

Philosophical analysis of ethnicity in modern African politics, leadership and governance

Abstract

Philosophical analysis of ethnicity in modern African politics leadership and governance argues that the millionist touted idea that nationalism and ethnicity would dissipate as globalization and of course universalization of political ideas on governance unfolded have been disproved as both nationalism and ethnicity have on the contrary resurged and proliferated. This points out that although there are several conceptualizations of ethnicity; the one being singled out for closer study and analysis is instrumental ethnicity, the kind strategically fermented by the political elites who at times double as military leaders, ostensibly for ethnic benefit but more often than not, for the exclusive benefits of the political or military elites themselves. The nuanced dialectic at play with instrumental ethnicity is that, superficially it looks like everybody in the ethnic grouping will benefit; indeed, for some time they may as ethnic members feel it is their son/daughter in charge, a kind of psychological satisfaction, which may be accompanied by some rudimentary economic benefits. Closer study of the dynamics of sharing locally generated resources and revenue, however, shows that lack of transparency and equity in the apportionment of those resources ends up fanning civil/tribal unrest and may flair out into open conflicts.

Keywords: ethnicity, philosophy, modern, African politics and analysis

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Introduction

Studies in social sciences had projected that the importance of ethnicity and nationalism would decrease and eventually disappear as a result of the world becoming more industrialized and people more individualized. But on the contrary, ethnicity and nationalism have acquired greater political importance, especially after the Second World War and continuing in the twenty-first century.¹ The question I am asking is why is this happening and more so with greater intensity in Africa?¹ Is it, as Lajul² argued that, the principle of African traditional communal responsibility is the one responsible for the wide spread ethnic conflicts, favouritism and tensions in Africa,² or some other factors?

Today, even though authors like Tarimo who seems to support Lajul's hypothesis by saying; "For many people ethnic identity stands as a symbol of communal solidarity and security,"³ I think there is need to dig deeper into this topic in order to answer the above question. Most likely, the African traditional sense of communal responsibility is being blown beyond its proportion by the more informed members of African society, thus creating ethnic tensions and conflicts in Africa.

In order to understand the gravity of the problem of ethnicity in Africa, I should distinguish the three types of ethnicities; the natural, instrumental and the situational ethnicities. While natural ethnicity is the spontaneous inclination to favour a member of one's ethnic group on the basis of sheer common origin, instrumental ethnicity is the calculated use of ethnic sentiments and favour given to the members of one's ethnic group with the desire to achieve some specific ends. On the other hand, situational ethnicity is the momentary fallback for support, protection and security from the members of one's ethnic origin at the time of need.

In this paper, I want to argue that, while all these three types of ethnicities exist in Africa, the one most responsible for political problems in Africa is the instrumental ethnicity. This is supported by several authors who gave it different names. For example, Tarimo³ calls instrumental ethnicity "politicized ethnicity";⁴ Idowu⁴ calls it "ethnicism".⁵ Idowu argues that, although for many the concept of ethnicity has been demonised, this concept is innocent. What makes ethnicity an evil to dread is the politicization of ethnicity.⁶

Politicized ethnicity, ethnicism, or instrumental ethnicity, often uses ethnic sentiments for gain. These gains range from political to social and economic ends. Natural ethnicity is common at lower levels of public administration and that is where communal responsibility principle heavily lies. On the other hand, instrumental ethnicity is practiced at higher enclaves of public administration, i.e. at the level of political leadership and governance. The innocent concept of ethnicity as mentioned by Idowu above, basically refers to the spontaneous inclination by which lower cadres in public administration favour members of their ethnic groups on the basis of sheer belief in common origin, which is natural. Moreover, the momentary fallback for support, protection and security from the members of one's ethnic community at the time of need is also innocent. The majority of lower servants in public administration fall victim to these two types of ethnicities. However, the political leaders and people in top administrative positions are more subtle in the use of these ethnic sentiments.

Given the above stance, one may want to know, what then is ethnicity? Sian defined ethnicity as "all those social and psychological phenomena associated with a culturally constructed group identity".⁷ So, ethnicity is a social construction of group identity. This is also

¹Erickson T Hylland. *Ethnicity and Nationalism: Anthropological Perspectives*, (London: Pluto Press, 2010), p. 2.

²Lajul Wilfred, "Impact of African traditional ethics on behaviour in Uganda," *Mawazo: The Journal of the College of Humanities and social Sciences, Makerere University*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (September, 2011), pp.125-139.

³Tarimo A. *Ethnicity, Citizenship and State in Eastern Africa*, (Mankon, Bamenda: Langaa RPCIG, 2011), p. 2.

⁴*Ibid*, p. 25.

⁵Idowu William. "Ethnicity, Ethnicism and Citizenship: A Philosophical Reflection on the African Experience," *Journal of Social Science*, Vol.8, No.1 (2004), p. 46.

⁶*Ibid*.

⁷Sian J. *The Archaeology of Ethnicity: Constructing Identities in the Past and Present*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1997), p. xiii.

supported by authors like; Nnoli,⁸ Young,⁹ and Sanda¹⁰ who say ethnicity is a social phenomenon, a sense of identification with some ethnic units, or a feeling of allegiance to one's ethnic group.⁵⁻⁸ In this view, the underlying point is that, ethnicity is not a spontaneous natural inclination towards the members of one's ethnic group, but a social and psychological phenomenon, constructed and devoid of natural basis.

