

Socio-Political Exclusion as Bane of Nigeria's Fourth Republic

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ABSTRACT

This work focuses on socio-political exclusion which characterises the Nigerian fourth republic and the damage it has brought to the system. It is structured to address the conceptualizations of Socio-political exclusion, Democracy, and the Nigerian Fourth Republic; observed acts of socio-political exclusion in the Nigeria's Fourth Republic and the repercussion of this exclusion on the nation. Exploiting the Marxist social conflict theory and drawing information from events which have been unfolding as depicted in the news media and other authoritative sources, the discourse observes that, the myriad of problems inherent in contemporary Nigeria sprang out of the unlevelled political playing field designed and handed down by the ruling class made up of retired military and their civilian cronies. It concludes therefore that unless the political contest field is redesigned to accommodate those that are currently excluded from both socio political and economic activities; the ensuing crises might bring the fourth republic just like its predecessors to an undesirable end.

Keywords: Democracy, Socio political exclusion, and Fourth Nigerian Republic.

INTRODUCTION

When the Nigerian military retracted to the barracks in 1999 following the elections conducted that same year, sighs of relief engulfed the entire nation as many thought the incoming system of government would accord them the opportunity to participate fully in the politics of their lands. But this hope became dashed when the populace realised that the kind of democracy being bequeathed is one that would actually disenfranchise them. Acts that promote elitism, classism, ethnocentrism, rights abuse as well as policies that systematically exclude the ordinary people socially and politically soon became rife in the polity. The electorate particularly realised how politicians romance them only to legitimise rigged elections and thereafter dump them. But this has not done the system any good particularly as some aggrieved individuals and groups now engage the state for being short-changed. While this hostility rages, the government who now find it difficult to deliver public goods blames its inability on this insurgency. This indeed is the security challenge facing the country. So, utilising the Marxist social conflict theory which foresees revolution as outcome of the ruling class' oppression of its subjects, this work examines the nexus between socio political exclusion and the myriad of problems that is tearing the Nigerian fourth republic apart. Drawing information from unfolded events as well as news media reports, various forms of exclusion inherent in the era were analysed before arriving at

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conclusion and the recommendations that aims at preventing a doomsday. Democracy which originates from the Greek word ‘demokratía’ meaning rule of the people, is a form of government that allows all eligible citizens to participate equally - either directly or indirectly through elected representatives - in the proposal, development, and creation of laws. It contrasts with forms of government where power is either held by one person, as in a monarchy, or a small number of individuals, as in oligarchy. Sergeant (2006) lists seven elements which should characterise every democratic polity. These are: citizens’ involvement in decision making, a system of representation, the rule of law, an electoral system of majority rule, some degree of equality among citizens, some degree of liberty or freedom granted to or retained by citizens, and education.

Socio-Political Exclusion, also referred to as marginalisation is a term used to denote the various processes by which individuals or entire communities of people are systematically blocked from rights, opportunities, and resources such as employment, civic engagement, democratic participation, due process and health care that are normally available to members of society and which are fundamental to social integration (Silver, 1994). Political exclusion can include the denial of citizenship rights such as political participation and the right to organise, and also of personal security, the rule of law, freedom of expression and equality of opportunity. Socio-political exclusion is commonly embodied in elitism, classism, sexism or discrimination on the basis of sex, ethnocentrism and cronyism.

All these involve prejudices or discrimination on the basis of social class, sex or ethnic affiliation. They include individual attitudes and behaviours, systems of policies and practices that are set up to benefit a particular group at the expense of others (Kadi, 1996). Policies are made to enable particular families or clans, for instance, to assume some traditional political positions while barring others from enjoying the same opportunities. The outcome of this exclusion is the prevention of affected individuals or communities from participating fully in the socio-economic and political life of the society in which they live. Material deprivation which results in poverty is the most common outcome of this. This, of course is in addition to the emotional and psychological traumas usually suffered by the excluded people. The phrase “Nigeria’s Fourth Republic” is used to denote what is being referred to as the peoples’ representative government of Nigeria which since 1999 has governed the country according to the fourth republican constitution. This constitution was adopted on May 29, 1999 when the military officially handed over political authority to the civilians before it retracted to the barracks.

