

POLITICAL ELITES AND NATION BUILDING IN AFRICA

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Abstract

The project of Nation building in virtually all the African states is faced with lot of challenges. One of the challenges is the presence of ethnic biased and unpatriotic political elites who in most cases emerge as leaders. The political elites instead of playing national politics unfortunately diverted to ethnic politics. It is obvious that many African states were created through the merging of different ethnic groups who never consented to become one by the colonial masters. The ethnic groups were forced to become one entity and to coexist. After independence of the African states, a lot of rivalries have been springing forth. In order to address these conflict situations among all the ethnic groups in all the African states, the course of nation building was championed. This was to put these ethnic groups together to become a nation, coexist, think alike and become nationalistic and patriotic in nature. However, the political elites in most of the African states have decided to follow their ethnic lines and favour their ethnic groups to the detriment of other ethnic groups. This has led to many ethnic clashes and affects nation building. This can be seen in countries like Nigeria, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Cote d'voire, among others. It is based on the above that this study examined the impact of the political elites to the challenges of nation building in Africa. This work adopted qualitative descriptive method. The theoretical framework of analysis is classical elite theory. The work found out that the political elites of some African states failed to respect human rights, create a society free from marginalization, oppression and violence, and are full of ethnic bias. Based on the findings, the work recommended that the political elites should remove the spirit of marginalization and carry every one along in governance and decision making and among others.

Key Words: Nation, Nation Building, Political Elites, Patriotism, Ethnicism.

Introduction

The post independent countries of Africa such as Kenya, Nigeria, Tanzania, South Africa, Namibia, Uganda, Somalia, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Mali, Central African Republic, Democratic Republic of Congo, Ghana, Ethiopia, among others are characterized by leaders who are trying to create unity in a culturally diverse society. The process of colonization in Africa capitalized on the existing diversity to entrench colonial rule through the creation of artificial arbitrary boundaries. Colonial rule encouraged separate and uneven development and creation of hierarchies among different ethnic groups to sow

divisions (Mukwedeya, 2016). These divisions done by colonial rules caused post-independence conflicts in some African states. After decolonization, African countries embarked on massive nation building programmes to form a collective national identity within a given territory (Bandyopadhyay & Green, 2013). Governance is a creative art and no leader or government can boast of having a magic wand to nation building in an ethnically diverse society. The expectations of different ethnic groups and individuals have increased over time and the new breed of Africa leadership cannot afford to relent on their commitment to improve the well-being

of their people (Irobi, 2013).

In the early 1960 when the colonialists granted independence to most African states, they equally transferred the mantle of leadership to the elites. These political elites assumed offices with promises of building a United Nations in all African States. According Irobi (2013), these elites were able to lead a coalition of civil societies, like the trade unions, welfare associations, women organization, youth movements and even student associations and ethnic town unions to struggle for independence from the colonizers. Irobi stressed further that this alliance which could have been used to build wide national consciousness and unity resulted to ethno-centric politics and disunity.

An assessment of the post independence African states showed existence of civil wars, secessionists, coups and countercoups. All these posed threat to the project of nation building in Africa. Nation building implies that an elite political identity be expanded beyond the immediate parochial and primordial setting so that national identity should take precedence over the others. Historical development of the African states greatly influenced the project of nation building. This is due to the fact that most African states were made up of different ethnic groups who never consented to become one entity. In the case of Nigeria, the amalgamation saga of the north and south, nature and character of post-independence politics,

1966 coup, the Nigeria / Biafra Civil war, among others made the political elites to always think along ethnic lines. The merging of these ethnic groups are also seen in Burundi, Rwanda, DR Congo, Somalia, Kenya, Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, among others. In these countries ethnic conflicts have devastated them. The problem hinges on their political elites who instead of playing national politics diverted to ethnic politics. For instance, Kenya is a country where nation building is not effective. Kenya has over 70 ethnic groups but the five largest Kikuyu, Luo, Luthya, Kamba, and Kalenyin account for 70% of the population. Ethnic problem have always been a significant force in their politics. In 1960, there was a split between the Kenya African National Union (KANU) and the Kenya African Democratic Union (KADU), which were along ethnic lines. The supports of these two groups by different ethnic groups led to producing ethnic minded leaders in Kenya (Forster, Hitchcock & Lyimo, 2000). The first two presidents, Jomo Kenyatta and Daniel Arap Moi were perceived as tribalists who thrived on the politics of ethnic division (Miguel, 2004). The case of Kenya is same as it applies to some other African countries. According to Munroe (1993) cited in Dada (2007), whenever a nation lacks the quality, legitimacy and just Leaders, national deterioration occurs. Quality leadership is the key to prosperous and peaceful life of a nation.

