A HISTORICAL BACKGROUND TO THE CHALLENGE OF NATIONAL POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA
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O.A OGUNBUNMI & Jacob Olusola BAMIGBOSE
Department of History,
Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Oyo.

Abstract

It is becoming an acceptable fact that leadership problem is an important challenge that faces the Nigerian polity in the contemporary age. The problem has greatly precluded sustainable growth and development of the country. This paper, therefore examines the situation and the existential realities that have networked together to precipitate the challenge of national political leadership in Nigeria. The paper discovers that the foundation of Nigeria was laid with a phenomenon that dictates the super structural political history of Nigeria that is fraught with leadership challenge after independence. Hence, the paper suggests establishment of national mechanisms that can help creates political figures with human tendencies favourable to nationhood, as well as the structures that will sustain unionism among the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria. The work relies on qualitative analysis to address its focus. Data were sourced from books, journals, newspapers, magazines and other relevant historical documents.

Keywords: Background, challenge. Leadership, national, political.

Introduction

The Lugardian amalgamation of southern and northern protectorates in 1914 of the Niger area which became Nigerian country made the polity to become hundred years in 2014. As Nigeria clocks hundred years as an amalgamated polity and fifty four years as an independent nation state the large scale index underdevelopment are very expedient. The country still far below the required expectation, most especially in terms of sustainable development within the context of unorthodox theoretical framework of equitable distribution and consumption of common wealth resources.

In the contemporary Nigeria, there are untamable upsurge of poverty, high mortality rate, poor life expectancy, infantile educational system, high rate of unemployment, under-employment of higher proportion and political corruption among others. What is coming from this is a heavy burden to interrogate the socio-political structure required to prevent the occurrence of these social evils, or how to prevent their escalation in a situation of occurrence.

It suffices to point out that if Nigeria, at its hundred years as an amalgamated polity and over fifty years of its existence as an independent nation-state still wallowing in the throes of pandemic underdevelopment and abysmal decadence, it therefore calls to question the seriousness of Nigeria political leadership at tackling the challenges since independence when some other nations with whose Nigeria started together had almost got to the eldorado. Incessant ethnic violence, ethno religious, uprising and rebellion bear eloquent testimony to how deeply divided and polarized Nigeria. It is on this premises that this paper assesses the historical backgrounds of the challenge of national political leadership in hundred years of Nigeria with a view to suggest constructive suggestions that are capable of benefiting cornatose centenarian nation. Also, to be able to regain its lost strength prodigiously needed for the attainment of sustainable development and virile nation building is impossible.

Conceptual Issues

It is imperative to make clarification of some concepts that are germane to this intellectual discourse to prevent thinking at cross-purposes as well as putting into relevant perspectives, the concepts

as they relate to the focus of the research work. Hence some concepts, such as background, challenge and leadership are explained.

Background

This has to do with the foundation and the antecedents of a thing, being, issue or event that has developed to become the concern of people. Contained in the background are the environment and other allied factors that help to bring about or create the phenomenon that is becoming an issue or a concern.

Leadership

This is systematic arrangement put in place to manage, direct or harness the resources of a giving establishment or society towards certain goals. It is an institutional framework saddled with the responsibility of managing the affairs of a given state or establishment. Leadership can be goal or based on how people in charge pilot the affairs. It is a good leadership if resources are managed to better the lots of the generality of the people but bad when it is otherwise. Therefore national political leadership in the context of this work has to do with good leadership which is acceptable to all the people of the country without any prejudice. It is a form of leadership that is devoid of ethnic sentiment, religious bigotry and all shades of prejudices, but that only has stomach for the sustainable growth and development of the country within the context of equitable distribution of commonwealth resources towards equitable consumption by the citizenry of the society.

Challenge

This can simply be seen as problem which precludes the attainment of the desired objectives at a particular point in time.

It is fast becoming indisputable fact that Nigeria's major problem lies in the lack of good political leadership which actually has political will to harness the various resources that saturate the country, towards its sustainable growth and development. However, it is a usual character in a socio political clime in Nigeria that people always expend a lot of effort talking about the problems or the challenges that the country faces. Nigerians, in their characteristics feature, are

best analyst of their problems but without concrete effort towards discovering what actually are the causes of the menacing challenges and the problems. They seems not to understand that a problem is just like a blossoming tree, very close to a beautiful house, and whose roots have become a serious threat to the building. If the house is to be saved indeed, from the danger of collapse posed by the roots of the tree, the tap of the tree, and not the foundation of the building, must be located and uprooted. It is at that level the house can have the sigh of relief from the threat and get rising hope for continuous existence, though some damages have been done by the roots of the tree. The owner of the house can then rise up to rehabilitate and renovate the building to give it real befitting outlook.