The second group of authors define ethnicity as a feeling of togetherness amongst primordial groups of people who share common beliefs in origin, ancestry, language, values etc. Tarimo is one of those who described ethnicity as referring to "a group of people sharing a common ancestry, language, belief, myth, custom, history, kinship, territory and other distinctive attributes".¹¹ This is supported by Lentz who thinks ethnicity is "a term connoting a 'we group' with a common culture and history".¹² Others, in this category are; Shils¹³ and Geertz,¹⁴ who understood ethnicity as a primordial group with distinctive characteristics like myths, origin, ritual, religion or genealogical descent. Enloe adds that "the basic function" of ethnicity "is to bind the individual to a group".¹⁵ In this view, ethnic identity derives its foundation from combined memories of the past and common expectation.⁹⁻¹³ Many people have lived and continue to lead their lives within the framework of such "tribal identities".¹⁶

From these definitions, I can basically identify two theories of ethnicity; instrumentalism and primordialism (see also Keyes).¹⁷ In my view, a better understanding of ethnicity only comes from a combination of these two theories as we shall discuss shortly.¹⁴ Ethnicity is not just a social construction, but it is a real feeling of allegiance to one's ethnic group, which in most cases are spontaneous, situational and practical. Ethnicity is the affinity to ethnic identity that is based on primordial group distinctive characteristics like myths, origin, ritual, language, religion or genealogical descent. This primordial feeling can be used or misused by different people, especially in the public domain.

This combined understanding of ethnicity is also supported by Young who wrote;

While cultural formulations that serve to define the heritage assumed to have been determined by virtue of one's descent from mythical ancestors or historical forebears are essential to the establishment of ethnicities, they are not sufficient in and of themselves to make ethnicity a factor in social relations. It becomes so when activated by interest.¹⁸

⁸Nnoli O. *Ethnicity and Development in Nigeria*, (Aldershot: Avebury Ashgate Publishing Limited, 1995), p. 1.

⁹Young CM. *Politics in the Congo: Decolonization and Independence*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 234.

¹⁰Sanda AO. (ed), *Ethnic Relations in Nigeria: Problems and Prospects*, (Ibadan, Nigeria: Caxton Press, 1976), p. 33.

¹¹Tarimo A. *Ethnicity, Citizenship and State in Eastern Africa*, p. 2

¹²Lentz C. "Tribalism and Ethnicity in Africa: A review of four decades of Anglophone research", *Chi. Sci. Hum.*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (1995), pp. 305.

¹³Shils E. "Primordial, Personal, Social and Civil Ties." *British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 7, (1957), pp. 113-145.

¹⁴Geertz C. "The Integrative Revolution: Primordial Sentiments and Civil Politics in the New States" in C. Geertz (ed.) *Old Societies and New States*, (New York: The Free Press, 1963), pp.105-57.

¹⁵Enloe Cynthia. *Ethnic Conflict and Political Development*, (Boston, MA: Brown, 1973), p.187.

¹⁶Mbiti SJ. *African Religions and Philosophy*, (Oxford: Heinemann Educational Publishers, 1969), p. 102.

¹⁷Keyes C. (ed). *Ethnic Change*, (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1981), p.10.

¹⁸Young CM. "Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Class in Africa: A Retrospective," *Cahiers d'etudes africaines*, Vol. 26, No. 103 (1986), p. 450.

By interest, Young¹⁵ refers to the use or activation of these primordial sentiments for some targeted aims. The activation of the primordial sentiments for some ends is what I have called instrumental ethnicity. So, instrumental ethnicity does not exist in isolation of the already existing primordial feelings amongst given social groups. We have to take the fact that interested use of the sentimental feelings that a particular ethnic group attributes to themselves or are attributed to them by others is what is called instrumental ethnicity, politicised ethnicity or ethnicism. Ethnicity is not just a created or socially constructed feeling of belonging to particular ethnic community; rather it is the use of that feeling by interested parties for political or other social gains.

An example of such interested use of ethnic feelings by African political leaders is given by Tarimo when he said; "A number of leaders, at the national level, allocate to their ethnic groups considerable state resources to maintain their political influence and control of the ethnic group concerned".¹⁹ He calls this practice "politicization of ethnic identities, which is the appeal to the ethnic solidarity founded upon blood-relationships as a means that can guarantee economic security".²⁰

The role of ethnicity in African politics, leadership and governance will therefore need to be understood as the instrumental use of ethnic sentiments by political leadership in the governance of their societies. It is insufficient to explain the rampant abuse of ethnicity in Africa by political leaders by merely appealing to the spirit of communal solidarity practiced in traditional African societies. This is because, sentiments of ethnicity are mainly felt at the moment of political, social or economic crisis. Tarimo observes that "people do not kill one another merely because of the ethnic differences; rather, they kill each other when these differences promote unhealthy competition."²¹ The competition is most of the time political or economic. Economic and political factors make these ethnic differences explosive. The political leadership are responsible for the management of these economic and political forces.

Though authors like; Barth,²² Anderson,²³ Saul,²⁴ Sharp²⁵ and Cohen²⁶ still think that ethnicity is something constructed, invented or created, this is not true. Often associated with this view is the notion that the ethnic group has not a concrete existence but is rather a figment of the human imagination,²⁷ which also is not true.¹⁶⁻²¹

As seen above, ethnicity is not a myth, nor a human imagination, but it is a social dynamic reality felt, cherished, and at times organized and promoted on the basis of existing actual traditional ethnic communities that have always lived and survived social challenges that faced them through the years. In this paper, I am exploring the deeper issues behind the dynamic reality of these feelings, sentiments and affinity among community of people with shared values, goals and aspirations in African politics, leadership and governance. Deeper

¹⁹Tarimo A. *Ethnicity, Citizenship and State in Eastern Africa*, p. 25.