This paper therefore aimed at

examining the impact of the political elites towards the challenges of nation building in Africa.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of analysis in this work is classical elite theory derived from the work of Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941). This theory according to Mosca as cited in Ogundiya (2012) emphasized the way in which tiny minorities out-organized and outwit large majorities. He stressed that political classes usually have certain material, intellectual or even moral superiority over those they govern. The theory x-rayed every society as been ruled by a small group of people who possess the attributes that made it possible for them to ascend to the top. The elites therefore consist of those successful persons who rise to the top in every occupation and stratum of society (Ogundiya, 2012). Mosca (1939) stated that in all societies, two classes of people exists- the class that rules and the class that is ruled. Mosca cited in Varma (1999) opined that those who get to the top are known as the elites. According to Ihonvbere cited in Ojukwu and Shopeju, (2010), elites not only control and dominate the commanding heights of the economy, exercise legal monopoly over the process of coercion, dominate the structures and institutions of politics and economy but also shape the ideological and philosophical direction of society.

In the application of the theory to the problem at hand, it is seen some that

the African political elites mostly base on identifying with their ethnic nationalities; they lack & do not promote national identity. They lure people from their ethnic extractions to believe and always support them to acquire the political power and that their welfare is guaranteed. Some of the political elites, when they could not succeed at the central government decide to secede with the people of their ethnic extraction in the name of marginalization but their main reason is to control the political power and in some cases do not favour the entire citizens.

Conceptual Clarification

Political Elites:

The Political elite are those who have influence over the fate of the society because of their superiority. The members of any political group have important influence in shaping the values and attitudes held by their segment of society (Nnoli, 1981). Falola (2005) described them as those who make decisions having major consequences, which are able to realize their will even if others resist and who have the most of what it takes to have-money, power and prestige.

It is also used to explain superior individual, member of a ruling class, power holders of a body politic and a class of people with highest indices in their branch of activity. It is restricted to those who are at top of the pyramid of political power and are however, not large in number. This group of people

exercises directly, or are in a position to influence very strongly the exercises of political power and shape policy outcomes as they engage in varying degree of cooperation, consultation, competition or conflict with each other (Audu, 2015). Political elites therefore are small group of people who control the leadership or political powers of a state and are very influential in decision making.

Nation Building

Nation according to Emerson cited in Alkali (2003) is a community of people who feel that they belong together in a double sense-that they share deeply significant elements of common heritage, such as common language, religion, history, culture, to some extent geographical boundary, and that they have common destiny for the future.

Oche (2008) argued that the traditional western political science literature portrays the process of nation building as involving the cultivation by a people over time of political attitudes, beliefs and values that make up a political culture. Oche stressed further that these newly independent states for which the construction of united, stable and prosperous states was an imperative, the concept of nation building involved the widening of the scope of identity of parochial and primordial units to include larger entities such as the states (Oche, 2008).

Nation building aims at the unification of the people within the state

so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run (Nairn & James, 2005). Nation building is a deliberate, domestic process where the country's population is integrated and assimilated into the emerging state apparatus wherein a common national identity is claimed (Rwengabo, 2016). Nation building in this paper means paying an unreserved loyalty to the centre and not to the ethnic groups. Nation building according to Oche (2008) takes two dimensions. These are vertical and horizontal dimensions:

Vertical dimension refers to the progressive acceptance by members of the polity of legitimacy of a central government and identification with the central government as symbol of the nation. This implies that you don't only have a state but that people should accept the authority of the state and see its government as the symbol of their political community. On the horizontal dimension of nation building, it involves the people accepting other community as co-equal members of other community. It involves the existence of shared expectations among all the community members of equal obligation towards the sustenance of the state as well as an equal share in the distribution of economic values otherwise (Oche, 2008).

Challenges of Nation Building in Africa

There are some challenges faced by the African states in trying to carry out nation building project. They include;

ethnicism, religious intolerance, hate speeches, lack of democracy and infrastructural development. These problems have been affecting the course of nation building in virtually all African State.

