The Challenge of Power Sharing and National Development: The Case of Nigeria

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Abstract: The return to civil rule in 1999 in Nigeria has resulted in the transformation of inter-community relations. It has also set in motion new forms of competition for prestige, power and positions among communities, as well as new forms of co-operation. Such relations have generally tended to contradict the demands of modern global principles contained in the nation building project. This has led to a crisis of modernization as local communities try to grapple with the demands of a modern setting, while living their essential communal substance. This has become evident in the political arena with the competition over scarce resources, positions of pre-eminence and the delineation of political sphere of influence. Coming after decades of military suzerainty, including the centralization of power and resources that accompanied it, groups and communities that hitherto felt excluded and marginalized are seeking to be accommodated. The liberalization of the political process and expansion of the political space appear to have provided additional impetus to their demands. This paper examines issues of power sharing as mechanisms of promoting inter-community relations and stability beyond the framework offered by constitutional democracy which has stymied national development. It is concluded that taint government cannot be a substitute for the traditional requirements that engender national development.

Keywords: Power sharing; Conciasional democracy; Ethnicity; Inter-community relations; National development

Introduction

Competition for resources typically lies at the heart of ethnic conflict…. In societies where ethnicity is an important basis for identity, group competition often forms along ethnic lines [1].

Nigeria by its complex web of politically salient identities and history of chronic and seemingly intractable conflict and instability can be described as one of the mostly divided state in Africa [2]. Nigeria's plurality and secular characteristics therefore, offers a wide ranging and fertile ground for group relations, explaining why national diversities have been vigorously transformed and contested against the politics of national integration and stability. These politically salient identities became more pronounced and transformed since the country returned to democratic rule in 1999, given that "the expression of identities for sectional or group sentiments during the military rule was effectively suppressed and the political spaces for agitation were contrived barring any interest groups and socio-political formations from making any claims on the state" [3]. While interest groups and socio-political formations of the military years indoctrinated into the democratization process, the expression of ethnic grievances and diversities only gained wider expression since the enthronement of democratic rule. This resurgence is instructive given the spate of communal clashes, ethnic agitations, ethno-religious politics and violence which have exacerbated tremendously since the return to democratic rule. Fatai further argues that the mobilization of ethnic tendencies and nationalism had given rise to the metamorphosis of different ethnic identities and militias all in the context of advancing their long suppressed interest in the democratic space. In most cases however, the Federal Government is compelled to use military power to quell such ethnic and/or religious conflicts.

As a result of this, the Nigeria's political history is replete with cases of the use of the military to quell domestic rebellions. The first recorded use of the Nigerian military in domestic politics was in 1964 when it intervened in the Tiv riot. Since then, Nigerian leaders have been making use of the military in political crises even when there is no evidence of success in such interventions. The north-eastern part which is a boiling cauldron is the latest example of the deployment of troops as instrument of crisis management. However, the intention of the federal government in deploying troops to these trouble spots is to secure peace and security in the country.

Although, military power is the legally sanctioned instrument of violence which governments all over the world use in their relations with each other, and when necessary, in an internal security role. It should be noted that war is a means of allocating scarce values to resolve conflicts and in this view is a rational instrument of decision-making and, in any case, war policies are decided by a logical computation of costs and benefits. But the claim to rationality is however controversial. Conflict analysts thus, had confronted the questions about the sources and impacts of military in involving in inter-community relations, while practitioners had to deal with the practicalities of managing change and conflict, so as to minimize violence and destruction. In any case, the rules of engagement must be upheld in any military intervention in conflict management.

Inter-ethnic competition invariably involves a struggle for resources, irrespective of the expressive metaphor within which the resources are subsumed. In such inter-community relationship, violence may be involved which is the reason why the military mechanism is often times used as an instrument to suppress such violence. Violence here is seen to mean a situation where there is actual physical attack on persons or wanton destruction of lives and property. Thus, as Otite [4] puts it, an analysis of inter-community relationships must take cognizance of the unequal access to the sources and opportunities for economic survival.

