



AN EXAMINATION OF AMARTYA SEN'S *IDEA OF JUSTICE* AND THE QUESTION OF ETHNIC CRISES IN MODERN NIGERIAN SOCIETY

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Abstract

Since the creation of the country called Nigeria, there has been debate on the issue of peaceful coexistence among the different ethnic groups in Nigeria. The nation has faced a series of ethnic, political, and economic crises; this has divided the ethnic lines bringing about disparities among the people. These disparities have raised rivalries due to the unequal distribution of the nation's resources and this is due to manipulation of power by the elite group. This study adopted analytical method and uses the tool of critical analysis. This is to analyse ethnic crises and political instability in contemporary Nigeria. The ethnic crises are more compelling when viewed against the many occasions of injustice and unfair treatment suffered by the marginalised, disadvantaged, and vulnerable ethnic groups in Nigerian society by the ruling elite. Findings revealed that Ethnic crises are one of the challenges facing the stability of Nigeria as a nation. It is on this premise that this research is based. Amartya Sen's Idea of Justice will end the ethnic crises by adhering to it. Through Amartya Sen's Niti and Nyaya, human reason can differentiate between justice and injustice through the realization process. The study concluded that Ethnic crises have led to economic loss and rivalries between various ethnic groups. Contemporary Nigeria can end ethnic crises by adopting Amartya Sen's Niti and Nyaya, and it is possible through public reasoning to end injustice among various Ethnic groups in contemporary Nigeria.

Keywords: Ethnic crises, injustice, ethnic, Amartya Sen.

Introduction

Many African countries such as the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Uganda, Somalia, Sudan, Burundi, and many more have experienced a series of crises, that occurred between communities, ethnic groups, and religious groups and Nigeria is not excluded. Crises have been linked to ethnicity and have led to serious loss of lives and properties in many areas of the country. Nigeria is a country in the continent of Africa, with over 250 ethnic groups and 120 different languages spoken in the country. Nigeria has two major religious affiliations which are Christianity and Islam and diverse ethnic groups. The ethnic groups have all seen themselves as rivals competing for power and decision-making over economic resources. Ethnicity is characterised by a common consciousness of being and this factor, more than any other, defines the boundary of the group that is relevant for understanding ethnicity at any point in time (Nnoli, 1980). Ethnicity, in addition, often contains an obscured class component which becomes a tool for the elite members of society to hold on to their privileges. Ethnicity, according to Nnoli (1980) is a social phenomenon that is associated with interactions among members of different ethnic groups. Nnoli explained that ethnic groups are social formations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries. He



noted that such groups may be distinct in terms of language, culture, or both. According to Nnoli, language has clearly been the most crucial dividing factor in Africa and Nigeria in particular. Nigeria is seen as a plural society due to different ethnic groups, religion, language, culture and institutional arrangements. As a heterogeneous society, over 250 ethnic groups have been identified each interacting with one another in competition for power and wealth. This has resulted in ethnic conflicts (Salawu & Hassan, 2011). The history of ethnic crises in Nigeria can be traced back to the colonial and post-colonial periods. Ojo (2014) posited that the colonial tripartite division of Nigeria prevented a Nigerian nationalistic movement, manipulating geographical boundaries to reinforce separation between ethnic groups and transforming ethnicity into an identity by which to gain political power. This structure and other administrative decisions emphasized ethnic nationalism and regional politics, resulting from significant uneven development within each region.

According to Ebegbulem (2011), the colonial division of Nigeria that reinforced ethnic groups, the rise of ethno-political consciousness, and the development of ethnic/regional political parties demonstrated that the British administration intentionally prevented the rise and success of Nigerian nationalism, instead promoting ethnic nationalism as a means to gain political power. It is believed that Lord Frederick Lugard's 1914-18 constitutional exercises, which resulted in the amalgamation of the separate protectorates of Southern Nigeria and Cameroon with the protectorate of Northern Nigeria, were carried out without any explicit consent from Nigerians.

As a result of this action, Okoye (2005) opined that provinces and other divisions were created according to the wisdom and convenience of imperial British officials. This influenced the ethnic consciousness of Nigerians. The ethnic crises in the country can also be traced to the creation of three regions by the British government using the two major rivers, the Niger and the Benue Rivers to divide the country into three geographical units, namely, the North, East, and West. The unjust nature of the division is encapsulated in the words of Ojo (2014) who averred that the:

division exacerbated the country's ethnic problems. Firstly, the regions were not equal; the Northern region was the size of the Eastern and Western regions combined. Secondly, the three regions were created without due consideration of minority groups that abound in these regions.

