POLITICAL LEADERSHIP AND DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT IN POST-COLONIAL NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper probes the interplay of political leadership and diversity management, and the challenges facing sixty-one-year-old Nigerian state. Several inquiries have been conducted on the crisis of diversity management in Nigeria. However, several studies have adduced corruption poverty, nepotism, and failure to give recognition to various ethnic nationalities among others as the reasons for problems in managing Nigerian diversity. This paper argues that the major problem in managing Nigeria's diversity is bad leadership; as problem of bad governance has continued to exert pressure on the poor management of Nigeria's diversity. The persistent ethno-religious clashes since independence, and especially since 1999 when Nigeria began her democratic journey has demonstrated that Nigeria is far from achieving nation building. Today, poor management of Nigeria's diversity has given way to different conflict and division among ethnic nationalities. A wide range of unification strategies have been set-up by past and current political leadership; such as introduction of federalism, state creation, introduction of NYSC among others. These have failed to achieve the desire result because of leadership failure and promotion of ethnic interest above national interest. Therefore, twenty-one years of democratic rule in Nigeria has been embroiled with incessant agitation for self-determination by various ethnic nationalities. The study adopts descriptive method, while transformation leadership theory of leadership is adopted to inquire how and why political leadership is failing in the management of Nigeria's diversity. The findings reveal that the success or failure of nation building dependent on how leadership implement ethno-political strategies to build sense of belonging, and nationalistic feelings as against the current sectional feelings that is currently tearing Nigerian- state apart. The researchers suggest de-politicization of ethnicity, compulsory education, and implementation of residence rights, recruitment of leadership imbue with vision and reform character, and policy toward attitudinal change among Nigerians.

Introduction

Political leadership can be seen as a group of elected or selected people who manage allocation of resources and power distribution on behalf of government for public service delivery. However, political leadership is a broad concept when compare with other aspect of leadership such as, religious, Legal organization, Military, athletics among others. In the main, some scholars have focus on social leadership as a whole, and deal with political leadership as a part among parts (Grin 2000; Grint 2005). However, Researchers have not established one approach to defining diversity, thus there are various ways the concept was conceptualized. Political leadership represents but one of the many categories of leadership and is most elusive one at that (Dion 1968). This indicates that political leadership has no universal definition. Thus, scholars tend to define it in their preferred approach. William and O'Relly (1998: 81) define diversity as an attribute people used to tell themselves that another person is different (a broad view).

Diversity is considered as the collection of human differences; ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, social class, physical ability, ethical value system, national origin and political beliefs that people shared. Nevertheless, many people prefer diversity in relation to race and ethnicity, however, the concept include more than that (Stevens and Ogunji (2011). The synergy between political leadership and diversity cannot be quantify because the ability to govern a diverse country require leadership which has wisdom, ethical value, capacity and desire to implement ethno-political strategy that will strengthen the country's diversity. The connection between political leadership and diversity has known no bound given the diversity challenge facing Nigerian-state at present. In recent years, Nigeria's ethnic and religious diversity has become synonymous with Nigeria's underdeveloped, social, and political problems. It is not debatable that Nigeria exhibits unusually high levels of diversity, as indicated in the global diversity survey conducted by the SHRM, USA, and the Economic Intelligence Unit (SHRM 2009). It is undeniable that 1960 was regarded as the golden year for Nigerians and Nigeria because of the excitement that greeted her independence. However since decolonization in 1960, managing the country's diversity has become a difficult task. The trouble with Nigeria started with political crisis of 1962-1965, and the collapsed of the first republic due to military coup in 1966. The civil war that followed in 1967-1970 clearly demonstrated the level of unholy alliance of diverse ethnic groups which cohabited to form Nigerian federation. The collapsed of federalism in 1967 and the eventual division of the country into twelve states and integration of different ethnic group under centralized political system coined as federalism accounted for major problem the country is facing today.