As a result of competition for resources, there seem to be an unprecedented explosion of ethnic identities which appear to question the very foundation of the Nigerian project. This is because more than any time in the history of Nigeria, Egwu [5] argues, the political mobilization of ethnicity, exclusive claims based on "station" was well as "indigeneity" have threatened national cohesion and the emergence of a co-operate Nigerian identity. It is further argued that, these have pushed the country to be confronted with the resurgence of old and new identities which have resulted in the dramatic upsurge in ethno-religious conflicts, and the remarkable impact of ethnic politics on national development. This is understandable in the context of globalization, the assertion of market forces, the quest for democratization and the deliberate attempt to de-emphasize the relevance of ideological contribution in political discourses; but a co-relation to the exploitation of ethnic difference by ethnic entrepreneurs and extremist groups (like the Boko Haram), who have a different inter-community agenda.

While the unleashing of these centrifugal forces in the context of a multi-party political system and competition for power and relevance, forcefully attracts attention to the need for power sharing as a means of guaranteeing stability and achieving development; Nigeria's plurality and secular characteristics therefore offers a wide ranging and fertile ground for group relations. This explains why national diversities have been vigorously transformed and contested against the politics of national integration and stability. One of the challenges for development in Nigeria is how to raise inter-community relationships to the level of positive construction and managing tensions which they create with a view to ensuring peace in our society. These brief noted highlight is for the purpose of provoking further analysis on issues of power sharing and the changing inter-community relationship in the context of the consequences that can result in national development.

Power Sharing and Consociationalism

Power sharing is very common to societies marked by deep ethnic, religious and other forms of cleavages which are not easily amenable to the solution offered by democratic principle of majority rule and the adoption of federalism as a constitutional measure of grappling with diversity and the management of differences. Power sharing basically refers to a process of consensus building among the diverse contending political elites and actors in the political arena regarding what is either proportional, or the minimum level of representation that would be acceptable to each bloc. This is known as the consociation model.

The consociational model of power sharing or proportional representation represents Lijphart's [6], original contribution to the problem of stability and order in the deeply divided societies. It is presented as a better and more creative response to the crisis generated by zero sum party competition for power in a multi-ethnic and culturally diverse political setting. The consociational model emphasizes consensus rather than competition as the basis of political stability and order. It is therefore, distinguishable from plurality elections in the sense that rather than relying on pure and concentrated majority rule, it tries to limit, divide, separate and share power in a variety of ways.

Proportional representation, according to Lijphart [6], was conceived as a response to two major demands. First, it was meant to deal with the threat to national unity and stability by ethnic and religious minorities. Second, it was necessitated by the dynamics of democratization, especially the need to contain the threat posed to liberal democracy by the emergent working class that had been mobilized by universal adult suffrage. However, the strongest argument in its favour is that it leads to an effective and durable democratic regime in a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria.

However, for the consociational model of democracy to thrive and bear fruits, some basic requirements need to be fulfilled. As a matter of fact,

being largely a cartel or grand coalition of elite who come together to reduce the destabilizing effect of open conflicts between groups, Egwu [5] argues that consociationalism must be predicated on the assumption that the behaviour of the elite is accommodating and are united by a deep and common desire for the peaceful survival of the system. Besides, the system thrives on consensus and compromise, both within and between groups. The most critical factor however, as Egwu stated is the accommodative attitude and behaviour of the elite. In this regard, three conditions have been identified. First, is the existence of multiple balances of power among elite, such that, the likelihood of domination of one elite group is reduced to the minimum. Second, the advantage conferred by smallness in the size of the state in question, because in that situation, the decision-making apparatus will not be overloaded; while it also affords the chances that interacting elites may know themselves personally. Finally, the existence of a federal solution presupposes that, existence of ethnic and cultural diversity is jealously guarded [7].

