Biafra Agitation and Politics of Imbalance in Nigeria

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Abstract

The problem of underdevelopment, high level of poverty, inequality in resource sharing, and wealth control and in the socio-political composition of the Nigerian state, creates tension, instability, insecurity and countless agitation for restructuring, fairness, justice and equity, and very recently, Biafra agitation. This has dominated the discourse in the Nigerian polity today, prompted for increased participation, involvement and inclusion of every ethnic Nationalities in the Nigerian society for equal sharing, participation and allocation of the Nation's National wealth and resources. Hence, the subsequent leadership failure by the various levels of government in addressing and tackling these challenges has prompted this study. Hence, the papers examine Biafra agitation in the light of leadership failure within context of the Nigerian polity. From the highlighted narrative above, and also conceptualizing Biafra Agitation and leadership failure in Nigeria generally. The methodology adopted in the paper was qualitative and content analysis, which was also used to examine various texts from secondary sources such as textbooks, internet materials, newspapers and magazines, journals, articles, etc. Group theory was also adopted as the theoretical framework to examine key variable in the study. The paper concludes that a re-structuring of the political structure of the Nigerian state, for fairness, justice and equity may address some of the challenges confronting the nation today. Again this will further reduce the tensions and agitations coming from the different ethnic nationalities as a result of a feeling of marginalization and economic and political exclusion from the scheme of things in Nigerian state. The paper recommends good governance and national development across the length and breadth of Nigerian state, remains a veritable tool for social, economic, and political inclusion, and will engender national unity and political, social, and economic inclusion and development in the nation.

Keywords: Biafra agitation; Leadership failure; Tribal programs

Introduction

Politics of imbalance and to very a large extent poor Leadership in Nigeria at various levels of governance and administration has failed to address nagging the socio-political, and economic inequality in the nation's polity. The politics of imbalance in the nation's political, social, economic, political and co-operate governance in the management, sharing, and allocation of the nation's common wealth, constitute to a very large rampant state of insecurity, rancor, fear, suspicion and feelings of agitation, exclusion and isolation within and among the various ethnic nationalities in Nigerian state.

Hence, primarily the problems of underdevelopment, poverty, social and political imbalance further fuel the desire for agitation and division within the Nigerian federation. Again, the politics of uneven wealth sharing formula further stimulates feelings of secession from the Nigerian state, via agitation for Biafra from the South Eastern Nigeria, calls for re-structuring also from the South Western Nigeria stemmed from the marginalization and exploitation of the resources from the South-South area of Nigeria.

Hence, feelings of marginalization and deprivation nursed by people of the South East region occasioned by the high spate of poverty in the region has fuelled the called secession for another country, other than Nigeria.

Biafra agitation stemmed from leadership failure on the part of government, amounting to years of social neglect, economic and political isolation of the people in Nigeria and particularly people from the South East of the Nation in general. Again, the monumental underdevelopment, lingering unemployment for the youth skewed political structure and composition and snarled speed economic growth of the Nigerian state resulting to increased poverty, hunger, insecurity and instability via Boko Haram [1].

The problem is further compounded with the failure of successive government over the over years to address the high rate of unemployment, corruption, mismanagement of public funds at the expense of the national interest.

This has led to brain drain, money laundering by government officials, immigration to Europe in search of greener pastures and terrorism and very recently violence clashes between farmers and Fulani herdsmen in the North Central of the Nation. A Nation is an abstraction in itself without any form or status; it is the people, their customs, culture, language and political difference/affiliation, personality and their idiosyncrasies that gives forms and meaning to what constitute a Nation (Soremekun, 2012).

Again, a Nation's characteristic is noted in its geographical location, topography, population, natural resources, climatic conditions, social, political, economic, cultural beliefs and ideology. Nigeria is describe and regarded as a nation because of these characteristics highlighted above. Fundamentally, again, a Nation exists because of its people, values, cultures, and socio-political and economic structure [2].

While, it is true that Nigeria as a Nation fit into these description as well as other Nation in the world, its socio-political composition has created tension, insecurity and a feeling and consciousness of social, economic and political exclusion and isolation of some of its constituent part in the minds and hearts of peoples in these areas. Many scholars have contended that the skewed composition of Nigerian political structure constitutes avenues of conflict, political instability

and unending agitations for balance, fairness, sense of belonging and social inclusion, and most recently restructuring in the polity.

