The Politicization of Ethnicity and its Role in the Formation of Political Parties

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Abstract:

Ethnicity is one of the most important approaches to understand the political process and institutions as well as the analysis of the political parties and its role of politicization. It is an important social component in African societies. Therefore, ethnicity must be studied in terms of the roots of its composition, and its role to understand the political process. This article gives a brief explanation about The Politicization of Ethnicity and its Role in the Formation of Political Parties in Africa, taken from a comparative politics perspective.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Politicization of Ethnicity, Political Parties.

Introduction

The main object of an ethnic party is to serve the interests of a specific ethnic group; however, the party may not represent all members or every preference. The party may be made up entirely of members of the group, or it may include other individuals who have won the trust of the ethnic group. Whether ethnic parties emerge, the number of parties that emerge, their relative strength, and their interactions are largely determined by the strength and cohesion of the ethnic groups in a state. Strong ethnic loyalty can create intensely loyal party members, and divisions between ethnic groups may be formalized in ethnic party platforms.

So: **what is the role of ethnicity in the formation of political parties?**

Definition of Ethnicity:

Ethnicity is a fundamental category of social organization which is based on membership defined by a sense of common historical origins and which may also include shared culture, religion or language. It is to be distinguished from kinship in so far as kinship depends on biological inheritance. The term is derived from the Greek noun ethnos, which may be translated as 'a people or nation'. One of the most influential definitions of ethnicity can be found in Max Weber's Economy and Society(1968 [1922]) where he describes ethnic groups as 'human groups (other than kinship groups) which cherish a belief in their common origins of such a kind that it provides a basis for the creation of a community'.[1]

Traditionally, ethnicity was largely defined in terms of shared genetic, racial, and sometimes linguistic traits, usually visibly apparent and hence detectable by outsiders. Moreover, these definitions of ethnic communities were not limited to those of geneticists and linguists. Statesmen too got in the act, most famously at Versailles after World War I, when the joining of the northern Slavic lands and the southern lands formerly ruled by the Austrian-Hungarian empire into, respectively, Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia were celebrated as triumphs of the principle of national self-determination for Slavs. Ethnicity, however, is self- as well as other-defined, and the Czechs and the Slovaks in the north, and the principal groups in the south (the Serbs and Croats) saw themselves as separate ethnic entities possessing distinct histories, linguistic nuances, and religions, and in the world of ethnic politics what matters is how a group sees itself, not how others define it. Consequently, unless otherwise noted, and recognizing that a broad and inclusive definition of ethnicity does raise issues pertaining to analytical precision, we will be defining an ethnic group broadly—as opposed to narrowly in terms of biological similarities—as a people "who identify themselves or are identified by others in cultural terms, such as language, religion, tribe, nationality, and possibly race.[2]

Beyond the meanings assigned to these critical concepts, the still growing literature on ethnic politics and conflict has elsewhere mirrored the increasing importance of the ethnic factor in the political processes of developed and developing, democratic and nondemocratic political processes during the last third of the twentieth century. Unfortunately, in too many instances this literature has developed in an alternately ambiguous or compartmentalized

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[1] The social science Encyclopedia. (Adam Kuper and Jessica Kuper), Second Edition, USA, Rutledge Taylor & Francis Group, London and New York, 2005, p 448.

[2] Joseph Rudolph, Politics and Ethnicity: A Comparative Study, (Perspectives on comparative politics), First published, Hampshire, England, PALGRAVE MACMILLAN, 2006, p.p 01-02.

manner, failing on the one hand to distinguish clearly between those factors explaining the persistence of the ethnic factor in modern politics versus those affecting its influence in the modern world, while on the other hand providing neither broad, cross-country studies of ethnic conflict nor comparative explorations of the various types of ethnic conflict to be found in the contemporary world. There have been notable.[1]

The Politicization of Ethnicity and its Role in the Formation of Political Parties:

Horowitz, et al. (1985) claimed that ethnicity had a crucial and important role in the political parties in Africa, where the multi-ethnic and geographical focus is very important in the interpretation of partisan phenomena in terms of the number of parties and orientations.

It is one of the important variants in the political process, many of the political analysis pass through social unit expressed with by ethnicity, it was entered to the political field through its politicization, i.e., the introduction of political variables in the social role of ethnicity, where it become a significant factor in the political units, and it has a political role through political institutions such as parties.

Lipset and Rokkan (1967) tried to discuss the issue of division lines in the society by the following exposition: can the principal division lines determine the type of the political competition appearing in a natural way (such as the reflection of social divisions)? Or, do political elites make the divisions from the top?[2]

To discuss, we must identify the key variables involved in the structuring of the politicization of ethnicity, and identify the mechanisms through which the political elites manage politicization process.

