ACTIVE CITIZENSHIP: A RESOURCE FOR NIGERIAN INTEGRATION

PAULINUS O. OKORO
Department of social sciences,
Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic, Unwana, Ebonyi State.

ABSTRACT

Nigeria started on faulty grounds leading to challenges of integration. The Nigerian Federation is not a product of the citizens desire to be together but an imposition. There has been no commitment to resolving the challenges. Thus disconnect between the state and citizens and the anomie in the country. At various historical points, there existed indications of disintegration. Relationship among various ethnic and religious groups and institutionalized discrimination threaten the continued existence of the country. The government has failed in security responsibilities. A country where corruption has risen to exponential levels is a disaster. There is palpable anger in the land. The challenges of integration seem insurmountable. That is why Nigeria faces the challenges of disintegration. Popular processes for the resolution of these challenges erroneously focused on structure and leadership. It is the position of this paper that re-interrogation of the citizenship question will resolve the challenges of integration. To the paper, the citizenship order births active citizenship that would resolve the challenges. To arrive at this conclusion, the author embarked on expository methodology using desktop and library research. The concept and conceptualization of active citizenship was the analytical framework that guided the search. The paper concluded that the conceptualization and practice of active citizenship and the citizen provided the panacea for integration in Nigeria. It made a number of recommendations to the achievement of the purpose amongst which is dialogue on citizenship by the state and civil society.

Keywords: Active Citizenship, Nigeria, integration, relationship dynamics.

INTRODUCTION

With the existential realities of the country, Nigeria is on the edge of disintegration. Merriam - Webster, an encyclopedic dictionary takes on the idiom on the edge of to be very close to something. According to the dictionary it could mean being on the edge of disaster or extinction (Merriam-Webster, 2018). As a country, disintegration means Nigeria going extinct.

At various points of its history, Nigeria had been on the brinks of disintegration. In 1953, with the independence motion moved by Anthony Enahoro, the North threatened to pull out of the union unless the pre 1914 arrangement was returned to. That was what Abubarkar Tafawa Balewa called the mistake of 1914 (Omoruyi, 1993). The independent motion led to a sponsored riot against Southerners with the attendant destruction of lives and property, particularly those of the Igbo (Albert, 2000). The 1965 Coup that metamorphosed into the Civil War and the crisis of the annulment of the June 12, 1993 elections won by Chief Moshood Abiola, were also instances of being on the brinks of disintegration (Omoruyi, 1993). A country where the government has failed to provide security cannot be said to just be on the edge but on the edge of extinction. A country where corruption has risen to such exponential levels that it is no longer stolen billions (Nwankwo, 1999), but trillions and snakes swallow millions of naira (Adekunle, 2018), cannot just be said to be on the edge.

When in 1983 Achebe wrote his seminal work, The Trouble with Nigeria, ' *The trouble with Nigeria* was [still] the subject of small talk in much the same way as the weather is for the English (Achebe, 1998), in spite of our sad and distasteful historical experiences. Achebe identified the subject of the small talks to be a litany of our national deficiencies which bordered on tribalism, indiscipline, false image of ourselves, lack of leadership, lack of patriotism, social injustice and the cult of mediocrity and corruption. The deficiencies were the same reasons given by the coup plotters that led to the civil war (Ademoyega, 1981). That must have been why Achebe warned against trivializing, a life-and-death issue on the daily routine of small talk' (Achebe, 1998). According to him while nothing much can be done about the weather, it is to our peril that we resign to national bad habits (Achebe, 1998).

We did not heed his warning and so Nigeria is today a disaster many are attesting to. Agreeing with the fact that Nigeria is already a disaster, Carl Maier wrote his work on Nigeria entitled, *This House Has Fallen: Nigeria in Crisis* (2000). The deficiencies Achebe referred to have turned to pandemics. Today, many man-made epidemics threaten the continued existence

of Nigeria. That is why Nigeria is at the edge of extinction. The Conference of Catholic Bishops of Nigeria in a courtesy call on President Buhari on February 8, 2018 could not have put it any better when they told him:

> there is too much suffering in the country: poverty, hunger, joblessness, insecurity, violence, fear. What is even more distressful is that the government, whose responsibility it is to protect the life and property of every citizen seems either incapable or unwilling to do so. The silence of the federal government in the wake of these horrifying attacks is, to say the least, shocking. (Catholic Bishops' Conference of Nigeria (CBCN), 2018).

