



MINORITY QUESTION IN NIGERIA: TYPES OF MINORITY AND THE ECONOMY; FORMS OF INCLUSION/ORGANISING METHODS

¹YONGO, VENO MICLOTH; ¹ABDULLAHI, MOHAMMED; & ²NAMUKU, AMINU MOSES,

¹Department of International Relations and Strategic Studies, School of Social and Management Sciences, Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola. ²Departments of Social Development, School of Administrative and Business Studies, Adamawa State Polytechnic, Yola.

Abstract

The hue and cry of marginalization coming from all sections, sexes and other types of minority has reached the crescendo in Nigeria. It is now even more confusing in knowing who is truly a minority or the actual definition of a minority. This work therefore, examines the minority question in Nigeria, the types of minority and the economy, the form of inclusion/organizing methods, thereby clearly exposing the intricate and issues of minority question in Nigeria. The paper concludes that, it is possible to eliminating the problems of inequitable distribution of rewards and others that has been the bent of minorities in Nigeria. The paper ended with so many recommendations, one of which is for the minority groups to use their positions to bring about development in their areas.

Keywords: Minority, Types, Economy, Forms, Inclusion.

Introduction

The Minority question all over the world and especially in Nigeria has become a festering sore. Clearly, it is now one of the most pressing, contending and vexed issues in the contemporary Nigerian Political Economy. This is essentially so because, the minority groups put together are by implication the majority in terms of number, that are deliberately being neglected in almost all areas of human endeavors by the federal government that has been dominated over the years by major ethnic groups: Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo in their order of importance as the case may be in Nigeria before the administration that occurred,

that brought about the child of circumstance, that a minority took over the helm of affairs in the country, though the situation under him remained in disguise as the circumstantial child was controlled and molded by the same majority, who continually even today determines who becomes what, when and how.

The minority question arises in a country like ours when the general welfare of the constituent members in general must be assured (Eteng 1997), as (Awa 1976:1) noted “for only in these terms, it is possible to objectively evaluate the relevance of a federal arrangement for all the citizens”. But we must note that, the question of minority oppression and suppression by the majority ethnic groups in the operation of Nigeria is not new. Naturally and equally not new too, are the demands for redress by the minority groups. The earliest minority question noted in history was essentially directed against the regional governments then, which manifested in the demands for the creation of separate regions and states. The idea was to allow ethnic minority groups within the regions to have their own self- autonomy. Prominent amongst these agitations were the bloody Tiv riots of 1959/1960 in the North, the demand for the creation of a Calabar-Ogoja-Rivers state from the former Eastern region and the demand for the creation of the Mid-West region out of the old Western region.

The tempo and the intensity as well as the focus of the minority agitations have increased and changed after the attainment of political independence in October, 1960. These agitations have taken new dimensions to asking for political, social and especially economic emancipation. The reason being that, the major ethnic groups have seized completely the state machinery in defiance to the principle of federalism and also to the disadvantage of the minority groups that constituted the larger number in the federation put together.

Minority Question in Nigeria

Minority question all over the world is associated with general socio-economic development. This is even more relevant to the developing countries where aspirations and agitations for rapid socio-economic development are often tied to ethnic identities. Since the colonial period, the minority question in Nigeria has been a recurring issue which has generated series of crises in Nigeria. Different Nigerian Peoples have all along attempted to hinge their developmental goals on ethnic affiliation although, the dominant ethnic groups- the majority notably, Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo have derived much from this approach to development leaving the minority to wallow in penury.

Thus, the ensuing agitation has in the past years to now reveal the displeasure of minority groups in Nigerian and this has raised the level of group consciousness

and identity especially in relation to the assumed role of the dominant majority groups in the affairs of the country. This has led to the issue of meeting or satisfying individual or group interest, which have of cause brought about communal clashes with unprecedented consequences in so many states in Nigeria and is today threatening the corporate existence of Nigeria as one nation. This therefore, depicts the importance of the topic in question as minority question in Nigeria, if not tackle and redress with caution, is likely to be the number one source of disintegration of Nigeria as a nation.

The paper is therefore; aim at exposing the minority question and types of minorities, minorities and the economy, their forms of inclusion/organizing methods especially in Nigeria. This is to exposing generally the minority question, their potential threat to the corporate existence of Nigeria as a nation especially because of the continuous economic marginalization of the minorities in all facets and possibly proffers recommendations towards redressing the issues involved to avoiding the dire consequences.