Origin of the challenge of national political leadership in Nigeria

It is imperative to make it clear from the onset that the people that have occupied national political leadership position in Nigeria, by assessment, majority of them were driven by ethnic sentiment, egocentric and selfish empathy, though with few exceptions who were also to a large extent in the course of time become consumed by ethnic chauvinism and capitalist animosity thus derailed to become over sentimentalized in their leadership and governance style. These ethnic and tribal sentiments were said to have their origin in colonial era of the polity which eventually become Nigeria. The various peoples, clans , communities, empires and kingdoms, out of which evolved Nigerian nation, prior the coming of the colonial rule, had historical linkages such as traditions of origin, commercial relational exigencies, boundary contiguities, and many common experiences that made ethnic or racial prejudices unthinkable and non-existent in their minds. The primordial people of History does not keep us in the dark that Nigeria in particular and Africa in general have well established mechanisms that encouraged and sustain intergroups harmonious relation. The inter group relations, among the khoikhoi, the San and the Bantu of the Southern African region was to a greater extent non-adversary before the Merchant capitalism of the Dutch East Indian Company of the 17th century that the kikuyu and the Masai people of the Eastern hemisphere of the African region fared favourably well in the eras that proceeded the advent of the Europeaans. Besides, the

peaceful and harmonious relationship that existed between the Hutu and the Tutsi of the Great Lakes Region were made expedient in the historical writings about the pre colonial era of the region. Nigeria, the focus of this work was also peopled by the human societies who had favourable interactions with one another in the primordial antiquity. According to Erim (1996) Nigeria of today was neither a cultural nor economic vacuum into which the British implanted Nigerians. The people that constitute the social milieu of modern Nigeria not only existed and reproduced themselves as the pre industrial people of Europe as done else indeed, they evolved sophisticated superstructures of state, religion and ideologies of legitimation from their encounter with the physical environment and with other cultural systems around them. In a similar vein Dudley (1973) posited that by the beginning of 20th century, though broad differences still persisted, diffusion and assimilation were already providing a homogenizing effect sufficient for one to perceive the incipient emergence of a wider community, covering the area known as Nigeria. The ancestors of Nigeria succeeded in building bridges across diverse cultural and linguistic landscapes in a manner designed to provide genuine harmony between themselves. Ikime (1985) gave a justifiable example in the Achabu traditions as a certain level of relations between the Igala and some Igbo group or group significantly crucial to lead to a degree of accommodation which make people of Igbo descent play an important part in the state system of Igala. It is also on record, according to Erim (1996) that the Etsu of Nupe, for instance, sought advice from the Balogun of Abeokuta and sultan of Sokoto the latter of whom was reported to have mediated in the Yoruba civil wars f the nineteenth century. It is instructive to state that though not that the cross cultural relationships were all out rosy but in the primodial era among the people of Nigeria war was the last resort when all other peace processes had been exhausted.

However, things that were hitherto unheard of among the indigenous African societies began to happen with the advent of colonial rule. Thus ethnic and racial prejudice with their concomitant socio-political effects became part of the African cultural lexicon up till the present moment. Mlambo and Raftopoulos (2010) noted,

for instance that the state of the conflict inZimbabwe could best be described as one rooted in the long term structural political-economic legacies of colonial rule, combined with the legacies of African nationalist politics. In Nigeria according to Okwudiba (1980) still buttressing and affirming colonial origin or cradle of ethnicity, tribalism or ethnicity is the creature of the colonial and post colonial order. It can be concluded in the light of the foregoing that the post colonial type of ethnicity got its inspiration from that of the colonial era. It therefore portrays the inherent dynamism in social relations which started little and grew to become bogus as a response to the pervading reality of the contemporary age.

