staff of the office of the President, the Vice-president, a Ministry or Department of the Government of the Federation (State) assigned with the responsibility for any business of the Government of the Federation (State). It is narrower than the public service earlier defined.

In the same part V or as defined in the Fifth Schedule, it excludes judicial officers, Board and Officers of the Statutory Corporations or Companies in which the Government has an interest however large, members of Armed Forces and the Police. It follows that civil servants are public servants but not all public servants are civil servants.

In (he popular mind the separation is also often made between the civil service and the public service. Public servants, e.g., in the parastatals, etc. often refer to the civil service in a derogatory tone as the bureaucracy in an effort to distant themselves from the accusations of in efficiency and red tape associated with the civil service. Bureaucracy, however, exists everywhere in the civil and public services as well as in the large organized private sector. Derived from the French word "Bureau", meaning a writing or desk.

The bureaucrat is the clerk or official that sits behind the desk or the writing table. It was indeed coined in the 19th Century by the French encyclopedias as a term of contempt. Today, it retains the pejorative flavour and is flung at the civil service to denote a slow, clumsy, inefficient and cumbersome machine that grinds down every decision, obstructs action and perverts policy. In this study, for convenience, the two terms Public Service and Public Administration are used interchangeably. For both are given the same meaning in administrative literature.

The paper is divided into three parts starting with introduction. The second is impact of ethnicity and strategies adopted by Nigerian State in managing it. The third takes of care of recommendations and conclusion.

2(a) Impact of Ethnicity

Ethnicity or ethnic consciousness is rising and impacting against the expectation of commentators, which assumed that modernity and liberal democracy would dilute ethnic distinctiveness, atavistic rivalries and communal solidarities. Beside, Black Nationalism, clearly highlights one of the sources of ethnic politics the desire to challenge economic and social marginalization, and sometimes-racial oppression (Heywood, 1997:33).

In trying to explain ethnic conflicts Fmerson (1966), states that "it is one of the charges against colonialism particular where it took the form of indirect rule, that it divided and rules through backing tribal separatism and playing tribes off against one 'another at the expense of the national movement". Nnoli (1978). see ethnicity as a rising from the desiring from the desire of individuals or organize themselves in ways to enhance their competitive efficiency in a situation where they perceive each other as competing for resources and position. While Osaghae (1994), slates that they ensue from situations in which ethnic groups decide to employ their ethnic differences in pursuing competing interest. In the light of the foregoing, ethnicity have always being seen as having negative impacts on nations, studies have revealed that there are f> lot of positive attributes and features of ethnicity. Wallenstein as cited in Obasi (2001 :239), has outlined these positive impacts of ethnicity thus:

First, ethnic group tend to assume some functions of the extended family and hence diminish the importance of kinship roles, loyalties to ethnic groups interfere

less with national integration than loyalties to the extended family. This is because it extend" further the boundaries of the extended family system. Although ethnic: tic-¹; fire still particularistic and diffuse, it is however less so and less strong than the caste of kinship groups (extended family system). Secondly, ethnicity aids national integration in the sense that ethnic groups serve as a mechanism of re-socialization. Thirdly, ethnic groups help keep the class structure fluid and so prevent the emergence of castes. This is because by encouraging social mobility, it minimizes any tendency towards caste formation. Finally, ethnic groups serve as an outlet for political tension. It helps, for instance, to divert expectation from the state to other social groups. By performing this important scapegoat function, it may permit individual to challenge person rather than the authority of the office these persons occupy. Thus by rejecting the men, they implicitly accept the system.

Still on the positive side of ethnicity, Nnoli (1994:12), believes that ethnicity really has many positive effects. In outlining them he argues that:

First, the political demand of man; ethnic movement's concern liberty and justice. They express fear about the oppression of their members by other groups and about the nepotistic-distribution of public service jobs and social amenities, and the imposition of culture of the dominant ethnic groups on the others. In this way, ethnicity contributed to democratic practice by its emphasis on quality and justice in socio-political relations. Second, it leads to the appreciation of one's own social roots in a community and cultural groups which is essentially not only for the stability of the individual and ethnic group but that of the country as a whole. Third, it provided a local mobilization base for the anti-colonial movement for national freedom. Fourth, ethnic identity has been instrumental to the promotion of the community development in the rural areas. Fifth, the mobilization of the various ethnic groups behind the various functions of a nation ruling class contributes to the decentralization of power in the country which is healthy for democratic freedoms.

