

THE INSTITUTIONALIZATION OF OTHERING IN THE NIGERIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM

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Abstract

This paper examines the institutionalization of othering in the Nigerian political system. The paper adopts the library literature instrument for data collection. Findings show that anxiety between ethnic groups has traditionally been relatable in Nigeria. Understanding Social exclusion goes beyond the dichotomy of being excluded or included, the appreciation and acknowledgment of long-term consequences and progressions, from the perspectives of the human experiences, and socio-cultural dynamisms form salient aspects of appreciating social exclusivism. ‘Othering’ is one of such progression; it is a system of marginalization through being the other as an in-group or an out-group. The Nigerian society is witnessing an observable societal schism and amplified public detachment and dislike among social identity groups. Most groups do not exercise reverence for the identity of the others; neither do they respect their rights and spaces. They are also threatened by the ideas and standpoints of the ‘Other’ and do not share similar political and social views. Identity formation among social groups in Nigeria has been substantially shaped by colonial participation of the past, leading to Othering and escalations of conflict among the federating units. The paper concludes that The creation of imaginary boundaries and the amalgamation of the southern and the northern protectorates by the Colonial elements generated a traditionally synthetic and divergence federation that never stimulates or arouses substantial unanimity. The paper recommends that Nigerians should adopt cultural relativism to live in peace and harmony among themselves and the ecosystem.

Keywords: institutionalization’ othering; politics; ethnicity; tribalism; regionalism

Introduction

Anxiety between ethnic groups has traditionally been relatable in Nigeria. Understanding Social exclusion goes beyond the dichotomy of being excluded or included, the appreciation and acknowledgment of long-term consequences and progressions, from the perspectives of the human experiences, and socio-cultural dynamisms form salient aspects of appreciating social exclusivism. ‘Othering’ is one of such progression; it is a system of marginalization through being the other as an in-group or an out-group. Studies across social sciences background have shown intensified divergence by ethnic, religious and political positions in Nigeria political system, indicating an intractable sense of social exclusion, and personality delinquent among groups and persons (Taket, Crisp, Nevill, Lamaro, Graham, & (Ed), 2009). Public considerations around this issue have intensified even in contemporary times. The Nigerian society is witnessing an observable societal schism and amplified public detachment and dislike among social identity groups. Although there are increasing cognizance of the rise of group polarization and hate propagations in the political sphere, not much is known about the configurations and level of structural racism and othering in Nigeria (Weis, 1995). While one might understand why intergroup conflict happens, the intragroup conflict remains a mystery. Many factors are known as trigger Othering and Conflict in Nigeria; this research seeks to identify the observable factors, the interest of social, local and international groups, and largely the effect of othering on political participation and the ensuing crisis in Nigeria. Most groups do not exercise reverence for the identity of the others; neither do they respect their rights and spaces. They are also threatened by the ideas and standpoints of the ‘Other’ and do not share similar political and social views.

Theoretical Perspective

The manifestations of in-group and out-group dichotomy are increasingly getting conspicuous in the politics of nations (as also indicative of the Nigerian political system). Social identity theory helps to explore and rationalize these ideas (Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Social identity approach exposes the fundamental ideologies of othering, arguing that individuals understand, appreciate and estimate others in relations to ‘adherence or belonging to social groups’ (Barter-Godfrey & Taket, 2009 p.167). Here, the groups identify the other to construct the viewpoints of group inclusion. The Otherness of the other are defined to individualize or distinguish people as in-group and out-group, and when others are categorized, the out-group do not enjoy the same rights and freedoms when compared to the in-group. The social identity of anyone is the person’s awareness of identity or whom he or she is, based on membership (or belonging) to a group. Tajfel & Turner (2004) argues that the group or social class that people belonged to are salient sources of self-esteem and superiority. People get feelings of social identity from the groups they belong to.

Moreover, to boost self-image or esteem, we enhance the status of the group we belong to, while also holding prejudice and discrimination against other group and their membership. This is the essence of social categorization; putting individuals in social groups and separating people into “us” (in-group) and “them” (out-group). Ethnocentrism is therefore predisposed or holds a bias towards the in-group, leading to widening incompatibilities that are capable of creating discrimination and conflicts between groups