It is convincing to argue that the various colonial constitutions such as; 1922, 1946, 1951 and 1954 were not established to proffer solution to Nigerian diversity challenge but ensure the perpetuation of

colonial interest. The return of democratic rule in 1999 has also failed to rekindle the hope of Nigerians on Nigeria unity. One can therefore suggest the decades of ethno-religious conflict which has bedeviled Nigeria since her nationhood emanated from overwhelming effect of leadership deficit. The failure of leadership both military and civilians counterpart to implement various ethno-political strategies suggested by scholars, analysts and groups of stakeholders has continue to create simultaneous crisis. It is against this backdrop Ilorah (2009) argue that political leadership has remained the business of narrow ethnic and group interest serving only special interest and focus groups. A global survey conducted by the Society for Human Resource Management SHRM (2009) and the US Economist Intelligence Unit ranked Nigeria in the top five most diverse countries; sustaining national diversity (indices include social inclusion, government inclusion and legal framework (Adeleye et al. 2014). This survey no doubt outlines the gap between diversity and utilization of the country's potential. Similarly, Nigeria's low diversity rating in the global survey is an indication of the obvious weak or perhaps non-existence of viable institutional tools to manage and promote Nigeria's diversity. These days, managing Nigerian diversity toward building a nation has become an uphill task. Political leadership since 1999 seems to have run out of ideas in tackling structural and institutional problems of Nigerian state. This paper outlines two lofty aims. One is to add to the existing literature on diversity debate in Nigeria, and explore the failure and challenges in the management of Nigeria's diversity. The second is to discuss the previous approaches adopted by Nigerian leadership in addressing diversity problem in Nigeria. The rest of the parts discuss the findings and conclusion.

Theoretical framework

A number of theories have been developed by researchers to explain how exactly some people became great leaders within the context of new theories of leadership. Some of these theories were developed to explain the nature and types of political leadership which achieved the best result for the people. Among these theories are; trait leadership theory, behavioral theory, contingency theory among others. This theory however adopts **transformational theory of leadership.** Transformational leadership theory emerged from a shift in transactional approach (Bass 1985). Transformational leadership theory was firstly introduced by James, V. Downton but was later developed by McGregor Burns in the late 20th Century. Transformational leadership is a theory that described how leader works with a team to identify the needed change, creating vision to guide the change through inspiration and executing the change in tandem with committed members of a group (Odumeru and Ogbona (2013). In the main transformational leadership are those who generally observe principles of human dignity, worth human rights, social values, individual, and social-political transformation.

Relevance of the Theory

This theory is relevant to this study because the challenges facing Nigeria and other heterogeneous state facing diversity challenge revolve in leadership question. The harsh situation Nigerians is passing through these days is a replica of Rothberg (2004:4) declaration, that Africa has long been saddled with poor malevolent leadership, predatory Kleptocracy, military-installed autocrats, economic illiterates and puffed-up pasture. This theory explains the synergy between political leadership, good governance, and managing diversity in a complex Nigerian-state. For instance, in the height of ethno-religious conflicts, which had engulfed Nigeria in the past years, north-south dichotomy, nepotism and other national question, it requires selfless transformational leaders like late (Julius Mwalimu Nyeyere) and late Nelson Mandela to bring the desire change, the leaders whose behavior and approach to governance transcend his or her own interest, ethnic group or region. Given this, analysts argue that transformational leadership has the capacity to inspire a sense of new direction and new ways of doing things. This theory has clearly established the missing link between leadership, political instability and nation building success. Fundamentally, it has clearly revealed what is expected of a leader who is determine to encourage national identity in diverse state like Nigeria should do in time of crisis. It is against this backdrop that scholars suggested, leader must be prepared to take risk to negotiate with the opposition for the sake of unity and peace, while not conceding too much to avoid defeating the objective of the negotiation. Basically, this is what is lacking in Nigeria political system, and this is gradually tearing Nigerian state apart. Scholars do suggest that for Nigeria to move forward in her quest to achieve national integration, the leader must be ethical in his or her doing, abhor ethnic and religious sentiment

