

THE NIGERIAN STATE AND LEADERSHIP QUESTION: A CRITICAL APPRAISAL

*Amobi P. Chiamogu ¹ Uzodinma Oscar Okafor

*Department of Public Administration Federal Polytechnic, Oko

² Department of Political Science Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka

Abstract

Nigerian nation is faced with so many challenges. These have earned the state a disreputable status in terms of development amongst comity of nations. X-raying the state from creation to date, to a large extent, there is no denial of the fact that the unpleasant situations hinge so much on the kind of governance the state has been subjected to over the decades. Those that have wielded power in the country have been self-centred that the will and the good of the governed have been relegated to the background in order to actualize their personal interests. In spite of claims by successive regimes to have governed to better the lives of the citizenry, the obvious remains that what is obtainable leaves much to be desired. This study traces the causes of these challenges to groups that have governed and/or governing the country, thus, adopted the elite theory for its analysis. With the aid of the theory, it shows the extent the activities of these few persons have contributed in stagnating and stifling development in the state. It concludes that there is need for an honest political leadership that would bring about the much needed development in the country. Therefore, makes a case for the restructuring of the state to give room for the emergence of purposeful, viable and honest leadership with vision and strong will as one of the ways forward.

Introduction

The prevailing system of governance that has over the years dominated Nigerian politics has remained a form of challenge towards the co-operate existence and sustainable development of the people and the state. This is mainly as a result of insincerity and lack of genuine leadership on the part of the elite that governs. The nature of governance in the country is no doubt worrisome; this is because over the years the government of the state never considered it imperative to better the lives of the populace. The series of political permutation and combination the system has been subjected to is posing serious worries to the system. The period of military interregnum bastardized the emerging democratic structures; the attendant civilian regimes since 1999 have not made any meaningful impact on the welfare of the people and advancement of the state.

The paper attempts to go beyond the influence of Britain on the governing elite in Nigeria. It exposes the effect of the colonial administration on the psyche of the elite and buttresses how it affected development in the state. The nature and character of leaders in the country overtime and how they have affected development of the people and state occupy a pride of place in the paper.

The challenges of governance in Nigeria have remained multifarious, endemic and intractable in nature owing to the complexities and bizarre institutional practices the state adopted. From the emergence of Nigeria through colonial era till date, the system has continued to produce some obnoxious policies that never captured the interest of the masses. This is essentially part of the system of governance inherited from the British government. It left a sense of inhuman treatment on the people, which invoked the activities of most of the African nationalists. Thus, Abdullar cited in Yaqub (2000) calls for the rejection of imperial rule which he argues remains the bane of African crisis; he asserts that, "I hate the Crown of Britain with all my heart because to me and my countrymen (and women), it is a symbol of oppression, a symbol of persecution, a symbol of exploitation, a symbol of brutality, and in short a material manifestation of iniquity. I hate the Union Jack because...wherever it goes...it creates a division. It cannot thrive without division. It feeds and nourishes on confusion and dissension. We must, therefore, have no more places for it in our hearts- this ugly representation of that satanic institution, imperialism..." Esiaba (2010) also shares in the frustration and thus, cautions that "the British knew what they did. He warns that: Never you under estimate British intelligence. Look at all the trouble spots in Africa and the world, can you or can you not see the expertise of the British, their political genius? And never you underestimate as well, the imbecility of African leaders". This is purely one of the reasons why the structures of governance have not proved to possess the capacity to carry the populace along dutifully and constitutionally. However, we cannot continue to hold the west responsible, if we sincerely consider the issue of development to be important. This is because the present class of leadership is conceived in self-seeking formation, acute and extreme individualism which is beyond the colonial rule thesis. The questions are: what is the essence of leadership in Nigeria where majority of the entire populace are wallowing in poverty? Why is it that after many years of colonial rule the state of Nigeria has not discovered its focus and locus? Why is it that after various successive regimes have come and

gone the state keeps dwindling? It is summed up in the character of leadership in the state and their level of commitment.

