

TRADITIONAL SOAP INDUSTRY IN WAMBA AREA OF NASARAWA STATE: AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY

By

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INTRODUCTION

Soap has been known for at least 2,300 years. The Phoenicians prepared it from goats tallow and wood ashes in 600BC and sometimes used it as article of barter with the Gaul's. Soap was widely known in the Roman Empire; whether the Romans learned its uses and manufacture from ancient Mediterranean peoples or from the Celts habitants of Britannia, is not known. The Celts, who produced their soap from animal fats and plant ashes, named the product saipo, from which the word soap is derived (Allan, 1926). The importance of soap for washing and cleaning was apparently not recognised until the 2nd century of Christ, the Greek physician Galen mentions as a medicament and as a means of cleansing the body. Previously soap had been used as medicine.

In Europe, soap production in the Middle Ages centred first at Marselles, later at Genoa, then at Venice. Although some manufacture developed in Germany, the subsistence was so little used in central Europe that a box soap presented to the Duchess of Juelich 1549 caused a sensation.

Traditional industries carried out in homes or in makeshift workshops in the nearby villages include the making of iron implements such as hoes and hatchets, door hinges, bolts, and Dane guns (firearms obsoletes design originally of Europeans manufacture). Traditional soap and salt making workshops appeared in large numbers after near collapse of the Nigerian economy in 1983, when most wage earners were unable to pay for factory made soap and imported table salt. These industries continued after the economy recovered, but they were concentrated in rural areas. Black soap is well known in many parts of Nigeria with various names. In Southern Nigeria particularly among the Yoruba people is known as "*osu Dudu*". In central part of Nigeria where the area understudy is located and where Hausa language is use commonly as the medium of communication is known as "*sabulu solo*". This black soap is usually brown in colour and has a mild, clear natural smell or flavour (not offensive), wonderfully

moisturizing and always giving scrumptious creamy leather that is somewhat addictive *sabulun solo*. It is an excellent cleaner for all skin types' diseases especially for boils commonly called "korokoro". It is also made with pure natural ingredients, not artificial ingredients are added in the process of production. This paper examines the processes involved in the making of black soap (*sabulu solo*) in Wamba area of Nasarawa State.

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF BLACK SOAP INDUSTRY

The use of numerous soap materials and cleansing agents date back from ancient time. The first century Roman historian Pliny Culture described various forms of hard and soft content of soap as rutitanclis which had previously been used by women to clean and impact brilliant colours to their hairs (Anbro, 1989).

Soap making was common in Italy and Spain during the 18th century. By the 13th century when the soap industry was introduced from Italy to France; most soap was produced from tallow of goats. The French after experimentation devised a method of soap making from olive or animal fats, and in about 1509, introduced their discoveries into England. The industry in England grew rapidly and in 1622 was granted special privileges by King James I (Allan, 1926). Meanwhile, the manufacture of soap was revolutionised in 1791 by French chemist, Nicholas Lablance who invented a process of obtaining soda from salt (Fagbule, 1983). In the early American colonies, soap was made from animal fats and was processed mainly for the household.

While soap making was spreading in Europe, Africa was not entirely left out. The black soap industry originally originated from West Africa has been used for centuries. Its method and secret have been passed down from generation to generation known with various names. In Ghana, it is known as "Angos" oapor "Alata", in the western part of Nigeria is known as "Osu Dudu", while in central Nigeria where Wamba is located in Nasarawa State is known and called "Sabulu Solo".

"Osu" in Yoruba culture is a general term for cleansing and cleaning. The usage connotes not only cleansing but also nurturing. Soap making boiling or soap making was one of the oldest traditional industries in Nigeria. The discovery of soap was necessitated by the need to meet the demand of domestic chores of women in the society (Ajayi & Kola, 2007). In the olden days, streams, rivers, and lakes were bathing places of people. Grasses of various kinds were used as sponge for scrubbing the body. In order to wash off dirt's totally, sand was sometimes added or combined with grass sponge. Women after cooking at home also used sand and leaves of various kinds known to have cleansing tendencies (Ajayi & Kola, 2007).

policy of 'sabongari' which forced the southern migrants to live separately from their hosts."

This was a deliberate move by the British colonizers to divide Nigerians against one another for their easy suppression and exploitation. This unfortunate divide and rule tactic was copied by Nigerian elites who stepped into the white man's shoes and even political parties in Nigeria since the pre-colonial days have been based more on ethnic affiliations as rightly posited by Terkura Myom when she posits that:

...the first political parties formed during the colonial era were regionalized on ethnic identities. The NCNC formed in 1944 was a national party, but later with the formation of the other regional parties, it was relegated to the southeastern region. The Northern people's Congress (NPC) formed in 1949 was for the northern region thus a transformation from the cultural "jamiyar murtane arewa." Action Group (AG) formed in 1951 was identified with the western region, transformed from the "Egbe Omo Oduduwa."