²⁰*Ibid*.

²¹*Ibid*, pp. 24-25.

²²Barth F. *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries*, (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1969).

²³Anderson B. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983).

²⁴Saul J. "The dialectic of class and tribe" in *Race and Class*, Vol. 20 (1979).

²⁵Sharp J. "Ethnic group and nation: the apartheid vision in South Africa," in E. Boonzaier and J. Sharp (eds) *Keyword*, (Cape Town & Johannesburg: David Philip, 1988).

²⁶Cohen R. "Ethnicity: problem and focus in anthropology", in *Annual of Anthropology*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (1978).

²⁷Ake C. "What is the problem of ethnicity in Africa?" *Transformation*, Vol. 22 (1992), pp. 1-14.

issues are those that go beyond first sights or first observations. These are issues which I have termed philosophical, since they are underlying and consistent principles or theories that aim to explain ethnicity in an exhaustive way.

This will be done by exploring the deeper issues in ethnicity by looking at four main areas; the theories of ethnicity, the dimensions of ethnicity in Africa, the role of instrumental ethnicity, and the means used to foster instrumental ethnicity.

Theories of ethnicity

In an attempt to understand the deeper issues about ethnicity, several theories have been put forward. Similarly, if we are to understand the role of ethnicity in politics, leadership and governance, then we should make a brief survey of these theories. Three main theories of ethnicity have been proposed and these are primordialism, instrumentalism and pragmatism. Baumann called these; primordial, instrumental and practice theories of ethnicity.²⁸

Primordialism is a theory which states that “ethnicity is a natural phenomenon with its foundations in family and kinship ties”.²⁹ Bowmann²² cited Geertz³⁰ and Shils,³¹ who were “narrowing down ethnicity as a social concept to biological terms”.³²

Primordial ethnicity as a natural phenomenon is real in Africa, but it should not be narrowed down to purely a biological concept. Ethnicity is a concept through which individuals and groups associate or are associated with certain ethnic communities. These ethnic communities had bases in the human families, which are constituted both biologically and socially, and which over the years have expanded far beyond the biological confines. The membership of an ethnic community is basically by association or affiliation to a definite group with both biological and social origins.

Instrumentalism, on the other hand, is the belief that ethnicity is socially constructed since²³ “people have the ability to cut and mix from a variety of ethnic heritages and cultures to form their own individual or group identities”.³³ Instrumentalist’s theory has been characterized as concerned “with the role of ethnicity in the mediation of social relations and the negotiation of access to resources, primarily economic and political resources”.³⁴

This theory, underlines that ethnicity is socially constructed. However, I do not share this opinion. Ethnicity in Africa is not a myth and it is not socially constructed in the sense Hutchinson states above. As I have stated above, every ethnic community has its origin in the human family. But the human family is not only a biological reality, but also a social one. Two or more people, who come together in marriage, do not have common biological origins that is why marriage is a social concept. But as the members of this first human community continue to live together, they biologically produce offspring. The offspring is the basis of an extended family that keeps on growing to the extent of becoming a clan. In this process, there are many more members who join this extended family, either through marriage, adoption, pact friendship and affiliation. The new members also share similar feelings of togetherness as brothers and sisters. These feelings

of the members and of all those who freely, by choice or not, associate with them become members of the same ethnicity.

This view is supported by Ake who wrote; “The ethnic group is a descent-based group, a segmentary hierarchy with boundaries defined by standards of exclusion and inclusion which are objective and subjective”.³⁵ The problem Ake falls into is in thinking that this “social structure eventually disintegrates in social atomization as society reconstitutes in organic solidarity” (Ibid). The main reason for this transformation, as Ake puts it “is the development of capitalism, especially the generalization of commodity production and exchange; that is to say, the constitution of a market society”.³⁶ But as observed earlier, this seems not to come that easy, even in the most capitalistic countries of the world, sentiments of ethnicity or racism still exists, so we must find a better explanation, which Ake seems not to provide.

Pragmatism is the theory that ethnicity is the habit made up of durable dispositions towards certain perceptions and practices, which eventually become part of an individual’s or group behaviour and which are adoptable from one context to another.³⁷ May be this explains what Mbiti referred to as the tribal identity which “varies like temperature, from time to time, depending on prevailing circumstances”.³⁸

Under practice theory, ethnicity is not a static reflection of culture, nor is it produced entirely by social interaction and boundary maintenance. Instead, it is an inter-subjective construction of ethnic identity grounded in shared dispositions of habit, which creates feelings of identification among people similarly endowed.³⁹ This habit is dynamic and changes constantly within different social contexts. Individuals are viewed here as social agents who strategically act in pursuit of interests. Collectively, ethnicity is seen as a shared disposition of habits.⁴⁰

This pragmatic theory of ethnicity is real, but it fails to highlight the truth that Africa faces daily. In Africa, people do not get united for practical reasons *per se*, but always there is a context of social solidarity. So, to divorce practical interests or communality of location (*habitus*) from the social context of the community is unrealistic. If it happens, then it is not with the majority of the Africans. I agree with Tarimo who said, “Loyalty (in Africa) is always connected to interests expressed in terms of identity, solidarity and security”.⁴¹ Ethnicity is not an idealistic or abstract concept in the sense Sian described above. Neither will it diminish simply by some capitalistic interests, as Ake claims above. This means again that, this theory may not be the best description of the situation of ethnicity in Africa.