There are three important competing explanations embracing the controversy stirred up by all of Lipset and Rokkan (1967), the most actively traded is the one about the social cleavages in the political field especially the contemporary one. The first explanation could be incorporated broadly under the Social interpretations, it is based on the origin of the social divisions mentioned by Lipset and Rokkan (1967), as the most important division pattern and

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[1] Ibid, p 03.

[2] Mozaffar Shahhen,"the politicization of ethnic cleavage: theoretical lessons with empirical data from Africa", Prepared for presentation at the 2007 ECPR Workshop on «Politicizing Socio-Cultural Structures: Elite and Mass Perspectives on Cleavages «Helsinki, Finland, May 7 – 13, 2007, p 02.

reflects the division center, the foundation of religious, class, or the differences between rural and urban areas resulted from the Industrial Revolution.[1]

The sociological explanation confirms about the sociological purposes of cleavages as the origin to the direct collective and the sub-politics to gain the interests. This explanation cares also with the interpretation of cleavages that happen between groups especially the political parties that compete about the traded social values, which also highlights the social cleavages in a clear way as a result of polarization and agglomeration.

After the first stabilization of political parties, these cleavages become frozen, the electoral laws and the rules that serve these groups in terms of new divisions are tried to be modified to maintain the interests of the elites.

Facing this social situation that was differentiated on social and cultural basis, ethnicities have been politicized after its need to be represented and defended, it also resort to the formation of political parties that represent it politically, especially in the post-independence nation-building.[2] After the engagement of ethnicity in the political process, elections become an important factor in ethnic statistics, electoral tendencies, the political strength of ethnicities and the degree of proportionality in political representation in institutions.

The second explanation gives more weight to the political factor as an ideology and a political value. The history of the divisions that have been determined by Lipset and Rokkan (1967) have no longer political feasibility thereafter, because the conflicts have been resolved successively and have been also replaced by other forms of conflicts after the politicization of ethnicity as the replacement of political and ideological values.[3]

Many scholars view that the social divisions contributed to the change of the political behavior, continued to participate also in the emergence of new forms of competition and political conflict. It has to do with political parties which contributed, by their own part, in the framing of the historical conflict emanating from the historical political divisions and what consequences as the production of conflicting social relations of interests. Parties helped to give a new political values through organizational expression of social and political demands.

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[1] Idem, p 02.

[2] Manning Carrie, "Party Politics: Assessing African Party Systems after the Third Wave", VOL 11. No.6, SAGE Publications, London: Copyright, 2005, p 715.

[3] Mozaffar Shahhen, op. cit, p 03.

Ethno political studies try to concentrate on the political factors in dealing with ethnic conflicts as part of the social relations and as a problem from which Africa is suffering. The most who tried to organize these relations in the form of political institutions based on compatible political bases around is Arent Libhart (1977) through his theory based on the harmony across the importance of the elites in negotiations and institutional design. According to him, the adoption of a constitutional power-sharing, mutual veto, the expanded coalition in the formation of the cabinet, the proportional representation in the electoral law and the division of the executive device are all rules helping in the framing of the political competition and the treatment of ethnic conflicts.

Furthermore, many students of African politics shifted from a focus on ethnicity (after they made sure that it is a part of the social fabric that cannot be changed) to the social mobilization as part of political competition played by the political elites. As well the packing become responsible for the political and social tensions as an aspect of ethnic conflict and exaggeration in this process can lead to other types of conflict.

Political mobilization is considered as a new important topic in the political analysis or an explanatory tool of ethnic conflict and social allied or conflicting structures, as the most important source of political orientation, and expressive tool for change in the political values and ideology.

The third explanation is considered to be very important and a correct one for the imbalances exposed by the two previous explanations. It is named the strategic explanation. This interpretation confirms the elitism as an important interpreter in the phase of state-building when the socialist parties do not rely on a process of politicization in social mobilization but insisting on the interests of the working class that were unified, according to them, and it is the politic and the political agents that increase the cleavage lines and divisions in society.[1]

In contrast to sociological interpretations, the strategic ones confirm about the general situations in the political divisions based on strategic interests of different parts participated in the political process.[2] Political mechanisms are reflected in the elicit political interactions that had a role in the activation of social inequalities, which in turn may lead to politicized social

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[1] Mozaffar Shahhen, op. cit, p O4.