The philosophical and historical analysis of the crises of ethnic crisis in Nigeria indicates that there has been a succession of political instability and mutable constitutional strategies for solving ethnic diversity. Presently in Nigeria, there is rivalry among the ethnic groups over issues such as power and resource sharing formula. Successive governments have tried to find a lasting solution for inequality, marginalization, and ethnic crisis in the above-mentioned problems, all to no avail.

Ethnic Crises in Nigeria from the Eve of Civil War

Nigeria has evolved over the ages of different historical experiences in different geographical regions, into a modern and complex heterogeneity of groups and cultures. These nations with different languages and ideologies have been brought together by a "mere geographical expression". (Awolowo, 1947). Almost six decades of political independence and over hundred years of marginalisation, the nation is still being confronted with the challenges of



national unity. (Duyile, Nwachukwu, Ediagbonya, & Pelumi, 2020). Nigeria is undoubtedly a country with a great political and economic potential in the developing world. It is a country with many ethnic groups with diverse cultures. In terms of population and geographical spread, the major cultural groups of Nigeria are the Hausa, Yoruba, Igbo, Fulani, Ibibio, Kanuri, Tiv, Edo, Nupe and Ijaw. (Duyile, Ediagbonya, & Buhari, 2020). In 1960, Nigeria became a self-governing state with Sir Tafawa Balewa as the inaugurating Prime Minister and Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe as the President. Nigeria became a Republic in 1963. The country ran into a civil war in 1967 to 1970. The process of reconstruction and rehabilitation was partially successful after the end of the war. Nigeria can be seen in terms of its internal and external waters. The internal waters are the rivers and lakes body within its territorial land space.

The external waters are the Seas and Oceans within its border environs. The basic infrastructure in Nigeria is in a semi-comatose state, and this can be traced to the events during colonial times. The colonial impact on infrastructure was exploitative. (Duyile, 2016). The British intention of developing infrastructure in the land space called Nigeria was to exploit the mineral resources in the soil and transport the agricultural produce for onward seafight to Europe. For example, a Nigerian Navy Commander, Akinfemi Duyile (hydrography department), said that “even though the Bakassi and the fishing settlements historically belong to the Obong of Calabar,” (Duyile, 2015), Nigeria do not even a territory it created and ethnicity is associated with land and kindred.

As observed by Malam Abubakar Imam, “We despise each other, we call each other ignorant. The South is proud of its Western knowledge and culture – we are proud of our Eastern culture. (Alegbeleye, 2014) The plain truth is that the common people of the north put more confidence in the white man than in either their black southern brothers...” (Alegbeleye, 2014). This is an apt description of the scenario of the early years of the nation. Crises are not new to human societies, they are part of human existence, they are as old as human history because they have been in existence in all areas of human endeavour. But co-existence in Nigeria has not always been without stress, tension, violence and crisis. Nigeria has a long history of ethnic crises. Since the emergence of the recent democracy in the country in 1999, the nation has witnessed series of violent clashes. A country with ethnic crises cannot but experience monumental loss of lives, destruction of property worth billions of naira. From 1999- 2013, the country had witnessed many violent inter-ethnic crises.

As observed by Onodugo, Amujiri, and Nwuba (2015), Ethno-religious crisis with their multi-dimensional consequences has been an obstacle to progress, economic prosperity, and political stability and over all socio-economic development of Nigeria because of its destructive nature. (Onodugo, *et. al*, 2015) Ethnicity is a social phenomenon that is manifested in interactions among individuals of different ethnic groups within a political system where language and culture are the most prominent attributes. Ethnicity is natural in almost all societies made up of more than one ethnic group. Alegbeleye (2014), defined ethnicity as a situation in which individuals in a particular ethnic group consider themselves or are considered by others to have common affinity which distinct them from other groups in the society. Ethnic crisis is a concept that is difficult to define and perhaps, more difficult to comprehend.



Crises between ethnicities are a phenomenon that has occurred for ages and is not peculiar to Nigeria. Several scholars have taken issue with the term ‘ethnic crisis’ (alternately ‘ethnic war’ or ‘ethnic violence’)—loosely defined as a political or social crisis involving one or more groups that are identified by some marker of ethnic identity. Crises have been viewed in many different ways by various scholars. Attempts have been made by researchers to conceptualize conflict and one of the most quoted traditional definitions of crisis regards crisis as” ... a struggle over value and claims to scarce, status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals” (Onodugo, Amujiri, & Nwuba, 2015)

