

LEADERSHIP QUESTION, GOOD GOVERNANCE AND THE NIGERIAN NATION-STATE

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ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to address the reasons for this untoward situation. It interrogates the place of leadership in the state of governance in the Nigerian nation-state. In order to effectively embark on this task, this paper is divided into three sections. The first defines and clarifies the basic concepts in this paper. The second will attempt to highlight the performance of past Nigerian leaders in order to establish the extent the leadership they offered the nation stunted hindered or fostered good governance and thereby establish a nexus between leadership and good governance while the third provides the concluding remarks.

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria is a country generously endowed by nature with enormous resources, clement ecosystem that is extremely less disaster prone, variegated vegetation that could sustain all forms of agricultural activities for attending to the food challenges of its citizens, etc. It is also blessed with human resources; individuals who stand in high relief in all aspects of human endeavours yet, the country appears to lag in all indices of measuring greatness, or rather, the state of socio-economic and political development of the country appears to contradict its innate potentials. This situation has led many a man to conclude that Nigeria is a failed state, or one at the brinks of collapse and disintegration. Certainly, some recent developments may warrant even the greatest skeptic to accede to this assertion. Public utilities have virtually collapsed, infrastructures are in a state of disrepair; social amenities are only within the reach of the extremely wealthy, the bourgeoisie created essentially through government patronage and prebends and brazen embezzlement of public fund. The nation's security is threatened by organized terror and fissiparous groups and elements that unleash centrifugal forces on the corporate existence of the country and seek to atomize the state along, sectional, ethnic and religious lines. Corruption is rife. Profligacy and the concomitant lack of probity and accountability are the hallmarks of government expenditure.

CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS

The basic concepts in this paper are clarified and defined in the context of this paper. This would enable us, as much as possible, to limit controversies usually associated in the attempt to comprehend concepts in academic papers. These definitions however, are contextualized in the Nigerian situations.

Leadership

Leadership like concepts used in the social science disciplines has been defined in different ways by various scholars, particularly according to their ideological persuasions. But we shall avoid such controversies by making recourse to the dictionary definition of the Concept Leadership is derived from the verb "lead". The Chambers 21st Century Dictionary (1996 edition) defines 'lead' as "to guide or make someone or something go in a certain direction, holding or pulling with the hand" (p.774). According to the same dictionary, leader is "someone or something that leads or guides others; someone who organizes or is at the charge of a group" and leadership means 'ability to lead' (p.774). Leadership is influencing the performance of group members towards the achievement of organizational goals through persuasion, example, direction, control or oversight. It is also influencing people by providing purpose, direction and motivation- While operating to accomplish the mission and improving the organization.

Major General James Olunloye in his book *Military leadership in Nigeria, 1966-1979*, attempts to define leadership with particular reference to the subject matter of this paper. Quoting Webster's Third Law International Dictionary Volume II, he says that a leader is "a person or animal that leads a person" and that a leader must have the capacity to lead, having that ingredient of personality which causes men to follow, Successful solution of problems and mould individuals into a team. He informs us that Borgadus in 1928, defined leadership as "the creating and setting forth of exceptional behavior patterns in such a way that other people respond". He states further that "the leader must possess more intelligence, personality, task motivation and performance and social consequences" than the followers (p16).

Han. Justice Chukwudifu Oputa has lent his Voice in the definition of leadership. According to him, "Etymologically, to lead means to direct by going in front. Leadership implies a purposeful direction of the affairs of those led. Leadership implies some movement towards a definite and defined goal which will be for the benefit of society. He identifies the following as characteristics of leadership; imaginativeness, firm character, clear conscience, disciplined personal life style and stewardship" (p10). Onoge on his part identifies leadership function as, the roles of planner, policy maker executive, expert, group ambassador, facilitator of internal communication within the group, mediator, bearer of gratifications and Punishments, exemplar, and symbol of the group. The socio -psychological studies of leadership also conceive of the function to some times include emotional roles of father figure, escape-goat and even substitute for individual responsibility (p 25).

Leadership involves all facets of human endeavours. This is referred to as sectoral leadership. Such sectors in a socio-political system include the Judiciary, organized labour, professional groups like the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) the Press, among others. However, the focus of this is paper is political leadership. This is significant especially in the Nigerian context because all other aspects or sectoral leadership are subordinated to it And the political leadership influences the leadership at the other sectors. Examples abound to illustrate political leadership's interaction with and suppression of the sectoral leadership. For instance government meddlesomeness in the leadership of Trade Union Organizations, the professional groups etc. In some cases the leaders of such sectoral groups are incarcerated for opposition and 'subversion' to political leadership.