Contrariwise, as appealing as the consociational option appears to be, it also has inherent weaknesses and short-comings which necessitate a careful examination before application. Its application tends to favour states that possess characteristics other than deep ethnic religious divisions, which again, define the limit to which states that do not possess such characteristics can apply the model of consensus government. As Quade [8] criticized, it cannot be a substitute for the traditional requirement of the state action. Secondly, since much of the success stories of consociational democracy have come from small countries with low levels of racial, ethnic and religious turbulence such as Italy, Netherlands, Demark, Belgium, Austria etc, Quade thus, concludes that these are easy and "fair weather" cases that have thrived under favourable pre-political conditions that bear scant resemblance to the arduous circumstances confronting struggling new democracies. On this count, countries such as Nigeria with vast geographical territories and a record of prolonged socio-economic crisis and decline may not be a fertile ground for consociational option.

Other major criticisms of consociational democracy arise from the fact that it could provide incentives to extremists (like the Boko Haram), promotion of political immobilism, removal of the locus of accountability from the electorates, and the relocation and creation of society's natural divisions. For instance, since emphasis of proportional representation is vested on compromises and consensus that are struck at the elite level which may be far removed from the democratic ideal of popular empowerment as well as locating sovereignty in the people; the worst case scenario is a situation where power holders are not accountable to the people. As a result, several limitations are placed on the expansion of the frontiers of democracy. Therefore, consociationalism does not appeal any attractiveness to African democracies because it is not economically viable and cannot mitigate the disruptive effects of competing ethnicities in the context of poverty and scarcity. African ethnicities are highly fragmented which makes it difficult to attain intra-group consensus. Emphasis on proportionality tends to undermine merit as consociationalism provides some justification for the entrenchment of oligarchy.

Closely related to political order is the concept of stability which is often times discussed in relation to debates that centre on constitutional provisions and party systems in democracies. Egwu [5] opined that the desirability of any constitutional design for example, is predicated upon the possibility that it could enhance the prospect for political stability and orderliness. An indication of government effectiveness or stability Egwu argues could be the stable allocation for top political elites in roles of political authority, or the durability of regimes. For Egwu, in a democracy, the prevalence of instability due to persistent violence has dire consequences for the polity and national development which is as a result of loss of confidence in the system.

It is obvious from a careful assessment of Nigeria's political historiography that a major source that fans the embers of instability in our multi-ethnic political setting is strongly associated with ethnicity and the winner takes all syndromes inherent in the majoritization principle. Despite some ill-conceived and appalling attempts at power sharing in the First Republic, and the constitutionalization of the federal character principle in the Second Republic, there was collapse of the democratic experiments in the two periods. This brings into clear understanding, how the absence of power sharing and the disposition of politics of accommodation among the elites of the political class brought the democratic experiments to anguish. It is suggested however, that, stability and equitable national development might become an elusive pursuit in a deeply divided society if certain mechanisms of power sharing are not put in place.

Despite these reservations, the principle of consciationalism can be applied to complement both democracy and federalism in the quest for greater and more enduring stability in Nigeria. The greatest appeal of proportional representation to the Nigerian situation perhaps lies not only in the existence of ethno-cultural diversity, but also the existence of ethnic minority groups as well as the emergence of new political groups and expressions [5]. It is a unique context or recharged ethnicities, leading to the political mobilization of groups that hitherto lacked such awareness. The peculiar problem becomes more obvious in a

multicultural compositional society because while managing identities problem in a multi-ethnic society, the truth however is that, democracy offers opportunities for groups to express their feelings and putting their demand across to the state irrespective of their diversities. By this, democracy is seen as the instrumentality for addressing monopolization of power by 'single ethnic group' or a 'group of ethnic groups' in the country as well as the restoration of political stability in a multi-ethnic society [3].

However, for this to succeed and produce the expected result, two necessary conditions have to be satisfied. First, it is necessary that elites involve in the process of bargaining and consensus buildings are the authentic spokesmen and representatives of their ethnic groups and communities. Second, the group to be represented should determine their own representatives, rather than being determined from outside or dictated by the majority or ruling party [5].

