

**DYNAMICS OF ISLAMIC POLITICAL THOUGHT IN THE
CONTEXT OF NATIONALISM AND GOVERNANCE IN
NIGERIA**

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Abstract

Nigeria is acclaimed a nation with unity in diversity. The country has featured retrogressive development, political imbroglio, social unrest in forms of ethno-religious crises. Nationalism and the concept of truly representative government have become a mirage. There is a sharp dichotomy between the spirit of nationalism as portrayed by the early Nigerian nationalists in the pre-independent era and contemporary political leaders in Nigeria. Past administrations in Nigeria had seldom featured autocratic government devoid of altruism. The paper employs critical discourse methodology to examine trends in the socio-political syndrome in Nigeria with a view to resuscitating art of governance from Islamic perspective. Recommendations included suggestions on practicability of fundamental human rights and accountability in Nigeria. This is vital to ideal governance.

Introduction

Nationalism is an expression of strong love, passion and dedicated selfless strive for the betterment of one's nation. However, contextually applied to African colonial countries, the nationalistic struggle are indices of devotion to one's country, Anglophobia, decolonization, independence agitation against the shackles of imperialism (Owasa, 1993).

The Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English, New Edition (2012) defines nationalism as:

“A group of people of the same race, origin, language etc to form an independent country: love for your own country and the belief that it is better than any other country.”

Patriotism is a synonymous concept with nationalism. According to the above same dictionary source, it is also a demonstration of great passion and defence of one's country.

One of the general notions of nationalistic expression is that it abounds in a nation. The political scientists and expert in History and International Relation submit that a nation share a common historical heritage, culture and homogeneous language. A number of territories and Europe are specifically more relevant to the conceptual analysis of nation stated above. European territories were partitioned along the line of geographical proximity, language and cultural homogeneity (El-zakzaky, 1992).

Divergent ethical and cultural values of the peoples of Nigeria have brought the foundation of Nigeria as a nation under fire. It is an artificial colonial territory created by the British. The artificial nature of Nigeria is defined by the collection of divergent tribal groupings, cultural outlooks. For instance, Yoruba people of South-western Nigeria have a relatively cultural homogeneity with some group of people in Benin Republic. In the same vein, in Ondo State of Nigeria, the Ijaw Arogbo share the same political boundary with Ilaje people whose backgrounds are culturally antagonistic. Equally, the people of Taraba, Adamawa in Nigeria are genealogically linked with northern Cameroonian people in terms of cultural homogeneity (Duro, 2015).

Ethnicity and regional sentiments were however latent in Nigeria during the decolonization period because of the struggle for independence. Nigerians who were involved in the struggle for political freedom with one voice cut across dominant Nigerian ethnic groups. Such heroic landmark of history was achieved by Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Yoruba), Chief Nnamdi Azikwe (Igbo), Sir

Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and Sardauna of Sokoto; Alhaji Ahmad Bello (Hausa) (Ovwasa, 1993).

However, the post independent era witnessed turbulent inter-ethnic struggle for political power and violence in Nigeria as political parties formation reflected ethnic patronage and deceptive nationalism (Duro, 2015).

Struggle for identification by the minority group, inter-religious crises and insurgency syndrome have continued to undermine the corporate existence of Nigeria. Nigeria is a multi-religious society with western oriented socio-political dispensation. The impact of religion is indispensably felt in national life and has been the major determinant of the citizenry's social responsiveness. The focus of the paper therefore, is Islamic assessment of the concept of nationalism and good governance in the nation building in Nigeria.

Islam is critical of the upsurge of ethnic violence and political rivalries resulting from fear of domination. Other disintegrating appalling factors include the prevailing religious intolerance in the socio-political atmosphere of Nigeria (Duro, 2015). The Qur'an teaches in this regard:

And verily this Ummah of yours is a single ummah and I am your Lord and Cherisher; therefore fear Me (and no other). But people have cut off their affair (of unity), between them, into sects; Each party rejoices in that which is with itself. Qur'an 23: 52-53)

Nationalism: Conceptual Global Peace and Violence in the Medieval Polity

The unruly Arabs in the pre-Islamic epoch expressed early concept of nationalism in tribal chauvinism, dehumanizing gender discrimination, etc. they contended their aristocratic status with neighbouring kingdoms in warfare on regular basis to subdue their enemies in order to retain their socio-political hegemony (Carl, 1980).

The ancient Greek conceptualized other races of the world as barbarians. However, the Medieval Greek acknowledged alien national as second class Greek

citizen if he had undergone Graeco Roman acculturation with pride. In the same vein, the French and Germans individually proclaimed respective racial and cultural pride while other nations should be subservient and aspire cultural assimilation of the French epoch (El- zakzaky,1992).

