Review

Cultures and Ethnic Identities: The Dilemma in Conceptualising Leadership and Governance in Nigeria

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Abstract

This paper examines the ethno-cultural identity consciousness as the dilemma in conceptualizing and actualizing capacity-building in the leadership and good governance in Nigeria. The failure of capacity building in the leadership and good governance in Nigeria has its roots in the amalgamation of 250 ethnic-cultures in 1914, without regard to pre-existing ethno-political structures and leaderships, ethno-religious beliefs and values, languages, and even historic, geographic and demographic variables have created methodological and conceptual crisis in leadership and governance capacity building in Nigeria. This hindsight calls for a paradigm shift among practitioners and researchers in nation-building with reference to a multi ethno-cultural groupings like Nigeria, drawing data from the emerging crises of ethnic identity consciousness, ethnic militancy, and agitation for resource control, and ethno-tribal actualization movements for self-governance in the east, west, north, and south-south geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The paper contends that the logic of these contemporary social movements pose threats to leadership and good governance, specifically, with serious constraint on the unification and transformation agenda of Jonathan administration and future Nigeria. Thus, search for solutions is being increasingly urgent and requires multidimensional approaches to deal with the dilemma.

Keywords: Culture, Ethnic Identity, Leadership, Governance, Capacity building, Development, Dilemma, Nigeria.

INTRODUCTION

The dilemma in conceptualizing a national culture and loyalty to the state is a mind-set problem that can be best understood from the viewpoint of microsociological social identity theorists like Thomson, 2000, Thoits 1991, and Boskock 1997. They argue that cultural diversities in a plural society like Nigeria will lead to differences of interest in political and economic power sharing and subsequently create ethnic identity consciousness amongst the ethnic nationalities. According to Ajani (2014) all individuals have ethnic allegiances irrespective of whether they are from the minority of a state’s population or the majority, with the result that ethnicity as a sentiment expressed by both majority and minority populations.

By 1966, the political crisis and its threat to national unity and loyalty to the state created ethnic-identity consciousness among the different ethnic nationalities. This was further led to the competitions to be the most powerful ethnic group, specifically among the emerging 3 major ethnic groups: Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa. However, this interplay of ethnicity and political supremacy, eventually led to the first military coup in 1966, and subsequent military leadership and governance in Nigeria. This of course, had a negative effect on an emerging democratic-national culture.

It is important to note that the military government under General Yakubu Gowon desire for the creation of 12 states out of 4 regions further triggered ethnic identity consciousness which has dislocated the national culture and promote ethnic cultures. Thus, the country has had to grapple with intense ethnic-state creation agitations and conflicts emanating from intense competitions for resources, political and economic power sharing leading to wanton destruction of lives and property (Ajani, 2014).

Besides, ethno-culture rivalry on political and economic power sharing is the adaptation of English
language as our national language (official language) with its cultural-values as national language has a far reaching implication on the unification of Nigeria. For instance, the ethnic rivalry in Nigeria arises from the hostility that derives from competitions between different peoples (nationalities) wealth and power struggle over political, economic resources, Salawu and Hassan 2011 as noted in (Umar and Lamidi 2013:124). Put differently, Umar and Lamidi opined that:

*The origin of problem of ethnicity has been traced to the colonial period when the system of divide and rule was adopted in order to weaken the nationalistic aspiration and struggle of the Africans. During the period, the colonial masters found it more expedient to appeal to ethnic sentiments in order to divide the African elite for exploitative retention of power (2013:124).*

Therefore, it becomes imperative to examine the influence of colonial rule on Nigeria dilemma of conceptualization of nationalism after independence in 1960 to the present. This paper therefore tries to respond to the need to investigate and suggest the way forward for Nigeria-nationalism despite the dilemma of ethno-cultural variables from the 250 cultures and languages which often reflect and manifest in all national spheres or public goods in Nigeria.

