

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCHERS

Volume No.3 Issue No.1 March 2014

**NIGERIA DANCING ON THE BRINK – A DISCOURSE ON
THE ‘NIGERIAN PROJECT’**

TANKO AHMED *fwc*

www.iresearcher.org

ISSN 227-7471

THE INTERNATIONAL RESEARCH JOURNAL "INTERNATIONAL RESEARCHERS"

www.iresearcher.org

© 2014 (individual papers), the author(s)

© 2014 (selection and editorial matter)

This publication is subject to that author (s) is (are) responsible for Plagiarism, the accuracy of citations, quotations, diagrams, tables and maps.

All rights reserved. Apart from fair dealing for the purposes of study, research, criticism or review as permitted under the applicable copyright legislation, no part of this work may be reproduced by any process without written permission from the publisher. For permissions and other inquiries, please contact

editor@iresearcher.org

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCHERS is peer-reviewed, supported by rigorous processes of criterion-referenced article ranking and qualitative commentary, ensuring that only intellectual work of the greatest substance and highest significance is published.

INTERNATIONAL RESEARCHERS is indexed in wellknown indexing diectories



with ICV value 5.90



Directory of Research Journals Indexing

and monitor by



NIGERIA DANCING ON THE BRINK – A DISCOURSE ON THE 'NIGERIAN PROJECT'

TANKO AHMED fwc

Senior Fellow, Security & Strategic Studies Department,
Research Directorate, National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru-Jos,

(NIGERIA)

ta_mamuda@yahoo.com

1. INTRODUCTION

'Gyara kayan ka, ba sauke mu raba ba' -'adjust your wares is not to drop we share' – Nigerian (Hausa) Proverb

2. BACKGROUND

Ambassador John Campbell's book 'Nigeria Dancing on the Brink' is a discourse on the 'Nigerian Project' inferring the absence of committed 'national' leadership. In place are warring cliques or coteries which are, at best, 'local champions' operating on platforms of sectional, religious and ethnic fraternities. The 'Nigerian Project' therefore urgently requires a crop of creative transcultural leaders capable of utilizing the enormous human and natural resources packaged in the country, for its people and the whole wide world, including the United States. Failure to do this will lead to the lurking dangers of reversal to Brzezinski's (1998) concept, and project, of 'micro-nationalities' which at best are 'easy pickings' for even medium size multi-nationals or any of the marauding non-governmentals. This book review essay attempts to shift the contents and contexts of the book and assess the 'Nigerian Project'. It also probes the quality of leadership and the dangers it creates for the Nigerian state dancing on the brink.

3. THE BOOK PROFILE

Book Title	-	Nigeria Dancing on the Brink
Author	-	John Campbell
Publisher	-	Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
Pages	-	183 pages
Year	-	2011
Reviewer	-	Tanko Ahmed, fwc, Senior Fellow, NIPSS, Kuru

4. THE AUTHOR'S PROFILE

John Campbell is a Ralph Bunche Senior Fellow for Africa Policy Studies at the American Council on Foreign Relations, New York. He served as a U. S. Department of State Foreign Service Officer with two sojourns in Nigeria; 1988 to 1990 as political counselor; and 2004 to 2007 as ambassador. He is a 'long service' Foreign Service Officer at the US Department of state with sojourn at Lyon, Paris, Geneva, Pretoria, Lagos and Abuja. His academic stunts include Wisconsin, Princeton and the Foreign Service Institute. Ambassador Campbell can literally (and rightly) be described as a 'Voice of America' in reflection of the power of his views on the American platform. He ranks at par with notables like Zbigniew Brzezinski whose cogent views in the past, on the fate of countries like Nigeria complements the subject matter of this essay.