Plato's conception of training of army guardians was a distortion of universal peace and diplomatic communities. His postulation on army guardians was considered important epistle for recapitulation by successive rulers. He projected army guardian as nationalists in defence of their territory and citizens. However, Plato predicated nationalism on necessity for aggression by the army guidance. He recommends courage and ability to detect enemies spontaneously on non-cultural affinity (Ovwasa,1993). In other word, army guardian, though gentle to their own people but highly spirited temper to alien national.

The Jews portrayed insolent nationalism through the belief that they are the unique people chosen by God. Other humans are perceived as donkey to be led by the Jews. It was based on the belief in cultural and political superiority with strategized economic exploitative policies that African and Asia were colonized by the imperialists (El-Zakzaky, 1992).

Trends in Nationalism: Ethno-Cultural Chauvinism and Violence in Nigeria

Consequence of imperialism in the colonized territories was the practical realization of nationalism by the colonialists in the context of imposed racial and cultural superiority with a view to dominating alien lands.

The partition of African continent in 1884 by the Europeans, Dutch and France at Berlin ushered in cultural shock and a new social order in Africa. This was manifested in the practical artificially designed boundaries on the continent of Africa and subjugation of the traditional socio-political systems. Nations were shattered and aboriginal people were displaced (Ovwasa,1993).

Nigeria was a creation of the British colonial authority. The country consists of strange inhabitants of more than 373 ethnic groups who came together under one national identity. Nigeria became one political entity in 1914 after the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorates. The major tribes; Hausa Yoruba and Igbo can be found in the six geo-political zones of Nigeria. Each independent tribe had its distinct cultural value and methods of administrations before the European incursion. The British exploration and application of nationalism were causative factors of the colossal destruction of the social structures and disintegration of the closely knitted communities of Africa (Anikpo, 2002).

The British pretentiously acknowledged the *Shari'ah* centralized administrative structures in the northern Nigeria as effective to actualize indirect rule system (Kumo, 1980). The colonialists' conception of nationalism and its application was rather aggressive and politically exploitative through the practical establishment of political dominance tactically introduced to encroach and wither down *Shari'ah* system which had been the legal solace of the native people in the North. The *Shari'ah* jurisdiction implemented by Alkali courts covered civil and criminal laws and administrated on the people without sentiments (Kumo, 1980).

Subsequently the juridical capacity of the Alkali court was weakened as all legal proceedings and sentences were compulsorily scrutinized by the resident governor through his prerogatory power of clemency and retrial of cases (Owasa, 1993).

Ethnic and Kinship phenomena projected individualistic nationalism in the 1920s in Nigeria during the bandwagon drift of rural-urban migration of the Nigeria citizens. Each tribe sensitized their people on club and society formation along the line of ethnic homelands. The 1940s witnessed strong tribal affinity which resorted to formation of Igbo Federal Union and Egbe Omo Oduduwa (Owasa, 1993).

In the post second world war, there was an absurd reflection of nationalism. Political parties formation and nationalist movement revealed ethnicity and regionalism. Hausa and Fulani supported Northern people's congress (NPC) because it was strongly supported by the Emirs and personalities such as Alhaji Ahmad Bello. In the South-West, Action Group (AC) was not ethnically inclined by the founder but wore cultural consciousness of the Yoruba identity because it was formed by the secretary of Egbe oduduwa (chief Obafemi Awolowo). The National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon subsequently known as National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) were dominated by Igbo people in the South-East Nigeria because of its patronage by Hubert Macauley and Nnamdi Azikwe (Duro, 2015).

Although, the patrons of the political parties mentioned above struggled to bring the heterogeneity into one bloc without projecting ethnic bias. Their collective struggle was instrumental to Nigeria independence in 1960 (Ovwasa, 1993).

The cleavage among the Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo is accentuated by their keen competition for federal might at each interregnum. The scenario of the military coup executed by Igbo young military officers in 1966 resulted in the death of Ahmadu Bello and Tafawa Balewa in the bloody mutiny. The coup brought disastrous revelation to the unity of Nigeria. (Duro, 2015). This led to counter coup in 1967 championed by young Hausa military revolutionists and killed Major General J.T.U Aguiyi Ironsi. In furtherance of vengeance mission, the tragic coup subsequently led to arson and mass massacre of the Igbo people in the North (Ovwasa, 1993).