Ethnicism

Ethnic loyalty is one of the greatest problem of nation building in some the African states such as Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Somalia, among others. The political elites tend to favour their ethnic groups to the detriment of others. This has devastated some African states and has led to ethnic conflicts. This can be seen in Uganda in 1986 when a military mutiny occurred led by officers of the Acholi tribe protesting marginalization from a government favouring the Langa ethnic group, the hometown of the president. Nigeria was also an example, where ethnic conflict nearly disintegrated the country few years after independence in 1967, when the Igbo in the southeast attempted secession to protest domination and marginalization in the federation and program in the north (Irobi, 2013). The reason for the eruption of these conflicts was because the political elites were thinking along ethnic lines. Each tried to protect and promote its ethnic group and abandon others.

Religious Intolerance:

There is a problem of politicization of religion by the political elites. The political elites use religion to attract supporters for acquisition of

power. In the literature of Irobi (2003), in Sudan and Nigeria, for example, religious differences between the Christian and Muslim North sparked a gruesome conflict that overlapped into ethnic divide. The 1967 -1970 Nigeria/Biafra war had a religious undertone. Also, in the Sudan, the introduction of Sharia law in the Christian south cost the country much in the loss of human lives in ethnic conflict.

Hate Speeches:

Hate speech according to Ezeibe (2015) is any speech, gesture, conduct, writing or display which could incite people to violence or prejudicial action. Essentially, such speeches rob others of their dignity. In some African countries, Nigeria for instance, hate speeches from the political elites have become the order of the day. For instance during the 2015 election in Nigeria, hate speeches were used by some political actors against other opponents. For instance, Ayodele Fayose stated that the 2015 presidential candidate Muhammadu Buhari was likely to die in office if elected. Katsina State Governor, Shema reportedly urged his supporters to attack opponents and referred to his political opponents as cockroaches, urging his supporters to kill them as they kill cockroaches (Fasakin, Oyero, Oyesomi & Okorie, 2017).

Other challenges of nation-building could also be limited acceptability of the government in power by politicians from other ethnic groups as against wide acceptance. This brings

about disloyalty to the government in power.

There is low level of citizens' participation in government and policy making since the elites in power in most cases put people from their own ethnic groups in majority of the political offices. Hence, other citizens find it difficult to involve fully in the government. This is also seen in the manner in which valued public goods and services are allocated or distributed by the government.

African Political Elites and the Challenges of Nation Building

Nation building is a difficult task with many challenges. The major issue is that these problems affect some ethnic group and interest particular ones. The post independent political elites in Africa lack pan African identity. They so much believe in identifying with their different ethnic nationalities and pay more loyalty to their ethnic group. In line with the above, Audu (2015:5) stated that;

The nature, character, composition and orientation of the elites are very critical to determining a country's nation building. The formation of a nation or nation building may threaten the power base, material resources and selfish interests of the political elites; hence, they may stand as albatross to the

realization of nation building.

This is why most African political elites in most cases only talk about nation building but find it difficult to execute the policies of nation building. The elites are only interested in protecting their selfish interest of accumulation of wealth and favouring their ethnic groups. This is why it is difficult for rotational power to be put in place and practice. It is also the reason why these elites would not want to create or build a nation or territory with people who share or feel about themselves despite their difference. The absence of nation building in most African countries results to conflicts. In the case of Nigeria, Ojukwu and Shopeju (2010) stated that the nature and character of the Nigerian political elites of yesterday and today are materialistic, parochial, selfish, sentimental, unpatriotic and non-nationalistic to champion the course of a pan Nigerian state.

This selfish and unpatriotic nature of Nigerian political elites lead to so many crises in the country such as census crises of 1962/63; military interventions; Nigeria versus Biafra conflict, annulment of June, 1993 presidential election; Sharia law crisis of 2000; among others. In addition, Ogundiya, (2012) stated that in reality, at least in terms of actions and behaviour, the Nigeria state does not exist in the mental image of average Nigeria political elite. To show this, the statements of some

prominent Nigerian elites are examined. For instance, according to Awolowo (1947); Nigeria is not a nation, it is a mere geographical expression and among others.

