ETHNICITY AND THE QUEST FOR PEACE AND NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT: EXTRAPOLATING FROM THE PHILOSOPHY OF COMPLEMENTARY REFLECTIONS

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Abstract

Ethnicity, properly construed does not constitute a threat to peace and national development, what does is the negative employment of ethnicity for one's gain and a corresponding display of negative attitudes towards other ethnic groups. This attitude is both divisive and counter-productive; it leads to crisis and conflicts of attrition and fuels separatist tendencies and movements which undermine the peace and development of any multi-ethnic state. This reflects the exactitude of the Nigerian situation. This paper recognizes and argues for the imperativeness of peace for Nigerian's national development despite its multi-ethnic configuration; it is in this context that the philosophy of complimentary reflection which sees everything that exist as a missing link of reality that serves to complement one another finds relevance. This paper concludes that heterogeneous nature of the Nigerian state notwithstanding, peace, which is the requisite condition for national development can only be guaranteed when the concept of ethnicity is redefined and ethnic groups see each other as missing links of reality within the ambience of complementary reflections rather than competitors that should be outdone and enemies that should be degraded.

Introduction

Nigerian is a multi-ethnic state. The high point of its heterogeneity within the context of ethnic affiliations is evident in the fact that there exist over 250 ethnic groups and over 700 tribes in Nigeria. The above as history avers from the wake of independence have been harnessed negatively to achieve personal and group aims. Whilst it is a statement of fact that marginalization ranks amongst the major reasons for the above, it must be noted that the most part of ethnic conflicts as have been argued elsewhere are elitist conspiracy to create tension and consequently achieve their aims. Calhoun (1999) quoted in Adetiba and Rahim (2012:659) corroborate the above when they asserted that ethnicity "is a creation of political leaders who often utilize and depends on the strength of people's ethnic differences to gain socio-political and economic advantage for their groups as well as pursuing their own socio-economic benefits".

While the history of ethnicity and ethnic conflicts have been traced to the forceful amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorate in 1914 to become the entity called Nigeria today, it remains to argue that after over an hundred years of this amalgamation and over five decades of her independence, Nigeria have not been able to transcend this history and see themselves as Nigerians. Rather, they have elected to conceive of themselves as Igbo's, Hausa's, Yoruba's, Tiv's, Ijaw's just to mention but a few. The consequent of this antecedent is that there have been crisis of attritions which have served to fuel the ambers of ethnic agitation and conflicts. These have also led to the elevation of tribal nationalities over and against the country Nigeria which houses all the ethnic groups. In this regards, loyalty is paid to the tribal and ethnic configuration and not to the Nigerian state. The implications of the present reality in Nigeria is that national integration have been scarified on the altar of ethnicity, the frontiers of peace have been pushed back and hence, the presence of little or no development.

It is sequel to the above and the imperativeness of peace for development that this paper seeks to interrogate the conception of ethnicity within the context of Nigeria and to accordingly extrapolate from the philosophy of complementary reflections in the bid to defining ethnicity for institutionalization of national

integration for peace and development. To achieve this aim, the paper is divided into four sections: the first is this section which is the introduction; the second section concerns itself with an explication on the concept of ethnicity and its implications. The third section dwells on ethnicity, peace and national integration within the context of the philosophy of complementary reflection while the fourth section will sum up and brings the discourse to a close.

On the Concept of Ethnicity

The concept of ethnicity has been defined variously. According to Osariemen as quoted in Eze (2015:46), ethnicity is the "consciousness of belonging to, identifying with and being loyal to a social group distinguished by shared cultural traditions, a common language, in group sentiments and self Identity". It sometimes transcends a mere consciousness to a willingness to act on the behalf of the group, to limit one's vision, scope and perception of human existence to that as held by the group.

Drawing from the definition of Osariemen, one can argue that Ethnicity, taken objectively as an affiliation to or paying allegiance to one's kith, kins and place of birth does not constitute a problem. It is in this regards that Ake (1993:4) intimated that:

> It is not clear that ethnicity by itself generates conflict or that it is inherently threatening. One may prefer one's kinsfolk or one's own community without being antagonistic to others. It is odd that those who consider ethnicity as a manipulable instrument are also the ones who regard it as a problem. If ethnicity is manufactured at will and manipulated to serve any number of selfish purposes, then it is only an 'object', the case for calling it a cause of the numerous problems regularly attributed to it would not be sustainable.

