Power Contest: Impediment to Meaningful Ethnic, Religious and Political Dialogue in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

This work examined Power Contest as one of the numerous Impediments to Meaningful Ethnic Religious and Political Dialogue in Nigeria. It employed qualitative research methodology which helps in reviewing some literatures relevant for this paper. Nigeria is a multicultural society, comprising of almost 150 ethnic groups, each agitating for superiority and supremacy, these also transgress to politics and religion. Meaningful dialogue is often very difficult to achieve, as a result of these strive for superiority. It is against this backdrop that this paper highlights the use of power in politics, ethnic and religious arena. The effects of the use of power and abuse of power in politics, ethnic and religious domain, it further suggests that exercising superiority over the people's religious, politics and ethnic standard may adversely hampered meaningful dialogue. The work recommends that, for peace and tranquility to be experienced, in this country, dialogue and respect for each other's religious, political, and ethnic peculiarities should be encouraged. Creation of job opportunity and provision of workable security system for all citizens in this country is strongly advised. Researchers are also urged to carry out more research in a similar work such as this to proffer additional ways of curbing this situation.
Key Words: Ethnic, Political and Religious Conflict, Power contest, Multicultural society, Power and Superiority, Dialogue.

Introduction

The situation where needs of citizenry are not met in Nigeria structure of governance is said to be the real reasons why there is political instability in the country. In Nigeria, there is no gain saying that the country is homogeneous, as it has a multicultural, multi ethnic and multi-linguistic as well as religions diversity. All these groups seek to be recognized as an entity. This seriously affects the unity of the country as every ethnic group seeks to be recognized as the sole owner of the countries resource and manpower.

In this vein, power contest arises among different ethics, political and religious group with each desiring to be the sole controller of the human and economic resource of the country. The end result of all these, is the tension and restiveness experience in the country.

Following this backdrop, Kwuelum (2014) asserted that Nigeria a political entity, is faced with the contest of perspective regarding its birth of national journey to democratic governance, and the goal of democracy is embraced with conflicting notions and worsened by the lingering violent conflict. Also, the question of whether there is an ownership of the national unity process and citizen driven participation by the people unfolds in terms of efficiency/responsibility in relation to governance is seriously a problem to meaningful dialogue. In this vein, the paper is set to analyze the level at which ethno-religious and political sovereignty in Nigeria hinders meaningful dialogue. It further showcase the level at which different ethics, religious and political parties get to put themselves above other group, it also discuss the contending issues involve in dialogue, as well as analyze the fact that agitation for supremacy among different ethics religious and political groups only succeeds in hindering meaningful dialogue.

Ethno-Religious and Political Sovereignty in Nigeria

Nigeria as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural society is prone to competition for power and authority. It has been established that the elite manipulates ethnic loyalties in Nigeria in order to realize political and other ambitions.

According to Oladoyin (2001) ethnicity seems to be detaching itself from being a cultural group symbol. It is new being shaped by political economics consideration. Cultural factors are not irrelevant, but they are secondary, this reveals the compelling motives around which ethno-communal consciousness is built. Oladoyin (2001) further stressed that ethno-communal violence in Nigeria results from either a contest for power and influence at all level of the society or a contest over economics resources.

Sociologically, Nigeria is a multiethnic society with population that are sharply divided along racial, cultural, linguistic, religious and similar cleavages. Guenther Roth in Alazieuwa (2015) noted that divided plural society is an impediment to the realization of modern, rational-legal institutions. Therefore, the Nigeria rather than being a public force tends to be privatized that is appropriated to the service of private interest by the dominate factors of the elite, which is consequences upon the influence of the political contest and influence since after colonilization and post-colonial influence. Every ethnic background tends to seek its superiority and preference.