[2] Woods Dwayne, "Elites, Ethnicity, and 'Home Town' Associations in the Côte d'Ivoire: An Historical Analysis of State. Society Links", Journal of the International African Institute, Vol. 64, No. 4, Cambridge University Press, 2003, p 466.

conflicts and as a basis in the formation of different political groups that are competed or conflicted upon the interests.

The analytic view of the strategic interpretations in the political field of Africa based on the politicization of ethnic divisions, is the logical strategic behavior that involves activated units with unintended ethnic objective grounds of elites to form groups, identify its interests and organize the collective work to advance political goals towards verification.   In addition, all actors in the African political process are convinced that the politicization of ethnicity is an important strategic political supplier derived from two sources , namely: distribution and dissemination of ethnic objective signs that form the foundations of divisions, so that these brands may exacerbate differentiation and interaction , competition and more importantly, it is to increase the ethnic mobilization as a result of commercialization and deployment of these distinctions and differences.

Differences in the distribution of these parameters determine the pattern of constraints and the social structural opportunities to activate the role of strategic ethnicity in political life. Thus, the sociological interpretations remain deficient in mind that the social structures are the sole determinant in the formation of groups and the organization of collective action and the definition of interests and it refuses to emphasize the only directed role to the political process.

The second source in the activation of the ethnic role in the African politics is a collection of political institutions that work with constitutional rules which identify the general frame of the democratic governance through building political system.[1] These institutions represent the legal frame politically to protect the political process and confirm its stability and its peacefulness in the African politics. It is considered as the overall structure of the results of the political interactions of ethnicity.

The sociological interpretations decrease the importance of the institutional structures in restricting a large number of social divisions. However, theses interpretations confirm about the importance of the political institutions in restricting the divisions and its internal relations through framing, organizing and forming the divisions and also studying the ways through which it can forms the electoral majority. The institutions identify the opportunities and the obstacles that form the strategic calculations from the political elites that seek the politicization of the ethnic divisions.

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[1] Posner.n Daniel, institutions and ethnic politics in Africa, (Political Economy of Institutions and Decisions), USA: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p.p 03-04.

The most important determinant can be deduced from the previous explanation is the strategic calculations and interactions resulting from the political elites. In another variant context of social structures and institutional constraints and opportunities in increasing the politicization of ethnic divisions and what result from it.

The interpretation gives a great role to the elites in the politicization of ethnic divisions to benefit from it in increasing support to these elites. The social structural context also has a role in forming the ethnic divisions in addition to the institutional context that politicize these division. Thus, it is a complex process in which social, structural and institutional variables are interacting.

There are many theories dealt with the politicization of ethnicity by studying the variables governing this process.[1] The constructivism approach is the one which receive support in the results of its study through objective arguments coincided with reality and the most important evidence is that individuals have one fixed identities, at the same time they have identities of ethnic -specific group. However, there are those who criticized this theory considering it more philosophical rather than logical and realistic.

The social structural approach confirms that the social changes, resulting from the extensive modernization processes, determine the structural social context to build ethnic groups, identities and divisions. Also, the institutional perspective stresses the importance of political institutions in determining the political context of the politicization of ethnicity. In addition, the strategic perspective of rational choice emphasizes the importance of the cultural factor, the value of teamwork and strategic negotiation within and across each group, as well as between the groups and the state in building political ethnic groups (the politicization of ethnic groups). Thus, the constructivist theory combines between the description of the competent authority of politicizing ethnic groups (such as the elite) and the structure responsible for the process like the political institutions.

The process of politicization has several overlapped factors of institutional and functional play in this process by mobilizing it to use the electoral process; they reflect the political participation of ethnic hand, and a means to support the political process from the standpoint of political elites.

Supporters of constructivism suggests that there are two phases in the formation and the politicization of ethnic groups, the first phase depends on the process of political elections in

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[1] Pieterse Jan Nedeveen, "Varieties of Ethnic Politics and Ethnicity Discourse", The Politics of Difference: ethnic premises in a world, Working Paper Series No 154, 2000, p 03.

this societies and repeat the process by which groups are mobilized on certain foundations that increase the degree of polarization and deepen the ethnic boundaries. The second phase is the shift towards the politicization of ethnic divisions as a criterion to define the interests of the groups.

The previous two processes that depend on the preferences in the configuration and the electoral process leading towards another process that is the particization which are based on ethnic political divisions and it is a later stage composed after the lineups process behind certain political values may combine several groups based on the similarity of these values. These three phases may overlap based on the tracks that could be taken by each process of configuring, mobilization and particization.