Thus, the paper aims to see the possibility of achieving the following:

- That minority question in terms of economic discrimination and subordination is redress.
- Those physical or cultural traits that set the minority apart, and which are disapproved by the dominant ethnic groups are discouraged towards economic and social equality.
- That the shared sense of collective identity and common burdens harbored amongst the minority groups are defuse for proper integration of all Nigerians as equal in all aspects of life.
- That the socially shared rules about who belongs and who does not determine minority status be discourage towards national unification.
- That the tendencies to marry and relate within the minority groups be discourage and avenues open for general integration of all peoples in Nigeria.

Types of Minority and the Economy

This section of the paper deals with issues that have to do with all types of minority groups, which ranges from racial minority groups, ethnic minority groups, gender minority groups, to religions minority groups generally, but with particular reference to Nigeria.

The minority groups covered by this paper are as follows:

- Racial minority group: These are groups who are classified according to obvious physical characteristics like skin color which affect their transactions generally with other dominant ethnic groups where they

interact in economic and other aspects of life. Examples are the US racial minority groups like Blacks American, Indians, non-indigene syndrome in Nigeria etc.

- Ethnic minority groups: these are groups who are differentiated on the basis of culture such as language, food and other variables. Examples are US ethnic minority groups like Latinos such as Chicanos etc and especially ethnic Minority crises in most Nigerian States.
- Gender minority group: Males are a socially majority; women demonstrate four out of the five basic characteristics of minority status. So women are considered a minority in all aspects of life the world over and Nigeria in particular.
- Religious minority group: these are groups who have a religion other than the dominant faith like US religious minorities such as Muslims and others (Wikipedia, 2013); also a major issue in most Nigerian states.

Therefore, the issues to be covered generally in this paper as the scope are the issues that characterized all minority groups which are as follows:

- The issue of distinguishing physical or cultural traits e.g skin color or language.
- The issue of unequal treatment and less power over the lives of the minorities.
- The issues of involuntary membership in the minority group, that is of (no personal choice).
- The issues of awareness of subordination and strong sense of group solidarity and
- The issues of high in-group marriage and relationship generally amongst the minorities

In Nigeria, our case study, most minority groups economic and other socio-political problems can be traced to ethnicity. Minority and ethnicity are very important factors in the determination of who gets what, when and how in the Nigerian political arrangement. This is because of the dominance of the three major ethnic groups of Hausa/Fulani, Yoruba and the Igbo of the Nigerian Federal system. Minority and ethnicity concepts therefore, represent the opposite sides of the same coin as the two appear inseparable.

Ethnicity is a natural phenomenon, which makes people to be more loyal and attached to the sentiments of their primordial sub-cultural group than to the nation (Peers, 2004). The manifestation of ethnicity is evident where political

decision and exercise of government authority deliberately favor members of some cultural groups at the expense of others. Ethnicity may thus, be defined as the contextual discrimination by members of one group against others on the basis differentiated systems of socio-cultural symbols (Otite 1975). This definition is most appropriate for our purpose because it has the advantage of combining the two important aspects of the concept. The two pertinent aspects are its static and objective structural properties on the one hand and its dynamic and analytic sense on the other (Otite 1975). The four basic elements according to Kasfir (1976:44) that can be extracted from the two senses embedded in the definition are:

- 1 Certain objective characteristics associated with common ancestry such as language, territory, cultural practice and the likes (in some cases newly created or recently standardized).
- 2 Which are perceived by both insiders and outsiders as important indicators of identity,
- 3 So they became the bases for mobilizing social solidarity and
- 4 Which in certain situations result in political activity.

All these attributes are common to both ethnic majority and ethnic minority groups. Therefore, ethnic majority and ethnic minority groups are discernible within the framework of ethnicity defined as “social formations distinguished by the communal character of their boundaries” in terms of language and culture or both, with language constituting the most crucial variable in Africa (Shepherd Jr. 1987:35-39). We must add, however, that these groups are not necessarily linguistically or culturally homogenous. This is because occupational and class differentiation exists within an ethnic group. This differentiation is a function of the level of production, development of productive forces, the extent of the prevailing division of labor and the growth and differentiation of cultural forms within the group (Eteng 1996:166). Ethnocentrism is the negative evaluation of and response to other people’s culture in which the ethnocentric culture is always considered superior. Ethnocentrism is thus, attitudinal in form and perceptual in content. It therefore, represents the subjective dimension of ethnicity, which subsumes ethnocentrism. On the other hand Nnoli (1978) believes it is behavioral in form and convective in content. Ethnicity is real; it is not an imaginary phenomenon because it captures the various forms of consensual and conflictual relationships between ethnic groups. It is obvious today in Nigeria that the ethnic Minority groups exist in antagonistic relations to the ethnic majorities. The nature of their conflictual relationship in the context of

our federal system of government has been consistently outright cheating, marginalization especially on economic spheres and underdevelopment being perpetrated by the dominant majority groups. Thus, the concept of the minority groups as the key phrase of our paper needs to be analytically clarified.