(Tajfel & Turner, 2004). Social identity theory hold that in-group will naturally discriminate and differentiate against the out-group to enhance group image or self-esteem. This situation is extremely ubiquitous and prevalent in intergroup relationships, social categorization or even its perception is in itself enough to activate or generate intergroup strife and discrimination in the interest of the in-group (Paris, Budapest, Konstanz, Bristol, Oregon, & Stirling, 1972). This is also a truism in ethnocentric political participation; in-group and out-group depiction aids some exclusive preventive and protective purposes, because immediately a group understands or foresee the type of interaction or dealings between itself and another group, it will construct a social appearance for the group, which will morally rationalize and substantiate its conduct or behavior towards the out-groups. Ultimately, othering results in “in-group identity and out-group antipathy” (Huddy, Feldman, & Weber, The Political Consequences of Perceived Threat and Felf Insecurity, 2007) (Huddy, 2015). The core hypothesis of the social identity theory maintains that in-group members will pursue to find the harmful and objectionable qualities of the out-group for continuous enhancement of their self-esteem or pride. To Tajfel & Turner (2004), stereotyping is a normal cognitive process. Also, in grouping or categorization, people tend to overstate or over-estimate the disparities or variances between groups, and the similarities of things in the same social group.

Structural Colonial Implantation

The Nigerian distinctive chronological progression and nationhood can only be better appreciated when placed in perspectives with the massive effects of its colonial evolutionary past. Also, like many other nation-states with colonial history, a plethora of factors can be identified to be responsible for such development. The influences of

western education, religion, traditional political establishments, continuous interference or meddling in the political arrangement and participation, the issues of resource control, localization, poverty, militarization and dictatorship, etc. are some of the variables impacting on the progression and development of social institutions in Nigeria (Soyinka, 1996).

While many analyst and observers identified the ‘obvious’ or unobvious implanting of politics in the national social order, not much has been done to identify and categorize their effects on political participation and structural ‘othering’ that leads to racial or ethnocentric geopolitical conflicts in Nigeria. The idea of social order centers on the interplay between political software and hardware, laws and rules that define the coexistence or togetherness of groups, community or a nation. Nigeria is a typical example of connectedness in conflict. Although people live a communal life in thoughts and actions as members of a social group, they also form or forge groups of interdependence and collaboration, which also leads to frictions that result in conflict and widespread inequalities (Staerkle, 2013). Bias and destructive stances are not restricted to any single part or group in Nigeria, but it materializes amongst several social groups and regions, however at different destructive levels. It is more evident from recent happenings (especially in Northern Nigeria) that the Nigerian society is polarized along class, ethnic, religion, and partisan lines.

The arrival of the Colonial elements in the 19th Century and the eventual amalgamation of the southern and the northern protectorates in 1914 saw the movement of citizen into urban centers for economic reasons. Cities in Northern Nigeria like Sokoto, Kano, Jos Plateau, Kaduna witnessed the influx of Southern migrants, who relocated to take advantage of the new opportunities in these cities. Similarly, migrants also moved to

Lagos and Port Harcourt to exploit the new opportunities too. This mark the genesis of what many will call radical mixing among regional blocks in Nigeria; however, it never leads to national integration because everyone would instead hold to their ethnicity and religion. The southerners would rather cave out a settlement or territory of their own popularly known as ‘Sabon Gari’ where non-Muslims and non-indigenes reside. Same ‘Sabo’ are replicated in the South to house Northerners, this at best lead to a pseudo-integration with lack of trust and apathy among the groups. It eventually turns out to be an expanse for the inoculation of contradictory identity construction and intolerant practices. The amalgamation orchestrated by the colonialist therefore is one unique imperative element that crystalizes the modern identities, while also arousing identity crisis in the country.

Exploiting Poverty

Poverty stands out as a contrivance for the “politics of recognition and of respect” (Lister, 2002), which is also central to power dynamics that bring people together, and also set people apart for political relevance. Poverty is an index of financially and administratively fragile states (Fearon & Laitin, 1996). The nuance of verbalization or expression of misrecognition is alive at the core of political scrimmage for recognition as a crucial form of symbolic dominance. How poverty and people are situated in social discuss can be tantamount to an exploit of oppression that results in political, socioeconomic inequalities and class struggle, which further compound conflict and ‘othering,’ among ethnic political units (Mooney, 2009). This truism does not only relate to the nexus of politicians and the electorates but also indicative of the colonial social order that birthed Nigerian federalism in the first instance.