To some extent, if we are to properly understand ethnicity in Africa and the role it plays in politics, leadership and governance, then all these three theories are important, but the emphasis lies with instrumental ethnicity. Most common man/woman in Africa, relate to one another on a basis of ethnicity believed to be primordial, even though we know that the reality is more complex, since people associate and identify themselves with certain ethnic groups for various reasons. However, the effect of this belief is often times used by the more informed members of the African society, the politicians, to gain support and get access to the members of different ethnicities. In positive cases, such sentiments are used to mobilize for

²⁸Baumann T. *Defining Ethnicity*, (The SAA Archaeological Record, 2004), pp. 12-14.

²⁹*Ibid*, p. 13.

³⁰Geertz. *The Integrative Revolution*, pp.105-57.

³¹Shils. *Primordial, Personal, Social and Civil Ties*, pp. 113-145

³²Baumann. *Defining Ethnicity*, p.12-14.

³³Hutchinsen J. and A. D. Smith (eds), *Nationalism*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 9.

³⁴Sian. *The Archaeology of Ethnicity*, p. 72.

³⁵Ake. *What is the problem of ethnicity in Africa?* pp. 1-14

³⁶*Ibid*.

³⁷Sian. *The Archaeology of Ethnicity*, p. 88.

³⁸Mbiti. *African Religions and Philosophy*, p. 102.

³⁹Sian. *The Archaeology of Ethnicity*, p. 90.

⁴⁰*Ibid*.

⁴¹Tarimo. *Ethnicity, Citizenship and State in Eastern Africa*, p.16.

development. In more negative cases, such support is aggressively used and manipulated to gain political capital. Strictly speaking, mobilizing the primordial ethnic sentiments for political gains may look innocent, but often is disadvantageous to other candidates who may not have a large ethnic group behind their political programs.

In the same way, the collectivity of the shared dispositions of locality and habits shared by a particular community because of their similarity in endowment, by itself is innocent, yet such disposition can be used positively or negatively in the pursuance of political interests. Whether it is used positively or not, qualify it to be used instrumentally. So, these theories supplement one another, yet it is how these theories are applied that matters.

Dimensions of ethnicity in Africa

At this stage, it is important to analyse the dimensions of ethnicity in Africa. Ethnicity in African has taken three main dimensions; namely: political, economic and religious.

Political ethnicity, as described earlier, is the instrumentalization of ethnic differences to further ambitious national or political interests of political leaders in specific African countries. This view is supported by Nzongola-Ntalaja,²⁴ who contends that; "Where ethnicity has featured in the discourses of politicians and military commanders, it has served as little more than an instrument for rationalizing the expansionist aims of a state towards a neighbour".⁴²

This means, political ethnicity is the manipulation of ethnic sentiments, by African national or political leaders to meet their political interests. Clearest example is the ethnic conflicts in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC). The different ethnic groups that have lived in the DRC peacefully for years cannot wake up one morning to begin hating to the point of exterminating each other. This is the influence of the political elites of the DRC or of neighbouring countries surrounding Congo who want to fuel ethnic conflicts for their own political agenda.

Besides, Platteau²⁵ argued that African nation states have remained weakly established, not so much because of African ethnicity, other than agents of colonial rule prior to African independents. He states:

More precisely, has the logic of ethnicity worked to prevent the emergence of the nation-state, or is it the behaviour of state agents that is responsible for the enduring role of ethnicity? If we follow Ekeh's analysis, the second view is the most pertinent: the state has not succeeded in getting established because it has not met the legitimate aspirations and expectations of its citizens.⁴³

Again, African state agents have failed to build nation states and meet their people's aspirations not because of ethnicity. One can still read the four causes of politicization of ethnicity in Kenya by Anke⁴⁴ and the three causes of ethnicity in Kenya by Raila Odinga.⁴⁵ None of these two, blame ethnicity, but African state agents.^{26,27}

Geo-economic ethnicity refers to the claim of ownership of economic wealth located within particular geo-ethnic communities by the members of that community. Often times, it is the inequitable distribution of such wealth by the political leadership that extracts such wealth that creates ethnic conflicts. This is because the revenue derived from such a geographical space are often transferred to other geographical spaces without due consideration of the local ethnic communities living in such geographical space.

This is what Mwangi²⁸ has termed geoethnicity. He stated that; Ethnic groups are also associated with geographical regions; this is referred to as geoethnicity. Although the boundaries that define ethnic regions are generally fuzzy, they nevertheless exist and are generally respected by neighbouring groups. [...] A tax on a particular agricultural commodity is often a tax on a particular ethnic group; similarly, development project in one region provides benefits to a particular ethnic group. Consequently, ethnic groups have strong incentives to capture the instruments of transfer.⁴⁶

The text above, underlines the fact that economic activities taking place within a particular geoethnic space is claimed to be owned by such an ethnic community. This is what I have termed geo-economic ethnicity. The revenue that is derived from geo-economic activities is the rent the government get from such a geoethnic space. Political conflicts often arise as a result of rivalry over the instruments of transfer of this rent. This instrument is the political leadership. The transfer of rent to other communities depends on the political leadership and its policies. The way political leaders, transfer these rents to different communities, most of the time is not transparent, equitable and often do not reflect justice. This creates what I have called geo-economic ethnicity and conflicts.

Religious ethnicity is the claim of dominance and prerogative of religious institutions and their affiliation to particular ethnic communities. In Africa, some religious denominations have affiliated themselves to certain areas, geographically occupied by certain ethnic groups that have accepted them. Such religious denominations claim exclusive rights to such ethnic communities. For instance, in Buganda, the central region in Uganda, in the early 1890s, the British divided the twenty-two (22) counties of Buganda among the three religious denominations (Roman Catholics, Anglicans and Muslims) that were scrambling over dominance in Buganda.