The multistructural societies have different objectives that are determined based on the number of the groups forming the community. Besides these objectives have a group of signs or characteristics that form each group and this is what gives it a special differentiation concerning the cultural identity of the group and also affect the composition of the collective identity of the total community.[1]

This identitic configuration has implications in the ethnic construction on objective grounds along with the process of trying to promote the ethnic power politically, economically and socially by packing several rhetorical methods such as interests and the cultural as well as the political of the group.

The politicization process is done in several ways depending on the economic, social, political and cultural conditions that characterize each group, the methodological approaches adopted by the ethnic officials especially in African communities are represented in:

➢ The mobilization of groups as a first step which are not related in the formation of the political parties (small groups of marginal activities and associations related to ethnic civil society, the emerging leaders within the political and even the military associations). It has an affect may accede ordinary people, the process of filling is important as a first stage in the politicization process because the political strength of ethnicity or the party depends on this process, whether by the quality of individuals or by their number.

➢ The expression about the grievances and goals in ways that attract people and make them one block toward certain issues as the fate of one.

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[1] Lijphart Arend, Democracy in Plural Society, A Comparative Exploration, Yale University : Copyright, 1977, p 04.

➤ The engagement in collective action and the invitation to participate in it, whether this action was violent or peaceful, and no matter how this conflict against the other groups, or the state, or exposure to the violence of the state against other groups.

➤ Trying to control the administrative units of the area occupied by members of the ethnic group to control and extend their influence and facilitate the control of resources and competition by giving supremacy in terms of influence toward other groups, especially in the context of previous divisions which were adopted by the former colonial administrations.

➤ Filling the largest number of senior positions in the army and administrative bureaucracy to control the decision-maker centers, and economic as well as social resources.[1]

In contemporary Africa, there are many ethnic groups that have ethnic objective signs which have historical extensions to the pre- colonial period. it is characterized by fairly distinctive with a degree of complexity and reliability compared with modern characteristics of the other groups, this is a reason for primitive claims that consider contemporary ethnic groups are extensions and a continuation of the tribes of the pre-colonial period Which was created out instinctively and genetically before that the specific cultural has been as a distinctive sign for each ethnic group.[2] This argument is rejected by the structural approach because of its reliance on illogical historical interpretations and also for considering identity and cultural characteristics a fixed determiners in the form of ethnic groups. However, it remains the role of the characteristics that distinguish social components of fixed pre-colonial as religion, language, customs and kinship. The social structural constraints are important in building and politicizing the contemporary ethnic groups.[3]

These structural constraints emerged directly and indirectly from colonial rule, in particular through the institutional framework of colonial rule in the activation of the ethnic characteristics of the pre- colonial and restructuring (enabled or restricted) ethnic group and the construction of identity. The administration were benefiting from ethnic characteristics in

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[1] Mozaffar Shahhen, op. cit, p 09.

[2] Mahmoud Mamdani, "Political identity, citizenship and ethnicity in post-colonial Africa", Arusha Conference, «New Frontiers of Social Policy" ─ December 12-15, 2005, p 06.

[3] Crowder Michael, "Indirect Rule: French and British Style, Journal of the International African Institute", Vol. 34, No. 3, Jul., 1964, p 199.

support with its policies, otherwise it might restrict it if they undermine and impede the colonial objectives.

The colonial administration governors in their management of some African communities adopted local agents to face the dilemma of maintaining control, not only to enhance the strength of these local factors , but also to encourage them to differentiate between their groups than those who do not follow plans and policies of the colonial power, not only by reunify or to differentiate between groups, but through the redefinition of objective characteristics based on race, by highlighting minor differences between groups

Rulers in the colonial administrations sought to develop additional ways to manage ethnic groups, through the creation of administrative units that previously collected disparate social groups and facilitate sometimes the collection and redefine ethnic characteristics to create new larger groups and define it to serve the colonial interests.

The colonial policy indirectly compose the ethnic groups and build identity by generating a range of social, economic and political variables associated with the process of modernization and development. In this context, the colonial rule stressed the importance of having a wide range of Heterogeneous standards in the formation of the group and the construction of identity, this helps in controlling the standards of identitic construction and try to form a social fabric by intended ways that serve its strategic

The colonial period was one of the periods that have seen a relatively rapid changes in the constituent of the social fabric, identity, ethnic construction, political ethnicity, and the process of politicization and in some cases the particization of these groups and identities especially with the rise of African nationalism in the latter part of the colonial period and the subsequent acceleration of the pace of decolonization.[1]

This evolution in politicization was after the final agreement on the issue of independence between the departing colonial rulers and leaders of African nationalists, this require the process to control the government after independence to show popular support in democratic elections to be held as a condition to control the post-colonial governments.