By implication, ethnicity does not constitute any threat to the socio-political and economic development of a state. It is the negative employment of ethnicity – negative attitudes towards those regarded as outsiders – that constitute the threat to socio-political and economic development. Hence, the positive aspects of ethnicity often become insignificant in multi-ethnic states. The interaction of ethnic groups may either negatively or positively affect the socio-political and economic positions of other groups. In essence, ethnicity becomes problematic

when the various ethnic groups turn the table against each other in an attempt to have access to political power, thus degenerating from a form of political support into a basis for political conflict (Adetiba and Rahim, 2012:659).

Conversely, Achebe quoted in Iyanda and Owojori (2015:163) sees ethnicity as the discrimination against a citizen because of his place of birth. In Nigeria, the concept of ethnicity and tribalism are used interchangeably. Egwu (2003: 38) corroborated the above when he avers that ethnicity is about the mobilization and politicization of ethnic group identity drawing on those elements that mark out the group such as language, culture, territory, mode of dressing and sharing jokes. Often associated with multi-ethnic existence, ethnicity refers to context discrimination by members of one group against others on the basis of some exclusive criteria. Quoting Heinecke and Grove (1984) and UNRISD (1995), Tanko and Akombo (2016: 297-298) defines ethnicity as a "strained and exaggerated feeling of difference in relation to other groups. It is a deeply emotional basis of mobilization that not only merely distinguishes one group from the other but can also dehumanize other groups and demonise the other group".

From the above, Ake, Adetiba and Rahim could both be read as exonerating ethnicity and arguing against its being considered as the cause of the many problems that have been attributed to it. While the above position stands erect in the court of reason, it must be noted that "ethnicity does not only manifest in conflictive and competitive relations but also in the context of cooperation" (Okeke and Idike, 2016:70). Dodo (2015:142) corroborated the above when he avers that ethnicity is positive because it involves the appreciation of one's social root in a community and cultural group without necessarily disparaging other groups". Ethnic groups are often the major engine of development in Africa and the closest thing in existence to a social welfare organization (Ake, 1993:4).

Be that as it may, it is the discrimination, and the mobilization of ethnicity to achieve one's end and the dehumanization cum demonization of other ethnic groups in the process that constitutes a problem. The implications of the above within the context of Nigeria, is that it has ruptured inter-group relations and led the conflicts of attrition which consequently leads to inter-ethnic conflicts and wars. The result of which is the destruction of life and properties. It has also fuelled cessationists and separatists movements which threatens the peace and collective existence of the Nigeria state. The quit notices from the Northern

youths, the attempt at declaring the Niger-Delta state and the Sovereign state of Biafra in the recent past in Nigeria are lucid examples in that regards. All these do not make for peace which is imperative for national development.

It is in this context that this paper seeks to argue for the imperativeness of peace for national development in the midst of our heterogeneous existential life in Nigeria and to do that, this paper extrapolates from the philosophy of complementary reflections.

Ethnicity and the Search for Peace and National Development: Lessons from the Philosophy of Complementary Reflection

In Nigeria, Ethnicity constitutes a challenge to national development and this is historical. It has also permeated every aspect of our existential life. Citing Achebe, Iyanda and Owojori (2015:166-167) intimated that at our independence in 1960, our national anthem which is our hymn of deliverance from British colonial bondage has these lines, "though tribe and tongues may differ, in brotherhood we stand". This brotherhood lasted only six years and ever since, a Nigerian child seeking admission into a federal school; a student wishing to enter the university; a graduate seeking employment in the public service; a businessman tendering for a contract will fill a form which requires him to confess his tribe. In Nigeria, the tendency is for ethnic struggle and acrimony to become acute because of the peculiar nature of our dependent mode of production, the fragile nature of the state or of our federalism where the components units depends almost exclusively on the subventoires or grants from the national government for survival (Onah, 1997:5). Be that as it may, the need to navigate this innuendo and move towards peace and national development remains imperative.

The philosophy of complementary reflection (otherwise known as the *Ibuanyidanda* philosophy) was developed and championed by Innocent Asouzu, a professor of philosophy at the University of Calabar- Nigeria. It is a philosophy that emphasizes and elevates the imperativeness of a mutual dependence and interdependence of reality. At the background of this philosophical system is the lesson from the *dandas* (the Igbo cognate of the ants). According to Asouzu (2011:11),

> The concept *Ibuanyidanda* draws its inspiration from the teachings of traditional Igbo philosophers of the complementary system of

thought. The closest English equivalent to the word "*Ibuanyidanda*" is "complementarity". *Danda* are ants that have the capacity, in mutual dependence and interdependence, to carry loads that appear bigger and heavier than themselves. What this implies is that they can surmount very difficult challenges when they are mutually dependent on each other in the complementation of their efforts. Hence, traditional Igbo philosophers insist that: *ibu anyi danda* (no task is insurmountable for *danda*). It is from this synthetic idea "*ibu anyi danda*" that serves a heuristic pre-scientific function within the context of traditional Igbo experience that the synthetic-analytic concept "*Ibuanyidanda*" is derived through abstraction.