This policy later created what I have called religious ethnicity, which may not be exclusive to Uganda, since in many African countries, inter-religious conflicts that ensue as a result of religious claims over territories and ethnic communities is still going on. Mwangi observed; "Ethnicity closely mirrors religious heterogeneity. Religious affiliations frequently correspond to ethnic affiliations, and this is most important where both Christian and Muslim religions exist".⁴⁷

Religious ethnicity takes place where religious affiliations are disaggregated according to different ethnic communities. This is where different ethnic communities take on different religious affiliations and such religious denominations claim exclusive rights over such communities. Here too, the problem is not with ethnicity, but the use of the ethnic sentiments for religious dominance by religious institutions.

⁴²Nzongola- Ntalaja G. "Ethnicity and State Politics in Africa" *African Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 1 (1999), p. 31.

⁴³Platteau Jean-Philippe. "Institutional Obstacles to African Economic Development: State, Ethnicity, and Custom" *Journal of Economics Behaviour & Organization*, Vol. 71, No. 3, (2009), p. 673.

⁴⁴Anke W. *The Causes of Politicization of Ethnicity: A Comparative Case Study of Kenya and Tanzania*, (Zurich: Center for Comparative and International Studies (ETH Zurich and University of Zurich, 2009), pp. 13-21.

⁴⁵Odinga AR. (2007) "What Role Does Ethnicity Play in Africa's Elective Politics?" *American Press International*, September, 2007. Published by Korir, African Press International (API)/ African Press in Norway (APN). (Online) Available from: <<http://africanpress.me/2007/09/12/>> [21 July 2013].

⁴⁶Mwangi SK. "Ethnic Rent-Seeking, Stability & Institutional Reform in Sub-Saharan Africa", *The Political dimension of economic growth: proceedings of IEA Conference held in SanJose, Costa Rica- Basingstoke*, (Hampire: Macmillan, 1998), pp. 327-328.

⁴⁷*Ibid.* p. 327.

We have seen that, the use of ethnic sentiments politically, economically or religiously, is what defines instrumental ethnicity, simply as the strategic use of ethnic feelings to attain, either political, economic or religious ends. Let us now look at some of the roles of instrumental ethnicity in this context.

Discussions

In our discussions, having been made aware of the existing theories of ethnicity, we think that the most prevalent form of ethnicity is instrumental ethnicity. The protagonists of this form of ethnicity are aware of the existence of the other forms, like primordialism, and pragmatic ethnicity. But what makes instrumental ethnicity problematic is their timely use of any other forms for its own benefit. Usually, they are the political or religious elites that instrumentally employ these various ethnic sentiments for their interest. We can then discuss how this form of ethnicity works in African.

Instrumental ethnicity in modern Africa

Instrumental ethnicity plays several roles in Africa's politics, leadership and governance. Some of these roles are accessing and controlling resources, mediation, negotiation, extraction, distribution and creation of power bases.

Access and control of resources

The first role of instrumental ethnicity is to influence access and control of economic and political resources. While economic resources are financial and material wealth of a country, political resources are power to make decisions, influence policies and make laws with which a country is governed. In this role, most political leaders in Africa want to control all public economic institutions, through their aides and diehard supporters who do exactly as and what they want. In this way, they do not only have access but have complete control of economic resources.

In as far as political resources are concerned, they make sure they have absolute majority of their supporters in all key decision-making arms of government. In the judiciary they appoint people who trail their lines of thinking. The Parliament, which is supposed to be an independent arm of government, often times is a rubber stamps of African governments. They make laws and approve policies that ensure complete access and control of all political resources.

Tarimo argued, "Ethnic identities need not be destroyed; instead, what should be destroyed is the practice of manipulating them,"⁴⁸ and I would add to access resources. The title of Purkitt's⁴⁹ article "African politics and the strategic use of ethnic identity",⁴⁹ has a lot to tell in the same direction. Raila Odinga³⁰ adds that "these leaders, while looting public resources and amassing obscene amounts of wealth for themselves often go to their ethnic communities and feed them with a falsehood that it is time for their community to eat".⁵⁰

Indeed, while individual members of the ethnic community may personally benefit in this process of accessing wealth, majority of their members remain psychologically contented and proud, but with nothing to show for it. Odinga adds that "while the leaders get wealthy by grabbing land, houses and minerals like in the case of Mobutu, most members of their ethnic groups have nothing to show".⁵¹

⁴⁸Tarimo A. *Ethnicity, Citizenship and State in Eastern Africa*, p. 13.

⁴⁹Purkitt HE. "African politics and the Strategic use of ethnic Identity," *International Studies Review*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (September, 2007), pp. 293-294.

⁵⁰Odinga R. *What Role Does Ethnicity Play in Africa's Elective Politics?*

⁵¹*Ibid.*

The real problem with this type of role is that ethnicity is, more often than not, used for selfish reasons and not for the good of the majority of the people in given political dispensations.

Mediation for political and economic power balances

This refers to the use of different skills in harmonizing power balance among the different interest groups within a political economy. What political leaders do in this situation is to mediate between different interest groups, the greatest of which is ethnicity, to see how best they could work together in a political dispensation. The mediation between the different interest groups, in itself is positive, but the motive behind it is more often than not selfish, since the intention is either to gain political power, retain it or to consolidate one's political gains. One can see how political leaders want to show that they are interested in all the different activities and programs of the different interest groups, but actually, they are not for its own sake, but to gain the sympathy and support of the different interest groups.

