

ETHNICITY, FEDERALISM AND STATE CREATION IN NIGERIA: EXPLORING POLITICAL ECONOMY AS A THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Dele Adetoye, PhD. & Mike Opeyemi Omilusi, PhD

Department of Political Science
Ekiti State University
Ado Ekiti, **NIGERIA**

ABSTRACT

Studies of Political Development, Ethnicity, Federalism, and Social Groups or Classes usually meet with thematic confusion in respect to which theoretical framework, models, framework of analysis or paradigms, should be adopted. For scholars in this field, many factors affect or determine their choices of an approach. These factors include but not limited to orientation, training, and perceptions of disciplinary goals, among other things. In this study, an attempt is made to indicate the relevance of political economy as a framework of analysis on the politics of state creation in Nigeria, federalism, the role of the communal elite/class formation, primitive accumulation, ethnicity, socioeconomic development etc. The study concludes that the issues highlighted above are subsumable under and can be captured in a political economy theoretical scaffold, as a tool of scientific analysis, methodology or framework of analysis with its capacity to explain political, economic and social development within a society as a part of a whole process. This is what this study attempts to demonstrate.

Keywords: Theoretical Framework, Political Development, Ethnicity, Communal Elite/Class, Federalism, State Creation, Primitive Accumulation.

INTRODUCTION

An attempt to locate the effect of the interaction between politics, (a generic concept), and economy, on the efficacy of state creation as agent of development and integration in the Nigerian federal system must be grounded upon a fairly elaborate but, yet, precise theoretical framework. The issues raised in this study relates to federalism, state creation, economic development, ethnicity, communal elite/class formation, primitive accumulation, and integration. The choice of political economy as framework of analysis brings along with it, its own constraints because of its nebulous and eclectic nature. This nature is derived from the reality of social science inquiries which, more often than not, gropes in the world of uncertainties to locate a well ordered pattern of social occurrences and variously imploring differing methods, concepts and theories to describe the same phenomenon often differently without losing the substance. It is therefore not impossible that a study of the interconnection between politics and economy, usually referred to as political economy as it relates to the issues raised in the study, poses a great challenge. It is also the case that different scholars could view the concept of political economy without laying too much emphasis on the state, as a dominant figure. Such emphasis could be on corruption, structure of governance, education, military, democracy, election, and others as prebendal politics, colonialism, neo-colonialism, all which will reflect almost similar issues, but very often varying causal factors, without necessarily emphasizing as an independent variable the dominance of the state.

In another way, there is the temptation of asking the question of which strand of political economy one is adopting as a framework; liberal/classical, neo-classical, and Marxian, etc. It must be quickly said here that political economists had adopted the political economy approach to explain or understand certain phenomena. For instance, Karl Marx used the approach as a

tool of analysis to explain the development, growth, workings, and prediction of the contradiction and eventual demise of capitalism. In a similar vein, liberal and classical economists like Adam Smith employed the political economy to analyze the growth of the economy of nations while Thomas Keynes used it to explain the role of government/state in economy. Therefore, the political economy approach, therefore, lends itself to social science researchers as a multidisciplinary approach through which various issues could be investigated, examined and analyzed.

Adam Smith, the famous classical economist was the first scholar who attempted to study industrial capitalism from a political economy perspective. He took special interest in such issues as division of labour, social relations of production, classes, labour, capital, politics, culture, morality and so on and tried to understand them as part of the same historical and social process. Also, John Miller and David Ricardo later adopted this methodology. John Miller was not only interested in situating economic ideas within a social context but also in the broader context of history, while David Ricardo in an attempt to find an explanation for the increasing tension between factory owners and wage labourers, delved into the realms of politics, history and culture (Ake, 1983: 3).

Exploring Alternative Paradigms

In our attempt to situate this study in the most appropriate perspective, we note that relevant theories abound in the disciplines of the social sciences in general and political science in particular. Studies of political development of this nature that do not adopt structural-functional or systems analysis are likely to focus upon the actions of social groups or classes (Sklar, 1976:150). The actions of social groups and classes are conveniently subsumable under a broader political economy approach.

In adopting this approach, we are not unaware of the logic of the causal approach that also places emphasis on class analysis and the functional approach that emphasizes systems analysis, both of which are also useful tools of analysis with regard to the subject matter of this study. However, the choice of an approach is informed by various variables; these include the researcher's value orientation, training, and perceptions of disciplinary goals-among other things (Sklar, 1976:151). Political economy, whichever way it is used, as a scientific tool of investigation, methodology or framework of analysis, tries to explain or understand political, economic and social development within a society as a part of a whole process. The thrust of political economy was explained by Bjorn Beckman (1983:102-103) in a critique of other frameworks of analysis in the social sciences when he observed that:

...the question of democracy is treated as if it has nothing to do with control over the economy. The power and control exercised by capital over labour is considered to fall within the realm of economics, not political science. The economists, on the other hand have tended to eliminate power altogether from their analysis.

Beckman, therefore, saw the immediate need for all social scientists, irrespective of disciplines, pay greater attention to such general theory, that will allow them, in spite of their specializations relate their own piece to a dynamic whole (Banwo, 1999:9).