In a nutshell, political leadership could be defined as the individual who directs leads and manages the affairs of the nation. He could function with a team eg, The Supreme Military Council, the Armed forces Ruling Council, the Federal Executive Council, and the Nigeria Council of State etc. But the Head of state fundamentally is the leader. He has profound influence over the members of such bodies, In the Nigerian context, the regime or administration is inextricably tied to the helmsman, hence we often hear of Balewa-led administration, Gowon- led administration, and president Obasanjo led administration. With this mindset, the Leader/Head of State enjoys an omnibus Status. His personal socio-psychological construct appears to be the moving force of the administration, and not a laid down norm, convention and legislation. And as Tunde Adeniran would want us to believe "the [Leaders] perception of the world were often likely to be subjective and coloured by his values and beliefs" (p.39).

Good Governance

Good government is derived from the root words 'good' and 'govern'. The Chambers 21st century Dictionary (1996 edition) defines 'govern' as to "control and direct the affairs of (0 country, state or organization)". According to the same dictionary, 'governance' is seen "as the act or state of governing; the system of government; authority or control" (p.580). By inference governance is multi faceted, encompassing the act or state' which implies the dispensation of power; the system, which also implies the form of administration e.g. Democratic authoritarian autocratic etc; and finally, authority and control which would entail oppressive, suppressive. accommodating or laissez-faire", qualities of government. "Good" literarily means, positive, ennoblement, up building, constructive and beneficial.

A conflation of the two words would lead as to see or define good governance as constructive, ennobling and up-building methods of dispensing authority for the good and benefit of the majority of the citizens of a state.

Good governance should eschew such unwarranted and undeserving constructs as, authoritarianism, autocracy, suppression, repression and nepotism. Basically, governments are instituted to attend to the needs and aspirations of the citizens, protect and defend the sovereignty of the state. "Good governance is the process whereby public institutions conduct public affairs, manage public resources and guarantee the realization of human rights in a manner essentially free of abuse and corruption, and with due regard for the rule of law. The true test of "Good governance is the degree to which it delivers on the promise of human rights; civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. The institution of governance should effectively guarantee the right to health, adequate housing, sufficient food, quality education, fairness, justice and personal security. In its resolution 2000/64, the Commission on Human Rights identified the key attributes of good governance as;

Transparency

Responsibility

Accountability

Participation

Responsiveness (to the needs of the people)

- ❖ According to the United Nations (UN). good governance has eight characteristics, they are; Consensus oriented
- ❖ Participatory
- ❖ Following the Rule of Law
- ❖ Effective and Efficient
- ❖ Accountable
- ❖ Transparent
- ❖ Responsive
- ❖ Equitable and inclusive

We should use the benchmarks above to assess the leadership of the regimes in Nigeria with a view to establishing the extent to which the concept 'good governance' has been applied to the Nigerian nation-state.

LEADERSHIP IN THE NIGERIAN NATION-STATE IN TIME PERSPECTIVE

Although, Nigerian re-gained political independence from the British colonial masters in 1960, signs of the leadership the country would have had been made manifest in the actions and utterances of the key nationalist figures who incidentally took up reins of power in different forms. Most instructive in this regard was the sentence uttered by Ahmadu Bello, the Sarkin Daura of Sokoto When on March 31, 1953 as Anthony Enahoro moved his 'Nigeria self-government motion. He had said "The mistake of 1914 has come to light and I should like to go no further". (quoted in Aguda, p24) This utterance is not in any way different from what Chief Obofemi Awolowo had written in 1947 that,

Nigeria is not a nation: it is a mere geographical expression There are no "Nigerians" in the same sense as there are "English" or "Welsh" or "French"; the word "Nigeria" is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live in Nigeria from those Who do not. (pp 47-48).

The thought of the first Prime-Minister of Nigeria, Sir Tafawa Balewa was in tandem with the above, for, according to him;

Since the amalgamation of Southern and Northern Provinces in 1914, Nigeria has existed as one country only on paper. It is still far from being united. Nigerian unity is only a British intention for the country (quoted in Aguda; 24).

Nothing betrays lack of patriotism and commitment to the Nigerian nation state more than the above comments. Certainly, leaders who hold such opinions of their country can never commit themselves, their energies and wits to its development.

Again, Nigerian leaders, unlike those of other African countries which enjoyed good leadership and governance, are ideologically bankrupt. Those African leaders who were sources of pride to the African world over hinged their successes to strong ideological bases. For instance, Julius Nyerere of Tanzania in his Ujama'a socialism and Arusha Declaration set definite ideals upon which the Nation anchored her development and policies. Such commitment, tenacity of purpose and doggedness eloquently manifest in Nelson Mandela's travails, incarceration and eventual leadership position in South Africa. Kwame Nkrumah utilized such precepts as the consciences to provide an ideological bond for the country. But two prominent Nigerian leaders, even at the height of the nationalist movement would say the following about themselves. According to Obafemi Awolowo,

I was going to make myself formidable intellectually, morally invulnerable, to make all the money that is possible for a man with my brains and Brawn to make in Nigeria (quoted in Achebe, 13-14)

Nnamdi Azikiwe on his part pledged;

Henceforth I shall utilize my earned income to secure my enjoyment of a high standard of living and also to give a helping hand to the needy. (Quoted in Achebe, 13-14)