To fully understand this, one need to read Machiavelli's⁵¹ work, *The Prince* that has ably mentioned the instrumental purpose of the prince in political dispensations. He maintains that, the prince, a political leader for that matter, should know how to disguise his real characteristics and pretend always to be good, but he does not need to be good.⁵²

Most modern African political leaders are very good pretenders and users of available resources in consolidating themselves into power, with the least regards to fairness, justice or ethics. They often mediate, were necessary, the different interest groups to show that they are concerned about unity, however they are not concerned about national unity, but the type of unity among different interest groups that benefit them.

Negotiation of beneficial deals

Political leaders and governors of modern African societies are very good in negotiating deals that benefit them politically, but not their nations as such. Few of them, genuinely do negotiate deals that benefit all in their nations. Here mention can be made of leaders like Nelson Mandela, who made a genuine and strong political campaign; *I am against black domination, I am against white domination*. When Tanzania was moving away from a one-party system to a multi-party political dispensation, Nyerere insisted that, *Tanzanians should read the signs of time*. This means, these two leaders negotiated with other political forces to bring about harmony, stability and peaceful changes in their societies.

On the whole, politicians play the role of negotiators of power and wealth transfers. This negotiation can be between the external political forces and the internal ones, or among the different competing political forces within the same political dispensation. The case of Nelson Madella is clearly a negotiation between the white minority and the black majority. Mwangi brings in the example of intra-power negotiation when talking of the interplay between the demanders and the suppliers of wealth transfers. He said; "Well-organized groups benefit from transfers and other, less-well-organized groups supply those transfers. Politicians broker wealth transfers with the primary goals of maximizing their tenure in office".⁵³

⁵²Machiavelli N. *The Prince*, translated by George Bull, (London: Penguin, 1961), pp. 126-127.

⁵³Mwangi. *Ethnic Rent-Seeking, Stability & Institutional Reform in Sub-Saharan Africa*, p. 325.

Through political and economic programs, negotiated by these brokers of wealth transfers, the politicians do favour certain interest groups and help them to get better organized than others. Again, the guiding principle in Africa is the interest group to which the politicians are closely affiliated, their ethnic communities. These ethnic communities could be tribal, regional, racial or other affiliations like religion or political parties.

Extraction of resources

This is one of the roles of instrumental ethnicity. The leaders of instrumental ethnicity extract sufficient resources to enable them run their political programs. To legally extract these resources or revenue, they need laws and policies, and to create these laws and policies, politicians need a type of lawmakers that can carry out this task. For that matter, the first tasks of many politicians are to get the absolute majority in parliament, so that they can effectively play around with laws and policies that favour their extraction programs.

The main role of many modern African parliaments is not to create independent arms of governance, but to get a group of loyalists that make and change laws according to the needs of the politicians and not of the nation. For that matter, most African constitutions are not reflective of the will and aspirations of the people, but of the will and aspirations of their leaders. That is why many African constitutions are not stable, since they are often made, amended, overhauled, and suspended as needs arise. In the final analysis, these laws and policies make extraction of revenue, with which political leaders are kept in power and their supporters are rewarded, very easy.

Distribution of revenue collected

One of the roles of political leadership in modern Africa is the distribution of revenue collected. Generally, while the rent is collected from all interest groups, but their distribution is not equitable. This role of instrumental ethnicity creates more problems in African politics.

The distribution of revenue is done at all levels; personal, ethnic, or regional. Personally, individual supporters are rewarded by political leaders in terms of wealth not commensurate with the support they give to the governing politicians. The wealth such individual supporters get over a very short period of time, has created a scramble for political positions in Africa as forms of employments other than services to one's country.

At regional levels, if we bring in the geo-economic dimensions of ethnicity, then we get disturbed. The justifiable claims different regions make over mineral resources extracted from their regions, are usually ignored when it comes to the distribution of wealth derived from such resources. This practice is contrary to the 9th principle of the 2003 *International Council on Mining and Metals* (ICMM),⁵² which states that countries or companies engaged in mining and metals' extraction should "Contribute to the social, economic and institutional development of the communities in which we (they) operate".⁵⁴ In 2003, ICMM developed 10 Principles to guide mining and mineral extraction in the world.

Contrary to this principle, I can give examples of some African countries that have not followed this principle. For instance, wealth generated mainly from Southern Sudan was not primarily benefitting the southerners, so the result was ethnic divisions, conflicts, wars and the eventual secession of South Sudan from the Republic of Sudan on

9th July 2011. In Nigeria, the Delta region has been in conflict for a long time because this principle is not fully respected. One can read Petra Pavšič,⁵⁵ Ikelegbe,⁵⁶ and Hallenson⁵⁷ for more information.³³⁻³⁵

This lack of economic justice has led Pope Paul VI to remind us that, "If you want peace, work for justice".⁵⁸ Kurland³⁵ continues to explain that, "Property rights require that income be distributed based on the value of what one contributes to production one's labour, one's capital, or both".⁵⁹ In case of mineral wealth, which is geographically located, the contribution of the community becomes their land and the natural resources imbedded in that land, and the active involvement of the members of that community. On the basis of these, justice requires that they should not be ignored in the distribution of such wealth. Unfortunately, African leaders do not take heed to these basic principles of justice; instead, wealth is majorly distributed to other individuals, ethnic communities, or other regions of the country where they get political support.