Deducible from the above is the fact of the importance of mutual dependence and the benefits of the same. Asouzu further intimates that *Ibuanyidanda* Philosophy is a transcendent complementary comprehensive systematic inquiry into the structure and dynamics of human consciousness as to determine the reason for the subject-object tension and dichotomy by reason of which the ego always seeks its autonomy outside the foundation of its unity. It is an attempt at addressing this tension with a view to providing workable solutions towards its containment in a complementary comprehensive mutually harmonized fashion (2011: 38). The central methodological thesis of the philosophy of complementary reflections it hinged on the fact that anything that exists serves a missing link of reality. The question however is that as has to do with what is a missing link? In response to the above poser, Asouzu (2004: 277-278) intimated that the missing links are the:

> Diverse units that make up an entity within the framework of the whole and as they are complementarily related. They are all the imaginable, fragments, units, components, and combinations that enter into our understanding of any aspect of our world. They are also all the units and combinations necessary in the conceptualization of an entity or of the whole. Thus missing links are, for example, thoughts and the thoughts of thoughts. They are diverse modes of manifestation of being in history. They are categories and the categories of categories. They are the units and the units of units, entities and the entities of entities, and things and the things of things. They are ideas and the ideas of ideas, etc., as

these can possibly be abstracted and related to each other as conditions of possibility of their perfectibility in a harmonious systemic manner.

Viewed in the light of ethnicity, especially within the context of a multi-ethnic nation state like Nigeria, one can say that every ethnic group that exists in Nigeria serves as a missing link to the other. In other words, the Igbos serves a missing link to the Hausas and vice versa and hence should live in complementary terms. However, and in reality, this has not been the case. The reason is not farfetched; it is because of fundamental and the greatest instinct in man which is tailored towards self-preservation. Due to this instinct, the human person reacts to conceive and perceive ethnic and tribal similarities and difference along the line of the maxim that Asouzu calls "the nearer the better the safer". This illusion, related to ethnic matters, Asouzu (2007:181) avers that:

> The mind seeks to convince itself that a person or a group of individuals are better off and are safer in the midst of those that share certain common, unique or exclusive qualities. These are our kith and kin, our own tribal people, people of our race, of our (tribal) nation etc. Thus, in most contentious issues of life, we tend to act in keeping with this maxim.

The above can be read as stipulating a situation where the Igbos feels that they are most likely to realize themselves if they are closer to themselves, so do the Hausa and other ethnic groups and as such they fall into intended or unintended ethnocentric commitment. It can also be taken to mean that one has some form of security when one is attached to his or her kith and kin. This kind of security according to Asouzu is a false security and is based on a thinking that is semi-rational. In this thinking, a negative formulation of the maxim of the nearer the better the safer could be articulated to mean that "the more removed a unit is from the world of our internal belongingness, our ethnic world for example, the less are we obliged to it and the more can we exploit it freely with impunity for our own survival, and in this case without remorse" (2007: 181). The above aptly captures the present realities in Nigeria as regards the misinterpretation and misuse of ethnicity for private or group gains which have assumed the status of being a problem.

A critical look at the maxim of the nearer the better the safer reveals some limitations. These limitations as put forward by Asouzu are in three folds, and an explication of them is here considered necessary. The first limitation and illusion is that as have to do with the assumption that "units can attain set goals optimally, within the same system, and at the exclusion of the interest of some other units that necessarily enter into the definition of the system in question". In response to this assumption, Asouzu (2007:183) intimated that:

> If a system is constituted of units, the realization of the interest of the units can hardly be achieved where the actor acts in a way that negates the fact of the necessary link joining all stakeholders. This necessary link has the character of a higher principle of integration on the basis of which equity and justice can be guaranteed for all. Where actors pretend that that such a higher principle of integration is not necessary and acts in a way as to arrogate this function to themselves and thereby seek to legislate arbitrarily on matters of general interest, the invariably expose themselves to the risk of not realizing the goals they have set for themselves.

The response of Asouzu in this regards cannot be truer, especially within the context of Nigeria. The failure of the Biafran civil war, the failure of the attempts at establishment of an Islamic state out of Nigeria by the Boko Haram group and the recent collapse (in principle) of the Indigenous People of Biafra, a unit of the system called Nigeria can be attributed to the actors negating the necessary link binding and joining all stakeholders.