More so, in the current trend of insurgency in Nigeria, it is the issues of superiority and sovereignty that gives rise to Boko-Haram threat. According to Alazieuwa (2015), politically though Muslim may want to disassociate themselves from

it activities, it remains an Islamic movement. It is also occurring in a multi-religious, and political settings in which religious itself is a major factor in determining the distribution of political power in Nigeria (Kukah in Alazieuwa (2015). On this premised Alazieuwa (2015) explains that politically, the contest for power in Nigeria between the north and south attributes largely to the insurgency experience in Nigeria. It therefore, requires detail exposition.

The political feud perspective is premised primarily on the argument that power distribution within Northern part of Nigeria itself has continually perpetuated the Boko-Haram.

According to Alaziewua (2014), analysis the political feud in North between the Kanuri and the North-East, in his words, a closer examination of the Boko-Haram terror movement thus reveals clearly, a Kanuri revolt – it is dominantly by Kaunri boys, despite the recruitment of volunteers from areas outside Borno and Yobe State (Tribune, online June 27, 2012). Also, a statement by Ishiaka Mohammed Bawa the chief whip of the house of representative of the Nigeria national assembly and leader of the North-East caucus in the house, further underscore a general North-East revolution. According to him, "we felt that over the years, the North-East region has been marginalized in all aspect of life in this country, (and) Marginalization is responsible for insecurity in the North-East" (Sunday trust, online, February 12, 2012).

This statement aptly portrays the definition of politics by Midlarsky (1975), who defines political violence as the result of an attempted or actual injury (ordinarily not sanctioned by law or custom) perpetuated on person or properly with the actual or intended consequence of effecting transformation either within structures of political authority or within economics and/or social system. In this vein. Joseph (1991) and Sklar (1998) maintained that the stake for the control of political power can be quite high and loss of central power could prompts a "highly placed, highly disgruntled, and thus highly motivated individuals" or groups towards bringing the country "under a specific kind of fundamentalist strain.

It is against this backdrop, that some scholars. Stake holders in government and philosophers are of the view that, ethnic militia in Nigeria is a propaganda machinery to acquire power position or a call towards the actualization of political power.

For instance, the statement by Chukwumerije and professor Bolaji, Akinyemi suffice. According to Chukwumerije:
Jonathan accession to power from the vice-president in 2007 to the elected President in 2011, to the Niger Delta militancy spear headed by the Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) from the late 1990s Obansanjo'semergence as Nigeria's president in 1999 to him also owed to the militancy by the Yoruba ethnic militia, the Oodua people's congress, OPC as an aftermath of the 1993 presidential election annulment. Thus his suggestion to his ethnic Igbo nationality to mobilize its own militia, Movement for the sovereign state of Biafra (MASSOB)

He therefore, proposed a device or means of constructive engagement with the youth. Chukwumerije called for the mobilization of the Igbo militia within the context of the mobilization of ethnic militia for political ascendancy in Nigeria (Vanguard, online, 20th January, 2015).
ProfessorBolajiAkinyemi supported Chukwumerije when he said, the appropriation of the Nigerian military as northern and or Hausa Fulnai militia was perpetuated by

monopolization. Thus, the loss of such monopoly has obviously removed the appropriation of the Nigeria army as the ethnic militia by the north and/or Hausa-Fulani. Significantly, in 1999, retired army captain and former military intelligence operative, sager Mohammed, formed a northern militia, the Arewa people's congress (APC) to protect and safeguard the interest of the North.

In this vein, Akinyemi maintained that in the general context of northern angst over the loss of central power, Boko-Haram may be conceived of as a resurgent Northern ethnic militia or in the specific context of the Kanuri sense of marginalization, an emergent militia for that ethnic group (Alozieuwa, 2015).

Religiously, the struggle for sovereignty stems from the rivalry between the two major religious in Nigeria, that is, the Islamic and the Christian religion. Each seeking prominent recognition and ascendency However, it is difficult or impossible to totally separate religious crisis from political, economic, social/ethnic crisis. This is why Ajibola (2015) noted that in Nigeria, three things are intertwined; religion, politics and ethnicity and the three are be clouded with corruption, poverty and insecurity. It is therefore, difficult to solve one without considering all other underpinning factors.