Elements of Socio-Political Exclusion in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic

Elitism is obviously the first tool of socio political exclusion utilised at the inception of current democratic dispensation. The arrangements and scheming that ensued immediately the country’s political contest field was declared opened in 1998 laid bare the desire of retired military elite and their cronies to take control of the country. They rallied round Chief Obasanjo a retired military head of state with their resources which were advantageously obtained from long years of military dictatorship. Before completing his tenure of eight years, he encouraged Alhaji Umar Yar’ Adua – a sibling of a late retired

General Shehu Yar' Adua - his erstwhile second in command to contest for the presidency. The National Assembly equally witnessed the inflow of a number of retired military personnel and their cronies. A situation that enabled David Mark to emerge as the head of the senate for two terms. This situation also replicated in most of the federating states. States and Federal Executive Councils have more often than not portrayed this same image as names of same set of old politicians, their family members and cronies continue to reoccur during appointments into public positions. Through their public policies and actions the governing elite have observably excluded the poor masses from socio political and economic activities. Since 1999 for instance, the cost of obtaining nomination form for elective positions have only been affordable by the rich. The least price for some of the lower positions like that of local government chairmanship goes for an average of 1 Million Naira.

In fact, those who obtained the ruling People's Democratic Party nomination forms to contest the Ekiti state governorship polls paid as much as 10 Million Naira each which is about 6,000 U.S. Dollars PM (News, 2014). These are happening at a time when about 70% of the population lives on less than one (1) U.S. Dollar a day and 92.4% on less than two (2) Dollars a day (UNDP, 2006). Another instance of exclusionism is the ban on private commercial bus and motorbike services in Abuja and other major cities in Nigeria without arrangements for alternative means of survival for the operators. These operators who number in millions across the country have been pushed out of most states' city centres where they operated to fend for themselves and their families. Along with many others, they have remained jobless in their rural communities where they have been relegated to, particularly as the same ruling class have by their maladministration neglected the rural areas. These unemployed are now only temporarily employed whenever dishonest moneybags need their services to carry out bombings, killings, electoral rigging, kidnapping and their likes. In fact those conversant with Abuja before the policy that banned bikes from the city will recall that most operators were from the neighbouring states of Nasarawa, Plateau, Kaduna, Niger, Benue and Kogi where jobless youths today constitute nuisance and security threats. They are now mainly used to destroy political opponents and supporters under the guise of ethno religious violence.

Ethnocentrism has equally been a tool via which many have been marginalised. In fact, tribalism and its attendant religious persecution, which has always played visible roles in Nigerian politics both prior and subsequent to the country's independence, worsened since 1999. Kin-selective altruism has made its way into politics and spurred various attempts by tribalists to concentrate federal power to a particular region of their interests (Rashid, 2003). Competitions amongst major ethnic groups at both federal and state levels have continued to fuel graft and other corrupt practices which consequently prevent the citizenry from enjoying the dividends of democracy. Though not a recent phenomenon that pervades Nigeria (BBC News, 2007), cases of official misuse of resources for personal enrichment have even become rife in the Fourth Republic. The country is ranked 139th out of 176 countries in Transparency International's 2012 Corruption Perceptions Index, tying with Azerbaijan, Nepal, Pakistan and Kenya. The greed and selfishness of those in authority from the local to the Federal levels is a further cause of frustration in the system. Those in

authority care more about themselves than the citizens they took oath to serve. Their emoluments and entitlements are totally out of tune with economic realities in the country, yet their appetite for more is insatiable. They have become an Island of privilege and luxury, in a vast ocean of poverty and misery. Citizens who respond to these anomalies overtly or covertly have more often than not had their human rights trampled upon. The security forces have been committing extra-judicial killings and used lethal excessive force to apprehend criminals and disperse demonstrators. The killing in 2009 of a former Boko Haram leader named Mohammed Yusuf while in Police custody is one of the numerous cases of right abuse in the country. At a United Nations Human Rights Council held in Geneva, Ajoni (2008), reports several cases where impunity reigned without further investigations of serious abuses. The report cited how on February 25, 2008, police killed approximately 50 persons, burned nearly 100 homes, and destroyed more than 150 market stalls in Ogaminana, Kogi State to avenge the reported killing of a police officer by local youths. There are also reports that the same security forces commit rape and other forms of sexual violence against women and girls with impunity. The case of Corporal Anthony Onoja who raped a two-year-old girl on the 15th day of June 2013 in Kabayi, Nasarawa State (Thisday Newspaper, 2014), is one of the many instances of this crime.

Gender discrimination has also manifested many a time in the fourth republic. Though, the number of females in government increased when compared with previous dispensations, those who strove to assume critical leadership positions were heavily discriminated upon. They were not offered same level playing field with their male counterparts. The cases of erstwhile speakers Margaret Icheen of Benue State House of Assembly who was impeached and Patricia Etteh at the federal level who was accused of wrong doing, made to resign before being exonerated does not only demonstrate sexism as their male successors never proved to be better parliamentary leaders, but it equally exemplify how through character assassination the poor masses have over the years been denied their political right of good representation.

