POLITICAL CONFLICTS IN NIGERIA

INTRODUCTION

There is no phenomenon more worrisome in Nigeria today as political conflicts. The dimension it has taken has led to paralysis in all aspects of our daily life, making daily living some sort of an unending nightmare and leaving us with a *weltanschauung* that one could describe in honorific term as suicidal. Although many reasons have been adduced and are being adduced for this negative state of political conflict in Nigeria and many African countries, our mission in this short essay is not solely to deal with these causes. Rather, we want to examine how we can start to address the germane issues that can help us out of this political conundrum that has made us the laughing stock in the comity of nations.

It will be good to start with a subtle caution at the beginning. This is the fact that no human society can exist without conflict as the latter is an ever present human phenomenon. Even at the political level, it has to do with the struggle for power to be able to control not only the monopoly of coercion but also the authoritative allocation of scarce resources that are means to human and material development. According to Jim Unah:

Generally, conflicts do not occur in a Robinson Crusoe situation. They occur fundamentally from social relatedness. Consequently, insofar as we are human beings living in a human society, conflicts cannot but occur (Unah, 2000: 237).

The statements from Unah above reveal a fundamental axiom about human existence- the inevitability of conflict especially at interpersonal level. However, the nature of political conflict in Nigeria like many other parts of Africa is very destructive and cannot even function in the Heraclitean, Hegelian and Marxist fashions where conflict, through the dialectics, leads to collusion of positive and negative forces which ultimately lead to progressive development in all spheres of human existence. To use the Nobel Laureate Prof. Wole Soyinka's phrase, the political conflict in Nigeria is based on "*the Credo of Being Nothingness".*

Causes of Political Conflicts in Nigeria

Plethora of reasons both justifiable and unjustifiable has been adduced for political conflicts in Nigeria. These reasons have also accounted for uncountable disquisitions on the political development of the country called Nigeria. While some have called for a kind of restructuring of the values and ethos that govern the Nigerian state, others have called for an outright dismantling of the entity called Nigeria. Others still have called for a weak federation where individual ethnic nationalities that make up the Nigerian state will only have mere formal loyalty to the centre while they hold strongly to their ethnic cleavages.

Interestingly however in the debate, which is a common meeting point by all the agonists, is the fact that Nigeria is a product of false union by the then British Imperialist Power. Nigeria then is a country with milti-

faceted socio-political problems, which often lead to one political conflict or the other. The problems range from ethnicity, class-stratification, corruption and religious violence to unmitigated poverty, which in the end has compounded the plight of the common man.

Accordingly, these problems did not just emerge overnight. They have their history in the forced amalgamation of the southern and northern protectorates by Lord Lugard in 1914, the unholy alliance that subsequently metamorphosed into the Nigerian state (Oyeshile, 2005:14). This amalgamation has made it difficult to experience sustainable development in Nigeria in the sense of "expanding and adaptive capacity of the society in satisfying the material and cultural needs of its members" (Irele, 1993:15).

It should be noted also that given the configuration of the Nigerian state, we can only talk of factions, if appropriate at all, under the guise of North and South, Muslims and Christians. But in recent times, these classifications do not hold rigidly as Nigerians have interpenetrated themselves and intermingled in terms of marriage, economic preoccupations (trade), religion, political and socio-cultural ties. However, politicians (whether in military uniform or civilian robes) play up these artificial divisions for political reasons, especially when there are hotly contested national issues (Oyeshile, 2005:15).

The Way Forward

Certain points become obvious from our analysis. One that the merger of disparate entities into what is called Nigeria has come to stay and the separation of these entities will cause more burdens than benefits. Two, that we must embrace a politics of change and development since previous attempts by politician whether military or civilians have yielded little or no dividends. Three, that democracy, if seen as a way of life in which principles are followed is likely to reduce political conflicts and lead us to sustainable development and four, that whether as politicians or statesmen, we must embrace certain communal values that will help us to reconcile ourselves with the other thereby promoting human happiness.

On intervention one, we cannot go back to our ethnic cleavages now. It is better to accept the invented identity of the Nigerian state and work towards its survival. Perhaps, what we need to strive for is a nation-state that gives adequate recognition to her ethnic groups and which also incorporates the principle of justice, especially that advocated by Amartya Sen in his book, *Ideal of justice 2010*, in organizing the diverse groups within the Nigerian state.

On intervention two, we must embrace a politics of change and development in Nigeria. Any politics that does not promote the well-being of the people would only promote political conflict. Ahmadu Bello, Tafawa Balewa, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Michael Opara, Obafemi Awolowo, Ladoke Akintola, Herbert Macaule, Margaret Ekpo and Funmilayo Kuti to mention a few, played a politics of change and development even though they

differed on how to make their kinsmen and the Nigerian state great. We can still point to their unceasing legacies but they subdued their inordinate personal desires for the development of their people. It may be asked: would these great nationalist has supported the Maitasine, Boko Haram sets in the north and the kidnapping, robbery and oil theft in the southern part of the country.

It is really very shameful that Nigerian leaders, sorry rulers, pay lip-service to politics of development and democratic norms and ethos. On Friday 24th May, 2013, the Nigerian governors' forum made up of 36 members could not conduct a free, even it is an unfair, election among themselves all because of politics of corruption, self and underdevelopment. Yet these so-called governors are to lead over 160 million Nigerians to various elections. If 36 Nigerian governors cannot hold an undisputed election among themselves, then we still have a long way to go considering the far-reaching implications of this shameful act.

Our third intervention borders on allowing democratic principles to hold sway. Democracy is not a talisman to be hanged on the neck without following the principles, which constitute its foundation. These principles include but not limited to adherence to the rule of law, being accountable, equality before the law, promotion and protection of rights, respecting the people's sovereignty and renewal of mandate through periodic elections that are free and fair. It is, therefore, not the tag democracy that makes a government democratic but the conformity and adherence to democratic principles which we lack in large dose in contemporary Nigeria.

The fourth intervention of reducing political conflicts in Nigeria in order to make way for politics of development involves the embrace of certain communal values, which is themselves are universal values. The analysis of the socio-political problems above reinforces the need for all (politicians especially) to look beyond personal well-being and what differentiates them as one set of people from the other to embrace those values that emphasize our common humanity such as trust, honesty, being one brother's keeper, altruism, forgiveness, tolerance of opposition, and compromise where necessary.

The viable option in this regard then is to go back to the communal basis of African socio-political organizations. It is when we negotiate our happiness within the collective psyche that we can truly avoid political conflict of the destructive type and confidentially assert with John Mbiti 'that I am because we are and since we are, therefore, I am'. In this regard also, the communal basis is very expedient to our being-in-the-world because man, no matter how politically powerful or wealthy, cannot negotiate his security, happiness and well-being in an isolated manner. In other words, our political actors must reconcile themselves with others to guarantee political development in Nigeria.

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