Causes of Ethnic Crises in Nigeria

Several scholars like Ojo (2014), Nnoli (1980), Egwu (2001), and Ebegbulem (2011) to name a few, have suggested that competition for scarce resources are a major factor in the ethnic crises in Nigeria. In a country with diverse ethnic groups like Nigeria, there are competitions for the scarce resources of the nation. In this case, states act with a bias to favour a particular ethnic group, and behaviors such as preferential treatment, tribalism, and nepotism fuel ethnic crises. It can be attributed to many factors, and they come in different dimensions. Some of the factors are: colonial legacy, boundary disputes, struggle for power and resources, struggle for citing of local government headquarters or government institutions, failure of the traditional model to solve crisis, poverty, perceived lack of sincerity and fair play on the part of government, manipulation of the elites in the society, ethnic intolerance and religious intolerance (Ojo, 2014). Ten major factors that cause ethnic crises are as follows:

- 1. Disputed Territorial Claims:** Farmers and pastoralists, fishermen and pond owners and so on have clashed throughout Nigeria over the uses or exploitation of land and water resources. The problem of land resources as a factor in ethnic crisis has been a major issue between communities and ethnic groups. All pieces of land in Nigeria belong to one ethnic group or the other, thus propelling ethnic crisis.
- 2. The Imperatives of culture-bound occupation:** As observed by several scholars interactions of a group’s heritage, ecology, technology population movements, and physical environmental resources, members of certain ethnic groups have learned to survive in certain occupations in which they have also achieved some preserve. For example, cattle rearers in need of pastures in the northeastern and northwestern areas of the country have engaged in violent crises over the limited and scarce land pastures for their animals with farmers over the crops and farmland destroyed by animals. There has been a loss of life and property from these ethnic violent clashes.
- 3. Scarcity of Resources:** Resources are minimal and scarce in the nation that is blessed with over 10 million people and thus stiff competition exists on the political and economic spheres. There are inter-ethnic and intra-ethnic crises in the race for political positions.
- 4. Multiculturalism and strategic Use of symbols:** Symbols have a strong connection to the culture of the people. Ethnic symbols are protected as a common heritage of the community or ethnic group. So any perceived disregard or humiliation for the culture of any ethnic group had led to crisis. A good example is the Hausa and Yorubas in Sagamu in 1999.
- 5. Religion and Ethnic Crisis:** Ethnicity crisis hardly happens in isolation or a vacuum, but it mingles with other variables such as religion and class. In Northern Nigeria



however, the two concepts are so interwoven to the extent that crises between groups in the region tend to be quickly interpreted as ethnic or religious crises. Experiences from the past have shown that most violent crises result from an interplay of ethnic, religious, political, socio-economic, and cultural differences. For example, during ethnic crises in volatile crisis areas in northern Nigeria like Kaduna or Kano, an Igbo Muslim or Yoruba Muslim may not be regarded as a Muslim by the Hausa neighbor but seen as from a different ethnic group.

6. **Ethnicity, Class, and Ethnic Crisis:** Ethnic consciousness is prevalent in Nigeria. National class interests are insignificant when the choice of identity is involved in important issues of individuals or communities. The upper or middle social classes in Nigeria are known to have used ethnic coloration to mobilize the people for support to positions of power and to foster ethnic crisis. This tendency of not establishing the boundary between ethnic, religious, cultural or political issues especially during moments of crisis and violence has for want of a better expression been captured by some scholars as an “ethno-religious crisis” or identity crisis.
7. **The Structural basis of Ethnic Crisis:** The pluralism of a nation makes it susceptible to crisis. The crises are a result of limited access to political, economic, and scarce resources. Thus, ethnic crises are not inevitable in such multiethnic societies as Nigeria.
8. **Internal Colonialism:** The different ethnic groups have unequal population size and access to political authority.
9. **Unintended Consequences of Political Development**
10. **External Forces**

From the points highlighted, the causes of crises in the country can be explained from many perspectives. Scholars have offered multiple explanations for the ongoing ethnic crisis in Nigeria.

Amartya Sen's Understanding of Justice

According to Sen, although the issue of social justice has been discussed for ages, the social and economic transformations that emerged with the European Enlightenment in the 18th and 19th centuries caused the political climate to change in Europe and America, and the concept was strongly supported by the changing political climate. Thus, the line of thought on justice among the main philosophers has been divided into two different directions and two different approaches. The first of these approaches is the justice approach, which was initiated by the works of Thomas Hobbes in the 17th century and followed by important thinkers with different styles such as Rousseau, Locke, Kant, and Rawls. This approach is the 'social contract' theory, which focuses on social justice mechanisms and is dominant in today's political philosophy. Sen also calls this approach the transcendental institutionalism approach. Another approach to justice is the influence of different institutions advocated by Smith, Condorcet, Wollstonecraft, Bentham, Mill, and Marx.