In this particular study of the politics of state creation in Nigeria, the political economy approach seems the most relevant because this work investigates the interface between ethnicity, state

creation, resource distribution and class accretion in the Nigerian polity. The approach looks at the resultant effects of the process of state creation on the nation's political economy. It analyses the interconnection among the various issues, such as ethno-territorial resource competition, class accumulation, quest for the use of state as agent of development, as they relate to state creation. Scholars in the field of the political economy of Nigeria have made propositions on the seemingly interminable agitation for further creation of states with the aim of clearing the conceptual undergrowth inherent in the exercise. For instance, Eteng (1998: 58) situates his observation in political economy framework with his observation that

a class analysis of ethnic and related communal politics in Nigeria
offers adequate explanation of the persisting national question

We must note here that the problem of state creation in Nigeria is a derivative of the 'national question'. The use of ethnic, religious and other communal bases for political and economic competition and legitimization among status quo beneficiaries has become the strategy in the hands of the ethnic populations in Nigeria to etch themselves in critical positions in resource allocation process in the country. In this process, the elite manipulate regional, state and local government apparatus for class and communal competition and personal aggrandizement. This is referred to as the *manipulation thesis* in the literature.

The structural reorganizations of 1963 and 1967 were carried out to redress the structural imbalance that characterized the Nigerian federation, and to allay the fears of the dominated and marginalized ethnic minorities in the country. According to Bach (1997: 384) whereas during the 1960s demands for the creation of new states came exclusively from the minorities, elites everywhere now canvass for the division of their states ostensibly because the revenue formula and the federal character principle ensure elites' increased capacity for crude and primitive accretion and guarantee their representation at the federal level if new states are created.

Corroborating this assertion, Suberu (1995: 56) argues that

the agitation for new states had transformed] from a political
mechanism for assuaging ethnic minority fears into a generalized
strategy in the competitive struggles among diverse constituencies
for federal resources.

This struggle is usually championed by the various elites of these constituencies. The class character of this struggle was aptly captured by Gana's observation that

given the character of the Nigerian political economy, in
particular the central role of the state in the process of
accumulation, it is not difficult to understand why the creation
of states has served to expand the material base of the agitators
in their aspiration to transform themselves into effective
competitors (1987).

The centrality of the state in the process of production and distribution of socioeconomic resources and opportunities and the multiethnic nature of the country had led to what Bach (1997: 385) referred to as 'politicization of ethnicity and ethnicization of politics'. For Suberu (1999: 277) this development is unavoidable

because Nigeria is an ethnically plural society and because of
the relative underdevelopment of socioeconomic processes and
identities, public competition for resources of the state would

take place, predominantly among ethnically defined constituencies.

and this has definitely resulted in a situation where ethnicity and the associated primordial paradigms of communalism, religion and regionalism...emerged as the primary organising principles for conceptualising, articulating, protecting or promoting collective *distributive interests in Nigeria* (Suberu, 1999: 277)

For Nnoli (1978:21), Ake (1985), and Ekekwe (1986: 132-133), the hidden hand of class contradiction and the opposing class interest of the country's dominant social forces lie behind virtually all the virulent and interminable communal agitation for the creation of more states and local government areas as well as for the establishment of an ethnic-based confederacy.

Bringing a broader dimension into the class analysis of the national question, Ayoade (1999: 106) sees state creation as a strategy of the northern oligarchy to ensure the perpetration of what he called 'Northern ascendancy' in the Nigerian federation, on the one hand and to divide and rule the East and the West whereby 'both of them would continue to be vassal states to the north'.

Chronicling state creation exercises from the inception of the exercise in 1963, Ayoade (1999: 106) concludes that by the various state reorganization exercises in Nigeria a relationship, which stood at 50:50 in 1951, had by 1995 become 54:46 [ostensibly referring to north-south relationship]. Similarly, east-west relationship, which started in 1951 as 50:50, has by 1995 become 53:47. Consequently, the north has gained at the expense of the South, and the East at the expense of the West ...If anything, the creation of states in the north has improved the northern argument for domination.

This dimension of class analysis of state creation in the country is very revealing. We observe that since independence and for the better part of its existence, a particular ethno-linguistic and religious group has ruled Nigeria. This particular group, whether through civil rule or military administration, carried out all the state reorganization exercises that had ever taken place in the country. The Hausa-Fulani Muslim of the northern Nigeria *de facto* has ruled this country than any other group, only choosing between either the East or West to secure a minimum winning coalition at any particular point in time. This group had used the advantage of office to manipulate state creation exercises to give it "greater liberty to solely determine the political fate of all Nigerians while ensuring east's victory over the west, yet keeping both as "political vassals of the north" (Ayoade, 1999: 107).