The second assumption of the maxim of the nearer the better the safer according to Asouzu is that ensuring from the illusion that the greatest threat is always from the outside. Here the outside is defines as all the groups and individuals whose interest are diametrically opposed to that of the group in question and against whom the group must unite to defend its interest. For Asouzu (2004:184),

> In the excessive sensitivity concerning external threats, most ethnic groups makes themselves ill prepared for the challenges of difference arising from within their own rank and file, such that when these do arise, they easily destabilize and consume the groups concerned. In the absence of commitment to such a higher principle,

ethnic groups are exposed to incessant internal strife and to the danger of annihilation.

The third assumption stemming from illusion of the maxim of the nearer the better the safer according to Asouzu (2004:185) is that "the right to cleavage entitles to absolute otherness an in this sense to the use of privilege ensuring from such rights in a manner that can imperil and even negate the interest of other stakeholders without serious consequences". In Nigeria, a nation of heterogeneity, this case of the above assumption is evident. For many in Nigeria, "the impression is created that the state is the overriding principle of appropriation of the right of her citizens and this by the reason of her natural right to guarantee harmony among stakeholders" (2004: 185). It is in this sense that one can see the crisis of attritions that have been fostered by ethnic groupings as OPC (Oduwa People's Congress), MASSOB (Movement for the Actualisation of the Sovereign State of Biafra), MOSOP (Movement for the survival of Ogoni People), APC (Arewa People's Congress), NDVF (Niger Delta Volunteer Force) and more recently IPOB (Indigenous People of Biafra).

An assessment of the activities of all these groups here mentioned reveals their readiness to employ and deploy whatever means at their disposal with the intent of getting their demands met not minding whether it infringes on the right of other ethnic groups or stakeholders. It must be noted that "in such ambivalent situations, in the passionate and blind pursuance of those interest perceived as the natural rights of units, in total negation of the higher principle of harmony, stakeholders easily forget the severe consequences that goes with such approach"(185). From common senses construct, it returns that if self determination is granted, the unit (as in the case of the Niger-Delta region of Nigeria and the Indigenous people of Biafra) will survive and be sustained while the wealth in question lasts. Hence, the thinking that the maxim of the nearer the better the safer within the purview of ethnicity is a principle and method of actualizing one's aim is flawed. Closely linked to the third assumption is the fact that "issues relating to control and appropriation of resources (resource control), in a multiethnic context cannot be resolved on the basis of winner takes-all as we are misled to believe due to ambivalence of our situation. Such matters are best handled within the context of a higher principle of integration, which is capable of guaranteeing the equitable participation of all stakeholders" (Asouzu,

2007:185-186) and within the purview of complementarism which sees all units of the system as a missing links.

Away from the illusions of the maxim of the nearer the better the safer, a universal principle of integration on the basis of the philosophy of complementary reflection is imperative. To move from this maxim and its assumptions, and move towards a universal platform for the harmonization of the differences resulting from the multi-ethnic nature of the Nigerian state that will guarantee the realization of the interest of all, the philosophy of complementarity will do. As early stated, the general principle of the philosophy of complementary reflections is that as based on the principle of harmonious integration on the basis of the fact that anything that exists serves a missing link of reality. This, according to Asouzu (2007), means that in any given framework or system of action, all units (in this case, ethnic groups in Nigeria), no matter how insignificant, enter necessarily into the definition of the system (Nigeria) in question. And hence, to ensure that the life (and corporate existence) of the system is maintained, all the units constituting it have to be considered in their insufficiency, such that a typical human action in all given situations is understood as geared towards the joy of all concerned. Understood in other words, the acceptance of all ethnic groups and the respect for same in view of their contributions to the whole or not, or on the basis of our contribution to them or not is what makes for the integration and the joy of all. In this regards:

> Without the commitment to such categories as integration, tolerance, endurance, acceptance, readiness to forgive, to reconcile and to view the world in a comprehensive way, and leave the future open for the amendment of errors ensuring from inherent human insufficiency, no system-typical act is thinkable. These positive categories of integration belongs to intrinsically to the character of the principle of complementarity as its most dynamic moment (Asouzu, 2007:187).