It is the comparative theory of justice, which argues that justice can be possible by comparing different lifestyles under it (Sen, 2009:6-7). For Sen, in the transcendental institutionalism approach, rather than comparing justice and injustice in actual societies, it is aimed to define the nature of the just and it is tried to diagnose what perfect justice is without focusing directly on actual societies. Sen evaluates this feature of this approach, which focuses on the



fair organization of institutions rather than people and actual societies, as a contractual mode of thinking and states that a hypothetical social contract situation is assumed in this thinking mode.

The obvious relevance of this social contract is to offer an ideal alternative to chaos/confusion. Emphasizing that the transcendental institutionalism approach is arrangement-focused, Sen states that “the results of this approach lead to the development of theories of justice that focus on the transcendent identity of ideal institutions” (Sen, 2009:6). Pointing out that the other approach to justice, the comparative justice approach, is a realization-focused approach, Sen points out that comparative theorists try to correct it by clearly showing the injustice in the world and that social realization (actual institutions, behaviors and other effects on human life) states that they focus on the results). “These theorists, instead of limiting their studies to the transcendent investigation of a perfectly just society, have conducted studies involving the comparison of existing or probable societies, and have directed all their attention to the abolition of injustice in the world” (Sen, 2009:7). In making a crucial difference between the arrangement-focused approach to justice and the realization-focused approach to justice, the realization-oriented approach, that is, the comparative justice approach focuses its attention on the actual behavior of people rather than the obedience of ideal behavior. While the regulation-oriented approach (transcendental institutionalism approach) asks 'How is a competent just institution', the realization-oriented approach asks the question 'How can justice be developed'. The realization-oriented approach focuses not only on institutions and rules but also on the actual realization of justice in societies, that is, it focuses attention on comparison/comparison instead of following a transcendent route (Sen, 2009:7-9).

Sen argues that the dominant view regarding justice in today's political philosophy is the view of transcendental institutionalism and shows John Rawls as the representative of this view in our time. Sen states that it is possible to clearly see the principles of justice in Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*, in which the norms of right behavior in the moral and political context are illuminating, and our relationship with perfectly just institutions is fully defined/determined. Regarding justice, Sen states that he sees two problems in the transcendental institutionalism approach, which includes Rawls. First, even under strict conditions of open-minded scrutiny and impartiality (for example, in the original position Rawls described) there can be an unreasonable agreement on the nature of a just society. According to Sen, this is an agreed-upon transcendent solution and it is a question of feasibility of the conclusion reached. Another of these problems involves the actual selection demands for a comparative framework of justice in the application of practical reason and the selection of the improbably improbable perfect situation from among possible alternatives. According to Sen, this is “the redundancy problem of research in terms of a transcendent solution” (Sen, 2009:9). In Rawls' theory of justice, a hypothetical state of equality (the original position) is assumed to exist at the outset, and it is assumed that people who have no knowledge of themselves (under the veil of ignorance) will unanimously choose one thing in choosing the two principles of justice. However, Rawls fails to show why different alternative views on justice were not chosen. Here, Sen, in his approach to justice, tries to show that Rawls' description of these principles of justice is a mistake.



Sen, claims that, other alternative approaches can easily dismiss Rawls's argument, which he formulated to draw attention to objectivity because it is not a useful and credible argument. For this reason, Sen states that the fulcrum of Rawls' theory of justice is blocked. Sen's interest is focused on how to reduce injustice even though we have different perspectives on an ideal system with a rational consensus. In this context, Sen sees “the diversity of systems and lifestyles not as an error or mistake, but as things that signify human freedom” (Sen, 2009:12). Sen argues that it is impossible to reach a perfect consensus on what a just world is. Justice can have multiple competing causes, all claiming to be impartial. Because Sen (2009:16) argues that “there is more than one value and criterion system to think about justice”. Sen (2009:54), states that the concept of truth is the basic concept of Rawls' theory of justice, "The principles of justice in Rawls' formulation determine the basic social institutions that regulate society." The need for accuracy arises when negotiating within an imaginary original situation to determine the principles of justice in impartiality. “Justice as truth has been central to political thought from the very beginning as a right” (Sen, 2009:55). The structural purpose of righteousness practice includes identifying appropriate principles that determine the unanimous selection of just institutions needed for the basic structure of a society. In Rawls, accuracy and impartiality are combined for the selection of appropriate principles of justice. Sen compares Rawls to Kant at this point. According to Sen, “Those who defend a universal law, as Kant did, accept that the characteristics such as not being emotional and being objective are shared by most people” (Sen, 2009:57). At this point, Sen, talks about the multiplicity of competing objective principles and tries to explain this with the example of three children with a flute (Sen, 2009:16): There is a flute, and there are three children named Anne, Bob and Carla. One of these three children will have the flute. Anne says she deserves this flute only because she knows how to play the flute; Bob wants that flute given to him because he has no toys; Carla claims to have produced the flute herself.