5. NIGERIA DANCING ON THE BRINK:

The book 'Nigeria Dancing on the Brink' is structured into nine interconnected but flowing sections and sub-sections, at ease with the schema or rule of mental pattern in writing prose; with explicit introductory paragraphs and 'guiding' first sentences. An **Introduction** projects an umbrella of the complete work of nine chapters. Chapter One is a brief history '**Un Peu d'Histoire**' of Nigeria, reflective of the obvious socio-economic and political riddle sited in Chapter two, that: '**If Nigerian is Rich, Why are Nigerians so Poor**'. Chapter three '**Who Runs Nigeria?**' exposes

the cliques, coteries and cabals of 'leadership' perpetuating personal, family, clique, tribal, religious and professional cronyism platforms and networks. Chapter four pounds on the spiritual fraud of religiosity using '*Faith*' in controlling Nigerians; as chapter five '*The Niger Delta*' imbroglia sounds the facts of oppression as enabler for insurrection. Chapters six and seven '*A President for Life*' and '*The Election-like Event of 2007*' open up the high risk of seat-tight leadership and the mockery of election process which may eventually backfire in a nation of vibrant people. The bilateral relationship between the US and Nigeria, as reflected in chapter eight '*Washington and Abuja*', is entirely based on American economic and regional or strategic interests. Chapter nine '*Dancing on the Brink*' struggles to define Nigeria as a 'failed' or 'falling' state with a clear conclusive statement on a nation at the verge of state failure.

6. THE NIGERIAN PROJECT

Nigeria is blessed with abundance human and material resources of rich cultural groups, fertile land and minerals deliberately put together to make a large and powerful state with ample resources to play a leading role in the affairs of the African continent and the world at large (Bingel, 2009). The main thrust of the Nigerian Project aims at harnessing and utilization of the country's enormous human, cultural and natural endowments to make Nigeria a great nation. This quest is often coined by its leaders in the currency of 'unity in diversity'. Lalonde (1994) explained '*unity in diversity*' as a concept of 'unity without uniformity and diversity without fragmentation' shifting focus from unity based on a mere tolerance of differences towards a more complex unity based on the understanding that difference enriches human interactions. This was initially captured by Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Nigeria's first Prime Minister, in a speech at the occasion marking the motion requesting for Nigeria's independence from Britain titled 'Unity Diversity in Independence' (Cartey and Kilson, 1970).

The Nigerian Project, if pursued along this line would lead the country to harmony and well-defined development under highly disciplined, patriotic and committed leadership. The truth remains, as Campbell argued, the lack of a 'national' leadership in an embroiled crisis of leadership along primordial sectionalism manned by 'local champions'. As Parekh (2005) put it, groups can contribute to the national cultural assets new forms of imagination; new ideas of beauty and goodness; new forms of resourcefulness and skills; new sources of energy and dynamism; and add to its national assets. This is the basis for much needed national integration, nation-building and national development. However, George (2009) noted that crises accentuate the dynamics of leadership and reveal its strength and weaknesses in a way that ordinary challenges do not. In this case, Campbell in a way has challenged and spotlighted the dangers and weaknesses of the Nigerian leadership in the quest for the Nigerian Project.

7. CRISES OF LEADERSHIP IN NIGERIA

A clear-cut conceptualization of '*crisis of leadership*' sums up a dangerous or worrying situation or period in which are very uncertain, difficult or painful events requiring immediate action to avoid total disaster or breakdown in the ability to lead or the process of influencing others in the accomplishment of common tasks. Uzoigwe (1996) pointed out that exploitation of differences created distrusts, suspicions and cleavages among the various groups often seen in the conduct of Nigeria's national affairs. Joshua (2002) observed that the lack of any true national integration as basis for nation-building in Nigeria is traceable to the belief and conduct of the elite class represented in the various ethnic groups who use their position to consolidate their own gains. While Metumara (2010) concluded that successive post-independence regimes, not only failed to initiate far-reaching policy measures to settle ethnic differences into positive ventures that could create effective national integration, but ended up escalating its negative tendencies to present times. Consequently, the major problem of national character in Nigeria, and most Africa states, has to do with creating overarching loyalties to the nation over and above the primordial and sub-national loyalties.