It is strongly suggested that the need to go beyond consociationalism as desirable as it is, partly derived from the weakness inherent in the model and partly from the limit of the ethnic paradigm in explaining and understanding the problem of the political community including the question of stability and order. It is emphasized that these weaknesses which include the relocation of natural divisions, political immobilism, support for extremist groups and the very unstable nature of coalitions are result from behind the scene brinkmanship. The most important imperative however, is that consociational democracy is not an alternative to democracy and the template offered by democracy for diversity management.

Finally, democratic governance with its corollary of people empowerment must be seen as promoting accountability, transparency and openness in the conduct of public affairs as well as the existence of a strong and virile civil society with a clear mandate to compel the state to promote public good. It is for this reason that, it is strongly suggested that consociational measures as complement of democracy be studied critically and palliative measures to deal with the exigencies of the moment. Without efforts aimed at strengthening democratic ideals through popular participation and mechanisms of accountability and transparency, Nigeria may not unwittingly ignore the question of state responsibility which has implication for stability and orders in inter-ethnic and community relations.

Ethnicity and Political Stability in Nigeria
It is common to assume no difficulty in the conceptualization of ethnicity. This faulty assumption leads to the tendency to confuse ethnicity with other social phenomena that share similar features, especially those that fall within the category of primordial and communal identities in the first place. A related problem is the tendency to see ethnicity as the natural outcome of existence of ethnic groups. As Mafeje [9] has observed, ethnicity is not merely an abstract construct, but an ideological loaded concept which is not a natural outcome of any ethnic existence in any objective sense of the concept. Thus, despite its etymological origin, ethnicity is an abstraction of any ethnic group, precisely because it has no independent existence of its own, but always driven by class interest or the quest for power.

Ethnicity is a consequence of mobilization and politicization of ethnic group identity. Ethnic features such as language, culture, territory, mode of dressing and sharing jokes provides the basis for such mobilization. It is for this reason that multi-ethnic political societies provide the basis for the kind of contextual discrimination and exclusion which constitute the hallmark of ethnicity[4]. For as Nnoli [10] indicates, ethnicity and the conflict spiral associated with it tends to become more pronounced in competitive situations where available resources are scarce in relation to the interest which grow around them. The main elements of ethnicity according to Nnoli include exclusiveness manifested in inter-group competition, conflict in relation to stiff competition and the consciousness of being one in relation to others.

The most significant element of ethnicity in relation to our discourse is the phenomenon of politicized ethnicity. More often than not, it is invoked by elements which are not necessarily defined in ethnic terms. It can be mobilized in pursuit of perceived ethnic interest or not related to ethnic interests at all. Perhaps Ake [11], makes the boldest attempt at the reconstruction of ethnicity when he argues that conflicts arising from the construction of ethnicity to conceal exploitation by building solidarity across class lines, conflicts arising from appeals to ethnic support in the face of vanishing legitimacy, and from the manipulation of ethnicity for obvious political gains are not ethnic problems, but problems of particular political dynamics which are pinned on ethnicity.

While social constructivism theorists of ethnicity viewed ethnicity as constructed, expression of this nature is usually exacerbated through the struggle for power in the democratization process. As power contestation get intense, groups reach out to their diversities and the potential for conflict become imminent in the potential changes that the struggle generates, the outcome of which is capable of escalating to distrust and conflict. As Bomhoff [12] asserts, democratization process will fail if the prevalent level of distrust is high and national identities problem remains unresolved. In his view, having a sense of national unity is a precondition for democracy, but democracy is not a condition for peaceful relation and

stability among identities. While it can be said that democracy can cope with political question about major inequality in socio-economic issues, it is not equipped to deal with antagonistic relations between religious and ethno-racial groups [3]. Ake [13] was one of the boldest optimists when he argued that "far from being prone to generating ethnic conflicts, democratization is actually an antidote to those things, which promote ethnic identity and what passes for ethnic conflicts in Africa. The most important is the character of the post-colonial state in Africa…its power over economy and society is enormous, arbitrary and it is largely privatized. For all but a few of its citizens, it is alien and remote, uncaring and oppressive…many of them have turned away from the state and given their loyalty to sub-national formations.' The implication of Ake's summation is that, while democracy allows for expression of identity interest, it does not have the capacity for resolving identity problems. Indeed, it exacerbate ethnic identity, promote conflict and capable of undermining national security and development in the context of these vociferous manifestations.