Sen emphasizes that each child in the example above has different reasons for owning the flute, and in this case, the decision about whom to give the flute to will be very difficult. According to Sen, different theorists such as utilitarians, economic egalitarians, and liberals will think differently about who should be given the flute. For example, economic egalitarians will support Bob because he is the poorest; liberals will want the flute to be given to Carla since Carla is the one who produced the flute; utilitarians will support giving the flute to Anne since only Anne knows how to play the flute and in this case she will get the greatest pleasure while playing the flute. According to Sen, for Rawls and his followers, only one of these children will be right and the decision will be made accordingly. The transcendental institutionalism approach, in which Rawls is also included, attributes to justice a necessity and universality that can be applied at all times and everywhere. Sen, who argues that this is not possible, emphasizes that in Rawls' model of justice, there is only one type of just society, which is defined by reference to principles. That is, plausible, reasonable answers to the pluralism existing in the modern world cannot be seen within this ideal form of Rawls and all other alternatives fail.

However, according to Sen, in the example of three children, giving the flute to one of the children causes us to contradict at least one principle of justice every time: If the flute is not given to Anne, it will lead to human performance to the abolition of poverty if the flute is not given to Bob; If the flute is not given to Carla, it would be inconsistent with one's right to enjoy what is the result of one's own effort. The focus should be on choosing among possible



alternatives, rather than discussing perfect solutions that are potentially unusable. Sen (2009:16) tries to explain this choice with the following example: “If we try to choose between Picasso and Dali, we should not do it by referring to the diagnosis that Mona Lisa is the most ideal painting in the world.” According to Sen, in the example of 'three children with a flute', each of these three children's justified arguments shows non-arbitrary reasons and different types of impartiality. Sen argues that the peaceful settlement of such conflict can only come from a social negotiation and not from any social institution. He emphasizes that this is possible by excluding criteria that do not originate from common sense to measure justice (Sen, 2009:14-15). According to Sen, the example of the flute reflects different fundamental ideas, which are considered separately and defended impartially, about the nature of a just society. Therefore, it does not seem possible to determine the institutions needed for the basic structure of society and to establish the principles of justice altogether.

For this reason, Sen states that “it is very difficult to use the whole procedure of justice as the correctness developed by Rawls in his theory” (Sen, 2009:57). Rawls, in his book *Theory of Justice*, argues that people who come together in the initial situation will not choose other alternative ideas about justice and that the establishment of principles of justice will emerge in a single way. Sen considers this approach of Rawls as an effort to reach a transcendent ideal. Indeed, according to Sen, Rawls himself later admitted that in the original position it was a problem to reach unanimous consensus on the single choice of principles of justice, but this incorrigible problem has had devastating effects on the theory of justice as truth. However, Rawls' theory, according to Sen, “played a great role in our understanding of various aspects of the idea of justice and enriched political philosophy with its thoughts” (Sen, 2009: 58). On the other hand, Sen (2009:18) sees that “the importance of experiences and realizations in human life cannot be replaced by knowledge about the creation and regulation of institutions and rules”. Because for Sen, people's actual lives are closely related to an achievement/skill-based understanding of justice and there is a need for such an approach to justice. According to Sen, institutions and rules are of course very important and they affect situations and events to a great extent. However, institutions and rules give only a certain part of the actual world, that is, this organizational picture does not include the ability or inability to manage one's own life.

Therefore, Sen, sees himself closer to the justice tradition (comparative justice approach) to which thinkers such as Adam Smith, Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill, and Karl Marx adhere. Sen states that comparative theorists focus directly on social realization (the consequences of actual institutions, behavior, and other influences) by clearly demonstrating the injustice in the world and striving to correct injustice. According to Sen, “these thinkers believed that injustices were correctable by gathering around the desire to eliminate injustice, rather than designing a completely unjust world” (Sen, 2009:7). At this point, Sen especially finds Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments* important and supports it. Instead of the veil of ignorance put forward by Rawls, Sen defends the concept of an impartial audience put forward by Smith. According to Sen, Rawls used the concept of the veil of ignorance to bring objectivity to the discussion of justice. Rawls argued that participants chose the principles of justice under a hypothetical imaginary situation, assuming that participants under the veil of ignorance did not know their own position. On the other hand, Smith put forward the concept of a neutral audience. Smith defined an impartial spectator who supervises, questions, or to some extent shapes an individual's moral actions. The individual in the society controls the



rightness or wrongness of his moral action, just as if he were another person (impartial audience), and his action is shaped accordingly. The individual and the neutral audience are like two different selves and may not always be consistent with each other. The impartial spectator is a second self-established in one's imagination, not one's character. However, it precedes one's character and controls and shapes the other to a certain extent. In other words, for Smith, emotions and reason play a role together in shaping our actions or in the formation of character (Metin, 2010:68-69). Sen refers to the concept of an impartial audience, which Smith put forward as a means of achieving objectivity in public debate.

