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ETHNICITY AS A SYNOPSIS OF AFRICA'S UNDER-DEVELOPMENT; WAY FORWARD

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INTRODUCTION

Ethnicity has been differently defined but for the sake of our focus, it is a situation of internal instability of a person in which he/she manifests his/her inability to have a good relationship internally with himself/herself, others and God, which develops and snowballs into ethnic pandemonium¹. Invariably, one of the ways of exhibiting this internal uncertainty is in common differences exhibited due to ethnic diversities; and because we so want to move into our safety zone, we begin to see our ethnic group as not just being superior but longing for protection and advancement of territory. It is at this point that conflict begins because different people possess incompatible values, needs and interests and have different ways of achieving them². The ethnic nationalism that has been spotted in the above statements is summed in the definition which states that it is a situation in which the relationship between members of one ethnic group and another, or generally amongst ethnic groups in a multi polity (such as Guinea, Tanzania, Liberia, Nigeria and many African countries) is characterized by a lack of cordiality, heightened mutual suspicions and fears, by quarrelsomeness and a tendency towards violent confrontations³.

In contemporary times, we hear pronouns like: I, mine, our, theirs, my tribal man, my language woman, my towns man, etc. forming the crux of describing the “we” versus the “them” which often make people to only get interested in things that affect the “we” group to which they belong while they often do not get bothered about whatever happens to the “them” group

Interestingly, it is important to note that the original usage of the word ethnicity was not divisive but a way to celebrate the beauty in people's diverse cultures. It is meant to define the characters of ethnic groups to know more about each other and what each stands for but again as stated above, it's meaning has been bastardized to suit the aspiration of divisive politicians whose actions have given prominence to the newly metamorphosed word which reflects more of negativity. This new meaning of the word ethnicity is making many countries especially the developing ones to face internal instability from the processes of politicization of the issue of ethnicity and ethnicization of politics⁵, stalling development as evident in Burundi, Rwanda, Liberia, Nigeria, Somali and of recent Sudan.

PREDISPOSING FACTORS TO ETHNICITY

As we move into understanding how ethnicity impacts on the development of nations especially the African society, it is important that we conduct a prognosis of factors that are said to influence individuals or groups in the society into promoting the concept. It has been acknowledged that social mobilization of people in a democratic society, existence of a pool of symbols connoting distinctiveness of a people, selection, standardization and transmission of such pool of symbols

in communities by leadership and a particular ethnic group being a reference point in relation to whom a sense of relative deprivation (real or imaginary) is aggregated ⁶ are all seen as promoting factors to ethnicity in communities especially those with weak social institutions. In Africa, these factors are majorly the means of identification, which either takes one close to common wealth or the contrary, which makes those at the advantage to promote it while those at the disadvantage with regards to population, to disregard it.

In a more explicit manner as stated above, elite contestation for political power to capture states which is characterized by cut-throat competition in a sort of zero-sum game manner on the altar of ethnic mobilization and ethno-religious and communal identities have created a lot of insecurity among ethnic nationals in the country ³ thereby calling for ethnic nationalism. People of a particular ethnic group feel the importance of mobilizing support for their ethnic group because they stand at risk of marginalization and extinction on the extreme when they do not do it. Also, mass poverty has been spotted as a pre-disposing factor closely linked to political mobilization. This often conditions the minds and attitudes of people thereby making them susceptible to elite manipulation and mobilization. The elites use differences in culture as a dividing line in order to achieve their vision tied to political aspiration.

Systemic failure is also one of the factors that have made ethnicity to thrive in most African societies. As states become unable to satisfy basic needs of the people due to bad leadership, the poor people in-turn withdraw from the collective goals of the state into ethnic and religious cocoons with high level sensitivity to the roles of those they regard as "them" in their perceived marginalization and immiseration ⁷. This failure is used by the politicians as an entry point especially in states with weak institution as stated elsewhere in the paper.

Fear of ethnic imperialism is one of the major factors that have caused ethnicity. People have developed all manner of defense mechanisms in a way of protecting themselves from being annihilated by another ethnic group which may be drawn by past experiences. Explaining further, a professor at the University of Belgrade stated that, ethnic conflict is caused by the "*fear of the future*", lived through the past ⁸. This is because ethnic champions through their vantage positions mortgage the state system to the benefit of their people which often goes a long way in re-enforcing ethnicity either by the benefitting communities or victimized communities.

These and many other factors have widened the scope of ethnicity in the country which are pointers to where we can all start from if we must get it right, otherwise, we continue to be a continent in perpetual antagonism of each other, tampering not just with interpersonal relationships but also leading to the loss of lives and property thereby promoting underdevelopment that hitherto characterises the African continent.