Minority is a culturally, ethnically or racially distinct group that coexists with, but is subordinate to a more dominant group (Smihula 2009). As the term is used in the social sciences, this subordinancy is the key chief defining characteristic of a minority group as such; minority status does not necessarily correlate to population. In some cases, one or more so-called minority group may have a population many times the size of the dominating group, as was the case in South Africa under apartheid.

Thus, sociologist Louis Wirth defined a minority group as “a group of people who, because of their physical or cultural characteristics are single out from the others in the society in which they live for differential and unequal treatment, and who therefore, regard themselves as objects of collective discrimination” (Wirth 1945: 347). This definition includes both objective and subjective criteria: membership of a minority group is objectively ascribed by society, based on an individual’s physical or behavioral characteristics; it is also subjectively applied by its members, who may use their status as the bases of group identity or solidarity. In any case, minority group status is categorical in nature. An individual who exhibits the physical or behavioral characteristics of a given minority group will be accorded the status of the group and be subject to the same treatment as other members of that group. Clearly by the above definition, Wirth places the minority groups in opposition to the majority group. Valien (1964) expresses the view that the term minority group sometimes just referred to as minority as applied to an ethnic group, racial or religious group. He contends that, the term ethnic group is utilized when invidious distinctions are not intended, while the minority group connotes such invidious distinctions. He however, agrees that both terms, nonetheless, underscores physical, religious, racial and other cultural features of a designated group which distinguish them from other dominant ethnic group in the society. It has not been easy to know the appropriate basic features to be applied to designate the minority status of a given group. This is because almost all common variables used in identifying any minority group usually throw up uncertainty as to their exact meaning and functions. However, the following characteristics are often identified with a minority group. They include statistical or numerical size, socio-economic and political power distribution, homogeneous physical and cultural traits and differentiated treatment or status. To these, can be added agitations and

incessant calls for redress. In a fundamental sense, therefore, minority specifically implies low status in a social power relationship between a dominant power group and a dominated group.

Although, Rose and C.B. (1948) consider any purely statistical definition of the term unacceptable, they however, placed emphasis on the opposition between the dominant and minority groups. Therefore, in their opinion, the more fact of being generally hated and being hated because of religious, racial or national background is simply what defines a minority group.

One theme though, that runs through all the definitions is the placing of the minority group in opposition to the majority group. This is because of the powerlessness and the low social status of the minority group made even worse by the overbearing attitude of the dominant groups especially in the Nigeria federal system. Based on this, we accept the definition of minority group given by Eteng (1996) as our operational definition. According to him, a minority group is regarded as:

- (a) A social category, a collectivity, a social class, large or small,
- (b) Which exists within a socio-culture,
- (c) Whose members are distinguished from the majority or dominant group in power,
- (d) On the basis of inherent or contrived homogeneous physical/biological, national, racial, cultural and social characteristics,
- (e) And are, therefore, hated and consciously and deliberately excluded socially, physically and sometimes legally from participating in the social, economic, political economy or some sections of the larger society,
- (f) On account of which, they are self-conscious of their minority status and hence often excluded themselves from the mainstream culture;
- (g) A minority group is thus, almost always embroiled in a discriminatory, unequal and clientelistic power relationship with the dominant majority group in which they often consequently assume a subordinate status as the exploited, expropriated, disempowered, isolated, marginalized and targeted (Eteng 1996:119). This definition properly situates our topic; what follows now is the examination of the forms of inclusion/organizing methods.

Forms of Inclusion/Organizing Methods

The discussion here explores the main issues that involve the minorities in general; it assumes that all minorities share certain characteristics. It does not matter whether we are talking about the relationship between the Protestants