Overview of Approaches to Diversity Management in Nigeria

(i) Introduction of federal system

Nigerians opted for federalism in 1954 after two conferences were held at the instance of British authority. The purpose of federalism was to integrate diverse people of Nigeria toward national consciousness and identity. The flaws in Nigeria's amalgamation of 1914 first manifested in 1964 federal elections, and later snowballed into 1965 crisis. The military incursion into political scene in 1966 and subsequent coups and counter coup that followed has turned Nigeria federal system to unitary practice, with a single central capital. The collapsed of federalism and the subsequent state creation that followed subsequently put end to federalism in Nigeria. This inevitably accounted for establishment and promotion of the current set of political elites that place their personal interest above the unity Nigerian-state.

(ii) State Creation

State creation in Nigeria started in 1967 to weaken the Biafra secessionist group. The state creation exercise led to eventual dissolution of the former four regions into 12 states in 1967 and current 36 states system in 1966. Ironically, the proliferations of states have failed to tackle

the challenge of Nigerian diversity. As analysts observe, the more the creation of states, the more the emergence of new demand, and varieties of problems which will eventually called for another state's creation. In support of this, Suberu (1999) remarked that states creation exercise has often engendered profound sectional disagreement over ethno-territorial composition and distributions of the new states, the administrative headquarters of the new state and the modalities for sharing the assets and personnel of the sub-divided states. Unfortunately,

Nigeria has not been better-off in terms of integration of various identities; instead, Nigeria ranks poorly on several dimension of inclusion (SHRM, 2009).

(iii) **Establishment of National Youth Service Corps (NYSC).**

The necessity to bridge the gap in inter-ethnic and social relations, promote spirit of reconciliation and reconstruction after the Nigerian civil war in 1970 informed the establishment of (NYSC) by (Rtd) Gen. Yakubu Gowon. It was established by decree No 24 on May 24, 1973 for Nigerian graduate for the purpose of serving their father land for a period of one year. According to section 4 of the decree, it spells out how the program aimed to established ties and sense of belonging among Nigerian Youths. Thus, Youths are posted to states outside their state of origin, the ultimate goal is to promote unity in diversity and promote culture of oneness. Paradoxically, the scheme has been polluted and as such make insignificant anymore due to insecurity of Corps members and largely political influence of the scheme by politicians. This day, Corp members are now being posted to state and region where the Corp member graduated. Therefore, politicization of the scheme by Nigerian political elites have rendered the scheme irrelevant in promoting Nigerian diversity.

(iv) Federal Character Principle

Federal character was established by section 14 (3) of the 1979 and 1999 constitution. It is an integrative mechanism established and backed with various decrees and constitutions such as; 1979, 1989, 1996 and 1999 constitution. FCP was established to tackle the complaints of ethnic and religious domination of federal agencies and Boards by an ethnic group. The FCP is defined as follows:

> The distinctive desire of the people of Nigeria to promote unity, foster national loyalty and give citizens of Nigeria a sense of belonging to the nation, notwithstanding the diversities of ethnic origin, culture, language, or religion which may exist and which is their desire to nourish and harness to the enrichment of the Federal Republic of Nigeria Federal Character Commission, p.111 as cited by Marcellus and Christian (2012).

The above constitutional provision arguably provided mode of operation for FCP as it contained initially in 1979, and later 1999 constitution. The operation of the Commission has not been amended till date.

FCP was designed to ensure representative bureaucracy in order to promote unity and fairness to reflect the national, Cultural, and socio-linguistic diversity of Nigeria state.

