

## **The Politics of Marginalization in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

The Nigerian federation has been enmeshed in contradictions, paradoxes, controversies and crises. These are subsumed in the national question, and social groups of varying ideological leanings cohere on the central issues. These are linked to national unity, local autonomy and self-determination, equitable distribution of revenue, rewards, opportunities and power. They also include the observation and implementation of fundamental human rights, among which are the rights of franchise and empowerment, and socio-economic rights to basic needs' satisfaction, sustainable environment and life.

**Key words:** Federalism, , Marginalization, , Nigerian politics, Minority

### **Introduction:**

The term marginalization is a concept which is largely abused deliberately by different sections of the opportunist elite. Marginalization in Nigeria to date is multifaceted including ethnicity, gender, class, intergenerational conflicts, labour relation and religious polarization to mention the much touted variables. Marginalization politics in Nigeria inherited from the colonial past and nurtured by contemporary bourgeois politicians who want power based in communal hegemony. Marginalization in Nigeria was born out of particular economic interests of different regions but worsened with military intransigence and its impact on the economic relationship between the government's interest and the people interest. The power of the ruling class is always concentrated in the organization of the state, the oppressed class must aim directly against the mechanism of the state. Every class struggle is thus a political struggle which it its objective aim at the abolition of the existing social order and at the establishment of a new social order. The ethnic configuration in Nigeria has been allowed to degenerate into selfish interests due to the wrapped principals of revenue mobilisation and allocation and over concentration of power at the centre.

### **The Post Independent Nigeria and Marginalisation**

The problem of marginalization in domestic policy was intertwined with argument regarding the nature of federalism which took two forms(1) the territorial basis of federation and (2) the division of function between federal and regional government and the consequent relationship between the two level of govt. Minority delineation with in political party structures, is deeply entrenched that has been consolidated the power of one region over the other. The result has been felt not only in political representation but also in the scope of regional economic development.

Between 1960 and 1979, the three major ethnic groups (Hausa/Fulani, Yorubas and Igbos) exercised power in Nigeria in what could be characterized as tripolar system of balance of power. Regionalism was not only entrenched in the emergent federal arrangement of constitution, but also the major political parties were to recognize their regional basis as their only and proper sphere of political actions. Between 1979 and 1986, the regime of president Shehu shagari, the tripolar balance of power system was continued. The 1979 constitution provided the concept of the 'federal character' of the government having the requirement that "there shall be no predominance of persons from a few state or from a few ethnic and sectional groups in government or in any of its agencies". But the period of civilian rule saw a loss of power from federal government started closing up again to serve as the domain of the three majority groups. The minority groups began to serve again as helpless.

The majority group languages are also recognized by the government as the major languages that could be used in the 1979 constitution of the federal republic of Nigeria as languages that could be used in conducting business at the national assembly. In 1979, the selection of Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo as major indigenous languages of the country appears to suggest ethno culture domination, suspicion that seems to be reinforced by the these three majority groups have been producing the rulers. The domination at the linguistic level is seen to connect as well as signify other spheres of domination like the political and economic.

The minorities were now being treated as non-citizen. In the other words, their rights concerns and feelings were utterly disregarded in the national policy making process. At this time, citizen from the oil producing areas were now treated as colonial dependents of the Nigerian government. Their share of the oil revenue had been drastically reduced to pocket, not into the federal treasury. The minorities began a vigorous effort to stop exploitation and marginalization and demanded a greater share in allocation of revenues.

In 1986, the military government headed by Babangida announced the civilian government will be formed by 10 Oct 1990. Their government announced that Nigeria will apply for full membership of OIC (organization of Islamic conference) this announcement led to unrest among the Non-Muslim section of the Population. During the said period, various step were taken like constitution of national electoral commission, shifting of capital to Abuja and increasing the number of states from 19 to 21. During the first session of constitutional assembly in 1988, Muslim demanded inclusion of sharia court in the constitution. However subsequently, the debate on this topic was banned. Hence the, Banagida transition was characterized by criminal activities with in the state and civil society. There were more cause of politically

motivated violence in the county.