The Nigerian state historically, was the conception and the design of the British colonial master in 1914, when the Northern and the Southern protectorate were brought together as one political unit by Lord Lugard. Its primary objective and purpose was to service the British commercial, economic interest and for the ease of administration of colonial Nigeria in 1914 as postulated by James Ojiako.

Hence, this exercise did not consider the overall interest, customs, cultures, language, and religion of the different ethnic nationalities in the polity [3]. With the Hausa/Fulani in the North having heavy impact of Islamic culture and education for over six centuries and without common ties and relationship with the Yoruba and Igbo in the South with the influence of Christianity and European culture and values.

Again, the skewed administrative, socio-economic and political arrangement of the Nigerian state, occasioned by the merging of different ethnic nationalities in 1914 by the British colonial master. Hence, this gave undue advantage to particular ethnic nationalities in the polity in term of size, population, land mass and geographical spread, and revenue sharing at the expense other ethnic nationalities, particularly the minorities. Hence, this further generated insecurity, suspicion, and fear.

Again, this is further articulated by James Ojiako in his book titled: Nigeria: Yesterday, Today, "*that the British colonial master upon conquering the different ethnic nationalities and its peoples created the problem of how to merge, manage, and administer discordant elements and vast land mass into a coherent political unit*".

These gave rise for tension and agitation right from colonial period, whereby minorities in the polity demanded for increased revenue and political inclusion and participation in the scheme of things in Nigeria, through a credible, transparent and sustainable review of the revenue sharing formula and increased political expression and identity in the Nigerian polity [4].

Review of Literature

Group theory is adopted as the theoretical framework in this paper and it is used to examine the various scholarly writings on the subject matter. Again, Group Theory further explicates the dynamics of human relations in the society. It's maintained that given the gregarious nature of man, his actions are better understood in the context of the group relations in which people are involved as supported by Olomojobi [1], "*that what underscores every society is the organic interest that binds people together in groups and conditions*".

More so, (Smith, 1979:1), contends that individuals within group consider themselves as having a 'we' awareness and a sense of belonging. Again, Olomojobi [1] agrees with the assertion "*Society is a pluralist social configuration oriented towards the achievement of diverse interest and concerns*".

More so, according to (Macridis, 1964:139), "*the organic interests amongst group membership that act as the binding element of group relationship and thus provides the power of a group as deterministic social construct, either for good or evil*". This further explained the agitation for a sense of belonging and inclusion by the Igbo people of extraction situated in the South East of Nigeria in the involvement in scheme of things in the Nigerian federation, hence, feelings of exclusion and isolation by the dominant ethnic groupings in the Nigerian state.

Biafra agitation is occasioned by loss of confidence in the Nation's politics and economic exclusion from the common wealth of the Nigeria. These same feelings of exclusion is also noted in South West of the Nation via calls and clamor for restructuring stemmed from the perceived feeling and sense of marginalization and exclusion from the political, social and economic wealth of the Nation. It is the negation of the overall and collective interest of the Igbo people as contended by Macridis, (1964) that has fuelled the Biafra agitation for the Nation of their own [5].

Again the inability of the Nigerian state as a whole in addressing problems of poverty, underdevelopment in virtually all part of the Nigerian state has created tension, insecurity and instability in the polity. As noted by various scholars, that the high level of poverty, economic degradation and lack of basic social amenities stemmed from the bad governance structure and leadership failure across many African societies, particularly the Nigerian society, remains sources of conflict and tension in most of African society.

The underdevelopment and economic growth of the Nigerian state in particular and indeed in Africa in general, primarily, as a result of corruption in most of the public institutions and establishment and mismanagement of the common wealth accruing to the Nation. This has deepened divisive tendencies in the Nation, amounting to social and economic isolation of the people at different strata in the Nigerian society, particularly, the common man.

Again, this resulting to tension, frustration and political agitation in most parts of the nation, particularly observed in the Biafra agitation, mostly by the Igbo extraction and several other agitation across the Nation. As Olomojobi [1] noted that group's sentiment of suffering in turn leads to a sense of frustration and isolation amongst the group and may be the causal link to hatred, feelings of neglect/abandonment and violent conflict. This assertion in seen in the Biafra course, a feeling of frustration and domination by other tribes in the Nigerian state is been expressed.