Theoretical Discourse

They are scholars that have analysed socio-political issues in Nigeria from the Marxists' Class perspective. Such an approach, no doubt, has its merits in understanding the deep structural issues in Nigerian politics. Class analysis explains the Nigerian situation in sections because it divides the state along several cleavages: ethnic, regional, educational and occupational lines (Kalu in Alemika and Okoye, 2000). It is the position of this paper that the bulk of Nigeria problem is the consequences of elite actions, therefore, going by the works of elite proponents like Vilfredo Pareto: Machiavellian Realism and the Circulation of Elite; Gaetano Mosca: Ruling Class - which draws attention to the inevitability of an "Iron law of Oligarchy and Robert Michel cited in (Krieger, 1993). The theory posits that:

In all societies from societies that are very meagrely developed and have barely attained the dawn of civilization, down to the most advanced and powerful societies; two classes of people appear – a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class always the less numerous, performs all political functions, monopolises power and enjoys the advantage that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class is directed and controlled by the first.

In line with the submission above, it is consequential to note that the elite who are the few are characterised by three C's (3Cs) namely: group coherence, group conspiracy and group consciousness. They are designated variously as "the power elite", "the ruling class", "the political entrepreneurs", the establishment and the governing minority. Thus, their common thesis is that the concentration of power in a small set of controlling elite is inevitable in all societies that have marked history in politics. Hence, the nature of any society whether, democratic or authoritarian, dynamic or static, pacifist or totalitarian, legitimate or illegitimate – is determined by the nature of its elite. It shows that the type of elite that exists in a particular state determines the locus and direction of that state. It simply defines what is obtainable in such a state whether their policies will be in line with the desires and aspirations of the people. In Nigeria, the elite is self-centred, think more of their families rather than the society; represents their pocket instead of the electorates, make self-protection policies against national interest. They preach democracy and practice the opposite under the guise that the country's democracy is nascent. Ake (1996a:11) aptly captures this; he states that "democratisation in Africa has focussed on the elite who are the natural enemies of democracy. Although, the elite have provided the vast majority leaders of democratic movement, their involvement in democratic movement is mainly a tactical manoeuvre. It is a response to internal contradictions and power struggle within a group for whom democracy is essentially a means to power".

It becomes imperative to note that over the years the Nigerian system has suffered an immeasurable setback due to the style and character of leadership the state produces. The collapse of several institutions is purely a function of group activities that are bent on using

the state to achieve some ulterior motives against what should profit all for national development. The amazing scenario captures the fact that these few groups of persons have over the years continued to dominate and dictate paces for the citizens against their wishes and desires. Since independence, leadership has being a serious recurrent question in the country; those that govern have consistently continued in the acts that negate sustainable development. Despite the hue and cry from every quarter, they remained adamant to the plight of the public and are submissive to their various personal pockets (Ake, 1996b).

Owing to their low knowledge and sit tight traits to perpetuate themselves in power they have created poverty in the system and have continued to do everything within their powers to sustain it. This accounts partly for why they emerge with one form of gimmicks or another in successive elections to hoodwink the electorates into believing that they meant well for them. They metamorphose overnight into achievers, Father Christmas, philanthropists, etc; however, immediately the election is over, the whole financial spree and benevolence to the public disappear into oblivion. This explains why those who have found themselves in power always embark on all kinds of inconsistent and diabolical plans to maintain and sustain their stay in power. That tendency is painted vividly by Ake (1996b), he argues that because too much premium was placed on state power, people are going about it with Machiavellian unscrupulousness. This has led to the under-productiveness and underdevelopment of other sectors against the development of political office with so much financial attractions attached to it. In that light, therefore, no one wants to do any other thing than being a practising politician and living by the permutation of periodic election. It is against this backdrop that it is imperative to articulate that politicians of our contemporary times are pure jobbers who rely on government resources to sustain their existence.

Importantly, this paper vis-à-vis the elite theory does not asserts full comprehension and explanation of the socio-political, economic crises and the leadership challenge in Nigeria as these cannot be easily explained in a single work owing to the dynamics and complexity associated with the nature of Nigerian state.

A Critique of Leadership and Development in Nigeria

The need for social co-existence as Mclean (1996:223) observes informed social contract that was theorized from various perspectives by some scholars of the medieval period like: Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean Jacque Rousseau, etc. The contract was formulated on the grounds that life in the society was brutish, nasty, hopeless and cruel and could be said to be cannibalistic. Fear, humiliation and domination were the routine practice that really affected social existence. The worries of that critical period necessitated the urgent need for solution to address man's inhumanity to man, which give rise to the establishment of a central authority (the Leviathan) that commands general will and support. Following that common agreement, various forms of powers were bestowed on the man (the Leviathan), which include political, economic, legal etc; according to the proponents of the social contract theory, the establishment of the state and government were institutionalized based on that group agreement. The essence of leadership therefore, is the provision of good life for the good man in the good state and to do for the people what they cannot do for themselves.