The even and rapid development postulate states that state creation brings about accelerated development. This proposition has been subjected to critical scrutiny and it has been refuted. According to the Irikefe Panel, what is generally confused with development are raging inflation, conspicuous consumption and excitement of wants which are not likely to be fulfilled given the best will in the world. It is debatable that the mythical common man's lot is appreciably better and even if it is, that it was due to the creation of state. To Gana (1987: 12-23), creation of state helps state capitals put on a facade of development in the springing up of a fresh crop of *nouveaux riches* around commercial activities. He said there are no advanced or backward areas but backward and

advanced family groups. Therefore, to “talk maliciously of an ethnic domination is to be naïve, malicious, mystifying and criminal to the core” (Gana, 1987: 43). By this statement, one can infer that state creation has merely been used by and has indeed served the class interest of the Nigerian ruling class.

For instance, Nnoli (1978) in refuting the development thesis of state creation observes that by focusing on the distributive side of the production process to the neglect of the production aspect, the creation of states militate against the mobilization of creative energies of the population through the transformation of the productive forces. Development is inconceivable without growth in the productive forces of the society.

Berating the elites for disarticulating the developmental forces of their societies, Nnoli notes that, because they lack capacity to increase production owing to their remoteness from the directly productive functions, they (the elite) rely on the manipulation of the distributive forces for whatever benefits they derive from production process. Nnoli insisted that the elite have not been known to build any material civilization.

Nnoli’s observation as enunciated above explains why there has been insignificant development save for distribution of socioeconomic amenities and opportunities from the centre in the new states after they are created. The socioeconomic resources and opportunities are usually the payoffs of the elites in the ethnic competitions in which they are principal actors and through which they strategize.

The manipulation of state creation for self-aggrandizement is not confined to the civilian category of the elite alone. It extends to the military. In the history of state creation in Nigeria, the exercise has been the exclusive preserve of military regimes. Ambitious military heads of states and other military elites are known to create new states to fulfill personal ambition of civilianizing through creation of clientele states to secure support from such population and to create a sphere of influence for themselves (Suberu and Agbaje, 1999: 343). Moreover, the proliferation of states also leads to their incapacitation and the emergence of a very powerful centre. The military, by creating mushroom states, had imprinted its nature and organizational structure on Nigerian federalism. Since the Nigerian federation was administered by the “Northern military”, the latter has used the balkanization of the south to help the North achieve its political ascendancy agenda in the country. Every military government in Nigeria headed by a northerner had always helped the “caliphate” actualize its agenda of northern hegemony.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, we have thus far demonstrated the conceptual interface between several issues – ethnicity, state creation, resource allocation, class/group accumulation, the centrality of the Nigerian states in distribution of resources and the nature of Nigerian politics, what Suberu (1999: 276) referred to as the mixture of “economic statism and ethnic pluralism”, a scenario where the Nigerian society is characterized by an overpowering statism which inextricably intertwines political and economic power. The line of demarcation between politics and power has, therefore, been erased as state power equals wealth and wealth the pathway to power. In summary, because of its composition and nature, ethnicity, and the associated primordial paradigms of communalism, religion and regionalism, have been elevated to the level of state ideology and the primary organizing principles for conceptualizing, articulating, protecting or

promoting collective distributive interests in Nigeria. Consequently, from the foregoing, we have the conviction that the scope of issues raised by this research can be accommodated in the framework of political economy.

REFERENCES

- Ake, C. (1983). "The political economy approach: Explanatory notes on Marxian legacy in Africa". Paper presented at the Marx and Africa Centenary Conference at Ahmadu Bello University Zaria.
- Ake, C. (1985). *A political economy of Nigeria*. London: Macmillan.
- Beckman, B.(1983) Political science and political economy. Political science in Africa: A critical review. ed. Y. Barongo. Ed. London: Zed Press.
- Banwo, A. (1999) "Theoretical issues in political economy" in Saliu, H. A. (1999) Issue in contemporary political economy of Nigeria. Ilorin, Sally and Associates.
- Sklar, R.T. (1976) "Ethnic relations and social class" in Sanda, A.O (1976) Ethnic relations in Nigeria. Ibadan, The Caxton Press.
- Ayoade, J. A. A. (1999). The federal character principle and the search for national integration *Federalism and political restructuring in Nigeria*. K. Amuwo et al. eds. Ibadan: Spectrum books and IFRA.
- Bach, D. (1997). Indigeneity, ethnicity and federalism. *Transition without end*. L. Diamond et al. Ibadan: Vantage Publishers.
- Ekekwe, E. (1986). *Class and state in Nigeria*. Lagos: Longman Nig Ltd.
- Eteng, A. I. (1997). Minority rights under Nigeria's federal structure. *Constitutions and federalism*. Friedrich Ebert Foundations.
- Gana, A. T. (1987). The politics and economics of state creation in Nigeria. *Nigerian Journal of Politics and Strategy*. Vol. 11 No. 1 Kuru: NIPSS.
- Nnoli, O. (1978). *Ethnic politics in Nigeria*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publisher.
- Sanda, A. O. (1976). *Ethnic relations in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Caxton Press
- Suberu, R.T. (1995). The politics of state creation. *The political economy of Nigeria under military rule 1984-1993*. S. Adejumobi & A. Momoh. eds. Harare: Supes Books.
- Suberu, R.T. (1999). States creation and the political economy of Nigeria. *Federalism and Political restructuring in Nigeria*. K. Amuwo et al.eds. Ibadan: Spectrum Books.