What can we do to save Nigeria from the danger of disintegration as a country? Popular views have advocated remedy to failure of leadership in apparent agreement with Achebe that the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership (Achebe, 1998). That is why even those who led the country at one point or the other and failed blame their ilk or pose as elder statesmen to proffer remedies of which if they applied while in office would have saved us the trauma we are experiencing (Obasanjo, 2018). Many others blame it on the structure of the federation and thus support restructuring (Gowon, 2016) while others resist (Ogundipe, 2018). See also (Federalism and Political Restructuring in Nigeria, 2000)

Leadership and structure are never-the-less part of the problems. However, they are not primary. The place and role of the citizens and citizenship conceptualization and practice are. Interestingly, primary attention is not given to the role of citizenship and the citizen in the search for solution.

This paper seeks the solution in the citizenship question. It proposes that disconnect between Nigeria and its citizens is at the root of Nigeria heading to extinction. It asserts that Nigeria is not a creation of its citizens and was not made for them. Nigeria was created by and for the convenience of the colonial masters and by extension, the Hausa-Fulani elite (Omoruyi, 1993). This reality explains the existing disconnect between the citizens and the state. There have been no concerted efforts to bring the citizens into the Nigerian project. Then the citizens themselves erroneously following the design have failed to bring themselves into the project. In other words, there has been no practice of active citizenship in Nigeria. Consequently, there are 'no citizens in Nigeria but citizens of Nigeria' (Taiwo, Of Citizens and Citizenship, 2000). The intention of this paper is to change the narrative on the dangers facing Nigeria as a State and its panacea. That is focusing primary attention on what the Crick Report calls the Citizenship Order

(Advisory Group on Citizenship, 1998). That is, the citizens are the focus of attention and their participation primary in the running of the affairs of the state. It is a situation where the citizens are on the driving seat of state craft. The paradigm shift is that the citizen and citizenship are the primary focus of attention as against leadership and structure in the search for integration in Nigeria.

The Nature of Citizenship and the Importance of the Citizenship Discourse

Citizenship by nature connotes diversities and it grapples with the problem of articulating the challenges for stability and development. In the sense of the people who make up the polity, it has always been central to the state system[1] both in the polities considered traditional and in the development of the state in the Westphalia (modern) concept. They have always been concerned with issues of who is in and who is out (Tuchman, The March of Folly: From Troy to Vietnam, 1984; Alubo, 2008; Okoro, 2019). The controversy and volatility associated with citizenship are consequent on the fact that, 'the tendency to exclude others from enjoying some rights and benefits attached to membership of the political community is considered the highest level of exclusion' (Egwu, 2005). Prof. Sam Egwu, asserts that attempts by those excluded to be included, and to seek to enjoy rights conferred on them as members of the state or political community has always been a part of the interesting history of citizenship' (Egwu, Beyond 'Native' and 'Settler' Identities: Globalization and the Challenge of Multicultural Citizenship in Nigeria, 2005). Thus since humanity learnt to organize politically, the issue of citizenship has been a major political issue, because of the tendency to exclude others from enjoying some rights and benefits attached to membership of the political community (Bakut B. T., 'The Idea of 'The People' and the Challenge of Conceiving Citizenship in Nigeria', 2008)

Obviously, the diversities implicit in the concept and practice of citizenship are potential sources of tension in society. Thus the cohesiveness of the state, its peace and stability; and of course development, is determined by how the diversities are employed to create positive forces for coexistence. This is where Nigeria has failed because of its undeserved attention to leadership and structure. The root cause is partly explained by the operational concept and practice of

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[1] State system should not be confined to the development of the European States which dates from the Treaty of Westphalia, the deal that ended the Great Wars. In Africa before the intrusion of colonialism, empires and states existed. This is the Africa described by Ali A. Mazrui, the renowned Kenyan scholar, as the Africa of great empires, of big and small states, and - in some cases of nation states in an essay written in 1975. These states fulfilled the basic criteria for statehood such as permanent population, definite territory, government and sovereignty – capacity to enter into relations with others.

citizenship in Nigeria built on the pathological concept of African community membership, the concept of *The People,* by the colonial masters. It led to the manufacture of such terms as native and indigene that introduced exclusivity and inelasticity in an otherwise inclusive and elastic citizenship conceptualization and practice.