(b) Management Ethnicity

Despite the aforementioned positive good roles or impact of ethnicity. It is seen and regard as one of the greatest problem facing most African nation-states and Nigeria in particular. Many strategies have been adopted to manage it. The essence of adopting strategies to manage ethnicity, instead of eradicating it, is borne out of the realization, that it cannot be eradicated for as Diamond (1988), said, ethnic cleavages cannot be extinguished through repression or assimilation, however, they can be managed so that they do not threaten civil peace and people of different groups are able to exist tranquilly.

Quoting Osaghae (1994), he says that the cleavages do not die. Most unfortunately, countries that have tried to manage ethnicity through trying to eliminate it found out that they end up exacerbating ethnic conflicts and even making it more insidious, subterranean and dangerous (Obi and Abonyi, 2004: 209). It is therefore, better to accept Sithole's (1985), submission that:

If ethnicity is legitimated, then it can be diffused, controlled and managed better than approaching it as if it were an illegitimate social phenomenon. I have given up on the idea that ethnicity can be eliminated altogether.

Ake, (1996:24). Maintained that, the salience and resilience of ethnic groups in Africa is the fact that:

Some of us, perhaps most of us are prone to giving loyalty to the community the ethnic or national group. We tend to define ourselves in terms of these identify and it is in our oneness with them that we have become intelligible to ourselves, enjoy freedom, pursue interests and actualize our potentialities.

Arguing in the same vein Nnoli (1994:18), asserts that in Africa:

individuals do not have any claim, which may override those of the collectivity. Harmony and co-operation rather than their divergence of interest, competition and conflict characterize social life. People are more inclined to think of their obligation to other members of the group than their rights. In addition, feeling of kinship pervades social relations. However, hospitality towards peaceful foreigners is strongly valued. Even in the urban areas, feeling of belongingness to a community is an important part of

individual existence.

In other to contain the problem of ethnicity and further the goal of nationhood, various administrations or regimes in Nigeria have adopted various strategies at assuaging the impact of ethnicity. These include the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme, the Federal Character Principle. The Constitutional provision as contained in 1999 Constitution of Federal Republic of Nigeria has equally acted as assuage in the exacerbated ethnic impediment in nationhood through political representation and accommodation of sub-national constituencies at the Federal level which has been advanced by a wide varieties of means including equality representation of the states of the federation in the all powerful Senate, (the upper chamber of the bicameral federal legislature), the appointment of at least one Minister and Ambassador/High commissioner of foreign mission from each state of the federation (Orluwene and Jaja, 2007:134).

A further strategy adopted involves the use of revenue allocation system to redistribute centrally collected oil revenue to ail states of the federation among others. This paper is to limit itself to the Federal Character Principle.

(c) Federal Character Principle and the Public Service (Public Administration) in Nigeria

The federal character principles owe its origin to 1979 Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC). According to the 1979 Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) it refers to:

The distinctive desire of people of Nigeria to promote national unity, foster national unity and give every citizen of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation, notwithstanding the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language or religion which may exist and which in their desire to nourish, harness to the enrichment of Federal Republic of Nigeria (CDC, report 1976).

The term was later embodied in section 14 (3) of the of the principles as: 979 constitution. It stated the premises of the principles as:

The composition of the Federal Government or any of its agencies and the conduct of (heir affairs shall he carried out in such manner as lo recognize the Federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity and to commend national loyalty. Accordingly the predominance in that government or its agencies of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic as other sectional groups shall be avoided.

The same principle further extends to the states and local government councils through section 14 (A) of that same constitution that,

The composition of government of a state, or a local government or council, or any of (he agencies of such government or council and the conduct of the affairs of the government or council or such agencies shall be carried out in such a manner as to recognize the diversity of the peoples within its area of authority and (he need to promote a sense of belonging and loyalty among the people of the federation.

The Federal character is a distributive principle which is aimed at preventing the domination of government and its resources by people from one group or a few groups and at guaranteeing to every group, access to power and resources Ekth and Osaghae, (1989). It is in essences a "variant of the consociational principle of proportionality which is equally called quota system or ethnic arithmetic formula elsewhere (Onyeoziri, 1989).

The Nigerian therefore, tends to see institutional arrangements and the process of social engineering as the solution to ethnic - regional conflicts and tension in the country. The establishment of the Federal character commission in 1995 to apply the Federal character principle to the distribution of national resources can be seen in this light. The concern here in this section of the paper is to investigate the relationship between (he process of political engineering and the social problems as part of the strictures of the Nigerian Federalism. We are investigating the interconnections between Public Service (Public Administration). Public Policy and ethnic-regional conflicts and tension in Nigeria.