Sen sees Smith's principle of the neutral audience as a more useful and uncomplicated application than the veil of ignorance in Rawls' original position. According to Sen, the impartial audience guides a perspective that takes into account deficiencies and incompleteness, does not need a fully competent, just world, but considers a reasonable and credible understanding of justice sufficient. Guided by such a perspective, Sen argues, we must rely on our capability to determine justice, keeping it out of our interests and orientations. Justice is subjective and it cannot be universal. On the other hand, Sen (2009:20-21) refers as a useful example to two different words in the Sanskrit literature on ethics and legal doctrine in the ancient Indian legal system in order to better understand the contrast between the regulation-oriented approach and the realization-oriented approach to justice. *Niti* and *Nyaya* are two different concepts that replace/used justice in classical Sanskrit literature. These concepts are both different and related to each other.

Elite Theory and Ethnic Crises in Contemporary Nigeria

Ethnicity often contains an obscured class component which becomes a tool for the elite member of the society to hold on to their privileges. Most of the ethnic crises in Contemporary Nigeria is being influenced by the ruling elite, this elite group seizes power and manipulates the political and economic resources to their own favour bringing about injustice, disparities rivalry among the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. The marginalised masses are subdued and dominated without being heard, for their voice to be heard, they choose violence leading to ethnic crises.

Some of the propounders of this Elite theory are Jonathan Parry, Robert Michaels, Pareto and Mosca as well as St. Simon (Mazi Mbah, 2006:285). Johnson (2005) avers that "Elite theorists emphasize the degree to which interlocking corporate and foundation directorates, old-school ties, and frequent social interaction tend to link together and facilitate coordination between the top leaders in business, government, civic organizations, educational and cultural establishments, and the mass media". He stresses further that this "power elite" can effectively dictate the main goals if not always the practical means and details for all important government policy-making as well as dominate the activities of the major mass media and educational/cultural organizations in society under their control over the economic resources of the major business and financial organizations in the country. Their power is seen as based most fundamentally on their economic resources and especially on their positions within the top management of the big corporations and does not depend upon their ability to garner mass support through efforts to "represent" the interests of broader social groups, most times this Elitist group may not be majority group but they aim to grab power and amass wealth and control the available resource. Elitism is discriminatory, pre-emptive,



preventive, and saviours of a divine right to say what politics ought to be. Claim the political office and tend to disregard and snob mass opinion and competence (Mazi Mbah, 2006:284}.

According to Johnson (2005), elitist theoreticians differ somewhat among themselves, the exact degree of agreement or disagreement usually prevails within its ranks, and the degree of genuine concern for the broader public welfare that enters into their choices of public policy goals, but all such theorists broadly share the notion that it is these few thousand elite groups mostly from minority groups, who run the country and determine the basic directions of public policy, certainly not the manipulated and powerless masses of ordinary voters choosing among candidates at election time, they are "movers and shakers" of the political and economic resources of the country. This ethnic group dominates and controls the power and resources for the betterment and enrichment of themselves depriving some ethnic groups of access to power and available resources. This has generated disparities and unrest among the people leading to division and crises among themselves. Mazi Mbah (2006:283) in his definition on elite avers that "In its general sense the elite denotes a group of persons who in any society hold positions of eminence in politics it denotes specifically those who exercise preponderant political influence. He stressed further that they are political entrepreneurs, the establishment, and the governing minority. The ruling elite are known by high degree of elite consciousness or organisation which they possess. They may be a caste, a ruling class, in aristocracy of some form or they may be lacking in any conscious linkage other than occupation of authority positions. In Nigeria they may go by the designations: Leaders of thought, the V.I.P., the heavy weights, men of timber and calibre, the kingmakers, who in general feature as prominent in social and political affairs.