National and regional elections in Nigeria had seldom influenced ethnic nationalism and religious affinity. The negative impacts impede national unity and development. This has often led to crises and unprecedented carnage.

A relative experience was the local government elections conducted in Jos North, 2008 which was influenced by ethno-religious bigotry. The Muslims felt being marginalized and suspicious electoral malpractices were contested in protests (Musa, 2010). David Jonah Jang arbitrarily managed the crises against the protestants. Death toll rose to more than 700 on the day the election results were declared (Dufka, 2008).

There was a fatal crisis between Odua Peoples' Congress (OPC) and Hausa People in Shagamu on the 2nd July, 1999. In sequence to this, a retaliation of mass massacre of Yoruba people followed in Kano (Musa, 2010).

Nationalism and its threats in Nigeria would not be complete without reference to the resultant effects of sporadic boundary disputes and their disintegration impacts. On the basis of nationalism, territorial consciousness and definition, Nigeria and Cameroon had intermittent international boundary disputes on Bakassi Peninsula (Duro, 2015). In the South-West region, Ile-Ife and Modakeke had a protracted land dispute. In Ondo state, the Ilaje and Ijaw Arogbo combined ethnic chauvinism with land disputes and fought a war from September 1998 to August 5, 1999. Offa – Erinle communal dissension over boundary dispute had occurred intermittently and grossly retarded inter-communal development and social integration (Okunola, 2011).

Islam and Nationalism: A Critique of Political System and Participation in Nigeria

Nigeria is at 55th year after independence while she attained republican status 53 years ago. The country is practically not a nation in contrary to the fantasy political slogan: "one nation, one Nigeria". Nationalism in the context of Nigeria political socialization and modernization is projection and protection of tribal solidarity. It is individualistic pursuit of political aspiration and consolidation of power (Is-haq, 2004).

The political experience has deepened the existence of gruesome dichotomy in the Nigeria polity. It led to seemingly unabated socio-economic crises. However, Islam as a religion cannot be de-emphasized because of its indispensable reconstructive roles in the resuscitation of the country from ideological problems (Is-haq, 2004).

The wide range of differences between Islamic political thought and the western oriented nationalism is responsible for the lackadaisical attitude of Nigerian leaders to civic responsibilities. The politicians aggressively seek political mandate through corruptive and violence strategies. This includes bribery and elimination of political opponents by assassination (Ovwasa, 1993). The prophetic tradition reads as follows in this regard:

“Indeed, Allah has revealed to me that you should have humbleness, and that no one should act proudly and oppressively over anyone else, nor should one boast over anyone else.”(Saheeh Muslim 8: 120)

The locus of sovereignty in Islam state is Allah. A ruler in an Islamic is a vicegerent (*khalifah*) of Allah. He jealously guides the principles of accountability, welfarism and responsible governance. Justice and equality inherent in Islamic art of governance do not have nationality or boundary demarcation. It is applicable to humanity on equilibrium level. The prophetic tradition sensitizes rulers in this regard:

“Anybody whom Allah makes the ruler of a people but who fails to look after them properly and honestly will never smell even the sweet aroma of *Al-jannah*” (Bukhari: 89:8).

The basis of western nationalism inherent in the post colonial territories is the revival of the indigenous ancient heinous tradition such as geographical pride and blood bound compatriots, social alliance and synergy against non-members.

This is the reason why the Egyptians glorify the divinely accused Pharaoh as national hero. The Nigerian nationalism grossly manifests divergence cultural pride and superiority, heroes worship, group solidarity (whether morally wrong or right with prevalence inter ideological clashes. These have been the bane of good governance in Nigeria (El-zakzaky,1992).

As mentioned early, tribalism and its associated conflicts are expressed in the group solidarity to support guilty compatriots. The syndrome of embarrassing solidarity is displayed in the political dispensation in Nigeria when some corrupt past and present politicians were arraigned for accountability. This was repressed by undue protest their fellow compatriots (El-zakzaky, 1992). In such circumstances, protestants in support of the corrupt compatriot politicized violent demonstration tagged ethnic or regional marginalization to pre-empt natural justice.

The Islamic concept of good governance devolves round good leadership based on sincerity of purpose as reflected in the following prophetic Hadith:

“O Allah, whoever is in control over my people and is hard upon them, be hard upon him. Whoever is in control and is kind to them, be kind to him” (Muslims: 18:5).

In practical term, Ahmed Sani, the former governor of Zamfara State actualized Islamic ideal system of governance through the institution and implementation of Shari'ah on the socio-economic system of Zamfara State. The governor's anti-corruption crime stance sanitized the state. Ahmed Sani would be acknowledged for his bold step on the declaration of his personal assets and financial value to public (Ahmed, 2002:6).