The details interconnection is examined as we proceed that public service which is public

administration has to do with the mobilization and utilization of the material and human resources of society for national development (Nwosu, 1979). Administration, is therefore, inevitable in any situation where there is a defined objective concerning human welfare requiring the co-operation of two or more persons for its attainment. Administration generally takes place in the contexts of a planned system of cooperative efforts in which individuals have assigned functions. As an instrument of human welfare, administration is concerned with planning, coordination, supervision and control (Beard, 1941). It involves coordinate behaviours for the attainment of organizational objectives. The administrator's position within an organization is therefore strategic and pivotal. Indeed, so significant in administration that we can accept the view of writers that, if our civilization breaks down, it is mainly a breakdown of our administration (Donham, 1941).

Public Administration is also part of the political process. It is the machinery through which government executes its policies. This underscores the intricate relationship between politics and public administration in the society. In this regard Frederick (1940), maintains that the idea of a dichotomy between politics and administration is a 'misleading destruction, 'which had become 'fetish' a stereo-type in the mind of theorists and practitioner's alike (Frederick, 1940).

Public policy, on the hand, refers to the decision of a long-term perspective that guides government. Public policy manifest empirically in the consistent behavioural action of government in public affairs. There is therefore, a direct relationship between politics, public administration and public policy. Public Administration and Public Policy usually reflect the nature and character of the political struggles in society. It is in this context that establishment of federal character commission can be understood.

The Nigerian government established the federal character commission in 1995 to apply its policy of federal character to public administration in the country. We have noted earlier that Federal character principle has to do with ethno-regional relations in Nigeria federation. It is therefore pertinent to appraise the context to which bureaucratic organization can grapple with the problem of ethno-regional conflict and tension in the country. To start with, it has been observed that part of the reason for its ineffectiveness arises from its excessive bureaucratic politics and how far can or has federal character principle gone in tackling the problem for which it was designed; is (he question now?. Officials devote proportionally more time than is reasonable to the serious business of promotion and moving ahead within the system in which very little emphasis is placed on merit and performance.

In this struggle for personal advantage, ethnic-factors often intrude and it is cleverly manipulated. The Nigerian bureaucrat unable (o trust himself under this system of promotion by merit usually involves ethnic sentiments in order to be promoted. In the process subjectivism replaces objectivism and political factors boom much larger in administration than technical competence. With Administration mediores in charge because of the political dominant of their ethno-regional groups, public administration ceases to be neutral in the execution of public policy (Ifesinachi, 2006: 7).

Secondly, you cannot fight, eradicate or manage ethnicity by giving it ethnic groups and making them prominent in our political life, you are strengthening ethnic affiliation and by extension influencing ethnic tensions. If political appointments and public offices are shared out on the basis of ethnic groups, it invariably means that the struggle for public offices instead of being a struggle by individuals is made struggle among ethnic groups. It is also quite clear that federal character principle has exacerbated the main problem it was made to solve.

According to Ayoade (2000), the principle "is the Achilles hell of Nigeria politics. It is the most recent epiphany in the Nigerian troubled federal trilogy. It was aimed at redressing historical imbalance and integrate the country. Unfortunately, the attempt was to balance in order to create a virile and united nation. It has turned out to be a mere substitute for substance."

Abubakar (2000:169), sees the principle in Nigeria as being symptomatic to the desire by the political class in the second republic to ensure access to end sighing of national wealth through **patron-client** languages. He equally believes that it creates a prebendal system, which Joseph (1991), says could be seen as:

Not only as one in which the offices of the state are allocated and then exploited as benefits by the officeholders, but also as one where such a practice is legitimated by a set of political norms accordingly to which the appropriation of such offices is not just an act of individual greed or ambition but concurrently the satisfaction of the short-term objectives of a subset of the general population,

In his own argument on the principle Uroh (2000), sees the principle as weighing so low on the scale of social justice because not only are those discriminates against not holding any enviable

position, despite what is considered to be their attainment educationally: The preferred group "cannot be described as victims of past discriminatory governmental or social policies, they have- not been exploited by any group. Here there is no guilty group, which is morally bound to make reparation for past misdeeds".

Also indeed, the word Bureaucracy appears to have acquired an opprobrious meaning and odious connotation in Nigerian public service. It is also associated with inefficiency, lack of initiative, mi-intelligent rigidity in the approach to human problems, undue business and bossiness, on the part of officials and downright stubbornness (Adebayo, 1994:18). This is because bureaucracy as a process and element of public administration implies a certain degree of inflexibility and routinization of behaviour. It is against this background that one can understand the potentials of the Federal Character Commission as a bureaucratic organization in Nigerian-type societies in the management of the policy of federal character.