Many scholars like, Olomojobi [1] contends that corruption and leadership failure in Nigeria , particularly in the North East and South of the country are responsible of the advent of the Boko Haram terrorist group and militancy in the North East and South of the country respectively.

The mismanagement, misapplication and misappropriation of the vast oil wealth and resources as noted oil wind fall in 2009 to 2014 and the unabated abuse of public offices by public officials. Resulting in the complete isolation and abandonment of the people via the lack of provision of basic social amenities and developmental infrastructures across the Nigerian state prompted the rise various aggrieved groups such as IPOB, Niger Delta Force, Niger Delta Avengers, Middle Belt Front, etc. [6].

This is in the bid to find social expression, recognition, economic and political relevance for survival in the Nigerian society. Failure of the Nigerian state via corruption in its social responsibility and contract to the Nigerian people may have responsible for the outburst and break of these groups calling for secession in the South East, Boko-Haram terrorist attacks in the North East and restructuring in the West.

Religion also contributes the prevalence of corruption in the Nigerian state and society. Again, Group theory supports the argument that, the prevalence of radical Islam and indeed other forms of agitation be it political, social, or economic in the African continent generally and in Nigeria particularly stemmed primarily from the

dearth of socio-economic development in the continent in general and in Nigeria in particular.

Hence, the diverse agitations and advocacy for systematic change in the social, economic, and political structure of the Nigerian state is more or less seeking collective and mass participation, acceptance, identification and recognition in the scheme of thing in the Nigerian polity. Again, agitation is simply an expression of frustration of people, particularly in the South Eastern vis-a-vis Igbo tribe for inclusive rather than exclusive or dominating altitude from the rest of the tribes in Nigeria [7].

Nigerian Civil War was fought between the Government of Nigeria and secessionist state of Biafra of mostly Igbo and some minority extraction which took place between the years 1967 and 1970. The event that resulted to a full fledge war as outlined above, primarily was the political tension in the Nation as mostly as a consequent of the 1964 elections characterized by incidences of fraud, marred electoral process, rigging and political violence against party officials and the oppositions parties.

Thereafter, the year 1966 military coups, counter coups in July the year, and subsequent killings of the Igbo people in the northern part of the country. Which led to the mass exodus of the people from the North as directed by then region governor because of his inability to guarantee their safety and the eventual declaration of the Biafra Republic in 1967 and the subsequent rejection of the Biafran republic the Nigerian government culminating into a full blown war that same year [8].

According Ajayi [9], the conflict resulted from political, economic, ethnic, cultural and religious tensions which preceded British formal decolonization of Nigeria entity from 1960 to 1963. Again, the immediate causes of the war in 1966 stemmed from a military coup, and a counter coup respectively and later the subsequent massacred of the Igbo's people living in northern Nigeria, with tension and a state of insecurity in the Western region, between Akintola group and the Awolowo group for party supremacy and power struggle.

This activities later engulf the entire nation into a full fledge war that last three years. This particular action was necessitated by the perceived feelings of marginalization, deprivation and isolation by people in the south eastern Nigeria and domination altitude from the people in the Northern part of Nigeria.

Again, the political crisis in the nation in general and particularly in the western region stiffen the peace and tranquility of nation and engulf the entire nation also represented a factor that plunged the nation into a bloody civil war that took lives of over 500,000 to 2 million from both side of the divide.

Again, as noted by Ajayi [9] many civilians died from starvation as a result of economic blockade of the Nigerian government of strategic boarder and entry point between the Nigerian state and the secessionist state. The impact of this blockade policy created famine in 1968 on the Biafran divide, its effect was seen on the images of malnourished and starving Biafra children, suddenly saturated the mass media of Western countries.

This later created humanitarian crisis in the south eastern region and later prompted international community concern and action via funding of non-governmental organization like Red Cross and relief agencies for assistance in the war thorn areas.

Britain and the Soviet Union were the main supporters of the Nigerian government, while France, Israel and some other countries supported Biafra. However, France and Israel provided weapons to both combatants as submitted by Ajayi [9].

The consequent of the Nigeria-Biafran war was noted in the degree of destruction of properties and the loss of over 2 million lives from both side, it was a bloody experience that cost the nation dearly.

Again, the war had its root in the ethnicity and divisive manipulation and tendencies observed in the Nigerian political structure and arrangement by the British colonial master via the 1914 amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates.