Institution of *Zakat* (poor due) drastically reduced poverty and temptation to criminality. Women felt highly elated on the recognition of gender rights and matrimonial security (Is-haq, 2004). Ramatu Isa Mayana appraised the Shari'ah

legislation in Zamfara, especially, the cautionary measures put in place against adulterous plight:

“So many wives have expressed their happiness over the Shari`ah legal system as our husbands hardly stay beyond since its introduction” (The Monitor, March 20, 2003).

Nationalism and Governance in Nigeria: Islamic Recipe

Islam repels nationalism but establishes representative and good governance.

The following verse is an antidote against sentimental social dealings:

“ O you who believe! Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just: that is most close to piety, and mind God for God is well- acquainted with all that you do” (Qur’an 5:8)

Al- Maududi’s philosophy of ideal governance and Al-Maghii’s treatise in the principle Qur’an are applicable to the resuscitation of good governance in Nigeria. Maududi’s thought provoking political philosophy presented mania of nationalism as an aberration and the greatest curse that has ravaged the world (Sherwani, 1993). His criticism is on the grounds of Shari`ah system and moral probity.

Maududi explains the universality and applicability of the philosophy of the Quranic concept of political potential and *Sunnah* of the Prophet (SAW). This is against the traditional sentimental national consciousness projected by spirit of nationalism. Nationalism instills in the citizenry loyalty and dedication to national course whether it is morally accepted or condemned on the grounds of Islam (Rosenthal, 1962).

The watch word of nationalism is: “my country, right or wrong”. Shari`ah system is replaced by western philosophy of governance. The state or country is

exceedingly glorified and worshipped to replace monotheistic value. National heroes also replace divine purpose of Prophets (Sherwani, 1963).

Al- Maghili was one of the early scholars who contributed to the development of Islam in West Africa in the late 15th century. He was in Kano during the reign of Muhammad Rimfa (1463-1499) who requested him to write a treatise subsequently known as “The Crown of Religion Concerning the Obligations of Princess” (Muhammad and AbdulFatai, 2010)

The treatise, based on Islamic ideals had positive impact on the political life of West African states. The treatise outlined the expected welfare responsibilities of Muslim ruler in his kingdom as follows:

“The heights of affliction are the isolation of the ruler from the subjects” (Muhammad and AbdIFatai, 2010).

Al- Maghili recommends moral qualities expected to be satisfied by ministers, senators, directors, permanent secretaries, etc. According to him, public officials should possess high standard of moral rectitude and meticulousity. He strongly advocates for punitive measure against erring public officials according to Islamic law regardless of status or affiliation (Bobboyi and Yakubu, 2006).

Recommendations

In view of the indispensable attributes of the moral and social reconstructive roles of Shari’ah discussed in the paper, the following recommendations are vital to resuscitation of good governance in Nigeria:

There should be a new orientation drive towards enriching the citizenry with divine instructions on the origin and indispensable universal unity of mankind. The practicability of the suggestions is expected to be exemplified by Nigerian rulers on non-discriminatory ground (Qur’an, 4:1 and 7: 189).

Consistent maintenance of internal tranquility and security would be realistic when desired attention is paid to youth restiveness through provision of lucrative vocational training and financial backing for the deserving ones in terms of natural talent inherent in individuals.

Rationale for personnel recruitment and placement: The country needs reform and overhauling in the areas of wrong appointments and placements of personnel. For instance, those who have flair for academic, engineering, politics, etc should be placed according to their natural talent on non-discriminatory ground. This would pave for steady growth and development.

Tolerance and social dignity: There should be respect for other people's view points and sanctity of life. Usurpation, social denial of rights and aggressive application of authority are phenomenal trends in the corrupt Nigerian political system. The syndrome of protracted non-payment of workers' salaries and casualties in the education sector suffice as bad reference point in Nigeria.

Conclusion

International life on the basis of equality in Islam is built on the principle of universal brotherhood devoid of nationalism, intimidation, discrimination on the grounds of blood, geographical, and tribal affinity. These have been the hotbed of violence in Nigeria.

Ideal governance was exemplified in the constitution of Islamic state in Madinah during the life of Prophet Muhammad: the Jews, Christians and other nationals (*Dhimmis*) benefited from the commonwealth of Islamic polity on non-discriminatory ground. Therefore, good governance, citizenry inalienable rights, multi-national hitch-free socio-economic relationship stem from Divine guidance.

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