and the Catholics in the Northern Ireland, the relationship between the Chinese and the Muslims in Malaysia or the general mutual ethnic and religious distrust in Nigeria, economic inequality is the major common characteristics of the minority group. Many civil rights leaders have ultimately come to embrace economic injustice as the crucial issue of human existence (Steiner, 1996). Some examples will give us more understanding here: Jesse Jackson was asked at the Democratic National convention in August 1988 "What is the fundamental challenge of our day?" He answered his own question by saying "To end economic violence". Malcolm X, a spokesman for Afro-American causes during the early 1960s, began his political career with absolute hatred for white people. He had good grounds to do so base on the discrimination he experienced during his early life. Ultimately, however, Malcolm X came to embrace economic issues as more significant than race issues. After a trip to Mecca, where he discovered white praying to his god, he came back to the United States proclaiming a new philosophy. To Martin Luther king, many have forgotten the issues important to king's movement after his "I have a dream". That speech was given in 1963. King died in 1968 and much occurred between those two dates. General economic inequality of the oppressed was recognized (Britannica.com, 2012). In Nigeria, from the Biafara movement, the late Ken Saro-Wiwa struggle, the Niger Delta Militants, the Middle Belt movement, the South-West internal struggles, the single most important variable underlying all these movements is economic emancipation (Saliu(ed), 1999). Some have even argued that, the emergence of Boko Haram insurgency in North-East Nigeria may be link to poverty and by extension the issue of economic emancipation. Most of the various ethnic crises and other crisis colored by religion are actually crisis of economic marginalization. Almost all the so called political crisis, the various Fulani/Farmers clashes all over Nigeria, the recent Ombatse phenomenon in Nasarawa State are all economic crisis. So whether you are talking about racial minority group- the cry and all the struggles are directed at economic emancipation, if is ethnic minority group, is still economic, if is religion, the economic aspects takes pre-eminence and the gender minority groups, is still economy as the major goal is economic emancipation of women for instance, the UN Affirmative Action, the Beijing 1995, the 35% Affirmative Action of the last administration e.t.c; all justifies the economic sense in almost every minority struggle in Nigeria (Ovwase, 1999).

In line with above, many governments prefer to assure the people they rule all belong to the same nationality rather than separate ones based on ethnicity. The United States asks for race and ethnicity on its official census forms, with this

breaks up and organizes its population into different sub-groups, but primarily on racial origin rather than national one. Spain does not divide its nationals by ethnic group, although it does maintain an official notion of minority languages. Nigeria uses ethnic groupings in almost every official transactions and this has further divided the country into minority and majority group (Ige, 1999).

Therefore, as the minority groups are socially separated or segregated from the dominant forces of a society, members of minority groups usually are cut off from a full involvement in the workings of the society and from an unequal share in the society's rewards. Thus, the role of minority groups varies from society to society depending on the structure of the social system and the relative power of the minority group (Wheatley, 2003). For instance, the degree of social mobility of a member of a minority group depends on whether the society in which he lives is a closed or opened one. A closed society is one in which an individual's role and functions can theoretically never be changed, as in the traditional Hindu Caste system. An open society, on other hand, allows the individual to change his role and to benefit from corresponding changes in status unlike a closed society, which stresses hierarchical cooperation between social groups, an open system permits different social groups to vie for the same resources, so their relation are competitive. In an open society, the rank that the individual attains for himself is more important than the ranking of his social group.

So in the prevalent atmosphere of minority group consciousness and the struggle for political power which is invariably economic power among the majority groups, the less numerous language groups are inevitably been drawn into minority politics. Again, the increasing solidarity of each majority group behind a political party and the emphasis placed by Nigerian politics on the pursuit of ethnic interest, has raise the fears among the leaders of the minority groups concerning neglect and domination by the leaders of the majority groups. They perceived their opportunities for political leadership, contract, senior positions in the public service, and loans for business activities threatened by the tendency of the major political parties dominated by major ethnic groups in government to secure these for the members of their classes from the majority groups. By leading minority group agitations against government status, these leaders hope to carve out a place in the Nigeria political sun for themselves (Nnoli 1978).

Major Findings

The major findings of this research are as follows:

- Those resources could take the form of property, money, position, or organization and so majority groups benefit from the existence of minority.

From the stand point of the general public, minorities provide scapegoat. Deviantising minorities' takes people out of competition for jobs, housing and education. From the point of view of the majority group, minorities represent group where more profit can be extracted.

- That most people accept the structural and cultural pattern in the society and see little reason to change them. It takes a long time for social patterns to develop. Those patterns seem functional, especially to those who benefit from their existence. Therefore, those who benefit are more resistant to change. Remember the idea of the "Tyranny of majority". Most of the population is willing to let a minority of people suffer high rate of unemployment and poverty.
- That change means that those with resources will have to pay high taxes as well as give up existing advantages. Majority groups will not accept a change in the status quo.
- That the dominant groups always develop a set of values and beliefs which justify existing inequality. The justification is an attempt to rationalize the inequality. Once established, ideology become an integral part of social structure and is therefore, difficult to change.
- The research also found that women lack power relative to men, they do not hold high position relative to men because they have fewer resources. They lack privilege and prestige relative to men and so they are gradually developing a consciousness of themselves as a separate category of people with a common interest. That they are beginning to work together to achieve common goals.
- On women again, the research found that:
 - (a) Women generally have better education than other minorities, yet in what they are able to achieve with that education, they are similar to other minorities. In fact, when education is held equal women suffer more than racial and ethnic minorities.
 - (b) Women are actually a numerical majority (in USA and Nigeria) which gives them resources that other minorities do not have. Women can vote collectively; yet women face the same problems of organization and unity that other minorities face.