The political leaders (elites) according to Elsenhans (1994) cited in Irobi (2013) failed to transform the sluggish African economy because of intrinsic leaning on waste. Elsenhans stressed that this however explains why leaders like Jean-Bedel Bokassa of the central African Republic spent 20 million dollars to crown himself emperor in 1972. In Cote d'ivoire, President Houphout Boigny spent 360 million US dollars to build a Basilica for catholic mission in his home town of Yamassoukou (Ayitteh, 1992). Others, according to Amoo (1997) include General Sani Abacha of Nigeria who appropriated huge sums of money, which he distributed to members of his ethnic groups and friends so that he will be elected to civil rule in the country if contest; Idi Amin Dada of Uganda, General Samuel Doe of Liberia and Captain Jerry Rawlings of Ghana who were influenced by militias drawn from their ethnic regions and the victims were ethnically selected.

There is no gainsaying that some of the African political elites have failed to build a harmonious society free from oppression and violence (Amoo, 1997). Ake cited in Amoo (1997) stated that; what concerns the leaders most is a desperate struggle to win control of state power since this control means for all

practical purposes being all powerful, winner gets all and owning everything. Politics becomes warfare, a matter of life and death.

Other African leaders like Mobutu Sese Seko and Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe understood nation building to be an opportunity to marginalize ethnic groups, build up patronage net-works and create their own token of reality whereby human rights of citizens were violated. Such misunderstanding of nation building and elite behaviour cannot support peaceful coexistence of groups in a country. Instead, it increases groups' anger and discontent which also lead to lethality in various government institutions manifested in different forms in relationship to others (Paige, 2002).

The major issue in the governance of Africa is lack of visionary priorities from the political elites to address the issue of ethnicity and structural imbalances which were inherited from the colonial masters. Also, these African political elites failed to establish institutions to monitor land distribution. These have aggravated into ethnic clashes. In the literature of Ayitteh (1992), it is found out that in many African countries like Nambia and Zimbabwe, killing over land, both for farming and residential have become incessant. Land for Africans is very dear and issue about land distribution often is emotional in some places and could spur inter-village skirmishes. Nigeria is not exempted from this inter-ethnic clashes about land. The most current is the Fulani

herdsmen attacks on farmlands and human beings which have led to destruction of farm products and killing of human beings and animals. Their attacks in Benue State of Nigeria and other parts of the country have devastated those areas.

The political elites in some African states have failed to respect the rights of people from different ethnic groups, as in Nigeria where we had non-compliance to court orders as in the case of Sheikh Zakzaky, leader of Shia Islamic Movement of Nigeria (IMN) and his wife; and Nnamdi Kanu, the leader of Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) who the court ordered for their immediate and unconditional release and it was not carried out.

They do not allow the participation of their citizens from all the ethnic groups in decision making. In Nigeria, more than 70% of the Federal Government ministerial posts are occupied by the persons from northern part of the country in the present regime of President Muhammadu Buhari.

They failed to reform educational system to create awareness for peaceful coexistence and create a society free from marginalization, oppression and violence. Kochore (2014), notes that the northern region of Kenya has historically been marginalized. In Nigeria, the South Eastern part mainly comprising of Igbo ethnic nationality also cries been marginalized. There is no construction of good wealth distribution strategy, creation of non ethnic biased legislature

and legal system, creation of institutional mechanisms of power sharing and champion the security course of other ethnic groups other than theirs. For instance, South Africa's economy is still white dominated. 70% of the senior managers in the private sector are white (Business Tech, 2016). Despite all the efforts towards nation building by Nelson Mandela, contemporary South Africa is still divided.

The above becomes hindrances to the achievement of a successful, nation building project in African states by the political elites. The issue is because the elites champions and creates these challenges due to selfishness, unpatriotic and ethnic favouritism. It is only when political leaders who can champion pan Africanism starts springing forth that nation building project may be achieved.

Conclusion

The project of nation building is worthwhile. Achieving it will yield peaceful coexistence and unity in diversity among states in Africa if the political elites will try to become patriotic and nationalistic.

Recommendations

The nature and character of African political elites need re-orientation. The political elites should understand that the act of the colonial masters on merging different ethnic groups without their consent has been made and the only solution is for these ethnic groups to learn to coexist, share

things in common, have love for each other, remove mediocrity and favouritism and love for power and enthrone meritocracy and national consciousness.

The elites should remove the spirit of marginalization and carry everyone along in governance and decision making and enthrone the principle of equality of purpose and sharing of economic values.

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