The principle is not as peculiar to Nigeria as we also have them in operation in different classification of countries such as USA, Canada, India, and South Africa to mention just few. However, the principle has worsened the problem it was intended to solve. These days, allegation of ethnic and tribal domination of agencies of federal institutions has again fuel the fear of ethnic domination the policy was established to address. Thus, Afigbo (1986) argued; the principle of federal character was described, as unsophisticated everyday usage, is Nigeria affairs not dominated from few state or ethnic groups? Thus, Suberu (2001: 111) described it as federal discriminating at best or geographical apartheid; it's a confused balancing of the merit principle and the quota system' Adamalekun et al.1991:75). In all, FCP in Nigeria today has failed to ensure representative bureaucracy as it was meant to believe. Politicization and ethnic interest has eroded the value of FCP as it is currently being operated.

Diversity Management in Nigeria; Deciphering the Challenges

(i) Socio-economic inequality

The argument is overwhelming that socio-economic inequality is one of the greatest obstacles to diversity management in Nigeria. The level of economic disparity has widened economic capacity between the rich and the poor. World Bank reference (2013) listed Nigeria among the 22 largest economies in the World. However, Human development indicators from that year till present time have failed to keep pace with socio-economic development. Economic and social inequality is a global issue but in Nigeria's case aside the scale between the rich and the poor which is extremely wide, the situation has deepened poverty level in majority of Nigerians. The worrying challenging to diversity management in Nigeria includes; political instability, insecurity, poverty among others. It was reported years ago that Nigeria is next to Indian in terms of stunted Children in the World. Therefore, its not surprising that 'Gender Report in Nigeria categorizes Nigeria among 30 most unequal countries in the World (World Bank Base on Wealth (2016). And as former Minister of finance in Nigeria once argued, It is clear that the top 10 percent of the population is capturing most of the growth and the people at the bottom are being left behind. According to her, if we do not put our mind to the problem, the whole economy may be in danger (Okonjo-Iweala cited in Asu (2013). The National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) in 2019 on the release of the "2019 poverty and inequality in Nigeria" revealed that 40% of the total population of Nigeria which accounted for 80% people lives below poverty level. The same report has it that in the year 2000, 40 % of Nigerians which also account for 82 million people live below poverty lines in Nigeria.

(ii) The Challenge of leadership

In the argument of Achebe (1983) decades ago, 'the trouble with Nigeria' he argued the main problem with Nigeria is

leadership. Achebe's statement is a replica of leadership problem Nigerian state had been facing since 1960, while the method of her leadership recruitment since 1999 has left much to be desire. For Nigeria to succeed in diversity management, the country must have leadership that is committed to national unity, justice and democratic tolerance, and a leadership that will looks beyond his or her own ethnic or tribal groups. There is no gainsaying that the problems facing Nigerian state today revolve on leadership question. Given this, scholars and analysts have argued that Nigerian state "is a victim of high-level corruption, bad governance, political instability and a cyclical legitimacy crisis (Fagbadebo, 2007).

(iii) Historical Challenge

The legacies embedded on Nigeria by the colonial masters have continued to hunt the country on the path to nation building. During colonization, the colonial Nigeria was separated and administered like two different countries; the north and south with different local administrative system, land tenure, Judicial and educational system. This is in contrast to what exist in British ex-colonies such as Sudan and Indian, where the administration was concentrated under unified administrative system. It was as if these two separate countries held together by shared currency and transportation system (Gambari, 2008). Moreover, the regional political structure introduced by the colonialist was consolidated by Nigerian political class, and with the creation of states in 1967, it merely deepened ethnic and religious division among ethnic nationalities. Owing to this were the accentuation and defense of ethnic and regional interest in post-colonial Nigeria, and its undeniable today that Nigerian state is being hunted by history of colonial amalgamation and elite failure after independent.