This ethnic consciousness had had a chequered history in Nigerian polity and has at different times threatened the corporate existence of Nigeria as a single entity. If Nigeria should ever be divided into smaller nations, it will be courtesy of ethnicity. Until this situation is addressed the recent pronouncement by America that by 2015 Nigeria must have been split into many other nation states may even come true before the year in question.

EVIDENCES OF ETHNICITY AND ETHNIC VIOLENCE IN NIGERIA

It is not as if ethnicity does not have its merits. However, Nigerian elites have downplayed its merits and only its negative effects are usually felt by Nigerians. It is difficult to sustain the Nigerian polity in view of the fact that ethnicity has taken the centre stage and almost everything revolves around it. In Nigeria, ethnicity plays a very significant role in the voting behaviour of Nigerians. Candidates are usually voted not because they are qualified for such elective posts but because they come from certain ethnic groups. Reacting to this, Atia rightly maintains that:

By the very nature of Nigeria's compositions, ethnicity has become a very strong factor in Nigerian politics and it also influences the voting behavior of Nigerians during elections.

Other than elections, appointments are not made on merit and qualification passes for such but are greatly influenced by ethnicity. How can such a country as Nigeria sustain her polity where the blind are leading those with good sight?

Ethnicity has become a negative force in Nigerian politics plaguing all efforts at national cohesion. Even before Nigeria's independence, ethnic violence was rampant among the various ethnic groups. There was the Jos riot in 1945 which was followed by the Kano riots of 1953, the civil uprisings of 1959-1960 and 1964, the violence in the west in 1962 which forced the government to declare a state of emergency in the region in 1962. According to IDEA publication:

Ethnic politics have in the past threatened the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Nigeria. Although secession has only been declared twice in the history of this country, the Republic of Biafra (1967) and the Delta Peoples Republic (1966), it had been threatened many more times; by the Yoruba in 1966... and today by the Yoruba, Hausa and Fulani, Igbo and Ijaw. In fact, the Orkar coup in 1990 expelled much of the Hausa and Fulani from the federation. They were saved by the eventual failure of the coup.¹³

All these occurrences are pointers to the fact that ethnicity is a cankerworm and has eaten deep and destroyed the fabric of the Nigerian society so that 45 years after independence, Nigeria is still crawling and cannot stand erect on her feet.

The Nigerian civil war that lasted for three years had ethnic undertones. The war was actually the end product of the first coup that took place after Nigeria's independence. This is true in the sense that the coup which occurred on the 15th January, 1966 was led by an Igbo officer, Nzeogwu Kaduna. All the principal actors in the government of the day except Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, the then ceremonial president, were killed. People like Sir, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, the Prime Minister, the Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Premier of Western Region, Chief Akintola and the Minister of Finance Chief Okotie also from the Western Region lost their lives. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was spared because he was an Igbo man. All other Nigerians saw this coup as an Igbo affair. The Northerners also mobilized their forces and on the 29th of July, 1966, there was a counter coup in which the key actors in the government especially those of Igbo origin were brutally assassinated. They included Gen. Aguiyi Ironsi, the then Head of State and Nzeogwu Kaduna. The countercoup coupled with the feelings of marginalization among the Igbos actually led to the civil war which started in 1967 and lasted till 1970.

Apart from this civil strife, there have been series of countable number of ethnic upheavals that have seriously threatened the corporate existence and polity of this nation in no small measure. Yusuf Bala Usman and Aba A. have provided a comprehensive list of some of these uprisings which have

tually affected the country as follows:

- (i) Numa and parts of Adamawa State in 1986-88
- (ii) Kafanchan and parts of Kaduna State in 1987
- (iii) Wukari, Takum, and parts of Taraba State in 1991
- (iv) Tafawa Belewa in Bauchi State in 1991
- (v) Kano City in 1991
- (vi) Zango Kataf and parts of Kaduna State in 1992
- (vii) The Ogoni and Andoni areas of Rivers State in 1993
- (viii) Toto and other parts of Nasarawa State since 1994
- (ix) Ife, Modakeke and parts of Osun State since 1997
- (x) Oketipupa and part of Ondo State Since 1998
- (xi) Aguleri and Umuleri in Anambra State in 1999
- (xii) Warri and parts of delta since 1988¹⁴
- (xiii) Jos in plateau 2008

her than the long list of ethnic upheavals identified above, many more d occurred at different paces and times in the past few years in Nigeria. These include the Tiv-Jukun crisis of 2001, Taraba, Plateau, and Nasarawa states crises against the Tivs and many more. The Tiv-Jukun crisis specially attracted the attention of many people. The involvement of the Nigerian army in the crisis was an ethnic affair too. This because, the then Chief of Army Staff, an indigene of Udi in Bayelsa State had used the Nigerian army to pay his predecessor, Gen. Victor Malu who had ordered a reprisal attack on Udi for the community had killed army personnel who were detailed to maintain law and order in the region. When he took over from Malu and there was a rumor that army personnel were killed at Zaki-am, he equally detailed his boys to raze Zaki-Baim and Malu's house even though Malu's house is not in Ukum local Government Area but in Katsina Ala Local Government Area. How can such a nation as Nigeria where people instead of suing their positions to fight national causes use them to fight ethnic causes think of having a sustainable polity?