**Statement of the Problem**

The problem of culture and ethnic identifies movements in Nigeria is as old as colonial emergence in 1800 when the people were identified along tribes and cultural languages. This awareness of differences in areas and trade objects led to social identification and eventual rebellion against the foreign cultures imposed on the people. For instance, the rebellion of King William Koko of Nembe in 1844 and 1885; Nana of Itsekiri 1896; ad Oba Overamimi Nogbaisi of Benin 1897 and the indirect rule introduced in the Northern Province while direct rule in the Southern provinces fuelled culture and ethnic suspicions and encouraged ethnocentrism (Adedokun, 2013). Although, there has been much research conducted on the national question on culture, ethnic rivalry, ethnic identity and nationalism, but the roles of culture in nation building in a multicultural plural society like Nigeria is still relatively new and unexplored area of study. For instance, ethnocentrism has dominated our national life in politics, education and professionalism because no ethnic group believes that the other ethnic group is better than his, even when it is obvious that the person so appointed into a position of authority is more and better qualified yet the opposing ethnic group will not accept it on merit. The reason is that the role of identities are self-conceptions, self-referent cognitions or self-definitions that people apply to themselves as a consequence of the structural role positions they occupy, and through a process of labeling or self-definition as a member of a particular social category (Burke 1980; Thoits 1991).

However, in order to provide better understanding of Nigeria dilemma of conceptualization of unity and good governance through the principle of cultural diversity. This study attempts to examine the relevant roles of culture homogeneity plays in a plural society. Although, the process of cultural conceptualization of Nigerian culture within multicultural diversity has been problematic especially the general ethnic differences associated with ethnic identity related behaviour of the political elites.

From 1966, 1st military coup to 2011 general elections ethno-centricism has grown significantly in Nigeria: be it counter-coups, appointments, admissions and elections into national, states, and even outside institutions, all positions are considered on ethnic lines or belonging.

**Theoretical Framework**

The logic of ethno-cultural diversity in a nation-state suggests that different traditional, social and cultural institutions and even religious belief systems pose serious dilemma in conceptualization of unity among people from diverse cultures, beliefs and backgrounds than ever before (Mazur, 2010). Therefore they must be jettisoned or better harmonize in order to move a nation forward (Ewurun, 2000). On the contrary, Ogunbameru’s (2013), and Osaghie, (2003) submit that ethno-cultural diversity is not all about negative, disruptive and conflictual phenomenon but can be helpful in the mobilization of resources and community based developments. In other words, what the above statement implies is that the different cultural values in diversity in Nigeria can be harmonized and put to advantage for good governance and development.

But in a situation where ethnic identity consciousness influences selfish competition for economic resources and political power sharing among the diverse ethnic-nationalities then social conflict will emerge to undermine the process of harmonizing cultural values in diversity. According to Umar and Lamidi (2013) it will further aggravates acrimonious relationships between the ethnic groups and threatens the state stability.

Generally speaking, there appears to be a consensus among scholars of ethnic and national studies that cultural diversity is a “double-edged sword” that can develop or underdevelop, and unite or dislocate a nation, and as such attempt should be made to integrate cultural variables into national framework for unification and development.

Abdullahi (1985), Iyanda (1985) and Ocho (1984) observed that cultural variables such as social values,
morals, norms, knowledge, arts, customs and language are the fundamental principles of understanding of social identity and unity in a plural society. Therefore ethnic identity consciousness or geo-political sentiment project as it is in Nigeria today, should be jettisoned while maximization of cultural diversity and its benefits be embraced, Mazur, (2013), since managing diversity has become an important issues in a multi-cultural society.

Culture and Ethnicity Criteria in Nigeria

Culture as the fabric of the society for qualitative leadership and good governance could be defined in E. B. Tylor’s (1871) short phrase as the complex whole of a group’s cognitive way of life consisting of language, morals and values within a geographical area, then, if going by this definition of culture, one may ask, what is Nigerian culture, language, morals and values? Moreover, it follows that so long as the conception of a country’s national interest results in part from attitudinal dynamics of interactive cultural ideas, norms, morals and values would influenced capacity building in leadership and governance (Owoeye 1995:109). Thus, culture implies a groups sense of a shared values, norms, morals and language as in the case of developed nations currently observable in the economics of highly developed countries demonstrate the increased significance of social capital is a significant factor of economic development which in large part determines the effective functioning of the economy.

Ethnicity implies a group’s identity with common ancestry and cultural inheritance shared as commonwealth or group heritage. First, such heritage is the language of the people and environmental resources, land and water which derive meaning and values from the language, tradition and customs. Second types of inheritance, are the distinctive forms of family, kinship, social norms, socialization patterns, social ethics and social control given the historic antecedent of environmental determinants of the people.

To evaluate the major ethnic cultures in Nigeria. It is necessary to propose a typology of Nigerian cultures and ethnicities to reflect the range and variations of the major ethnicities as against the colonial invented 3 major ethnic groups: “Igbo, Yoruba and Hausa” though each had multi ethnic groupings which were not known or discovered then by the British colonial anthropologists.