From the elite point of view, politics is seen in terms of a small group dominating the whole society and making the important decisions i.e. big decisions. The elite approach to politics comes in when there is a conscious effort and practise to exercise exclusive decision-making as a prerogative of social position or class. In Nigeria's political dispensation, the ruling elite are from the various ethnic groups, they dominate both the political, economic and resources of the state to amass wealth for themselves. They dominate the key sectors of the state by appointing their royalist to head those sectors as ministers for instance power sector. The elite claim and retain powers by perpetuation until circumstances eject them from power. "They are either born to rule or made to rule" (Mazi Mbah, 2006:285). Democracy is to them, an easy political nomenclature by given the elite the choice to constitute themselves into a caste. Most times, it is assumed that the masses are disorganised and therefore the interest of small elite are will be normally accepted in the society. They normally control access into their ranks i.e they control recruitment into their ranks elites believe that political power like other social values is distributed unequally which mean that they can place people by their share of any good wealth, skill or political power (Mazi Mbah, 2006:287). Because they control power and economic resources, they decide whom to be in office. Most time they are being refer to as the Cabal. At times due to hardship and poverty, they use their influence to turn the ethnic groups against themselves in order to cover up their selfish motive. Nepotism and tribalism is being perpetrated by most of this elite group. For them to shield themselves from law they introduce immunity clause. They appoint into office their loyalties who work according to the dictate of this elite group. Crises in the contemporary Nigeria are traceable to the role and impact of the elite in contemporary political dispensation.



Critical Analysis of Ethnic crises in Nigeria

Nigeria has witnessed series of ethnic crisis which has led to loss of lives and destruction of properties. Some newspapers have published date of some of the crises from 1999 to 2002. Sources of this report are from 2000 Annual report on the Human Rights Situation in Nigeria, Tell Magazine, September 24, 2001, The Nigerian Tribune September 19, 2001, and The Punch Newspaper, November 22, 2002. Some of these crises are as follows:

May 30-June 9, 1999: Renewed Warri communal clash in Delta State.

July 18,1999: Oodua People's Congress and Hausa traders clashed at Sagamu, Ogun State.

November 25,1999: Communal clash in Lagos between Oodua People's Congress and Hausa traders.

January 25,2000: Communal clash in Brass Local Government area of Bayelsa State.

January 29,2000: Communal clash in Etsako Local Government area of Edo State.

January 30,2000: Communal clash at Etsako Local Government area of Edo State

February 2,2000: Boundary dispute between communities in Akwa Ibom and Cross Rivers State.

February 21,2000: Sharia riots in Kaduna.

February 28,2000: Religious riots in Aba, Abia State, reprisal killing from the Kaduna mayhem.

March 5,2000: Epoch of Ife – Modakeke war of attrition.

March 16,2000: Renewed hostilities between the people of Eleme and Okirika in Rivers State.

March 28,2000: Religious riots in Damboa, Borno State.

April 8,2000: Communal clash in Ovia South Local Government area of Edo State.

May 18,2000: Local farmers and Fulani cattle rearer's clash in Saki, Oyo State.

May 23,2000: Renewed religious riot in Kaduna.

June 5,2000: Epoch of the Owo mayhem in Ondo State.

June 12,2000: Communal clash in Isoko North Local Government area of Edo State.

June 23,2000: Communal clash between the people of Ikot Offiong and Oku-Iboku of Cross River State.

July 1,2000: The commencement of communal clash at Ikare Akoko, Ondo State.

July 21,2000: Renewed hostilities between the Ijaws and Urhobos in Delta State.

August 12,2000: Communal clash in Bendel Local Government area of Abia State.

August 22,2000: Violent clash at Agboma community in Epe Local Government area of Lagos State.

October16,2000: Igbos and Hausa traders clashed at Alaba Rago market area of Lagos State.

December 11,2000: Renewed clashes between Ife and Modakeke.

March 13,2001: Renewed communal clashes at Owo, Ondo State.

April 13,2001: Religious riot in Kano State

May 12.2001: Communal clash between the Ijaws and Itsekiri of Delta State.

July 2,2001: Communal clash between Odimodu and Ogulagba communities of Delta State.

July 12,2000: Ethnic violence in Nassarawa State.

September 7,2001: Religious clash in Jos, Plateau State.

September 16,2001: Religious riot in Kano.

September 18,2001: Religious riot in Benue State.

January 12,2002: Oodua People's Congress clash at Owo, Ondo State

February 2,2002: Oodua People's Congress and Hausa people clashed at Idi-Araba, Lagos State.



February 26,2002: Communal clash between Apprapum and Osatura communities of Cross Rivers State

March 10,2002: Egbara youth's revolt on Local Government creation

March 30-April 2,2002: All Peoples Party Intra party clash at Ilorin, Kwara State

August 31,2002: Communal clash at Ado-Ekiti

September 3,2002: Renewed communal clashes at Owo, Ondo State.

November 21,2002: Religious riots in Kaduna State and Abuja

There are many dimensions to the different ethnic Crises in the nation such as Resource exploitation; corrupt elites and colonization all play a part in the conflicts. The overall context of the violence outlined above has to be located in the manner in which minority and majority relations have been conducted in the recent past, and the manner in which different ethnic groups perceive the past blinded by the ethnic tensions of the present. To a certain extent, the emergence of ethnic politics can be understood in the context of colonialism and some colonial practices and policies put in place by the British Government during colonialism. From the very start of colonialism, the British introduced an extremely divisive and parochial form of limited representation based on economic status, ethnicity and political preference. However, this system has in many ways survived to date, and is the precursor of the current ethnic crises.