EFFORTS MADE TO CURB ETHNIC VIOLENCE AND ETHNICITY IN NIGERIA

Nigerian leaders at different times have made concerted efforts to address this cankerworm but to no avail. Right from the colonial days to the present, various policies have been promulgated to ensure that this menace is reduced to the barest minimum. Some of the plaices have, instead of solving a problem aggravated it. The effort made so far include:

the colonialists introduced the idea of 'sabongari' so as to keep the southern migrants away from their northern hosts so that inter-ethnic contact could

be minimized. This idea however yielded negative results for it rather succeeded in reproducing ethnic divisions.

The Native Authority introduced by the colonialists was another measure of curbing ethnicity. The intention was to create ethnic citizenship quite distinct from the civic citizenship of the urban areas for it was thought that it would permit each ethnic group to sustain its particular heritage in accordance with colonial interests. This also yielded negative results as members of the various groups especially in urban centres had a viable reference point for their ethnic identities.

Federalism as a form of governance was also introduced as a means of checking ethnicity and ethnic violence in Nigeria. It has been in force since 1954 with the creation of three regions to the present 36 states. This system allows for the decentralization of state power to ethno-regional entities. The various states are independent of one another but are linked to the center of the system. This system had also failed for instead of checking, ethnic politics and violence has rather intensified.

Another measure of checking the domination and suppression of smaller ethnic groups by the bigger ones is quota system and federal character. Their principle is to ensure the fair representation of various ethnic groups and subgroups in the admissions into federal institutions, recruitment into the Army, Police, Customs, Navy, Air force and so on as well as the decision making process. These programmes as grandiose as they are have also failed because of ethnicity and selfishness.

Furthermore, the Babangida administration's two party system and the Option A-4 formula was a design to fight ethnicity. Prior to this time, all political parties were formed along ethnic lines. However, the Option A-4 insisted that political parties should demonstrate countrywide membership support. The intention was to incorporate ethnic competition into an intra-party struggle rather than a struggle along ethnic lines. This succeeded to a large extent in eliminating the ethnic factor in the politics of that stalled transition to civil rule as Atia rightly observes that:

The ethnic factor was not so pronounced in the 1993 presidential elections because Abiola, a Yoruba from Southern Nigeria, won in many Hausa-Fulani dominated states like Kano, Kaduna, Jigawa, Katsina and other northern states like Benue, Plateau, Taraba, Kwara, Bornu and Yobe states as well as the federal capital territory... this was a step forward because it was the ethnicity but other factors.¹⁵

All these plausible attempts and effort have ended in a fiasco as ethnicity has taken a heavy toll of Nigeria's development efforts. This is because federalism had failed to address the problem of ethnic violence and ethnicity because the center seems to be so powerful that all states look up to it for their survival and other than that the problem of structural imbalance that characterizes the Nigerian federalism in which some ethnic groups are significantly dominate over others does not pave way for equal representation of minority interests in the face of this structural imbalance, policies such as quota system and federal character cannot work.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though Nigerian leaders and governments tried to address this problem, the problem still manifests. Based on the findings in the course of this study, the following recommendations are made:

- (I) That all tribal and ethnic associations in Nigerian higher institutions of learning as well as tribal associations operating outside the institutions should be banned forthwith. Associations such as CTS, NUBESS, ISA etc. should be banned and all Nigerian students should belong to NANS only and no other associations. This will inculcate in them the spirit of oneness.
- (ii) It is also recommend that the land use act as contained in Section 315 of the 1999 Constitution should be implemented so that all land in the country will belong t the federal government but not ethnic groups and individuals could acquire them through rights of occupancy for a period of time.
- (iii) The paper also posits that all ethnic provisions and quota system that are based on ethnic classifications should be eliminated and removed from constitutions.
- (iv) The paper further recommends that appropriate poverty reduction measures should be adopted to ensure that poverty is reduced to a manageable and controllable level. This is because , poverty generates Divisive socio-political and economic competition and the frustrated and unsuccessful competitors usually blame their failure on other groups and win their group's sympathy who rally round them so that they could win in future competitions. Basic education is also necessary so as to raise the level of consciousness and awareness of all Nigerians.
- (v) The paper also recommends that the multi-party system be abandoned for the two party systems. The multi-party system creates room for ethnic parties to spring up.

- (vi) It is also the submission of this paper that rather than indigenship, citizenship should be encouraged. The constitutional provision that one who is resident in a state other than his for a period of three years is eligible to contest and win elections in his state of residence should be removed. It should simply state that every Nigerian is eligible to contest and win elations in any Nigerian state without any precondition attached to it.
- (vii) The paper also recommends that the military should stay away from the state house for a period of time. It is discovered that their repressive nature had caused more problems than solved them.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it is pertinent to conclude that ethnicity and ethnic violence are actually the greatest impediments to Nigeria's dream of a sustainable polity. Unless stringent measures are taken to address them, the Nigerian nations is doomed for life.

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