The foregoing analysis provides a platform for us to have a comprehensive picture on the genesis, nature and import of the state and the essence of government. This portrays the duties of government to the people and the betrayal of that on the part of leaders in Nigeria.

Drawing example from the experiences of states like, Canada, Britain, United States, Germany, etc, the interests and welfare of their citizens are paramount and are taken seriously. They treat their citizens with dignity, respect and sense of responsibility. They have a common goal of building **United Nations** with an unshakable economic base that would continue to spread their influence to states considered important or strategic for their national interests. This could account mainly for why their citizens are not abandoning their country for menial jobs elsewhere in a bid to sustain existence like Nigerians. The systems of these countries are so structured that in most situations they make Africans succumb to the notion of being an inferior race and the evidences are very overwhelming. First, the actions and inactions of Nigerian leaders in terms of hiding looted funds and seeking medical attention abroad confirm that. Second, the high level of insecurity in diverse forms that thrive in almost all the nooks and crannies of the country as the leaders run abroad for holidays is another pointer.

In fact, comparing the developed and developing states brings the obvious into the fore. It would not be out of place here to point out that a good number of Nigerian youths would prefer to be jailed abroad in search of greener pasture than to be at home to eke out a living. This is supported by the number of people, especially youths that leave the shore of the country on daily basis for what is assumed to be “a search for greener pastures”. This explains the rationale behind the brain drain that confronts Nigeria today and the leaders are not disturbed by the great losses the country is experiencing in every sectors of human endeavours. Across the globe, Nigerians are making serious waves in virtually every sector; for instance, in the Information and Communication Technology the computer whiz kid Philip Emeagwali stands out. The country has not yet considered it necessary to tap into the potentials and prospects of her intellectuals; for instance, the likes of Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Philip Emeagwali, Ngozi Iweala, Chuba Okadigbo, Gani Fawehmi, Chike Obi, Pius Okigbo, Humphrey Nwosu of option A4, Oby Ezekwesili, to mention but a few, were purely under-used, under-explored and under-appreciated. Instead, mediocre are celebrated and crowned with *thieftaincy*, national honours and awards (by those who should have been the custodians of the state and the people) for milking the state treasury dry and depriving the citizens of their rights and privileges. The life styles of these leaders (serving and past) and their cronies tend to encourage and institutionalize corruption. The bid to emulate them by some of the citizens has led to a new wave of social vices ranging from cyber crimes, robbery, kidnapping/abduction, youth restiveness and other social vices.

The level of dexterity with which most of these cyber criminals manipulate computers and hack into restricted sites have caught the attention of the Western world and the manufacturers of computers and soft wares and programmes that they desire to apprehend them for rehabilitation and possible utilization. However, in Nigeria, the Economic and

Financial Crimes Commission, Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission, etc apprehend these computer scam whiz kids and cause them to rot in detention. These agencies are supposed to be part of the security network that ought to protect and promote the well-being of the people. Ironically, the leaders that perpetuate more heinous crimes go scot-free in spite of glaring evidence.

The primary concern of those that govern or intend to govern in the country is how to loot the treasury when (s)elected into office. They lack patriotic spirit but they preach patriotism to get the submission of the people to the law of the land, which they flout without regard. They have through their heinous and diabolical crimes become multi-millionaires and billionaires at the expense of the misery and poverty of the citizens. The constant siphoning of state finance to foreign banks according to Nwoye (2000) earned Nigeria a prolongation in debt forgiveness, which they borrowed and looted leaving the state worse than they met it.