Citizenship borders basically on human rights -entitlements and obligations; and identity who you are. It thus determines the individuals or groups political, social, cultural and economic participation in the polity. Thus a discourse on the concept and practice of human rights translates to a concern for the concept and practice of citizenship. The two are intrinsically connected. That is why exclusion from membership has always been fiercely fought by the excluded. As a result, citizenship is associated with tension. The stability or otherwise of a political community depends on how this tension is resolved. This is another point the fault lines in the creation and development of Nigeria birth the challenge of integration. The constitutional provisions on Nigerian citizenship with emphasis on consanguinity, taken together with federal character provisions, compound issues and serve as catastrophic time bomb rather than being conscionable and peace building mechanisms (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1999). Again, by its nature, citizenship involves the legal status of the individual in the polity. So we can say that citizenship discourse is not only controversial but equally legal, political, social, economic and emotive. It is very pronounced in multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies like Nigeria (Okoro, Education for Active Citizenship: A ew Approach to Citizenship Education in Nigeria, 2019).

Thus citizenship calls for a careful examination to avoid easy conclusions or policy decisions that could expose the civic community to violent conflict. That is to say that to resolve these issues, citizenship must play a central and dominant role. In other words, the stability of any polity depends on how the issues of citizenship are managed either constitutionally or pragmatically.

Conflict analysts on the crisis of citizenship in Nigeria attribute the incessant debilitating conflicts in the country to lack of proper management of the issues of citizenship (Institute of Peace and Conflict Resolution, 2008). Thus effective management of citizenship issues requires conflict sensitivity and is at the centre of the search for integration in Nigeria. The citizens themselves should take charge as the proprietors of the state. That is why a focus on structural imbalance and leadership has not solved the problems of Nigerian integration.

The Concept of Active Citizenship as our Theoretical Framework

Our theoretical framework is built on the concept of active citizenship. The notions of active citizenship and the active citizen unlock the meaning of the citizen and citizenship. It equally deepens their understanding and entrench their effective practice. It is an exercise in active citizenship and predicated on the concept of citizenship as a process. That is the fulfilling of the expectations required of citizenship as a status and a possession. When citizens fully appreciate the features of the citizen and are determined to exercise it, it engenders peace and development. Though at the inception they may generate conflict, they are creative energies for development. This is because the practice of citizenship has positive impact on (good) governance as it promotes participation, accountability, transparency and respect for human rights and the rule of law. That is, it promotes citizen engagement with the state. Consequently, it resolves the problem of disconnect between the state and the individual and the group. Active citizens ensure that whatever bodes evil for the state is discouraged or prevented, such as corruption and other anti-social behaviours and dictatorial tendencies and actions. Active citizenship ensures performance of civic duties and conversely ensures that the state performs its correlative duties.

The basic principles of participation, accountability and transparency are promoted when citizens migrate from I beg to I demand in the relationship with the government in the protection and promotion of human rights and service delivery. In other words, the proper understanding and application of the features of the citizen and citizenship, implicate the practice of active citizenship. Thus the Irish White Paper on Supporting Voluntary Activity and for Developing the Relationship between the State and the Community and Voluntary Sector (2000), defines active citizenship as the active role of people, communities and voluntary organisations in decision-making which directly affects them'. It 'extends the concept of formal citizenship and democratic society from one of basic civil, political and social and economic rights to one of direct democratic participation and responsibility, the report explains.

The National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) Report on Social Capital, on its part has defined Active Citizenship as ' the active exercise of social rights and shared responsibilities associated with belonging to a community or society (NESF, 2003). The report clarifies the concept as being broader than just a formal or legal definition and encompasses social, economic and cultural rights and obligations. That is why the Irish Taskforce on Active Citizenship asserts

that ' active citizenship transcends short-term structures, political philosophies and party political interests. It is based on a genuinely embracing and inclusive vision aimed at a full realisation of democratic values and community capabilities for sustainable well-being (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007). That is acting for the promotion of the political or civic community. Active citizens help shape strong, healthy, inclusive societies. (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007). As active citizens, we determine the sort of society we want for the future - our future in what sort of world. And what sort of economy, education system, community development, and governance we want and need (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007). It resolves the enigma of disconnect between the state and the citizen.