Underneath the ethnic diversities and language location in Nigeria, and different culture viewpoints the study traced the relations and separations that shape social space; differential categories and cultural perceptions in Nigeria polity.

It is clear, therefore, that the notion or believe that there are 3 major ethnic groups in Nigeria is a falsehood. Table 1, shows the deferential categories and cultural perceptions and outcomes as significant factors for a group or culture. Specifically, the cultural characteristics of an ethnic group or nation, that distinguishes it from another. These cultural characteristics are unique in practices.

Drawing on the ideas of Smith 1965, Clark argued that the basis of ethnicity and culture resided in the institutions that the ethnic group needed to perform socially, that pluralism occurs where there is formal diversity in the basic system of compulsory institutions. Kinship, education, religion, property and economy, and recreation (1965:85). In other words, Table 1, below explores the cultural relativism and its dominant features that distinguished each ethnicity with different outcomes. For Spencer, the variety of environments in which individuals live channels them to different cultural practices, hence, culture is a partner in the dance of ethnic-identity adaptation (Beckman, 2010) as a result when a group changes environments, the whole structure of its culture adapts and when groups encounter one another they react and adjust. He aptly put it. Individuals who move into new contexts, settings and circles may “pass”, re-fashion themselves, form and perform different identities. The same shifts occur in encounters of language, styles, indeed, all cultural products (Breckman, 2010).

All the above definitions shows that beyond ethnicity culture is a significant factor for political, economic, religious, moral, education and scientific growth in the society. However, it is pertinent to emphasize that the importance of culture may be developed outside ethnicity as Osaghie 1995, and Despress 1975, argued that ethnicity as a social construct s largely a subjective process of status identification in structures of competition. Hence ethnic identities to categories themselves and other for the purpose of interaction (Umar and Lamidi 2013:126).

For instance, the well-organised public good and social space today in American and European societies is a by-product of culture revolution which occurred during the period of ethnic identity consciousness by the multicultural and multiethnic groups as a result of the great age of anarchists between 1880 and 1914. It was an age which saw the invention of the motor car, moving pictures, and airplane and a time when Edward VII invented the weekend (Kedward 1971:5). In addition, the declaration of independence in 1776 by 52 congressmen in America marked the beginning of one indivisible America culture and identity rather than multi-ethnic. That is to say that culture, rather than ethnicism, is a mechanism for socio-economic, political engineering in the context of development. It stimulates cooperation, good governance and moral value understanding in society. In this way, man develops a psycho-cultural values which according to Tylus taxonomy of cultural values and customs appears in six categories

- Impacts on the housing and location attractiveness
- Determines the development of tourism
- Creates the labour market
### Table 1. Typology of Major Ethnic Groups and Cultural Diversity in Nigeria

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/n</th>
<th>Ethnicity/Language</th>
<th>Differential Categories</th>
<th>Cultural Perceptions</th>
<th>Outcome</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Igbo</td>
<td>Traditions</td>
<td>Economic life,</td>
<td>Ethnic identity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Ebira</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Yoruba</td>
<td>Languages/Main cultures</td>
<td>Economic: land and water resources; wealth</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Hausa</td>
<td>Dialects/Sub-cultures</td>
<td>Security: protection of life and property</td>
<td>Worldview,</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Fulani</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Kanuri</td>
<td>Customs</td>
<td>Development,</td>
<td>Communality,</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Ibibio</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Efik</td>
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<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>Ogoni</td>
<td>Trado-Political Systems</td>
<td>Gender: roles</td>
<td>Individualism,</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Ijaw</td>
<td></td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Idoma</td>
<td>Trado-Religious beliefs Trado-</td>
<td></td>
<td>Self actualization,</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Igala</td>
<td></td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Tiv</td>
<td>Architectural pattern</td>
<td>Work: labour</td>
<td>Recognition,</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Edo</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Urhobo</td>
<td>Marriage rituals</td>
<td>Ageism</td>
<td>Socialization,</td>
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<td>16.</td>
<td>Itsekiri</td>
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<td>17.</td>
<td>Nupe</td>
<td>Burial rituals</td>
<td>Achievement: title holder</td>
<td>Independence,</td>
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<td>18.</td>
<td>Koma</td>
<td>Naming rituals</td>
<td>Responsibility: Family life</td>
<td>Social Status,</td>
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<td>19.</td>
<td>Isosko</td>
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<td>20.</td>
<td>Atakar</td>
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<td>21.</td>
<td>Manga</td>
<td>Ethno music and dance</td>
<td>Ancestral: belief</td>
<td>Brotherhood,</td>
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<td>22.</td>
<td>Jetko</td>
<td>Lineage: origin</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>23.</td>
<td>Badawai</td>
<td>Widowhood rituals</td>
<td>Beliefs: gods, diets, oracles, values, morals,</td>
<td>Kinship: relationship Clans: descendants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24.</td>
<td>Koyam</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>25.</td>
<td>Mober</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Mode of worship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Fieldwork; Madubuike, S. C. 2014