This is further manifested in the various elections that they have conducted since the return to civilian rule, in stead of ensuring that elections deepen democratic roots they shocked the world by stage managing one of the worst election in the world. Ndibe (2004) x-raying the economic policies of these leaders, submits that they rested on two broad principles: to maximize the misery of poor Nigerians and to remove the stumbling blocks in the path of those who obscenely siphon away the nation's wealth. Even when the country had a president (Mr. Obasanjo) as a member of Transparency International (TI), he operated a system of governance that earned him high dishonour from the watchdog group. It was under his administration that Nigeria was branded the most corrupt country in the world and subsequently the second most corrupt country in the world. It became annoying and frustrating that at the end of his eight years administration, his government could not stem the tide of corruption in the country, instead it abetted it. Selective justice and injustice, ethnicism and cronyism assumed a centre stage. For instance, the former governor of Anambra State Dr Chris Ngige was abducted in collusion with a notable AIG of Police; the federal government did or said nothing to that effect. Most of the public office holders were not prosecuted as and when supposed, except when they work against the interests of a serving government. Government is sponsoring official waste, especially, in road construction and some other capital projects like Lagos – Benin expressway, Enugu – Onitsha, Aba expressway– Portharcourt expressway, Onitsha – Asaba Bridge, just to mention a few. Importantly, in spite of the fact that both past and present government are making unending promises on these roads and series of contract have been awarded to that effect they are still valleys and shadows of death in the name of roads.

Not long ago, the world economy was confronted with deep economic recession. The economic meltdown started in America and spread to other European states. With zeal and patriotic spirit inherent in their leaders, adequate attention was given to it. Their leaders and government, the United States for instances, offered a bailout plan of \$700 billion. Transnational Corporations pushed money back home; private and stock investors did their bits, all in a bid to salvage their dwindling and traumatized economy.

In Nigeria, what was done? What did the government do to show its commitment towards protecting the economy of the state? What did the leaders that carted away billions of naira to foreign banks do? What is the basis of asking Nigeria citizenry to be patriotic when the leaders are not and the government careless about them? In the event of the economic melt down, the country's stock market suffered seriously economic setback and many lost their jobs. What Nigerian government did was to make life more difficult for the people through wrong timing and introduction of policies that lay off bank workers, hike the domestic prices of vehicle fuel, diesel and kerosene.

There are symbols, events and songs that elicit loyalty, commitment and dedication to the state from the citizens. The import of the United States of American Flag and Statue of Liberty to an average American is a classical example. The import of Nigerian National Flag and National Anthem are worthy of note, especially with regard to the lyrics and diction of the Anthem. When the Anthem is x-rayed in juxtaposition with the character of leadership in Nigeria and those we reverence as our past heroes, who fought assiduously and were incarcerated for the sake of independence of the State. We understand the magnitude and extent of their commitment in the fight for the independence of the Nigerian State. Today, the political vampires in power have bastardized that effort committed towards restoring the dignity of man. The first stanza of the Anthem reads thus "arise o' compatriots; Nigeria calls obey, to serve our fatherland, with love, strength and faith".

It arouses a great feeling an inward movement, a passion that the independence of Nigeria was fought by people who loved their father land and were willing to die for the country. A call for brotherhood to rise, serve and defend our fatherland with love strength and faith in order to build a nation where peace and justice shall reign. Ironically, the present crops of leaders do not exhibit the essence of that clarion call. Most of them are not versed in any form of leadership training (formal or informal) with little or no knowledge that can hardly guarantee a peaceful administration of a family; however, they are piloting the affairs of the state. "The labours of our heroes past shall never be in vain. To serve with heart and might, one nation bound in freedom, peace and unity".

The next stanza of the Anthem above invokes a pathetic feeling for the state, not necessarily because of its present condition but because posterity would judge these leaders. It is a total failure for those who took over from our past heroes, our nationalists who fought for the independence of Nigeria, the likes of Nnamdi Azikiwe, Muokwugwo Okoye, Osita Agwuna, Habib Raji Abdallar, Obafemi Awolowo, Anthony Enahoro, Sarduana of Sokoto, etc. Thus, Agwuna cited in Yaqub (2000) made a pathetic statement in his effort at resisting continued colonial exploitation "I rededicate my life anew to vindicate the cause of African Irredentism and neither fear nor loss of life...prestige and personal wealth shall make me deviate from the path I have chosen".

With the benefit of hindsight, the leaders are the present enemies of the country. It is now explicit that enemies within are more dreaded and deadly than the enemies out side (the west); they have made the citizens slaves and objects of less value in their fatherland. For

instance, when Ironsi tried to uphold the legacies of our past heroes, he was murdered under a coterie conspiracy; he was a virtuous **General** of ‘*a suo generic*’ but his commitment was branded “Ironsi mistake” by those leaders in power today (Ironsi, 2000). Only two pounds was discovered in his account after his death to the utmost surprise of his military colleagues.