In specific respect, religious sovereignty in Nigeria constitutes such problems as the inadequate depth of understanding of both Christianity and Islam within and without these two religions, lack of knowledge and information on a popular level, particularly in local languages of the scriptural-based condemnations of violence and terrorism in both Christianity and Islam (Report on the Inter-religious tensions and crisis in Nigeria). More so, statement and actions of a number of religious leaders, both Muslim and Christianity which could be understood as condoning or encouraging violence can engender violence this portrays the extends to which religions Nigeria strived to show sovereignty over the other. In the same vein, tension arising from well-funded and organized foreign Christian missionary activity and well funded and organized foreign Muslim missionary works towards the exhibition of superiority.

Contending Issues in Dialogue

An understanding of dialogue begins first of all with a good knowledge of its definition. There are various aspect of dialogue which ranges from religious, cultural, social, economic, political and even up to geographical aspects. As these are all aspect of human endeavour, each aspect of dialogue is contextually situated with partners. This means therefore, that the first thing we should know about the nature of dialogue is that it is an activity of duality and happens between more than one person, it happens within specific contexts with specific partners.

In the words of Omerie (2001) dialogue leads to the partners involved to reason and to sharpen their conscience thereby overcoming their differences and obstacle. It could also help them to tolerate and reject each other, rather than resorting to violence at the least provocation. Dialogue is therefore, an avenue where different group or individual share the same dynamic process and ideologies from one another how to resolve their problem towards mutual understanding and cooperation. This type of approach, according to Omerie (2001) gives room for groups involve to discover one another beyond inaccurate perceptions and distorted images which had hitherto

characterized their relationship. Dialogue embraces all facets of life, religion, politics, economic, social and ethnic world view.

In today's Nigeria, politics, governance and religion are intertwined and twisted by political players which makes inter and intra ethnic relationships more complicated than imagined. Political parties have become glorified or secularized religious and ethnic groups. The pattern of Nigerian political economy is characterized by instability, conflicting social, religious, regional and ethnic interests; and a preoccupation with unequal distribution of resources, rather than creation of wealth. These factors tend to portray irreconcilable differences in Nigeria's federalism and it is on such that a common platform for dialogue is regarded as a fashionable political theory – sovereign national conference.

According to Adler and Calico (2003) policy dialogues are carefully constructed, deliberative meetings that address both politically controversial and technically complex aspects of an issue in a dispute. Generally speaking, policy dialogues seek to exchange information and build consensus recommendations between the public, private, and civic sectors through leaders who are in a position to forge alliances, make decisions, or strongly influence the trajectory of a possible solution to a challenging issue. Policy dialogues go by many names. Some call them "Roundtables" or "Issue Workshops". Others take the form of specialized committees, commissions, regulatory negotiations ("reg.negs") or working groups. Regardless of their name, all policy dialogues includes:

- bring diverse interest groups to the table
- focus on a regulatory, policy or planning issue that is of common interest
- have a life cycle with a beginning middle and end and
- seek to formulate practical solutions to complex problems

While there is no fixed and formal format, most policy dialogues usually involve (a) an emerging or ripe dispute; (b) multiple stakeholders, not all of whom may have standing in an existing or prospective lawsuit; (c) contending values or ideologies; (d) complex scientific and technical issues; and (d) challenging substantive, procedural and psychological dynamics (Adler and Calico, 2003). Policy dialogue usually have a convener or sponsor (sometimes, multiple co-conveners and sponsors), a negotiated mission or goal, stakeholders who are willing to sit in council on a tough issue and address it in a disciplined manner; and facilitators to help organize and moderate proceedings

The Need for Policy Dialogue

The idea of democracy is founded on the persistent belief that citizens can, through effective deliberation, govern themselves. Not only can they, they should. Democracy (from the Greek *demos,* "people", and *kratos,* "rule") assumes that ordinary people have the capacity, the means, and the will to participate in the shaping of key decisions that affect their own welfare. They do this through both elected representation in formal bodies and participation and effective deliberation in informal decision-making mechanisms that influence formal processes (Alder and Calico, 2003).