Repercussions of Socio-Political Exclusion in Nigerian's Fourth Republic

Socio-political exclusions as exemplified above have no doubt had its consequences on the polity. Following the marginalisation of the populace by the political class, many people particularly the unemployed, unable to live with the growing level of poverty and widespread social injustice, have opted to force their way out of this periphery of society. While some accepted their fates and decided to lean on their religions for consolation, others thought it wise to resort to kidnapping whoever they perceive as belonging to the elite class to survive. This was the beginning of kidnapping which Jonathan (2013) traces its origin to 2006. Some of the victims of kidnapping since then have been: Papa Jonathan- the late father of President Jonathan, Professor Kamene Okonjo - the mother of Dr Ngozi Okonjo Iweala the Finance Minister, Justice Rhodes' wife and daughter, Bishop Ignatius Kattey, and Chief Mike Ozekhome. Along with kidnapping, petroleum pipeline vandalism was equally a trend that characterise the hay days of Niger Delta militancy which itself was fallout from the marginalisation of their communities.

Now, a section of the citizenry particularly in the country's north, who sought refuge in Islam to ameliorate their sufferings, joined and strengthened the Congregation of the People of Tradition for Proselytism and Jihad otherwise known as 'Boko Haram'. This group which initially possessed no violent outlook was reported to assume violence when the Police attacked and killed several of its members during a funeral procession without provocation or apology. Its members decided to retaliate because they see the police as agents of the same Western educated elite that forced them to the margins of society now seeking to criminalize them (The Politico, 2012:24). This explains why their initial targets were political office holders and security agents. The situation worsened when their leader Mohammed Yusuf was extra judicially executed while in police custody. Boko Haram decried this and other state perpetrated violence as political sharia whose judgement only amputates the arms of those who steal cows while public office holders get away with massive offence.

Jobless and angry youths all over the country including students who are out of school due to industrial actions now see the State as enemy. They embark on any available job to survive including attacking governmental functionaries for payments. Hence dishonest politicians now find this group a ready tool to unleash terror on the state. Some of those rendered jobless through anti-masses policies like the stoppage of okadas and private commercial buses and taxis in Abuja and other cities have resorted to political thuggery and gangsterism. Some even engage in robbery. At a point, it was difficult for travellers to pass through Okene in Kogi State without being harassed by hoodlums. The Ombatse cult killings in Nasarawa State are still fresh in our memory. And, of course, we know the roles unemployed youths play in Nigerian political crises as exemplified by the 2011 post election violence. This has already led to voter apathy across the country as evident in the very low number of people that turn out to cast ballots in all the elections held after the 2011 incidence. Apart from these, violent clashes between major ethnic groups and the minorities who purportedly fight socio political exclusion have led to blood baths in places like Kaduna, Benue, Nasarawa, Taraba and Plateau States. This has led the government into imposing curfews and emergency rules at one time or the other. All these are indeed the signs of a collapsing republic. The Nigerian first, second and third republics were short-lived following similar socio political trends that characterised them. This republic may not be an exception following all the ills that sociopolitical exclusion have caused.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Explaining socio political exclusion as perpetrated through elitism, classism, ethnocentrism, and corruption, and depicting its manifestations in the Nigerian fourth republic, this discourse concludes that this form of violence is more debilitating to the country than the physical violence it instigates. In fact, it was established through exemplification of known facts that insurgency, militancy, vandalism, kidnapping and armed robbery which have undermined Nigeria's security and democracy are all a corollary of the psychological violence being suffered by the populace as perpetrated or encouraged by the state. Hence, this discourse

opines that unless the people are made to enjoy the rule of law, equality of opportunities, political and economic empowerment, freedom and education which are the actual dividends of democracy, a political system will not only remain insecure, but its democracy will continue to be threatened by crises that are capable of terminating it. Based on these, policies that seek to eliminate socio political exclusion in all its ramifications should be championed by political leaders. The people should be empowered politically and economically through a system of inclusion into government, good governance and accountability. The political class should be just enough to cut down to an affordable level, the cost of obtaining party nomination forms. Electoral reforms that aim at eradicating electoral frauds in its entire ramification should be embarked upon. This should include legal reforms that will enable electoral offenders face the full weight of the law without discrimination. And finally, political offices should be made less lucrative by a drastic reduction to a reasonable size in the monies and benefits accruing to political office holders. This for sure will allow more funds to be available for empowerment and other development projects.

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