Based on the foregoing, active citizenship is the most suitable approach and practice of citizenship in a multivariate state like Nigeria, as citizens may exercise this capacity individually or jointly in a territory or community of belonging even though they may differ with respect to religion, ethnicity, nationality, gender or other dimensions. Active citizenship is required in political communities where there is disconnect between the people and the state. The reason is simple. Institutions and practices of formal democracy, including local government and the system of elected representatives, do not exhaust the meaning and application of Active Citizenship they are potentially enhanced by it. That is why the report of the Taskforce on Active Citizenship asserts that:

> Broader than just a narrow legal definition of citizenship, such as appears on a passport, being an active citizen implies that we are aware and responsible members of a community. We can belong to a community in which there are many communities sometimes with divergent values and identities but all sharing some common sense of responsibility (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007).

As such it achieves a common ground for all the members of the community irrespective of community, gender, clan, ethnic or religious affiliations by wielding the diversities inherent in society into positive force rather than abrogating them. Again, active citizenship involves,

> duties as well as rights and … everyone has both a responsibility and a right to contribute fully to society through an active and continuing engagement. As citizens we enjoy the right to dignity, respect and protection. But, for every right there is a responsibility on the part of someone to act out of awareness and care for the welfare of fellow citizens. These responsibilities are shared between ordinary citizens, communities, minority groups,

voluntary and community organisations, businesses and Government (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007).

Importance of Active Citizenship

Active citizenship encompasses citizenship as a status (legal and formal) and includes rights such as equality or non-discrimination before the law and the fulfillment of citizenship obligations such as payment of taxes. It essentially involves voluntary capacity of citizens and communities working directly together, or through elected representatives, to exercise economic, social and political power in pursuit of shared goals (Cf. www.activecitizen.ie). It is a means and a mechanism of operation that promotes cooperation and coordination between the people and the state represented by government. It promotes democracy and good governance without which development eludes the state. It enables solidarity of action to save the community from disintegration.

Active Citizenship introduces creative instability that could destabilize Gestapo or command democracy such as practiced in Nigeria. Gestapo or command democracy is a pseudo or manipulated form of governance that pretends to be democratic without the actions that depict democracy. This risk is heightened where state and political actors fear the creative energy of the citizens. It could heat up the polity where governments lack transparency, participation and accountability. It operates with the principle that as a mechanism of cooperation and coordination, the stakeholders in good governance really need to cede some space to others.

It is fitting to conclude the discussion on our theoretical framework with the position of the Irish Taskforce on Active Citizenship that 'active citizenship is about engagement, participation in society and valuing contributions made by individuals, whether they are employed or outside the traditional workforce' (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007). Practically, engagement and participation may mean membership of a residents association or political party or lobby group, or simply being active and caring about the local neighbourhood, the environment as well as larger global and national issues' (Taskforce on Active Citizenship, 2007). In our own case, it may mean the membership of different gender, ethnic and ethno-religious and linguistic groups in harmonious and symbiotic relationships difficult to be overtaken by divisive sentiments and negative discrimination.

Relationship Dynamics as a Deciding Factor in the Practice of Active Citizenship

Relationship dynamics drives the practice of active citizenship. Active citizenship speaks to the living out of citizenship characteristics. In this respect, good citizenship is a resource for the resolution of the crisis facing the country. Inactive citizen or ineffective citizenship is a negation. So, we can speak of good citizens as people who, say, participate constructively in political life, or of ineffective citizenship when peoples rights are not upheld in practice (McCowan 2009). By this, citizenship is basically about ways relationship between the people and the state; and between the members of the state, is enhanced and made productive.