EFFECTS OF ETHNICITY ON DEVELOPMENT

Due to our different desire for ethnic interests as against national interest, people have become entangled in a fight of "all against all." They play the role of a parasite to the nation with each ethnic nationality taking a bite from the national cake rather than contributing to its growth. We have refused to align to the progressive life style where people work together to ensure that the center holds. Our societies have become common examples of instability, chaos and underdevelopment as a result of ethnic nationalism which is expressed through militancy, economic sabotage and political propaganda. Today, people are killed, properties are destroyed,

hate speeches are promoted against one another in order to show our disgust for the creativity of God who decided to make us either Berom, Tutsi, Hutu, Swali, Tiv, Idoma, Ntonkon, Fulani, Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, etc. As a result of ethnicity, people have continued to promote homogenous settlements which again breed insecurity while stalling development. For instance, we have the “no go” areas syndrome in communities that have experienced one form of violent conflict or the other. Very important to development is the fact that sharing of ideas is limited and this can be seen in difference of development between rural areas where homogenous habitation exist and big cities where multiculturalism is prominent.

It is unfortunate that many government appointments are made based on religious or ethnic grounds, putting meritocracy in oblivion. This is affecting the development of states within the continent. People see occupying public space at whatever level as empowerment rather than service to the nation. Remarkably, the employment of a particular person from a certain ethnic or religious group is celebrated while the person is mandated to promote ethnicity in office. This makes it difficult to get the best of hands to manage the public sector because mundane practices have overtaken objectivity which is against global practice.

Ethnicity can lead to lingering suspicion among different groups which limits tendencies for trust and even corporation. Parties are hardly able to access new information for common good or be receptive to the ideas of perceived opposing groups in order not to place others at an advantage. Minds are so crowded with assumptions and prejudices that they are usually not willing to allow anything to change even if it is to their benefit. Any community with such an experience is at the verge of a violent eruption, perpetually insecure and unstable. Any minor disagreement may push things beyond precipice³. They will hardly be willing to join forces to discuss the progress of the society or a nation and if they are compelled, they will be more interested in protecting their interest as stated above.

We must come to a realisation that ethnicity and many other factor have actually undermined many states' capacity to discharge fundamental obligations of a modern state to its citizens such as socio-economic provisions, guarantee of fundamental rights and freedoms, ensuring law and order and facilitating peace and stability which are all pre-conditions for growth and development³. Leaders have failed to deliver and may not even be questioned because they are hiding under ethnic canopies for protection from accountability seekers. Governance has become a turn by turn syndrome with everyone waiting for his/her turn to perpetrate impunity rather than to deliver.

To round off this discussion, at this level, we must be reminded that multi-ethnicity has become a socio-political phenomenon in most civil societies with inter-ethnic cleavages, competition and conflict seemingly acquiring a higher intensity. We must be very conscious of our environment to avoid a situation where we will be deeply rooted in the war of all against all contrary to the tenants of development adopted by global nations.

RECOMMENDATIONS

This paper will be incomplete if we discuss the nomenclature of the concept without proffering some recommendations which are expected to serve as a ladder upon which we can build a society of tolerance, love and sustainable development as Africans because we are Africans.

In the first instance, we must all be reminded that our diversities are conscious efforts of God, evident in the variety of liturgies and the spiritualities in the diverse theological expressions and even in the variety of expressions of the same doctrines. These doctrines complements one another showing that as a result of the communion with God Himself, diversity is not supposed to divide us but serves to bring glory to God for his gifts especially as Christians ⁹. There should be the entrenchment of the rule of law as stipulated in the constitution where everyone is equal before it. This will fight group insecurity arising from fear of ethnic imperialism and unhealthy competition as stated above. To add to this, there is the need for government at all levels to fashion out a leadership that will reflect the interest of all based on everyone's needs and not a projection of the interest of another especially when it endangers others. This will go a long way to show that government is impartial ³.

Also, the extent and magnitude of poverty in the continent must be addressed so that the right attitudes will be entrenched among people to avoid instances where they are easily mobilized along such vices based on who can pay more.

We also have to cultivate the habit of interactional habitation in our communities. This will help us appreciate the beauty in each other's culture as a result of interaction and information sharing. This should also be backed by consistent inter-cultural dialogue in every community that is multicultural in nature so that conflict elements are discussed at that level to avoid misinformation. There is the need for value reorientation among people especially the too young and very elderly. This will become like an antidote to cure greedy and selfish disposition that has been built over a period or that is about to be built. It will guide people into becoming more accommodating, tolerant, and harmonious in their relationships and coexistence.

We are reminded today that the role religious bodies play is of great implication on not just their immediate environments but also the society as a whole. This is because, as Africans we are assumed to be religious and the religious leaders have great impact on their followers whether young or old.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, people are challenged to always see themselves as one single race regardless of accidents of births which are always inconsequential to who people later become in life from an objective point of view. This will help Africa grow from a continent of war to that of love and unity for sustainable development. It is necessary that we remind people that our differences are smaller than we expect and our hearts larger than we imagined. Only if we first admire each other without border, though tribe and tongue may differ, because in brotherhood and sisterhood we stand, will our society grow because variety is the spice of life. We must be able to reflect more on the advantages of collective living in spite of our ethnicity rather than those things that have divided us thereby dehumanizing each other. In the words of pope John Paul II in Asia in 1986, "*if we fail to accept one another with love and as a common journey to a lofty destiny, if we realise other people are our brothers and sisters... it is either we learn to walk together in peace and harmony or we drift apart and ruin ourselves and others.*"

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