(iv) The constitutional challenge

Constitutional challenge was a serious question during nationalist agitation for the formation of Nigerian state and toward independence. Constitution also posed a challenge before the nationalist agreed to federal constitution in 1953. Nevertheless, federalism in Nigeria had since this period confronted with stiff resistance from those who prefer unitary system of government, and those in support of co-federal system. However, the worst enemies of Nigeria today are those who often speak federalism but act in unitary fashion by putting aside all the division of powers between different levels of federalism (Gambari, 2008). This problem is also related to fiscal relation among tiers of government which had severally enmeshed in several litigations over constitutional interpretation on ownership of mineral resources domicile in each state of the federation. Similarly, is the issue of who has power to share these resources and what percentage? state policing, and how to devolve power to states without altering the institution of governance is another challenge currently generating heated argument.

(v) The challenge of corruption and other social vices

Corruption is a cankerworm that has eaten deep into the fabric of Nigerian society. And owing to leadership failure which has crippled all facets of Nigerian system, corruption has become a monster, and a scourge that has weakened all efforts geared toward effective diversity management in Nigeria. Corruption disrupts efficient public service delivery; houses, health, electricity etc. Similarly, corruption affects formulation and implementation policy which can promote Community feelings because of the phenomenon of kicks-back. Nowadays in Nigeria, there have been several allegations of widespread corruption in public service, the Military, Police, Judiciary, while centre of governance is not left out in the allegation of abuse of public thrust. The weak and ineffective institutions in the country have encouraged corruption to fester with all its attendant consequences in already divided society. As of 2020, Nigeria was ranked 149th position out of 180 countries surveyed by Global Index ranking, while Transparency International currently ranked the country as the second most corrupt country in West Africa, second to Guinea-Bissau. The fight against corruption has been made difficult with section 308 which granted immunity to President, his Deputy, Governor and his Deputy.

It is against this backdrop Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) argue, it can trace more than $17bn in cash and assets transferred abroad by the state government (UNDID, 2006:22).

Findings

The findings from this study have revealed the diverse nature of Nigerian state and the inability of past and current political leadership in managing Nigeria's diversity in such a way to give a sense of belonging to all Nigerians. The failure of political leadership to accord recognition to various identity groups within Nigerian Union has created window of opportunity for various centrifugal forces threatening to dismember the Nigerian state. It is discovered that ethno-religious sentiment has rendered all efforts geared promoting nation building in Nigeria. Theoretically, it is expected that equitable representations of bureaucracies in ethnically and pluralized country like Nigeria should promote 'unity in diversity'. However, the problem in achieving this has been poor implementation of policies, and nepotism by political leadership. The paper also discover that success or failure of nation building is dependent upon the level with which the country's leadership develops and carry out various ethno-political strategy, such as de-politicization of ethnicity, integration of various identities, demilitarization of society and politics among others. The findings discover that leadership who sincerely implement all these strategies are more likely to succeed in achieving nation building than those who ignored or abandon it. The paper therefore explained below the indices that work to stabilize or collapse a federation.

Diversity could be a threat when there

- Leadership promoting nepotism and favoritism

- Promoting ethnic and religious consciousness
- Policy formulation and implementation that favors a particular ethnic groups or region
- Marginalization and likelihood of ethnic domination

Diversity will promote integration when there

- Absence of ethno-religious consciousness in favour of national solidarity
- Leadership with spirit of forgiveness and transformation ideas
- Equity, justice and fairness
- Integration, recognition and inclusion of identities in national politics

Conclusion

This paper has given analysis on Nigeria's political leadership in the management of diversity, various integrative policies, and why the political strategies have failed. The paper also demonstrates that a country's success in diversity management is dependent on the effectiveness of its ethno-political strategies such as integration of identities, neutralization, depoliticization, and national identity among others determines success with which a country integrate its diverse ethnic and religious identities into an integrated community. The study further argues that multiethnic nature of the country is not the problem but inability of the country's political leadership to employ and faithfully implement the developed ethno-political strategies such as (NYSC, and FCP) among others toward achieving national integration. The paper thus concludes attitudinal change, and recruitment of leadership with national identity, nationalistic feelings, and leadership that detest all forms of nepotism and discriminative tendency.

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