- Is a significant contributor to GDP
- Conducive to the allocation of human resources in developing sectors
- Create a positive lineage

Thus, the claim here is that the diverse cultural knowledge if properly implemented or executed would break the shackles of underdevelopment in all its ramifications. Interestingly, the issue of to extent the cultural diversity can help to stimulate development and cooperation in a plural society is visible in the developed economies of North America and European nations. For instance, Tylus 2014, observed that culture as a developmental element helps the polish economy to adapt, adjust and integrate when confronted with challenges of development. Thus, He outlined II significant factors for development namely:

- Create intellectual potential of regions, holding human capital
- Through polarization of cultural diversity, create a society guided by ethical norms
- Prevents social pathologies
- Is a link of social integration
- Is part of national identity
- Preserves local bonds

- Comprises a basis of initiating cooperation and human communication
- Replies the policy premises of gender equality
- Helps restore the mentality and physically handicapped to social and professional life
- Reduce disproportions of personal development and citizens
- Comprises a form and dimension of social advancement.

With the suggestions above, the Nigerian economy political; social, education, health care delivery and social morality would be able to transform. For instance, if Nigerian can put outside their ethnicism and unite as one nation-state with one unique cultural identity which gives meaning to every other aspects of her existence, then remarkably, social, economic, political, health, education, and even religious tolerance and developments would flourish in the country. Be that as it may, the coexistence of cultural diversities would apparently mediates the relationship between social structures, institutions and individual and group behaviour. Hence, relative emphasis would be placed on roles of culture and intergroup relations. (Hogg et al., 1995).
Evaluation

That Nigeria as a multiethnic society has not been able to tap into its multicultural diverse potentials for social and political transformation and economic development, rather, ethnicism and its pervasiveness has widened the insecurity of landscape and underdevelopment. Similarly Aluko 2003; Babangida 2002; Salawu and Hassan 2011, identified the causes of ethnicism in Nigeria as poverty of leadership in terms of forging national interaction among the multiple ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. As a result mass poverty and unemployment creates alienation and insecurity which in turn encourage Nigerians to experience and prefer accommodation within the social insurance system of ethnic nationalities.

In recognition of the above features of the factors responsible for ethnicism and social cultural arrangement in Nigeria, Otitie notes that Nigeria’s social boundaries one often described as artificial, although Nigeria formally became one entity in 1914 after the amalgamation of the then northern and southern protectorates along with Lagos, many members of different social groups found their kinsmen in and friendly neighbours just outside Nigeria’s political boundaries (Otitie 1990). This is one of a combination of factors brought about by the inextricable encapsulation of groups in one Modern new state. Such factors include increased frequency of social and cultural interactions, and common political participation and socialization within Nigeria and in the diaspora especially, appreciation and development of cultural values and the indigenous cultural knowledge irrespective of which ethno-culture is involved.

CONCLUSION

The available evidence and what has been discussed in this paper shows that ethnic identity consciousness and its manifest culture segregation has prevented Nigeria from the benefits of cultural diversities in terms of transformation of indigenous cultural knowledge to modern sciences and technologies and even, in leadership and good governance. Although, ethno-cultural diversities will remain or persist in spite of the transformation agenda of Jonathan administration, as long as ethnic identity consciousness is anchored on political, social, economic and federal character sharing formula, yet there is hope of evolving a national culture for Nigeria. Thus, the emerging national culture in Nigeria is little more than a rag tag of sorts. Yet it is still obvious when you see or meet a Nigerian in the midst of other Africans and, of course, non-Africans (Otitie 1995). There is the need to transfer ethnic-loyalty to national loyalty by so doing good leadership (The peoples Leader) will emerge without recourse to ethnic belonging and superiority.

REFERENCES