Stiglitz³⁷ calls a practice where politically generated wealth is distributed to benefit those that have not generated them "economic grabbing," not just rent-seeking. He wrote; "This process, known to economists as rent-seeking, brings income not from creation of wealth but from grabbing a larger share of the wealth that would otherwise have been produced without their effort".⁶⁰

Creation of support base

Another role of the instrumental ethnicity is to create a support base of their political power. In line with this, Ake argued that politicians politicize ethnicity in an effort to build their support base from specific ethnic groups and to distribute resources they accessed through political position to those ethnic groups. He wrote; "The ethnic group that forms the support base must, therefore, be large enough to constitute a winning majority".⁶¹

In fact, where such ethnic groups do not make a winning majority, most politicians take salvation into other forms of ethnicity, like religious ethnicity or political parties' interest groups. The former president of Uganda Idi Amin Dada (who ruled from 1971-1979), came from Kakwa, a very small ethnic community, so could not rely on that ethnic group for political support, but had to resort to the support of the members of his religion, Islam. Milton Obote, who ruled Uganda twice (from 1962-1971 and 1980-1985), resorted to his religious community, the Church of Ugandan's community, instead of his smaller ethnic community, the Langi.

In conclusion to this section, I would like to observe that all these roles of ethnicity outlined above, unfortunately lead to conflicts

⁵⁴ICMM. *10 Principles* (Online, 2003) Available from: <<http://www.icmm.com/our-work/sustainable-development-framework/10-principles>> [31 August 2013].

⁵⁵Pavšič P. (2012) *Niger Delta Region: What is Behind the Oil Conflict?* (Online, 2012). Available from: <http://www.consultancyafrica.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=1152:niger-delta-region-what-is-behind-the-oil-conflict-&catid=60:conflict-terrorism-discussion-papers&Itemid=265> [31 August, 2013]

⁵⁶Ikelegbe A. "The Economy of Conflict in the Oil Rich Niger Delta Region of Nigeria" *Nordic Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 2, (2005), pp. 208-234.

⁵⁷Halleon DN. "An analysis of natural resources related conflicts in Central Africa and the Gulf of Guinea" *Cameroon Journal on Democracy and Human Rights*, Vol. 3, No.1 (2009), pp.47-70.

⁵⁸Kurland GN. *The Just Third Way: Basic Principles of Economic and Social Justice* (Online, 2004) Available from: <<http://www.cesj.org/thirdway/paradigmpapers/csid-040528.htm>> [31 August 2013]

⁵⁹*Ibid.*

⁶⁰Stiglitz JE. *The Price of Inequality: How Today's Divided Society Endangers Our Future*, (Norton: Kindle Edition, 2012), p. 32.

⁶¹Ake. *What is the problem of ethnicity in Africa?* pp.1-14.

escalation other than stability. For more information one can read;³⁸⁻⁴¹ Gagnon⁶², Miguel,⁶³ Chandra⁶⁴ and Posner.⁶⁵

Means used by instrumental ethnicity in African governance

Political leaders use several means to gain control and retain political power in Africa. Alemazung⁴² lists some of them like; ethnic divisions, clientelism, institutionalized corruption, constitutional change, election rigging, embezzlements, succession by offspring, and use of state security.⁶⁶

However, the political leaders that are fond of instrumentally using ethnicity for their interests, specialize in using some of the means listed above, like their families and other interest groups like; the tribe, religion, the army and political parties as means of establishing power bases, gaining and retention of political powers.

The families

Among the main problems of African political leadership, is the political succession by the offspring of African leadership. While qualified and properly elected offspring of political leaders would be welcome to the political arena, but what is disturbing are the manoeuvres and favouritisms given to the children of political leaders over and above other political competitors. The planned use of the privileged positions of the family of the political leaders goes far beyond instrumental roles of ethnicities in competing for political power. This is what Amazung (2011) has called the "family-nization" of leadership in Africa.⁶⁷ Family-nization, in the view of Amazung, is "the personal appointment of family members, particularly sons, or successors (through inheritance) by autocratic rulers to high state positions without consultations, merits or elections".⁶⁸

The singled-handed style of rulership for the pursuit of personal interest and preservation of power also contributes or encourages the family-nization of state powers and institutions in Africa.⁶⁹ This is what I would like to call a form of planned ethnicity. Gabon is given as a good illustration of this practice in Africa.

Omar Bongo, after ascension to power in 1967, besides being the president was also minister of information, minister of planning and development - 1969 to 1981, minister of management of the territory - 1972 to 1981, minister of national guidance - 1974 to 1981, and minister of postal service and communication - 1975 to 1981 (Yates, 2005, p.180). After being criticized for doing this, he later appointed his sons, Martin Bongo - 1984 to 1989 and Ali Bongo - 1989 to 1991 and his daughter Pascaline Bongo - 1991 to 1994 as ministers of foreign affairs.⁷⁰

Polgreen⁴³ also illustrated that, besides Gabon other African states, like Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Togo, their political leaders simply prepared their sons to eventually inherit the presidency upon their death, in total disregard to the constitutions of their countries or protests from the international community.⁷¹

From the above examples, one can see one central issue being highlighted, that is the planned succession of African political leadership by their close family members. This is what I have described as planned ethnicity, or what Sian calls instrumentalist's ethnicity.⁷²

What is also becoming rampant in African political arena today is the election of sons and daughters of former heads of states as presidents. Some of these may appear as a clean democratic process, but on closer observation, one can see that these sons and daughters of former African heads of states have been empowered by the wealth accumulated by their fathers and which put them, economically far ahead of their rivals. One can read for oneself the wealth Uhuru Kenyatta, the son of the former president of Kenya has, and which advantaged him far above his peers during the March 4th 2013 General Elections. His success depended less on his personal wealth and merits other than the wealth he inherited from his father, the first president of Kenya after independence, Muzee Jomo Kenyatta.^{44,45} For more information, one can read *Kenya Daily Post*⁷³ and Odero.⁷⁴

Interest-groups

By interest groups I mean; ethnic communities, religious affiliations, political parties, regional collaborations etc. Politicians play a big role in the use of these different interest groups as means to attain or retain political powers and economic wealth.

