


Chapter 6

Ethical Implications of Identity Politics for Good Governance in 21st Century Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Contemporary empirical studies on identity question and political identity reveal that numerous political challenges revolve around the questions of identity. Identity thesis engenders a landscape of tremendous diversity and variation, which poses political problems when there is too much or too little of it. It manifests itself when there is a shift towards cultural diversity, largely due to upswing in migration and globalization. Given the multi-ethnic configuration of Nigeria characterized by heightened identity politics, a scenario of acute crisis of identity is inexorable. This study, therefore, examines why societies are today increasingly characterized by ethnic, racial, and religious diversity, which creates room for various forms of identity. Drawing upon extensive contemporary research and literature on diversity and identity politics, the study adopts qualitative descriptive methodology with content analysis curvature. Findings reveal that Nigerian political behavior, socio-economic relationship, and governance are driven by identity politics and ethnic solidarity.

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INTRODUCTION

Despite the extremely wide disparities in values existing between different parts of the world today, there has been a growing global sensitivity and concern with regards to the resurgence of identity politics, especially the negative forms of identity politics which can result in violent conflict and killings, struggle for recognition, as well as problem of discrimination. The achievements and advancement made so far in the area of science and technology, globalization as well as improvement in the economic and social sphere seem endangered by the anxiety about the rising tide of negative forms of identity politics such as ethnic, religious, communal, and resources conflicts and their potentially explosive consequences (Ambe-Uva, 2010). It is evident from the scholarly attention given to address this subject matter that there is a strong suspicion between today's identity politics and political irresponsibility. This is apparent in the particularistic and exclusionary form of identity politics that has intensified in recent years within and among nations. This is known to be responsible for some of the most egregious violations of human rights as well as international humanitarian law and, in several instances, of elementary standards of human dignity resulting in conflicts.

Realistically, there is a growing prominence in public discourse regarding the question of identity and identity politics in contemporary public debate. This however involves the issue of major transformations that has occurred in the way we live, work and migrate to settle in other places and/or do business. Scholars in political science, sociology and social anthropology, especially those of the modern theoretical orientation, have undertaken extensive studies on the role of identity in politics, as well as the task of ethnicity and communalism in the politics of the so called emergent nation-states (Ari, 2010), but their focus had not been on the subject of identity and identity politics as such. Similarly, studies on identity politics have long largely been ignored by ethicist, as well as the radical and neo-Marxist scholars and researchers of Africa and the African political economy. Thus, as Calhoun has aptly noted in general terms, for quite some time "we had managed to maintain for the most part theories that obscured the importance of identity politics rumour analyses..." (1994:4). This was partly because of the irrational fear factor among a certain category of scholars about undertaking any intellectual work perceived as capable of "undermining the process of nation-state formation", and the post-colonial state's national integration project (Mustapha, 1992:1), and also partly because of a pre-occupation with what can be termed as excessive "class-determinism" in most of the radical scholarship's which attempt to explain the dynamics of African politics and development. However, this situation is now changing as attested to by the increasing attention which is being paid to the identity issue. As Bangura has noted, "the subject of identity has gained prominence in recent years as dominant

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