In 1993, Military regime under Gen. Sani Abacha took control of the state and dissolved all organs of state bodies. The politics of marginalization during the transition to civilian rule reached up unprecedented heights during the Abacha years. The struggles of the Ogoni people, the Ijaw youth episode and Ife Modakeke was together indicated how resources from these areas had been mismanaged. The mismanaged transitional programme sowed the seeds of enmity between various ethnic nationalities and the Nigerian state, which they regarded as aggressor and robber. There were persistent Clamour, especially in the southern state, for the restructuring of the county into either a time federation or confederation. In Abacha years, there were incessant politically- motivated assassinations, bombing, torture, acid attacks and detention of opponents. During 1994 various group were formed which pressurized the government for releasing the existing prisoners and forming civilian government at the earliest. They joined the strike in this regard. The petroleum workers also took part in the strike and certain officials were also suspended. These factors led the national constitutional conference (NCC) to adopt rational presidency where by northern and southern will hold the office.

The period between 1999 and up to the present could be characterized as multipolar balance of power systems since President Olusegan Obasanjo has been working furiously to maintain peace and development in the country. However, Obasanjo leadership has shifted in favour of the south, which resulted that the north is boiling politically. The religions riots in Kaduna and other Islamic cities of northern Nigeria show the feeling of powerlessness by these who used to wield absolute power. Ethnic tension was very high during 2001 due to full scale conflict between Tib and Azara community in the middle belt, Itsekiri and Urhobo communities in warri region and Yoruba or Hausa groups in Lagos. These have resulted in violent clashes by militant groups in different parts of the country. The conferences in Nigeria have failed because none of them is sovereign. In view of increase tension in the various communities around the county they were demanded to convene a sovereign national conference.

The experience from the second and third republic demonstrates that the shortage of such democratic value as transparency and accountability was profoundly damaging to the political and economic rights of minority. During the military rule, the character of Nigerian state established on monopolies of political power. Predictably, there were prevalent human rights abuses, violation of due process, uneven social and economic development, repression and suppression marginalised group and interest who posed challenge to military misrule and authoritarianism.

The economic downturn from the late 1970s to date has put in impact on the citizenry by way mass poverty and low economic status. With the majority emasculated economically, the widening gap between minority and majority continues to make money an important variable on the political playing field. It is no secret that financial patronage is the ticket to political party membership and party nomination in Nigeria. The lower and now non-existent middle class have thus been effectively eliminated from active politics. Electoral process is heavily hinged on monetary compensation of the pauperized electorate and party delegates.

The class variable has been made more serious by the winner-take-all after the election. The Penchant for immediate enrichment through both legal and illegal means by leaders, including community leaders, without so much as an eyebrow raised by the governed, has legitimized leadership for self-interest and money politics. The leadership problems in Nigeria Ideological incongruencies, the nature of political competition, the structural dilemmas of the Nigerian Army, corruption and mismanagement, political departicipation, intolerance and inflexibility on policy issues and minority groups roles in national politics. All these continue to disenfranchise the non-wealthy from the political process. The way that money politics was played during the 1998/99 election indicates that class barriers will for a long time keep the majority out of political participation.

### **Barriers to progress in reducing marginalization in the Nigerian social politics**

The critical issue is how marginalization can be eradicated such that the interests and aspiration of both the high and the lowly can find fair representation on the political drawing board. If minorities interests are so exploited during leadership, the only way to reduce this tendency's is to keep the majority politically bowed low. Effective democratic structures are required to temper the effects of poverty and marginalized barriers via the promotion of social institutions.

To threat marginalization, political engineering must focus on prompting equal opportunities, issue based politics rather than divisive instrument such as political rotation of office and zoning as basis of contest for public office and strengthen the democratic political culture. Thus, democratic dispensation can reduce marginalization in body politic and promote social justice and equity in Nigeria.

The ability of the civil society to restrain the exercise of power, on the one hand and be in the best position to entrench democratic structures on the other hand. However, and impoverished civil society became subject to power pressures that were based on economic status, via military-managed civil movements. Indigenous social structures that were akin to democratic norms were eroded and entrenched. It is therefore, not farfetched to say that reintegration of civil society into the state affairs is the most likely way to empower the citizenry, irrespective of class, age, gender or other social status.

Conscious promotion of citizenship over indigenship through civic education and the conscious mobilization of law enforcement agencies, and the courts towards the defence of citizens fundamental human right across the federal republic of Nigeria. Hence, these suggestions should help in the business of strengthening national integration and Nigerian Republic playing a more positive and constructive role in the social, economic and political development of the country.

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