However, this administration lacks the time and skill to organize non-sectarian, national and collective election campaigns as a condition for building a civil state with democratic principle. By this national leaders chose an effective strategy in terms of providing for the political election mobilization of ethnic groups for each political party.

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[1] Ahluwalia Pal, Politics and Post-Colonial Theory, African Inflections, First published, New York: Rutledge, 2001, p.p 99-102.

The political forming of ethnic group usually involves: first the differences in the size of the group, so it do not always constitute the absolute ethnic major political group in the country, despite the fact that some of them make up a large majority. Secondly, the diversity of structural and functional characteristics of each ethnic group produces salient political ethnic differences as well as coalitions between homogeneous political groups that are limited by the cultural differences between the members of these groups.[1]

These two features in the formation of ethnic political group are combined with the establishment of a set of effective political ethnic demands, which lead to encourage ethnic differences between the groups and it is a familiar pattern to political interactions in multiple communities. The specific use of identitic determiners of political ethnic groups is an effective strategy in terms of cost of organizing the competition for representation and access to achieve the demands and interests.

On the other hand, the conflicts are considered as being another different variable in the formation of a new group and building identity. Thus, the responsibility stop on the owners of the political projects of the over- activation of the cultural differences between the groups, and encourage them instead to keep the identities of the major group by which they can achieve the strategic demands thanks to its ability to access to power and secure the goods and services offered by members of the group.

The demographics of ethnic resulting from the operations remain relative, as well as political ethnic division patterns resulting from demographic and social factor, which remains unstable, because the structural, institutional, strategic and social restrictions to the politicization of ethnic groups are the same variable and are unstable.

The concept of "constrained constructivism" is used to refer to a process which is made with a mixture of social, structural, institutional and strategic constraints in politicizing ethnic divisions and social structure resulting from ethno political emerging ethnic groups.[2] This concept emphasizes the centrality of political variables in the process of building a political ethnic group. However, the fundamental social constraints are important and significant thanks to its relation to accounts and interactions of strategic political agents, as well as external constraints of social structure and political institutions.

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[1] Mozaffar Shahhen, op. cit, p 10.

[2] Chandra Kanchan," Constructivist Theories of Ethnic Politics", London: Oxford University Press, 2012, p 29.

Constrained constructivism stimulates the formation of political ethnic groups and divisions that rejects simplistic arguments given by the political agents to manipulate identities in any way to maximize their interests. It also emphasizes about the importance of this theory structurally, institutionally and strategically restricted to political building of ethnic groups by taking other variables notably political and economic.[1]

Constructivism explanations usually give a specific explanation of exactly how to build a political ethnic groups and identities, these interpretations stem from ostensibly contenders of analytical trends reporting structural analysis which are widely related with changeable interpretations of human behavior in the construction process. This theory cares about the process of identitic building and ethnic political groups.

Multiple communities differ in the construction of its identities in terms of the degree of complexity of the structure, the changeable objective characteristics between groups such as language, race, religion, dress, and the system of ideological and habits constitute cultural elements that define ethnicity. Thus, it becomes ethnic features through a sense of belonging to the identity of the ethnic group.

The ethnic identity in Africa was used by Fearon, According to him, it represents the social group consisting of (1) the membership rules that determine who can be or cannot be a member of that (2) a set of presumed characteristics, values, beliefs, desires and behavioral tendencies, which determine the content and goals of the group, because the objective characteristics which define ethnicity in pluralistic societies are supposed to be the source of the content of the ethnic identity.[2]

However, the mere existence of objective ethnic characteristics in multiple communities does not mean that it will inevitably enhance the awareness of the identity of the self- ethnic. Its construction is a strategic social issue of that involves the transformation of one or more of the ethnic characteristics that define and differentiate its content to the social norm so as to draw the cultural boundaries that accommodate individuals simultaneously and dispersed them into distinct ethnic groups.

Conclusion:

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[1] Mozaffar Shahhen, op. cit, p 12.

[2] Fearon James D., "WHAT IS IDENTITY (AS WE NOW USE THE WORD)?", Department of Political Science, Stanford University, November 3, 1999, p.p 17-18.

The adverse effects of ethnic parties can be ameliorated by individuals, parties, and institutions. Individuals and parties build interethnic alliances to win elections and pursue policy changes. A larger ethnic group may ensure a victory by adding voters from smaller ethnic groups, whereas ethnic groups of similar size may ally to challenge a larger ethnic group instead of entering political battles and maintaining their permanent losing status. Institutions can facilitate interethnic allegiances by requiring parties to win elections from multiple electoral districts. Also, some political systems have forms of affirmative action policies guaranteeing an ethnic group some minimum level of state participation.

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