The idea of discussion and problem solving is fundamental. Unfortunately, "effective deliberation" – particularly in the face of a potent and highly controversial issue is often problematic. In everyday parlance, deliberation is the act of thinking about

a difficult or complex subject. In formally constituted bodies governed by parliamentary procedures, deliberation requires an on-the-record discussion of the reasons for or against passage of a measure. In court settings, deliberation is an off-the record procedural requirement placed on juries considering the fate of civil or criminal defendants. In policy, dialogues aimed at grapping with a stubborn problem, deliberation has more extorted meanings and nuanced applications. It is aimed at combating impatience, intolerance, and incivility and in furtherance of constructive and feasible solutions.

Too frequently, discussions on important civic and public interest matters are defeated for the wrong reasons. In some cases, groups have difficulty getting organized. In other settings, there is no shared or accepted process for dialogue. Sometimes, lack of a clear deliberation process leads to a premature push for decisions. Communication breakdowns often trigger an escalating spiral of suspicion with increased tension and confusion between procedural. Substantive and relationship issues. In the most extreme situations, people of normal integrity and good will actively seek to defeat each other (Alder and Calico, 2003).

Some Dialogical Experiences in Nigeria

Police handling of many aspects of the problem of minorities and many other subjects together with the Bill of Parliament for Independence (1960) The dialogue strengthened Nigeria's diversities at the embryonic stage of nationhood. Worthy of note is the fact that Nigeria's constitution has undergone several reviews via national conferences such as 1978, 2005 and 1994/95 conferences. There was also a Truth Commission (1999-2001) and the most recent national conference (2014). This national dialogue was saddled with the aim of realistically examining and genuinely resolving, long-standing impediments to our cohesion and harmonious development as a truly Federal State. According to President Jonathan Good luck "our sole motivation for convening this Conference is the patriotic desire for a better and greater nation; we are determine that things must be done in a way and manner that will positively advance that objective". The conference had these Recommendations; Creation of 18 New States, Resource Control/Derivation Principle/Fiscal Federalism, Public Finance/Revenue Allocation, Forms of government Legislature, Power Sharing/Rotation, local Government, Immunity Clauses, Independent Candidacy, Governance, Anti-corruption, Land Tenure Act, National Anthem and Religion (Kwuelum, 2014).

Agitation for Supremacy: Impediment to Meaningful Dialogue

Ethnic and political supremacy in Nigeria today is no longer a hidden issues, hence it is widely accepted that different ethnic groups especially, the two major political parties in Nigeria, the People Democratic Party (PDP) and the All Progressive Congress (APC) are now at each other neck for who would take over power. More so, agitation for supremacy interplays in the area of religion as the two main religious in Nigeria are always at each other neck.

In this vein, Alazeiuwa (2015) explain that these contests for supremacy always throw a state or nation to become prone to economic dislocation and political instability, all which are indices of state failure. Rotberg (2002) also affirms that agitation for supremacy guarantees that economics sphere is characterized by deteriorated standard of

living, a lack of public goods and services, the flouring of corruption and rent – seeking, and a pervasive, economic stagnation. In this sense, the paper argues that the trend at which people within different ethnic affiliation agitation for supremacy hinders seriously on the process of dialogue.