When the pursuit of development excludes solutions to problems arising from its own process, the system will run into a 'progress trap'. A nation polarized by intense sectionalism, tribalism, regionalism and religious bigotry is susceptible to incessant 'crisis of leadership' and trapped in dysfunctional conflicts. The resultant divisive process sets the various contending factions in perpetual struggle for advantages or supremacy over one another in the quest for ascendancy, retention, or even sabotage (Ahmed, 2013). Conflicts set in with resultant situations, depending on how they are handled by the elite or leadership of the various groups. Nigeria is therefore 'dancing on the brink', at the very edge of a steep drop or verge of disaster which require speedy retraction in order to spring back to stability. American views, opinions or even policies towards Nigeria are often interpreted by Nigerians as 'double standard' ways to exploit the country's perennial fluid situation. A casual look at Campbell's book generates same feelings; but a closer and more critical look reveals a paradigm shift from the hostile ways of Brzezinski (1998) to an open, sincere but stern warning of the dangers ahead for the Nigerian Project.

8. THE DANGERS AHEAD

The Nigerian state has witnessed several attempts at constitutional and physical reforms, from the initial two protectorate units of the North and South amalgamated in 1914. Presently, there is ever heightened clamour for creation of more states, local governments and other forms of decentralized units. The so called elites, in fragmented leadership, often behave like comedians in the movie *'The Last Married Couple in America'* (1980) in staging separatist tendencies where every unit is set for disintegration from within. The ultimate reality here portends dangers leading to, not only a simple division of Nigeria into smaller nations, but its complete fragmentation, further leading to system collapse. These dangers seem unnoticed by a leadership blinded by the selfish quest for power and wealth riding on Kelly's (1988) followership typology of the sheep. The seemingly docile Nigerian citizenry may suddenly awaken and revolt overnight.

A divided and warring Nigeria may ultimately serve the interests of the United States as cited by Brzezinski (1998), a top adviser to Barack Obama and leading US foreign policy theoretician. Zbigniew Brzezinski, who co-founded the Trilateral Commission, had 'undue influence in the Carter administration' and also pushed policies that encouraged the division of existing nation-states by the succession and emergence of microstates, based on cultural, ethnic and religious peculiarities (Chomsky, 1980). Also author and historian Webster G. Tarpley submitted that, for Africa, Brzezinski actually recommended that the so-called 'micro-nationalities' concept, which means that national boundaries established in the 19th century should be swept aside in favor of a crazy quilt of petty tribal entities, each one so small that it could not hope to resist even a medium-sized oil multinational (Griffin, 2008). It is however encouraging to note that the opposite of Brzezinski's concepts, and projects, are presently advocated by new crop of equally influential American voices, like Ambassador Campbell.

9. THE WAY FORWARD

Unity in diversity, as described by Novak(1983) is the highest possible attainment of a civilization, a testimony to the noblest possibilities of the human race through passionate concern for choice, in an atmosphere of social trust. An example of a modern diverse entity is the European Union (EU) which, in 2000, adopted **'United in Diversity'** as its official Motto, reflecting the many and diverse member states of the Union in terms of culture. The motto means that through the EU, the different groups of Europeans are united in working together for peace and prosperity, and that the many different cultures, traditions and languages in Europe are a positive asset for the continent. http://Europa.eu/abc/symbols/motto/index_en.htm.

While it is not feasible to ask for a greater degree and range of unity than is possible or necessary, a society cannot be held together unless its members share certain basic beliefs and values in common. A nation like Nigeria cannot be cohesive and stable unless its components share a common national outlook including, a common system of meaning and significance; a shared conception of the good life at personal and collective levels; and a shared body of customs, practices, habits, attitudes and collective memories. Campbell has clearly inferred that in order to move forward, the Nigerian nation, particularly its elite and leadership must work for 'unity in diversity' as main stream of the Nigerian Project. The way forward for Nigeria is therefore the investiture and sustenance of 'unity in diversity' for the success of the Nigerian Dream, for its people and the whole wide world, including the United States of America.