The purpose of the exercise was as asserted by Ajayi [9] for better administration due to close proximity and availability of finance from the southern protectorate. However, there was so much difference in the culture and religion of the people. The amalgamation, oil was discovered in Eastern Nigeria (now South-South Nigeria), and this was a turning point in the history of Nigeria, as that led to the struggle for control amongst the regions.

At this point, there was a power tussle to see who could control the central government between South and the North, political arrangement favored the North and South felt disadvantaged and foundation for social tension and political conflict was laid, which later translated to ethnic and religious conflict.

Problem Discussion

Problems of underdevelopment, economic decline, mismanagement and high level of poverty prompted by leadership and policies failures has plaque the Nigerian state for a very long time now. Fifty years after the Nigerian-Biafra war. The nation does not have a vibrant economic and social road map to pull the nation from the woods. It is still battling with identities issues such ethnicity, nepotism, religion and money politics.

No vibrant political direction it is embellished into the North-South division along the colonial master dictates and policies of divide and rule concept [10]. The nation cannot even organized a free and elections, until very recently in the year 2015, where there were frantic and fair effort by Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) to organize a transparent presidential polls.

Hence, social tension, political violence, militancy, terrorism and a high state of insecurity had engulf the Nation in many regards, particularly in the North East of the Nation, via the advent of the Boko-Haram terrorist group to Islamized the Nation due to failure of the government in their constitutional responsibilities and obligations.

The expression of frustration by people as a result of leadership failure or bad governance had taken a different dimension with advent of insurgency and agitation for Biafra and militancy at the Niger Delta region demanding for increased participation, allocation and management of their natural resource found in their habitat and outright resource control. Biafra Agitation in 2017 is simply a clear case of leadership failure and the reign of corruption on the part of the government at all levels of governance and administration in Nigeria.

The inability of the government either at the local, state or federal levels to address key developmental, economic and social problems affecting citizens in the Nation like unemployment for the teeming youth population, corruption in the public institution and establishment.

Hence, the inefficient and ineffective co-operate governance

structure in the administration and management of the vast common wealth and resources accruing to the nation via crude oil sales in the international market, nepotism and tribalism confronting the Nation in general.

All these are impacting negatively on the living standards and conditions of the ordinary citizens, and has prompted numerous and in many regards are responsible for the resurgent of Biafra agitation in the South East, militancy in the South-South and Boko-Haram in the North East of the Nation.

Again, the economic fortune of the Nation has nose dive to abysmal level, as a result of the economic recession the nation is currently experiencing difficulty to meet its financial obligation. This in many ways has hindered viable and people oriented projects and programs that would have impacted greatly on the wellbeing of the people in the Nation generally.

Biafra agitation in 2017 is more or less the problem of leadership ineptitude and governance failure on the part of government for failing to put in place basic social amenities and economic incentives and opportunities for the advancement and betterment of the entire people in the Nigerian state.

Again the promotion cronyisms in the nation's politics has further dampened the prospect of change and again, the culture of corrupts practices and tribalism in the nation's politics also hinders the cohesive cooperation and collaboration needed for the sustainable and enduring growth and development needed in the nation.

Chinua Achebe in his last book entitled There Was a Country: A Personal History of Biafra contends "*that the failure of government to addressing post war issues such proper rehabilitation, re-integration and re-construction of the Igbo and community has created increased doubts and suspicion in the minds and heart of the people of the Igbo extraction on the Nigerian project*".

The isolation and marginalization of the Igbo ethnic nationalities in the political, social and economic arrangement in the nation in today Nigeria has further raise doubts and questions marks as regard their place in Nigeria has a group of people, hence these unabated Agitation for self-rule and nation from the Nigerian state.

On 29 May 2000, *The Guardian* newspapers, reported that President Olusegun Obasanjo commuted to retirement the dismissal of all military persons who fought for the breakaway state of Biafra during the Nigerian civil war. Again, many years after, people of the Igbo extraction were either ignored or deliberated deprived of all benefits and entitlement in line with this policy.

It's simply means there is no proper integration, acceptance and future for the Igbo people in Nigeria, despite the war slogan "*no victor, no vanquish*" by the Nigerian Government in 1970. The indigenous people of Biafra otherwise known as IPOB remained in the forefront of championing the course of the Igbo group in the Nigerian polity.