Thus, a Nigerian administrator steeped in his jaundiced ethnic ciper and bogged down by excessive bureaucracy will be hard put to it, to apply the federal character policy to ethno-regional believing in the distribution of national resources. In the spectacle where ethno-regionally oriented administrator pursues conflicting ethno-regional interests, the pageantry in public administration practice becomes theatrical, quant, picturesque, and observed (Ifesinachi. 2006:17). This administrative spectacle can only produce confusion. As Adamolekun (1986). has noted the need to balance merit with the pressure of ensuring adequate representation of the geographical, class, ethnic, communal, religious and other interest in order to operate the federal character principle in 1979 constitution leads to considerable confusion over the interpretation of these constitutional provision.

Apart from the confusion that arises from the federal character policy, its net social benefit must be taken into consideration. Nnoli (3978), nrgues that:

The viewpoint that reduction in the social-economic imbalance between ethnic groups would reduce tension is thus mistaken. It arises essentially from the static conception of the ethnic groups to innate primary units of actions, thereby neglecting the historical changes in the boundaries of the ethnic groups and de-emphasizing the role of class and individual factors in inter-ethnic processes.

This is because the test of resources efficiency of the government can only be weighted in relation to its overall social benefits. The federal character principle, among other things, substitutes Nigerian citizenship with the indigene syndrome. It denies the democratic freedom of equal opportunity. Its implementation in an unbalanced and hegemonic federal structure driven on the wheels of primitive capital accumulation is no more than "theatre of the absurd. It is the height of pedestrianism to sacrifice merits in an attempt to savage the less endowed component units in a federation. The policy has been criticized for invading the integrity and standard of public bureaucracy and such other governmental bodies that normally requires safeguards from party politics. Another problem is that the policy has been a mask of ethnic cleansing (Dewan, 13). In essence, the policy is engendering federal instability rather than integration.

The net effect of the federal character policy is the intensification of the ethno-regional conflicts and tension in Nigeria. More importantly, it has to be noted that the political process of responding to demands, reconciling them by injecting consideration of prudence, perspective and principle is completed in the administrative hierarchy (Appleby, 1949). Thus, with the stultification of public administration by the implementation of the federal character policy, the political process becomes hampered. In a situation where exclusive ethno-regional demands allow for no mediation, the end product is further intensification of ethno-regional conflicts and tension in the country.

3. Recommendations and Conclusion

In order therefore, to douse ethno-regional and social tension and foster the proper federal democratic temperament, sentiment, conventions, institutions,, tendencies and values the following measures are imperative.

- i) There should be the restructuring of the Nigerian society, economically and politically in the direction deep enough to other the asymmetrical political structure that have over the years impoverished the people, thus allowing a few elites to feed fact on our commonwealths while these group of rentiers and looter have foisted a sense of false consciousness on the people through manipulating ethnic, sectarian and religious sentiments.
- ji) The adherence and adoption of, true federation by reducing the powers of the central government. A decentralization of critical power will result in a realized federal set up and less

heated inter ethnic relation. And solve the problem of unhealthy rivalry; Nigeria should operate a true federal system in which in the words of Obefemi Awolowo (1966:47), every section or ethnic groups is "autonomous in regard to its internal affairs". This would liberate the country or I other words liberate itself from what Claude Welch (1995:638), rightly describes as a "misleading federation".

- iii) Ethnic differences and sectional interests should not be seen as an unmitigated evil. Rather, effort should be made to transcend them and to harness and incorporate their virtues in the march to stable and integrated nation hood. Nigerians should made to stress more those things that unit them than those things that separate them. They should see the Nigerian nation as the rope that ties up their common destiny.
- iv) They should therefore, endeavour to rekindle, as advised by Nwankwo (1986:75), the nationalist fervour that united all Nigerians from all corners of the country against colonial rule. In so doing, however, they should heed the warnings of Ogunojemite (1987:230), not to misconstrue the nationalism of the *nouveau riche* with the well being of the masses.
- v) Above all, the federal character principle should not only concern itself with the inter-ethnic distribution of national resources privileges and **benefits**, but should also contributions to the overall common good, progress, stability and national integration of the country (Agbodike, 2000:188).

In conclusion, thus far, the paper tried to look at both the positive and negative impact of ethnicity and how unsuitable the federal character principle as a strategy adopted to mitigate ethnicity has worsen the principle as a solution to a problem leads to an exacerbation of that problem,

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