10. CONCLUSION

Ambassador Campbell has made a case on the importance of Nigeria to the interests and stability within and for other countries, particularly the United States of America. The natural Nigeria is as stable as any dancing stage can ever be, but the staggering steps of its performers roll on the brink, as anything goes. In a popular Hausa narrative: A courier's luggage rack or '*amalanke*' bears some displaced pieces as it rolls along a bumpy road, a passerby noticed and asked the bearer to drop and adjust the falling items. A Nigerian (Hausa) proverb to this effect preaches that '*gyara kayan ka, ba sauke mu raba ba*', that is, '**suggestion to adjust your wares is not a request to drop them and share**'. This is the time to do something about the Nigerian Project otherwise, when the chips are down those in charge will pay the highest price. To conclude with, in resilience studies, ***time is a friend before a disaster; after a disaster, time is an enemy***.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, T. (2013), Crisis of Leadership in Nigeria: An Analysis of National Psyche, political Behaviour and Nation-Building, *African Renaissance Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 3&4, pp 59-73.
- Bingel, B. T. (2009), 'Nigerian History in Perspectives: The Challenges of Nation-building'. A Paper Presented to the Senior Executive Course No. 31-2009 Participants, National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies (NIPSS), Kuru.
- Brzezinski, Z (1998), 'How Jimmy Carter and I Started the Mujahideen' Counterpunch, January 15 <http://www.counterpunch.org> Accessed on 14 November 2013.
- Cartey, W. and Kilson, M. (1970), 'The African Reader: Independent Africa', New York: Vintage, www.blackpast.org/1957-alhaji-abubakar-tafawa-balewa-unity-and-diversity-independence Accessed on 18 November 2013.
- Chomsky, N. (1980), 'The Carter Administration: Myth and Reality', New York: Vintage, www.chomsky.info/books/priorities01.htm Accessed 18 November 2013.
- George, B. (2009), 'Seven Lessons for Leading in Crisis', San Francisco: Jossey Bass www.billgeorge.org/files/media/leading-in-crisis-lessons-for-safety-leaders/20101014150246550.pdf Accessed on 14 November 2013
- Griffin, W (2008), 'Obama: The Postmodern Coup – Making of a Manchurian Candidate' Tarpley: Progressive Press, <http://books.google.com> Accessed on 14 November 2013.
- Joshua, A. A. (2002), 'Language, National Integration and Nigeria Federation', *Humanities Review, African Journals Online (AJOL)*, Vol. 2 (1), pp. 93-100.
- Kelley, R. E. (1988). 'In Praise of Followers', *Harvard Business Review*, 66, 142-148 www.emeralinsight.com/bibliographic_databases.htm Accessed 18 November 2013.
- Lalonde, R. (1994), '*Unity in Diversity: Acceptance and Integration in an Era of Intolerance and Fragmentation*' (PhD Thesis). Ottawa, Ontario: Department of Geography, Carleton University. http://bahai-library.com/lalonde_unity_diversity Accessed on 12 November 2013.
- Metumara, D. M. (2010), 'Ethnic Militias and Sub-nationalism in Nigeria: A Comparative Analysis of MASSOP and OPC', Unpublished Doctorate Dissertation, Department of Political Science, Covenant University, Ota, Ogun State, Nigeria.
- Novak, M. (1983), 'Epigraph' in Carol L. Birch *Unity in Diversity: An Index to the Publications of Conservative and Libertarian Institutions*. Metuchen, N.J.: Scarecrow Press: New American Foundation. http://bahai-library.com/lalonde_unity_diversity Accessed on 8 November 2013.
- Parekh, B (2005), 'Unity and Diversity in Multicultural Societies', International Institute for Labour Studies, Geneva, Switzerland, March www.academia.edu/5121983/UNITY_AND_DIVERSITY_IN_MULTICULTURAL_SOCIETIES Accessed on 14 November 2013
- Uzoigwe, Godwin N. (1996), 'The Evolution of the Nigerian State: 1900-1914', in Isawa J. Elaigwu & Godwin N. Uzoigwe (eds.) *Foundation of Nigeria Federalism 199-1960*. Jos: Institute of Governance and Social Research (IGRS) pp. 1-3. http://Europa.eu/abc/symbols/motto/index_en.htm