Asouzu further adds that since all units within a given system are necessarily related to each other, any service which they render each other turn out to be self-service. The same can be said of the denial of such services. In this sense, the idea of mutual indebtedness and interdependence in complemetarity of all stakeholders within any given system is a fundamental axiom of complementary reflection. Again, "where the principles and imperatives of complementary reflections are in force, a negation of the interest of any of the stakeholders

(ethnic groups), by any member of the system is immediately perceived as a contradiction that is consequent to self-negation. In this case, the stakeholders come to the full awareness that consistent or consequent self-interest is anti-self-interest. In any given system, the units have no other option than to adopt such a principle of action should they uphold their existence" (2007:187). He further intimated that:

> Adhering to dictates of the higher principle of integration in our actions offers us therefore the conditions for transition to a higher level of rationality, in so far as it puts us in a position to break with the constraints imposed by the maxim of the nearer the better the safer, whose origin is the prompting of a semi-rational natural instinct of self-preservation (187).

The above paragraph can be read, within the context of ethnicity and ethnic conflicts in Nigeria, to mean that the elevation of the interest of any particular ethnic group over and agent the interest of the others is self-negation and anti-self-interest and for us to uphold our corporate existence, only two possibilities are left open, and they include: one, all ethnic group who are stakeholders in the Nigerian system must learn to see them as missing links and that in their insufficiencies, they are as a matter of necessity dependent on other ethnic groups to exist authentically. Two, a subscription to the higher principle of integration which makes for peace and national development is imperative if Nigeria must move forward.

National development can be said to be a nationwide and wholistic development of a nation state. It implies the well being of a covert majority of the citizens in material terms. It implies the decrease in inequality levels. Above all, national development implies the guarantee of security of lives and property in the state, national development has an infrastructural trajectory, it is interpretable as the availability of critical infrastructures for the engendering of further positive changes in a given state. Consequently, national development is not a static condition. The availability that it indicates necessarily leads to some other end, in a continuing dimension. National development is accordingly "work in progress" (Okeke and Idike, 2016:72).

Deducible from the above within the context of the study, it is important to note that national development is a consequent of peace. Again, there is a total or near

absence of national development in a nation that is bedeviled by ethnic hostilities and crisis of attritions. This is true particularly for a country like Nigeria. The phenomenon of ethnicity has long been used to indicate various axes of ethnic differentiations that eventually contribute to and further accentuates social-political and economic backwardness. What this translates into is the need for an ideology and project that will bring to the fore as well as elevate a cohesive system of every ethnic group in Nigeria that will lead to national integration and development. The philosophy of complimentary reflections which emphasizes the mutual dependence and interdependence of units in any given system in the opinion of this paper is that cohesive system.

Drawing from the lessons that are derivable from the "*dandas*" (the English cognate of ants) who are usually able to surmount all hurdles and challenges, when in unity, this philosophy possesses within itself, the tendency of aiding Nigeria in her attempts at navigating and overcoming her challenges which to say the least are multifaceted. It remains to say that no human society can actualize itself outside the framework of unity in diversity. Where this is attempted (as it is the cases in Nigeria), it would be practiced at the great risk of self-strangulation. This is important because, the idea of a human being necessarily connotes relations. This is even truer because no individual is alone in the world and every human society is a composite of human individuals with diverse sets of resourcefulness, which fundamentally negates any form of closed-circuit mentality. No human society can be conceptualized as exclusively homogenous (Asouzu, 2004:74). It is in this regards that the notion of ethnicity is here redefined with the intent of pushing back the frontiers of the its mobilization on the basis of a closed circuit mentality along the lines of the maxim of the nearer the better the safer for group gains at the expense of national integration, peace and development.

Conclusion

In this paper, it has been argued that ethnicity, taken in itself does not constitute a problem to development. Rather, it is the mobilization of ethnicity fuelled by the maxim of the nearer the better, the safer for individual group gains to the neglect of other units within the system that constitutes a problem. It has also been argued that, viewed from that prism, ethnicity possesses the tendency and propensity of stunting growth and national development which is work in progress. In Nigeria, the above returns true and cohere with actual state of

affairs. Peace have eluded the state, there are tensions and agitations amongst the unit of the system called Nigeria and these have heated up the polity and pushed back the frontiers of peace and national development with the infrastructural trajectory being the worst hit in cases of crisis and conflict. To this end, this paper, drawing from the philosophy of complementarity which has at its core, the fact that everything that exist serves as a missing link of reality and elevates the imperativeness mutual dependence and interdependence of units in a system calls all ethnic groups and units in the system called Nigeria to see themselves as missing links of reality, to see themselves as Nigerians and not as Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, Tiv, Ijaw, Igede etc.

The conclusion that is reached is that, for Nigeria to come out of limbo within the context of national development despite it heterogeneity, a cohesive rational principle and project that is based on the higher principle of integration is both imperative and timely. This principle as can be extrapolated from the philosophy of complementary reflections and it is only with the philosophic temper that underpin this principle that Nigeria can surmount her numerous challenges and move in the path of national development.

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