This group resurrected the issue of Biafra by mobilization the people via social media, conventional media channels, roadwork/march in Nigerian cities and towns, mainly youth population of Igbo extraction across the Nation and abroad demanding for the actualization of the Biafran state.

It is important to note that Biafra agitation stemmed from the manner and way Buhari administration has treated the Igbo people; particularly in political appointments his government has neglected

constitutional provision of federal character and equal representation of all the different ethnic interest to foster unity, fairness and a sense of belonging to Nigerian project. Hence, a neglect of this constitutional provision is to give for anarchy and chaos in the polity.

Results

It was Chinua Achebe who postulated in his book-'The trouble with Nigeria'. The problem with Nigerian leaders and indeed the entire stakeholders as asserted by Chinua Achebe is the unwillingness or inability of these leaders to rise to the responsibility and demands of doing what is right and what is require to pull the Nations out of the woods. Hence, "*the lack of political will and leadership has been a major challenge to the Nigerian project*".

The politics of divisiveness and ethnicity in operation has undermined the leadership capacity of Nigerian leaders to extent of parochial, myopic and tribal programs and initiatives in the Nation.

Again, the challenge of exerting personal example, moral and values which is the hallmarks of true leadership in a given setting as soaring example for to imbibe and follow is lacking within the Nigerian leadership and the political class.

In other words leaders in Nigeria are men and women who negate responsibility and fail in their duty and assignment when it matter most, they to demonstrate statesmanship and toe the path of honor, diligence and sacrifice for the nation. Rather they embrace and deploy nepotism, selfishness and tribal sentiment in tackling national issues and problem, in therefore, the outcome of such stratagem is social crisis and tension in the nation generally.

The consequent of leadership failure in Nigeria is that, it has impacted negatively on the political system such that, the nation's economic, social and political resources are not properly managed and administered effectively and efficiently, hence, the advent of political tension, insecurity, social instability and religious crisis across the length and breadth of the nation. More so, leadership failure in the nation is observed from the family unit, which a subset of the society in general.

The loss of family values, morals and good upbringing at the family level in Nigeria to the pursuit of material and ill-gotten wealth also contribute to leadership failure in the Nation in term of providing a sterling example for true and quality leadership for the younger generation imbibe and follow.

In the words of David Oyedepo in his book-'Winning the War Against Poverty', he asserted that "*dreamer are pace setters, pathfinders, trail blazer and are leaders, they always leave footprints behind them that's show the root of their activities.*" Hence, Nigerian leaders fall short and are found wanting in this direction.

Again, Nigerian leadership as a whole has weak and selfish thinking mentality; hence, they are only conscious and mindful of themselves, family, tribes and religious belief. They are myopic in their thinking and activities, full of Fear of competition and accountability.

Lacking imagination and collectiveness, motivated by Selfishness and greed, always demonstrating Intemperance and impatience, and in habit of over indulgence in governance particularly in the acts of corruption and mismanagement of the Nation's wealth.

Another key characteristic associated with Nigerian leaders is the heavy emphasis on titles, they love titles, name calling and sing of praises for non-performance and unproductive via award of honorary

doctoral degrees and chieftaincy titles for mashing of ego and personal pride.

While it is noted that the structure of the present day Nigerian politics stemmed directly from the colonial heritage which was largely based on autocratic and divisive political framework design to exclude native population. Hence, this eventually produced ethnic politics and the mismanagement of the various ethnic nationalities that were brought together without their consent, consultation and contribution in the post independent Nigeria.

The underdevelopment of and spate of corruption undermines the future of the Nigerian state. The lack of political will to build a cohesive and enduring democratic society, devoid of ethnicity, nepotism and political exclusion and alienation of the minorities groups and indeed vulnerable people, creates room for countless fear, suspicion and unabated political agitation for self-expressions, sense of belonging and collective responsibility in the polity.

Conclusion

The paper therefore, concludes that the government and indeed the majority groups who enjoy privileged political positions and advantages in this skewed and unfair polity should allow a credible and a sustainable political reform in the system to engender equity, justice, fairness and political inclusion of all peoples in the society. To stemmed these agitations and demand for re-structuring in the polity, and further recommends a social development, economic empowerment and political inclusion within the confines of Nigerian unity and cooperate existence.

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