The relationship between the state and the people is what binds the citizen to the state and vice versa and the relationship dynamics determine the enjoyment of the citizenship rights and the fulfillment of the expectations required of the possession of the status of citizenship. If the citizens perceive their fellow citizens as human and equal in dignity, therefore, entitled to the same group of rights, the probability of according them respect will be high. This recognition of equality in dignity and its application facilitate peaceful relationship among people and thus promote active citizenship as trust does in social capital (Fukuyama, The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order, 1999). On the part of the state, they encourage the equal treatment of individuals and groups within the state. With discrimination, there will be suspicion and feeling of insecurity. This is what is referred to as relationship dynamics. This framework or paradigm shift, determines to a great extent, the relationship dynamics in multiethnic and multicultural societies. Thus, the practice of citizenship is determined by the dynamics of relationship between and among the people in a given state. The relationship dynamics in the practice of citizenship as a factor is very prominent in a multi-national state resulting from colonial history of state re-formation such as Nigeria. It explains the indigene/settler conflicts or ethnic based discrimination. Boko Haram insurgency, herdsmen terrorism, separatist and self-determination demands are properly understood and can be resolved within this framework. In our existential situation, the practice of active citizenship becomes impossible because the state is built on discrimination. The citizens will never act together in the promotion of sustainable devolvement, science and technology; entrepreneurship and women employment and development, no matter what structure or leadership in the country. Relationship dynamics is the soft ware of active citizenship. Because there is differential

treatment for the different ethnic groups that make up Nigeria by the state, Nigeria will continue to be on the brinks of disintegration without the practice of active citizenship.

Conclusion and Recommendations

What can be drawn from this paper is the role of the citizens in determining the course of the development of the state. They dictate the behavior, attitude and the disposition of the leaders towards the affairs of the community. Through active and popular participation, the active citizens determine the actions of the leaders. They select and give mandate to the leaders and demand they perform or be removed in the event of their failure. The active citizens insist on participating in the affairs of the state either directly or indirectly and in case of representation command transparency and accountability. These explain why leadership is not primary to the redemption of the country from the threat of extinction. The citizens will select their leaders, build the structures and systems of governance and demand restructuring when they no longer serve their purpose.

For Nigerian integration, the citizens must become central to governance and its primary focus by the conceptualization and practice of active citizenship. This is realizable when the citizens understand and practice the attributes of the citizen and citizenship, amongst which is proprietorship. As proprietors, they must take the driving seat in the ship of the state. This can be achieved through formal, non-formal and informal education. The people must be empowered and empower themselves to lead in the rebuilding of the state through all the socialization processes from the family through to all the socialization and educational institutions. The church plays a central role in this. The church can no longer stand aloof. The evangelical and Pentecostal churches must de-emphasize prosperity preaching and focus on the creation of awareness for active citizenship. So are the Muslim fundamentalists. History speaks volumes of the critical role of religious institutions in the development of society and the state. Liberation theology in Latin America testifies to this. The Joel Company Drama Unit of the Living Faith Church, Unwana, a church for the student members of the Winners Chapel of Akanu Ibiam Federal Polytechnic Unwana, in its annual Valentine programmes creates this kind of platform to encourage active citizenship among its members. The active participation of its members in political sensitization on campus is evidence of the role of this kind of non-formal education in the inculcation of active citizenship. Trade associations, gender based groups like WITED, clubs and societies; community based organizations can be accessed to educate and sensitize the

citizens of Nigeria on their roles in the making, development and sustenance of the state in the practice of active citizenship.

The curriculum for civic education in our primary and secondary schools and the contents of the Citizenship Education curriculum in our tertiary institutions should be revised to embrace education for active citizenship or transformative approach rather than nationalistic or formalistic citizenship education. The latest edition of the curriculum for Citizenship Education for Polytechnics in Nigeria is more than a generation and is unrealistic and unsuitable for education for active citizenship. An appropriate revision will dispose the products to active citizenship or readiness to transform the society.

To reclaim the proprietary rights of the state, the citizens should be sensitized to insist on sovereign national conference rather than restructuring. Or alternatively insist on constituent assembly properly constituted with the release of the constituent powers to the assembly. To be properly constituted, the assembly must be for the sole purpose of making the constitution. So far, the reviews and amendments made by the national assembly are not far-reaching. They have ended up being self-serving and palliative. When the people reclaim the sovereignty over the institutions of governance, state and political actors will become accountable rather than the status quo where they dictate for the citizens. Nigerians are yet to transit from being subjects to being citizens, which will engender the proper conceptualization and practice of active citizenship. It is only by this that integration can be achieved and the country will flourish.

Operationally, state and civil society groups should embark on dialogue on citizenship organized from the community and associational levels to national platforms. The National Orientation Agency should develop projects on this in collaboration with development agencies and funding organizations. Organizations like Women in Technical Education and Employment (WITED) have a special function in this respect, if we have to achieve progress in Science, Technology, Sustainable Development, Entrepreneurship and Women Employment and Development.

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