The country’s experience with leadership and development leaves a sour taste in the mouth. Almost, all the sectors of the state and economy have been bastardized and disoriented. For instance, the power sector manned by the Power Holding Company of Nigeria (PHCN) known popularly as Nigerian Electrical Power Authority (NEPA) is one of the institutions that have attracted a lot of criticisms from the people because of its poor performance. Challenges of power generation and distribution have done untold harm to other sectors of the economy especially the manufacturing sector. The bureaucratic and other institutions of governance are over bloated and redundant. Provision of basic amenities and services are at its lowest ebb; hunger, diseases, unemployment and other indicators of poverty are prevalent in the country.

Development in whatever form: human, infrastructure, etc are nothing to write home about. Thus, Okoye (2001) argues that, “Nigeria is developing under underdevelopment”. The submission of Okoye is not out of place as indices of development are seriously lacking in the country.

Conclusion

The nexus between leadership and development cannot be overemphasized. The level of development in any state is the function of the quality of leadership obtainable in that country. Where the leadership is poor, visionless, corrupt, oppressive and self-seeking; underdevelopment is the attendant result. This accounts for partly why most countries facing leadership challenges are found to be classified among third world or underdeveloped countries. Those that the leadership have improved tremendously and impacted positively on the quality of lives of the citizens are classified as developing countries. Those with well defined, developed and established systems in every ramifications reflected in the quality of lives of the citizenry, character of leadership and governance, infrastructural development and their roles in the global economy are classified as developed countries.

From our analysis, the Nigerian state and the level of development no doubt places her amongst the third world countries; which is mainly as a result of the quality of leadership it parades over time. Therefore, the colonial legacy thesis can no longer explain fully the crisis of development in the country.

Recommendations

Leadership is not a career; it is a vocation to serve. It is devoid of selfishness, deceit, ignorance, greed, clannishness, amongst other negative attitudes found among leaders in Nigeria. The system of leadership that is practiced in the country has been imbibed into the psyche of the people that future generations may emulate them if it is not addressed.

Therefore, there is urgent need for constant education on value re-orientation in every nook and cranny of the state to inculcate into the people the right kind of attitude towards leadership.

Furthermore, political processes need to be demonetised to enable decent people to participate and contribute meaningfully to the democratic process. Liberalization of the electoral processes in the country is important in that respect; when that is done, it will provide the masses good opportunity to participate in the political processes and elections that will encourage the emergence of legitimate and honest leadership. Honest political leadership is lacking in the country; the institution of honest political leadership is a sine qua non for positive development in the country. That is leadership with vision and will power to initiate and actualize drastic changes in the state.

References

- Ake, C. (1996a). *Is Africa Democratizing?* Lagos: Malthouse Press Limited.
- Ake, C. (1996b). *Political Economy of Africa*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited
- Alemika, E. E. O. and Okoye, F. O. (ed). (2000). *Constitutional Federalism and Democracy in Nigeria*. Kaduna: Human Rights Monitor
- Ironsi, A. V. (2000). Igbos Have the Right to Know Why their Children are Wasted. *Tell Magazine*, July 31
- Krieger, J. (ed). (1993). *The Oxford Companions to Politics of the World*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Mclean, I. (1996). *Oxford Concise Dictionary of Politics*. London, Oxford University Press.
- Ndibe, O. (2004). Achebe's Repudiation of Honour. Retrieved 3rd September, 2012 from <http://www.okeyndibe.com/articles.htm/12.30pm/sunday/02/05/2010>
- Nwoye, K. O. (2000). *Corruption, Leadership and the Dialectics of Development in Africa: An Explanatory Perspective*. Enugu: Associated Printing & Litho Co. Ltd.
- Okoye, I. C. (2001). *Political Behaviour*. Mimeograph, Department of Political Science, Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
- Yaqub, N. O. (2000). *The Northern Influence and Impact On The Radical of Nigeria: Habib Raji Abdullah + In Zikist Movement*. Nnamdi Azikiwe Journal of Political Science. Vol. 2 No 1