Politicians use the different interest groups, the first of which are the ethnic groups from which they hail for their political gains. A study carried out by Frank & Rainer, show that dynamics of ethnic proficiencies of particular ethnic communities in Africa changed according to the political leadership of their members. Frank and Rainer wrote,⁴⁶

This paper provides a new assessment of ethnic favouritism in Sub-Saharan Africa. Using data from 18 African countries, we study how primary education and infant mortality of ethnic groups were affected (positively) by changes in the ethnicity of the countries' leaders during the last fifty years.⁷⁵

This means, ethnic communities from which political leaders come, become better organized due to the role played by the politicians on the basis of ethnicity.

⁶²Gagnon VP. "Ethnic Nationalism and International Conflict" *International Security*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (1994-1995), pp. 130-166.

⁶³Miguel E. "Tribe or Nation? Nation Building and Public Goods in Kenya versus Tanzania," *World Politics*, Vol. 56, No. 3 (2004), pp. 327-362.

⁶⁴Chandra K. *Why Ethnic Parties Succeed - Patronage and Ethnic Head Counts in India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

⁶⁵Posner DN. *Institutions and Ethnic Politics in Africa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

⁶⁶Alemazung AJ. "Leadership flaws and fallibilities impacting democratization processes, governance and functional statehood in Africa", in *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (January, 2011), pp. 30-41.

⁶⁷*Ibid.* p. 38.

⁶⁸*Ibid.*

⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 40

⁷¹Polgreen L. "Clashes in Togo After Late Dictator's Son Succeeds Him," in *New York Times*. (Online, 2005). Available from:

<<http://www.nytimes.com/2005/02/14/international/africa/14cndtogo.html?fta=y>> [15 August 2008]

⁷²Sian. *The Archaeology of Ethnicity*, p. 90.

⁷³Kenya. Daily Post, *Revealed: The Companies that Uhuru Kenyatta owns - The LIST of all DETAILS*, (Online, April, 2013). Available from: <<http://www.kenyan-post.com/2013/04/revealed-companies-that-uhuru-kenyatta.html>> [31 August 2013].

⁷⁴Odero Jared. *Challenging Uhuru Kenyatta as "Richest Person in Kenya* (Online, 2011). Available from:

<kenyastockholm.com/2011/11/21/challenging-uhuru-kenyatta-as-richest-person-in-kenya/> [31 August, 2013].

⁷⁵Frank R, Rainer I. "Does the Leader's Ethnicity Matter? Ethnic Favoritism, Education, and Health in Sub-Saharan Africa", *American Political Science Review*, Vol. 106, No. 2 (2012), p. 294.

The most disturbing political phenomenon is that most political theories and practices, often borrowed from the rest of the world, end up around ethnically moulded interest groups. In fact, Mwangi stated that:

Many interest groups are organized around ethnicity. Consider, for example, political parties: in virtually all Sub-Saharan African countries, political parties are organized around ethnic groups. Even when coalition parties emerge, they are soon dominated by one ethnic group. Similarly, where political parties form around an ideology, they are soon dominated by ethnic groups.⁷⁶

So, the means used by instrumental ethnicity in African politics is the ethnic communities and other power bases are derived from different interest groups, from which the politicians receive their support.

Conclusion

In my conclusion, I would say that ethnicity is a social dynamic reality felt, cherished and sometimes, organized and promoted on the basis of existing actual traditional ethnic communities that have always lived and survived the social challenges through the years. This concept is then derived from both primordialist's and instrumentalist's theories of ethnicity. Instrumental ethnicity, on the other hand is the use of these primordial ethnic sentiments and feelings for political or economic reasons. Instrumental ethnicity is the one mostly responsible for Africa's ethno-political problems.

The role of ethnicity in African politics, leadership and governance are the access and control of socio-economic resources, the mediation of power balances among different interest groups, the negotiation of socio-economic space and privileges, the extraction and distribution of resources. Besides, instrumental ethnicity also creates power bases for the mobilizations of economic and political forces. Precisely, it is the way these economic and political factors are mobilized that sometimes make these ethnic sentiments and differences explosive. Political leadership is responsible for the governance of these economic and political forces. In Africa unfortunately, the management of these political and economic forces have not only been botched by political leadership, but have also been manoeuvred by them for selfish reasons.

Ethnicity is not a myth or a social construction, but is an innocent reality that needs to be handled with care. Unfortunately, many African political elites mishandle and abuse them. While capitalism and the growing modern individualism are supposed to have minimised ethnic differences, this has not come about, neither in Africa nor in the capitalized countries of the world. On the contrary, political ethnicity, geo-economic ethnicity and religious ethnicity have continued to flourish and almost reaching explosive levels in some parts of Africa.

Though instrumentalism as a theory is a better explanation of the phenomena of ethnicity in Africa, this has to be understood correctly, as the instrumental use of the primordial feelings, sentiments and affiliations deeply imbedded in the ethnic communities in Africa for mainly, politico-economic reasons.

Acknowledgments

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⁷⁶Mwangi. *Ethnic Rent-Seeking, Stability & Institutional Reform in Sub-Saharan Africa*, p. 326.

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