At the beginning of the formal British Indirect rule in 1901, Nigeria was divided into two regions: Northern and Southern. Both of them were divided into provinces. From 1901 to 1959, the number of regions was increase to the three through both acquisition of territories and partition from existing provinces (Salaudeen, 2014). Regionalism became formally introduced into Nigerian political system in1946 by Richards constitution. It is instructive to state that the British colonial administration in Nigeria which delighted in the corporate administrative polity of Nigeria, which resulted in the 1914 amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates of the Nigeria era, could still be interested in breaking the polity into region thereafter. This action calls for serious question on the part of the colonial rule as an arrangement that can consequently made the polity to have a sustainable socio-cultural integration which is capable of promoting and encouraging sustainable growth and development in the country. It should also be noted that in Nigeria by 1946 Nationalist activities are on the geometric increase hence the need for the British to break the country into regions so as to break and reduce the formidability that was garnered through the unity of purpose of the leaders of the nationalist struggle against the British imperial rule in Nigeria. Consequently the political parties that were formed during the political process that ushered in independence in Nigeria were predominantly tribal based. It is now a fact of history that action group party (A.G) evolved out Egbe Omo Oduduwa, a Yoruba socio-cultural Organization, the Northern people's Congress was also political metamorphose of a northern cultural organization

known as Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa while National Council of Nigeria and Cameroons. (Olawale, 1980) formed to be regarded as the party of the Igbo people in the course of time. Up till the contemporary age the political party formation follows ths tribal political trend and this to a greater extent has sustained ethnic sentiments in socio-political relations among various ethnic groups that are present in Nigeria today. State executive power was therefore acquired to fan the embblers of ethnicity. Otite (2000) thus argued that from both non Marxist and neo-Marxist conflicts perspectives, the control of the state is the greatest prize in ethnically plural societies. Once won, the state becomes an instrument used by the elite for the differential distribution of resources amongst the component ethnic-territorial units. As a result, state multinationalization is threatened and weakened as the ethnic bound elite infiltrate its several dimensions which include the military, professional bureaucracy and its unified legal and judicial system. So important therefore, were the rewards of controlling the state as a means of determining the allocation of economic and social resources that the fear of political exclusion held by minority ethnic groups has resulted in severe ethnic tension in Nigeria.

The political leadership that does emerged from this kind of ethnic political climate can hardly rise to become a truly national political leadership that is devoid of any sentiment either ethnic or religions. That is why up till today in Nigeria the problems of national political leadership still persists. Akinkuotu (2014) posited that "the exploitation of ethnic and religion sentiments predates the Jonathan presidency. Under past military regimes, religion and ethnicity played an unwelcoming and pernicious role in the formulation of national policies and the conduct of politics. Many years back, it was infact unavoidable to conclude that rulers of northern extraction deliberately and unwisely skewed postings and promotions in key ministries and the security services in favour of northern officers, even as they thoughtlessly appeared to promote Islamic trappings in governance, such as O.I.C."

The Europeans used sophisticated artilleries of war and diplomatic strategem to impose colonialism and imperial rule over Africa in general and Nigeria in particular but they, in the wake of

their departure concotted the weapon of demography to facilitate the eventual Hausa-Fulani hegemony in Nigeria. Hence, a home grown regional Hausa-Fulani imperialism was foisted on the Nigerian nation. The consequences were that governance became the dictates of oligarchic few, thus the democracy that eventually emerged became the designer of the people that lack of panoramic knowledge of the state craft. In effect, the political sagacity and will that are required in a true national political leadership became sacrificed on the altar of bad and sentimental political leadership.

It is clear therefore from the foregoing that one fundamental issue that brought about the predicament of national political leadership in Nigeria in the present time is the issue of ethnicity, and the origin of this phenomenon has been traced to colonial era. The effect of this has become so serious today in Nigeria that sustainable development has almost become a mirage in the hudred years of Nigeria existence as an amalgamated polity.

The effect of the challenge of national political leadership in Nigeria

One of the effects of the problem of leadership in Nigeria is the brazen display of selfish interest on the part of the political leaders or politicians in the country. It was not difficult and shameful for majority of the Nigerian Politicians to embezzle or siphon the funds as well as federal projects meant for general populace into their private account and quarters for self aggrandizement. It cannot be forgotten in a hurry how Operation Feed the Nation(O.F.N), a programme designed purposely to tackle the poverty confronting the Nigerian masses, eventually became the private property of an individual political figure. The projects are today concentrated in the south western Nigeria. Reference could also be made to the celebrated cases of treasuring looting of James Ibori, a one time governor of Delta State. The case of James Ibori is just a tip of ice-bag of many corrupted and corruptible politicians in Nigeria. Granting of amnesty to proven corrupted leader such as past governor of Bayelsa Alamesigha is a slight on Nigeria's integrity.