Again, in the political sphere, some leaders and their allies readily work to subvert prevailing democratic norms by coercing legislatures and bureaucracies into subservice, compromising judicial independence, stifling the emergence of civil society or space, and abusing security and defence force for parochial end (Alozeuwa, 2015). To this earn, power tussle and context continues to persists, which does not in any sense, give room for meaningful dialogue. Alozieuwa (2015) rightfully noted that political sphere is dotted with ethnic discrimination, acrimony and resultant discord. Because of this ethnic discrimination in the Nigerian context, government which was supposed to be built for the wellbeing of the general public, inspite of ethnic patrimony, tends to be operate for the fit of all the nation's citizens are perceived to have become partisan, which in real sense does not give room for meaningful dialogue,

Similarly, the socio-political and ethno-religious experience of Nigeria, comprising of multi ethnic, cultural and lingual, with its vast populations distributed among over 300 ethnic groups and equally between two major religious – Islam and Christianity along geographical demarcation of North and South, it faces the challenges that come with diversity. Therefore, when there is inadequate representation; and interests with positions seen as insignificant and irrelevant, then the struggle/quest for identify and recognition is visible as an exercise of 'agency' (Kwuelum, 2014). This phenomenon results to militia group formations, which is a clear indication of the focus of this paper that ethnic religious and political contest leads to lack of meaningful dialogue.

Recommendations

Nigeria's scenario is built around a cycle of repeated factors/causes, and militarization of national life. Conflict does not end with an accord; hence there is a need for a sustained engagement and a constantly renewed strategy (Lederach, 2012). This will naturally lead to violence prevention, despite the fact that it is extremely difficult to turn the imagination from the effects of massacre to the imaginably tasks of rebuilding (Pouligny*et al.,* 2007). Such a dialogue – engagement would enable people treat each other with dignity become more connected and able to create more meaningful relationships thereby leading to a sustainable development and wellbeing.

The provision of sound social security system for all citizens is long overdue in this country. It is necessary to provide for the social needs of the aged, the unemployed and destitute who as citizens of this country should be guaranteed at least a minimum standard of living as well as provision of Protection of Fundamental Rights to all Citizens Irrespective of One's Social Status for this will go a long way to bring peace.

It is imperative to have a dialogical exchange between insider and outsider knowledge and practice, thereby enhancing the elements of human dignity. This is because when dignity is violated, the reaction is possibly an aroused aggression, even violence, hatred and vengeance.

Effective dialogue is not only of representation, but also of inclusiveness and participation. It should be accessible and at the micro and macro levels. It begins with the

individual to the other/community and so entails trust building, transparency and transformation.

It involves education, because it is about changes in worldviews/perspectives. Good leadership/governance is synonymous to good followership/citizenry. Motivation towards transparent and acceptable dialogue is drawn from all forms of leadership (political, communal family, religious, secular, nongovernmental, traditional etc) within a context. A national unity/interest oriented leadership strives to formulate and execute policies that interpret the recommendations of such conferences. The recommendations and implementations must be for the Common Good.

Truth commissions and accords are not end products of dialogue. Holistic mechanics for peace building should be integrated for a just peace and sustainable human, structural development, healing and wellbeing. Probably, National conferences/dialogues are invariably limited in what they can do psychologically because they are often shaped by political compromise, and also impose limits on victim interaction with the process because of time and resources (Hamber, 2010).

There are varying perceptions regarding citizenship between states and at national level. The autonomy, which states/governors enjoy sometimes opportunities for clustered ambiguity regarding citizenship as birthright or indigene-ship being distinguished from citizenship National conferences/dialogues should be for long and short-term nation/state building and peace building in Nigeria, the agitation for restructuring of Nigeria's federalism should also be considered for a peaceful co-existence (Clerk, 123).

Mass literacy is sine qua non for development anywhere for all countries that are developed in the world have a high level of literacy. To achieve mass literacy in Nigeria, it is suggested that all levels of the educational system be made tuition free, with primary education made compulsory, while adult literacy should be taken to our citizens in the rural areas.

Employment generation is one social need our leaders cannot afford to ignore in all future development planning. And therefore, effort should be made towards the generation of employment for youths.

Conclusion

The relevance of dialogue cannot be overemphasized as it is necessary for amelioration of the deplorable state of economic, political resources of the country, therefore, the paper emphasize that dialogue is a reasonable means in attaining development and long envisage peace in the country and not power contest or ethnic militia.

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