Thus, the paper has been able to group all the major findings under two major reasons for the predicament of the minority groups, namely, economic marginalization and ethnic marginalization both of which have been making the minority groups powerless in their various locations in the country. It was

discovered that, it is the firm belief of these minority groups that the socio-economic neglect of them and their areas is due largely to their minority position.

Conclusion/Recommendations

This work has tried to examine the issue of minority question with particular reference to Nigeria. It has taken all the issues on the minorities, type of minorities, minorities and the economy, forms of inclusion/organizing methods. Thus, the recommendations below among others have the potential of eliminating the problems of inequitable distribution of rewards and others which have been the keenly contested issues in the five decades of the existence of the Federal Republic of Nigeria as an independent country.

The following are some of the recommendations proffer for the research:

- That a national dialogue be conducted. The dialogue should be constituted in such a manner that all shades of opinions affecting the minority question in the country are adequately and properly discussed and addressed. As such, membership of such a national dialogue should be by election. This national dialogue as recommended should be convened by the present democratic government that is in place.
- Government should put a policy in place that would guarantee even development and distribution of rewards. Such a policy if implemented is capable of resolving the minority question in Nigeria.
- There should be a periodic legislative or executive review of the minority question in Nigeria.
- It is recommended that a commission for the minority be established to adequately take care of all minorities problems that are plaguing the country such a commission should be made more effective in its performance than any other commission as minority question is one of the greatest problems of this country.
- Finally, minority group should use their minority positions to bring development to their areas. This can be achieved by looking inward rather than looking unto government which seems not to have a policy to save them from economic and political marginalization.

REFERENCES

- Awa, E.O. (1974) *Issues in Federalism*, Benin City – Nigeria Ethiope Publishing Corporation.
- Eteng, L.A. (1996) "Minority Rights under Nigeria Federal Structure" *Proceedings of the Conference on Constitutions and Federalism*, Held at the University of Lagos, Nigeria, 23-25 April, pp 111-168.
- http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minority_group (March, 2013)
- <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/384500/Minority> (April 2012)

- Ige, J. (1999) "State Creation and the Minority Question in Nigeria" In Saliu, H. A. (ed): Issues in contemporary Political Economy of Nigeria. Ilorin, Nigeria, Sally and associates.
- Kasfir, N. (1976), *The Shrinking Political Arena, Participation and Ethnicity in African Politics with a Case Study of Uganda*; California University of California Press
- Nnoli, O. (1978), *Ethnic Politics in Nigeria*. Enugu- Nigeria. Fourth Dimension Publisher.
- Otite; (1975), Cited in Ovwasa, L. (1999)
- Ovwase, L (1999), "Oil and the Minority Question in Nigeria"; In Saliu, H.A. (ed): Issues in Contemporary Political Economy of Nigeria. Ilorin, Nigeria, Sally and Associates.
- Peers, S. (2004), "New Minorities: What status for Third World Country Nationals in the EU System"? In Toggenburg, G.N. (ed): *Minority Protection and the Enlarge European Union: The Way Forward*. Osi, Budapest.
- Rose, A.M. and C.B. Cited in Eteng, I.A. (1996)
- Saliu, H.A. (1999) (ed); *Issues in Contemporary Political Economy of Nigeria*. Ilorin Nigeria, Sally and Associates.
- Shepherd Jr, G.W. (1987) "African People's Rights. The Third Generation in a Global perspective" In Shepherd Jr. G.W (Series Editor) *Emerging Human Rights*; New York, Green World Press, PP. 39-54.
- Smihula, D (2008), "Definition of National Minorities in International Law" In *Journal of US – China Public Administration*, Vol.6, No.5 October, 2009, pp.45-51
- Valien, P. (1964), "Minority: Minority Groups" In Goud, J and Kold, W (1994), *A Dictionary of Social Sciences* Tavistock Publications. pp. 432-433.
- Steiner, H.J. and Also, P. (1996), *International Human Rights in Context. Law, Politics, Morals*. Clarendon Press Oxford
- Wheatley, M. (2003), *Deliberate Democracy and Minorities*. *European Journal of International Law*, Vol. 14, No. 3, PP 507-527
- Wirth, L. (1945) "The Problem of Minority Groups" In Linton, R (ed): *The Sciences of Man in the World Crisis*. New York Colombia University Press.