The growing propensity of protracted ethnic crisis is potentially destructive to the extent that if nothing is done it can compromise the corporate existence of the country. So far, there appear to be no singular phenomenon in the history of Nigeria that shows the inability of the various identities to live together peacefully and pursue the goal of development than the regular occurrence of ethnic crisis. What the country is experiencing is a recurring spate of violence that is deeply rooted in mutual suspicion and hatred among the various ethnic and groups in the country. The aftermath of these violent crises bears destruction, physical and mental devastation, death, maiming of people, destruction of property and economic stagnation, disruption of the educational development of northern Nigeria with frequent closure of schools during crises.

The nation's diversity has continued to threaten its progress and even its existence. This is because of our orientation of non-commitment to the ideal of the nation but rather to our various ethnic identities. This is reflected in the frequent occurrence of ethnic and other crises that have afflicted the country since independence and particularly in the past two decades. These phenomena threaten the country's fragile democratic institutions and impede its socio-economic growth by diverting much needed funds from development initiatives to military and counter insurgency activities as well as to re-building destroyed infra-structure. The political process in the country is also influenced by ethnicity; religion and sometimes caste in those socio-cultural markers such as ethnicity and religion often play a vital and even strategic role. A number of factors have contributed to the incessant occurrences of ethnic crisis in Nigeria. Thus, from the different crises mentioned earlier, the causes of crisis in the country can be explained from many perspectives. Scholars have attributed the causes of these crises to various factors like struggle for land resources, traditional authority, competition for economic and political spaces, clash of values and way of lives, religion and ethnicity and religious manipulations. Poverty and unemployment, Failure of the government security intelligence and law enforcement agencies in bringing the culprits to book, Northern



Nigeria's tradition for carrying out Jihadist Islam. The imposition of Sharia Law in some northern parts of the country, Lack of understanding of what the Islamic faith preaches and Indigene and Settler Controversy according to Egwu, 2001.

Conclusion

The ethnic crises have resulted in economic losses and rivalries between various ethnic groups in Nigeria. The evaluation of the "federal character" strategy led to additional state and local government unit divisions to better reflect ethnic recognition and representation. It also involved an agreement on proportional representation of political parties, which was assumed to reflect ethno-regional interest in the executive cabinet, and on the rotation of state offices among ethnic regions. These initiatives were thought to provide a long-term solution to ethnic inequality and crisis, but they appeared to have been compromised. A philosophical and historical analysis of Nigeria's ethnic crisis reveals a history of political instability and shifting constitutional approaches to resolving ethnic diversity. The ethnic groups in Nigeria are currently at odds with one another over matters like the allocation of resources and power. To no success, successive governments have looked for a long-term solution to the issues of marginalization, inequality, and ethnic crises. By implementing Amartya Sen's Niti and Nyaya principle, which he outlined in his book *Idea of Justice*, modern Nigeria can effectively resolve ethnic conflicts. By doing this, ethnic divides will be eliminated and equality, harmony, and peace will be fostered.

The government has tried, but has not been able, to stop ethnic crises in Nigeria today. The issue of finding a common ground for social justice and fair treatment raises concerns about maintaining political stability, peaceful coexistence, and unity within society. Given the current state of ethnic crises and instability in Nigeria, how can we maintain political stability, peaceful coexistence, and unity in a society made up of diverse ethnic groups and occasionally at odds with one another? Sen's *Idea of Justice* addresses the concepts of social injustice and ethnic crises by outlining a practical formula for the equitable distribution of individual liberties, rights, and socioeconomic benefits, which include income, health, education, and other political rights.

Sen's theory Niti and Nyaya can put an end to ethnic conflicts. According to Sen, the Niti is a concept of a just society, a means of codification, and a procedural sense of justice. Nyaya is a comprehensive conception of justice that has been achieved. It emphasizes attention to the finer points of the outcome and stands for a practical and comprehensive concept of justice. The primary objective of Nyaya is to stop the injustice of "big fish eating small fish," or *matsanyaya*. The primary function of justice is to prevent this from happening, and "justice in the fish world" should not be permitted to intrude into the human world. Sen, central acceptance is not about critiquing institutions and laws, but rather about societies coming to their own conclusions and realizing justice with Nyaya consciousness. In order to accomplish this, he emphasizes the need to replicate genuine democratic opportunities and dialogue spaces, and he calls for the differentiation of justice and injustice through a process of realization, emphasizing public reason through human reason. This will end social injustice and usher in a system of equality and fairness, ending ethnic division in the nation.

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