The case of corruption and political elites in Nigeria is fast creating a scenario and situation whereby those people who actually want to maintain an integrity are becoming so overstreched to fall into

temptation of eating with devil but with long spoon. It is bringing about the reality of ambigious 'chichidodo bird' in Ayi Kwei Armah's book The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born. The bird which loves maggot but hates excreta.

The consequence of the challenge of national political leadership was also seen in the tantrum of the factionalized and sectionalized military formation and other agents that were supposed to be structures and symbols of national unity eventually developed to be haven of ethnic bigotry. Omotoso, (2003) posited that "the army" in the early years of Nigerian independence "was affected by all the shades of difference which existed in the civilian life of the country: material success, ethnic loyalty, religious prejudices and political ambition" "thus according to him, "is why it is easy to understand how after the January 1966 Coup, so many sides could built up evidence of other people's involvement in a long-term liquidation of the other."

Furthermore, the political practices in Nigeria become fraught with acerbity, brigandry, nepotism social chauvinism, religious bigotry and bourgeois political economy, such that commonwealth resources become appropriated and mis-appropriated by the bougoeise politicians and capitalist economists. Thus the masses were made to bear the consequent terrific brunt. Hence poverty, high rate unemployment, large scale mortality and many other indices of underdevelopment envelope Nigeria like a whirlwind. Nigeria therefore oscillates like a pendulum between integration and disintegration

Conclusion

It can be stated at this juncture that import of a true national political leadership cannot be over-emphasized as a veritable instrument for social engineering of a country towards the sustainable development of such a nation. The contributions of the likes of Nelson Mandela (South Africa), Amicar Cabral (Portuguese Guinea), Julius Nyerrese (Tanzaria), Getulio Vagas, the architect of the modern day (Brazil), Andel Gamal Nazzer (Egypt), Kemal Atar Turk (Turkey), Abraham Lincoln (United States of America) and so on. to the development of their respective countries are superb and are indelible.

No nation can develop more than the quality of its leadership,

therefore Nigeria's development is largely dependent on a qualitative and detribalized liberal minded political leadership that actually has stomach for the yearnings and aspirations of all the social milieu of the fabnc of Nigerian nation.

Recommendations

Government should incorporate the study of national character into the educational curriculum in Nigeria. It should be part of every stage of formal education in the country, that is from nursery to the university. This enables the students who are prospective future leaders in the country to imbibe the culture of national unity and integration.

- Also, the teachers who are to impart this culture should be adequately trained and debriefed of their sectional sentiments to be able to externalize the conduct of national oneness in the discharge of their professional duties as well as their relationship to their students and people around them.

- Monument of national importance should be sited in all schools, public centers and strategic places of all the states of the federation by the government and people should have hinder assess to them. This, if done, would go a long way towards inspiring belief in the Nigerian nationhood.

- Government should also made it mandatory for all schools private or public, right from the nursery to tertiary to have knowledge of the three principal languages in Nigeria- Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba languages.

- There should be a very transparent political process that would lead to the selection and election of political leaders based on merit and detribalized competence of the leaders.

- In addition to the national geographical coverage of the political parties, there should be constitutional provision for the establishment of two party systems in the country, and the logos of the parties should respectively bear national symbols such as the one during the National Republican Convention (NRC) and Social Democratic Party (SDP) political

dispensation. The flags of these political parties should be respectively be white or green colour. The two political parties should also be ideologically based.

- There should also be forum for socio-cultural interactions among the various group in the country which would automatically lead to cultural diffusion.

- There should also be a constitutional provision which must be strictly enforced to discourage whipping up of ethnic and religious sentiments during the electioneering campaigns. It can be incorporated in the constitution that any element of ethnic or religious sentiment display by any candidate would lead to the automatic disqualification of such candidate by the constituted authority.

- Moreso, there should be transparent equitable distribution and consumption of commonwealth resources of the country by all Nigerians. For instance if the least paid, in any establishment, either public or private, is earning seventy five percent (75%) of the salary of highest paid, it would bridge the wider gap between the rich and the poor, and this would encourage the spirit of brotherhood and nationhood in the people as well as discouraging the frustration, anger and aggression that are caused by poverty, which could spell national doom. Through this arrangement everybody would have sense of belonging.

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