While it is sacrosanct to involve all persons in decision-making that affects them; including political participation, the Copenhagen Declaration of 1995 did not envisage how the relationships and political dynamics can be a tool of othering for political purposes. Democratic and political participation is enshrined in the politics of poverty. It is a “politics of recognition and respect” to those who have experienced poverty and suppression (Lister, 2002). Although such recognition has not changed the circumstances of those affected by poverty, it offers respect and equity for the underprivileged, while also changing the narrative of politics of poverty into that of inclusiveness, power and resource allocation. It is also important to state that ethnic and religious diversity does not lead to violent civil conflict in itself, but it can create an environment that makes violence lucrative (Fearon & Laitin, 1996).

Ethnicity & Religiousity

Nigeria is by far, one of the most diverse multi-ethnic society in the world. The Nigerian society is socially and ethnically varied along group lines, leading to cultural and multi-ethnic distinction or variation. This fact is observable not only in the multiple social systems existing in Nigeria as a nation but also in language, religion, fashion and regionalism (Smyth & Robinson, 2001). Nigeria has divergent religious, ethnic, and factional social groups, and has continuously faced many struggle and conflicts along the lines of these group through history. From the colonial era, sectarian conflict and pressure have always existed between tribes, religious groups, regional group, political groups, ethnic, social groups and even between the people and the state.

Ethnicism is commonly acclaimed as the most essential and constitutionally significant identity across individuals, groups, and regions in Nigeria. Ethnicity is entrenched as part

of national identity even in the constitution of the country. Nigerians are known to commonly describe themselves from the perspective of ethnic and religion attachment than any other identities at any social level (Lewis & Bratton, 2000).

While many would expect that globalization and internet would have eroded its ethnic-based cultural or social system, Nigeria holds to its ancient tongues and disparities. With over five hundred (500) interconnected ethnic groups, speaking over hundred (500) dialects, every member of an ethnic group is easily identified by a unique dialect or language throughout Nigeria. Nigerian ethnicity and culture are twice as diverse as its estimated population of about 200 million. Hence, when states are deeply polarized, it tends to be also volatile and delicate, because the center of conjunction and union among its federating units are somewhat inadequate to stimulate mutual understanding to assuage the contending forces that rip the groups further separately.

In most places in the Southeast and Northern Nigeria specifically, people hold to religious identity, the dominant religion includes Christianity, Islam and Traditional religions (at a meager level). While the Southwestern Yoruba group would identify themselves along ethnic lines, The Southeastern Igbos and the Northern Hausa/Fulani would instead identify themselves along religious line. Both Christianity and Islam have multiple denominations and sects, which often compete and contend unethically, leading to conflict and othering.

Despite age-long interrelatedness and inter-tribal marriage among the people, the ethnocentric cultural gaps have yet to produce homogeneity and unification across religious, ethnic and political contours. Retaining such heterogenous contextual, therefore, a multiplicity of ethnoreligious conflict exists in Nigeria, which can be traced

to multiple factors of unhealthy competitiveness, inter-tribal antagonism, political participation and quest for central (regional and local) political power. Even after almost six decades of her independence as a nation, ‘we the people’ factor only existed in paper and not in heart.

The Nigerian diverse socio-cultural structure has not seen many significant changes, and while the diverseness continues to increase, the national spirit among the citizens have remained constant. The people are rather identified along ethnic and region lines, and not as a nation. Many would never genuinely develop an appropriate conception of nationhood due to ethnic group relations, which is impacting negatively on peace and the political system of the nation. Political marginalization is a common allegation among groups in the Nigerian democratic participation. Ethnocentrism is reflected in the allocation of political representation and partisan politics; through voting in elections, employment into government institutions, citizen patronage, and government programs are some examples of where ethnic politics come into play.

Historical Nexus of Ethnic Political Participation

The constitutional consideration and formulation of Nigeria is a major cause of ethnic strife in Nigeria. The Arthur Richard Constitution of 1946 was developed across ethnic coloration; a colonial pattern with an inclination that stimulates ethnicity and not national integration and unity (Sagay, 2001). The constitution was designed to promote unity and integration in Nigeria and ensure the participation of Nigerians in issues that concern them, it was however promulgated without due consultation to the Nigerian people. It was the same constitution that entrenched the regional participation through the establishment of regional government in Nigeria. While the integration of the North and