However, it is important to point out that, it is not in all instances, that ethnicity invokes negative connotations. This is because, not only has it become legitimate to assert ethnic identity and interests, it is also increasingly being realized that ethnicity does have a positive side to it. Egwu [5] has pointed out, that ethnic demands for justice, equity in the distribution of social amenities and for equal representation are democratic demands. For instance, in the struggle for Nigeria's independence, ethnic associations provided the platforms for support and mobilization. In more recent times, the positive manifestation of ethnicity can be seen in the emergence of coalitions that successfully challenged authoritarian rule. Nevertheless, the dangers inherent in ethnic mobilization appear so frightening to the extent that the positive dimensions fizzles into insignificance.

However, once ethnicity is mobilized, ethnic conflict spiral associated with it become self-perpetuating, irreversible and self-consuming. In other word, once a particular society crosses the threshold of irreversibility that results in outbreak of violence and hostility, the trend becomes difficult to reverse. This is perhaps the explanation for the scourge of antagonistic ethnicity that has turned different communal groups against one another, and the increasing salience of the notion of ethnic cleansing in different part of Nigeria. Closely associated to ethnicity is another territorially-based form of identity commonly referred to as statism.

Statism according to Egwu [5] is a form of territorial identity with state of origins in the Nigerian federal system. It is largely an elite-driven demand aimed at the exclusive control of the resources of a state as a component unit of the Nigerian federation. The entrenched interests of such elites explain the persistent demand for creation of new states since 1999.

However, the notion of statism conceals a number of contradictions. While it is true that every state creation exercise has had the salutary effect of either addressing or redressing the specific grievance of minority groups concerning domination or fear of domination. It nevertheless tends to reproduce the same contradictions based on "majority-minority" divide that fuelled the demand for new states initially with two attendant consequences. First, it tends to mask the class and elite driven character of the interests that is being projected. Secondly and most importantly, identities based on statism are highly malleable and subject to redefinition and reconstruction.

It is interesting to note at this point that, from the foregoing discourse that ethnicity is not a natural phenomenon as such, nor it is some kind of social atavism. Indeed, it is historically a subject of social and political construction and a dialectics of imagination and reality. The strength of this fact is significant because it points to the limits which power sharing arrangements, in so far as they are directed at mitigating the disruptive effect of inter-community and ethnic competition can go as a solution to the problem of instability. In the same token, it is important to further indicate that, the dynamics of social conflicts as a result of ethnicity is also related to the nature and character of the state.

In examining the changing nature of inter-ethnic relationships in Nigeria since 1999, it is observed that the state remains a central factor in the discourse of ethnic conflicts. Murphree [14], points to the fact that the state system in Africa is the authoritative arena for the definition of among others, structures, identity and goals . In other words, the structural position of the post-colonial state, its mode of insertion into the economy, and its relationship with society, all has implications for ethnic identity formation and relations.27 For Murphree, this embraces the different spectrum of relationships, ranging from antagonism to cooperation and harmony. Ake [11] raises the important issues of the absence of autonomy of the Nigerian state, drawing our attention to the fact that the state is a major factor in ethnic conflict. Ake submits that the state lacks all the attributes of a bourgeois state as a system of domination that is differentiated and dissociated from the ruling class and even the society such that it appears as an objective force standing alongside society.

Worse still, the Nigerian state has remained a crisis generating mechanism, hardly shedding its colonial characteristics. In the scheme of Samuel Egwu, repression, suppression and intimidation have remained its enduring features. While the establishment of hegemonic influence, consensus-building, dialogue,

negotiation and respect for human rights and the rule of law are largely alien to its modus operandi. This has however deepened the crisis of the nation-building project and has sharpened internal ethnic and class relations. The problem of inequity among the various ethnic groups and nationalities is therefore central to the problem of security and national development. Thus, as Ifidon [15], puts it, the problem has to be understood as consequences of not merely ethnic plurality, but tentatively put, the state of ethnic relations characterized by intense unequal competition for resources of the state, the most sought after being the appropriation of state power, particularly its coercive and resource allocating elements.