South in a common legislative council was achieved by the constitution (Salawu & Hassan, 2011), it birthed the intractable dynamics of regionalism in political system of Nigeria. The introduction of the regionalism was said to have started the fragmentation of a once united front in Nigeria (Salawu & Hassan, 2011). Every other amendment and changes made by the colonial rule plunged the nation further into ethnic disintegration and factions, which eventually occasioned the arrival of ethnic nationalism in the national polity. Nigerian would rather identify themselves as an in-group of an ethnic race rather than as a citizen of a nation; the loyalty is to the ethnic group and not the nation. The demonstration of such character motivates elemental romanticisms or idealizations that pitch the people one against the other. Consequently, people's perception of national development and growth tends to be more region oriented and not nationalistic, and "*as it was in the beginning*", partisan politics are conducted along ethnic divides rather than ideological and nationalistic inclination. The three foremost ethnic group of Yoruba, Hausa and Ibo floated the early parties in the wake of political participation between 1920s and 1930s. Both the composition and the objective of the parties were ethnic based. Parties were created to checkmate the hegemony or domination of ethnic groups due to apathy demonstrated by ethno-religious leaders.

The early administrative division of Nigeria into three geopolitical regions is another cause that tilt the political system of the country towards ethnic political participation. The three early regions were dominated by tribal groups, which compete continuously against one another, and while the nationalism should integrate the people, ethnic regionalism drift the people apart significantly. Some factions momentarily demand for self-determination, which often result in ethnic conflict but the Nigerian constitution does not support any self-rule, especially after the Nigerian civil war that lasted between 1967

to 1970. The different shades of fear, suspicion and mistrust lingers between tribes in Nigeria, it is moreover obvious in political participation and electioneering. Aggravating societal schism, Nigerian political parties lack real ideology, they mostly construct political ideology and identities along social identity appearances that mostly exclude and estrange others; leading to conflict before, during and post elections. The political environment offers ground for vicious hate crimes and political attacks on oppositions that supported different groups.

The position of Nigeria in the global schemes of things cannot be over-emphasized, it is the most populous black nation in the globe, and its economy remains the largest in Africa. However, Nigerian continue to exist in the shadow of colonialism and its expansive structures planted in it demography and cultures. The inclusion of Nigeria in global system was entrenched *in the Berlin conference of 1884/1885*, where the European colonial powers superimposed their realms on the African continent, leading to the balkanization of a once peaceful and united Africa with imaginary maps and ruler (Nilsson, 2013), (Rosenberg, 2004), (Forster, Wolfgang, & Robinson, 1988).

Nigeria's designation was a product of colonial game crafted by Flora Shaw; a White-British and girlfried, who eventually became wife of the then Governor General of Nigeria; Sir Fredrick Lugard. The name *Nigeria* was never the brainchild of the people but the colonial structures. The imposition of colonial hegemony, and the conquest of Nigeria by the British colonial structure, generated the situations of conflict and violence from the second half of the 19th century to early 20th century. Colonialism and Conflict were engaged by both sides as tools of othering, the British colonial powers used violence to pursue their political dominant motive, while the conquest group used violence to resist continuous domination, and to also set up a negotiating platform between

the colonialists and the conquests. From both sides of the devide, their was the legitimization of violence; the colonial powers visualized violence from their own standpoint of self interest, to ensure dominance, while the Nigerian side used violence to pursue their own motive of resistance, both *legitimizing and othering* each other (Falola, 2009). It should also be noted, that many actors across both political and academic nuances have also condonmend the present contitution of Nigeria, they termed it deffective and patial because it was drafted and signed by the military disctatoship to favor a section of the country.

Othering among Regions

At the center of the conflict are imaginary colonial structures and lines manifesting in different ways, but leading to stereotypes and othering. Othering is the shared structural, mental and linguistic mechanism that individualizes or differentiates 'us' and 'them', the normal from the deviant (Barter-Godfrey & Taket, 2009). It can contain at the community level, marginalization, and social rejection, while at the individual level, it involves a sense of intense aversion, dislike, disgust, distrust, and cageyness towards some persons of specific identity group in a society.

As a concept, Othering intersects with some terms in the social sciences scholarship, social expressions like hate, and bias, discrimination, stereotype, and prejudice are intrinsically connected with Othering. It is intently linked to social exclusion at all levels and involves social, subjective and subconscious dynamics of bias, hates stereotyping, prejudice and discrimination. Others are socially excluded and negatively tagged by the claim and imaginative conspiracy of different identity (Gol, 2005).

Othering indicates identity formation progressions; through which group outline their identity in the difference and delineation from others (out-group). Othering defines the otherness of the other, marking and providing a nomenclature for the other. Increasingly, othering creates a gulf of social detachment and gap between individual and groups, which can also be multiplied or replicated via social learning systems. Coined within the post-colonial theory, othering can help to rationalize identity or group formation from the specific social contexts (Jesen, 2011).