In addition to the problems created by constitutional development in Nigeria since 1999 and the failure of the modernization projects initiated, the Nigerian state has effectively limited the capacity of the state to meet the increasing withdrawal of Nigerians into primordial and primary levels of identity. In other words, it is well known that ethnic related demands and pressures, though not exclusively, have substantially accounted for Nigeria's problem of instability and the frequent breakdown of the democratic political process in the post-colonial period. In this regard, it is argued that what is often regarded as the crisis of political hegemony is the intense struggle for the control of state power and its allocation of values between the various factions of the ruling class. Although the emergent ruling elite appeared to have acquired ethnic orientation in response to imperial policies which deliberately fostered ethno-regional differences, it tended to have coincided with their interest as they tacitly endorse it and pursued the struggle for independence from that narrow ethno-political framework which has endured to this moment.

As it turned out, identification with political parties and electoral support followed the same ethnic cum regional divide such that the struggle for power and resources especially at the national level easily translated into inter-ethnic and inter-regional rivalry. Although, the adoption of federalism provided a measure of compromise but it also institutionalized tension, acrimony, suspicion and violence characterized by stiff competition for power. The desperation to win at all cost led to cut-throat competition and a culture of lack of respect for the rules of the game. Thus, elections and competition for power degenerated into violence and thuggery became the order of the day; where political elite in power exhibited intolerance towards opposition elements by using state power to ruthlessly deal with those perceived to be in the opposition.

CONCLUSION

The paper examined power sharing arrangements and indicated that power sharing has positive attributes which can be imbibed to strengthen the government and guarantee unity in a unity threatened Nigerian state. It was argued that consociational democracy has immense strength with its emphasis on the changing political attitudes and behaviour of the political elites and actors in the power milieu in the direction of consensus and accommodation. To this extent, it is suggested as a positive response to the built-in problem of instability in a political environment marked by a high level of elite intolerance.

Although, it is not an alternative to democracy, proportional representation can be used to deal with the political plaques of the moment. However, the virtues of democracy such as dialogue, compromise and collective bargaining when creatively used can provide the conducive environment for the management of ethno-religious and political tensions in a democracy. It provides the framework for making adjustment in federalism such as revenue allocation formula, promotion of even and balance development and the question of equitable access to power for all ethnic and communal groups.

For a country like Nigeria that is confronted with multifaceted challenges including underdevelopment, low economic growth, non-provision of basic needs and the management of ethnicity, what is needed is a strong, durable and effective democratic government that would satisfy the yearnings of the masses. It stands to reason that the instability engendered by the frequent inter-ethnic violence has direct bearing on the country's development prospects. Not only that it creates an unstable environment for productive activity, violence also destroys what has already been achieved. Development is by people for people. In other words, man is the subject and object of any development effort. When man engages his environment, gains control of the productive forces which indeed include the means of production and distribution and establishes an equitable reward system, development is assured. The implication of the above is that a conductive atmosphere devoid of distractions of any kind, oppressive condition, alienation and inequity must prevail for development to flourish.

Given the implications of good governance, stability and development, it is submitted that, for real development to take place, the leadership must show adequate and prompt concern over the plight of all marginalized and disadvantaged groups. A situation where some groups superintend over others, flaunt their corruptly acquired wealth with impunity and show brazen contempt for the feeling of other people and/or group is not only unacceptable but provocative.

It is absolutely ridiculous for a nation like Nigeria to expect stability and achieve national

development in a situation where more than half of the educated youths are unemployed. Mass unemployment is a catalyst for violence and insecurity. Unemployment must be confronted frontally through the establishment of small and large industries particularly in the agro-allied sector and the strengthening of the existing ones.

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