Othering as a pattern of behavior is ultimately augmented through the direct (or indirect) experiences of people, and by character observation in others. Since the rudimentary form of learning are entrenched indirect experiences and are mostly directed by the “rewarding and punishing consequences that follow of any given action,” othering exist as a satisfying and defensive mechanism in groups or individual’s behavior (Bandura & Walters, 1977 p.3). In this way, othering serves a psychological purpose of marginalizing and exclusion of the other. It fulfills the need to keep psycho- and socio-spatial proximity 'clean' from deviant (Barter-Godfrey & Taket, 2009 p.166), and in the process tainting or aggressively intimidating the other while claiming probity and loyalty to the in-group.

The actualization or construction of self can be imagined and interactive, in such a way that the (perceived) meaning of self can be based on a dialectical opposition to the mythical identity of the other (Gol, 2005). The other is perceived as distinctive from self due to one or mix of Ethnocentrism, Xenophobia, racial colorations, prejudice and other biases that hypothesis the other as socially lesser due to some physical or perceived peculiarities of the other. It is essential also to understand that Othering is a process engendered and reinforced through social practices, patterns, traditions and institutions of people and groups. The process involves finding and categorizing the other, and

permanently strengthening and replicating positions of supremacy and subservience culturally.

In the contemporary global relations, countries employ Othering in the determination of their socio-political limitations. Such ‘Others’ can be historical minority groups, who contested or opposed the status quo of domination and marginalization of the establishments. The dominant groups generally institutionalize myths and biases against the ‘Other,’ which portray them as dangerous, or threatening, and deserving of human rights violation and injustice. Many (young) citizens of Nigeria who belong to a separatist group in the Southeastern region, those from the oil-rich Niger-Delta region, and Northern Nigeria where insurgents and terrorist groups are active can be typical examples of manifestation of Othering. In other places, Migrants and Refugees are so labeled as dangerous, rapists, drug traffickers, etc. The progression of Othering can be transformative, as systems and alignment changes; it can result in the evolution of different ‘Others’ in society.

Othering effectively leads to the construction of stigma; which is the process of ‘marking.’ It is a socially constructed process of devaluing or debasing an individual or group and subjecting them to exclusion from the societal goods. It is not just about the identity of persons but the process by which individuals that fit specific assessments and descriptions become excluded from diverse categories of social interactions and belonging (Kurzban & Leary, 2001).

External Distortion of Internal Matters

Just like most African States, Nigeria is perceived as the ‘baby of the world’ who cannot do anything objectively without the influence and contributions of the global north. Such

interest in Nigeria predates her independence. Major global powers like Britain, America, Russia, France, The European Union, the Arabs, and China are contesting for significance and influence in a diverging social Society. There is a consciousness in which Nigeria has always been alive to the delinquency of external interference of her internal issues.

Although the world now talks of a post-colonial or neo-colonial era, colonialism is still evidently present in many African societies, including Nigeria. Colonialism was evicted from Africa, the colonialists never gave independence out of objectivity or goodwill, and the interest of foreign influences is still evident in the ‘oversight’ functions they wield in Nigeria’s economy, elections and policies. Some of these interests might be subtle, brazen or structural.

Nigeria and every other African nation-state are still tightened to the imposed identities of the European Colonialist; either as Arab, Francophone or Anglophones. Both Britain and France are holding on to the latches that condition the former colonies to be under their subjugation, believing the global north has a mandate to eternally instruct on social, economic and political matters, and that African leadership also have an eternal mandate to accept instructions. Britain is evident in the political activities of Nigeria, either as Commonwealth, European Union, or through diplomacy. While it might not be evident that foreign influences are seeking to disrupt the political system of Nigeria in the modern day, it is apparent that they are not interested in her cohesion. This truism is symptomatic of the position of the West in the last (2019) Nigerian elections.

Conclusion and Recommendation

This paper is systematized to address the root causes of social exclusion, ethnicity, structural colonialism, regionalism and its nexus to the institutionalizing of Othering in Nigeria. It accounts for the display of social identities that are condensed in ethnicity, religiosity, regionalism and political participation. Identity formation among social groups in Nigeria has been substantially shaped by colonial participation of the past, leading to Othering and escalations of conflict among the federating units. The creation of imaginary boundaries and the amalgamation of the southern and the northern protectorates by the Colonial elements generated a traditionally synthetic and divergence federation that never stimulates or arouses substantial unanimity. Nigerians should adopt cultural relativism to live in peace and harmony among themselves and the ecosystem.

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