Thoughts such as these are more likely to produce aggressive millionaires than selfless leaders of their people, (Achebe, pp 14 - 15). Other attributes exhibited by Nigerian leaders before the attainment of political independence were corruption and graft. A few examples may suffice. In 1956, the Colonial Secretary set up the Foster-sutton Commission of inquiry to investigate

allegations of impropriety on the management of the accounts of the African Continental Bank by then premier of Eastern Region. Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe. The commission in its report, found Azikiwe's conduct as "falling short of expectations of honest and reliable people". Ironically to Azikiwe's admirers, his action was "a matter more of congratulation than condemnation", and saw the whole affair around Azikiwe at the time as widely suspected to be a little better than a plot contrived by the imperialists "to discredit and dethrone their idol for their Own ends" (Quoted in Nwadike, p. 65)

Again, during a parliamentary debate, the then Minister of Aviation, Chief K.O. Mbadiwe, had been asked where he got the money used to build a stone mansion in his country home, the minister quickly replied without reservation that the money was got "from sources known and unknown", In a similar manner, Chief Festus Okote-Eboh, responding to charges of accumulation of fund by public affairs through dubious means, shamelessly and brazenly quoted from the Bible that "to those that have, more shall be given ..." (Quoted in Nwadike, pp.67-68).

As Michael Crowder pungently puts it,

By the end of 1965, the politicians had earned almost universal contempt for their conception, profligacy, and lack of real concern for those they rule and who had elected them. (p. 260).

Events in the country in the immediate post independence period would reveal the level of intrigues, power-play and deviousness that characterized the activities of the Leaders of that period. At the attainment of political independence, the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) had formed an alliance (NNA) in order to form the government. At that period there was wide agitation for the creation of regions by the minority groups in the various regions; the Middle Belt in the North, the Cross River-Ogoja and Rivers movement in the East and the Mid-west in the Western region. In order to cripple and stunt the Action Group which was the opposition party, Midwest region was created and the NCNC formed government in the nascent region. That other region remained intact was a ploy to weaken the Action Group and not necessarily borne out of any altruistic and genuine political intentions. Allied to this was the involvement of the Tafawa Balewa led administration in the Western region elections and crises. With the political realignment nation-wide that led to an alliance between the NCNC and Action Group, the NPC sought to weaken the Action Group by supporting Samuel Akintola who succeeded Awolowo as the premier of the Western region. In the feud that ensued between the duos, the Balewa led administration supported the former. The attempt by Awolowo's group to remove Akintola as premier led to an open combat in the House. The Federal Government reacted in a manner that tended to favour Akintola. First, He appointed chief Majekodunmi the administrator of the region for six months, at the expiration of which he restored Akintola as the premier without any consultation with the electorate. And to add insult to injury, Chief Awolowo was in June 1963, sentenced to a ten year jail term. All these were done by Tafawa-Balewa led administration to suppress opposition at the federal level and to install a puppet and pliable administration in the Western region. These were done to consolidate hold on power and not for any genuine leadership intentions. This betrays selfishness and abuse of power by a political helmsman. Part of the fall-out of these actions was the coup d'etat that eventually led to the outbreak of the civil war in 1967.

Also the lack of decisive action on the part of Major General Aguiyi Ironsi over the fate of the Majors that plotted the 1966 coup and the Unification Decree which sent the wrong signals may have led to the counter coup of 1967. It is believed that Aguiyi Ironsi lacked the mental capacity to contrive and initiate policies that could have assuaged the frayed nerves from the 1966 military coup. This is obviously an administrative and mental ineptitude.

The leadership qualities and humility exhibited why Gowon made him to take certain decision and actions that led to successful execution of the civil war and the reintegration of the secessionist group into the Nigerian family. The greatest hallmark of humility ever exhibited by a Nigerian leader was his decision to grant amnesty to Chief Awolowo and to make him a member of Federal Executive Council. His wits did not appear to disappoint him until he began to prevaricate on the return of the country to civilian rule. He lost grip of governance and could not discipline erring governors and subordinates. This gave rise to unprecedented corruption and scandals. His lack of tact led him to declare that the problem of country was not money, but how to spend it. He mismanaged the enormous revenue that accrued to the nation from oil. There was general laxity in government circles and public life.

It was in the face of this situation, that he was overthrown in a military coup in 1975. General Murtala Mohammed became the next head of state. His reputation for discipline and aversion for corruption led to massive purges in the civil and public service, a change in the nation foreign policy thrust on colonization and liberation movements in Southern Africa. Though he was impetuous, his character and personality brought mixed feelings. Most of the purges were not very thoughtful. It is believed that it destroyed the respect and dignity of civil service in the country. By and large, his disciplined tenor brought a new lease of life to the country. His desire to hand over to an elected government within a foreseeable future and definite time frame helped to rejuvenate interest in the government. His administration was short-lived, having been assassinated in a coup plot on 13th February 1976, barely seven months in power. His successor, Olusegun Obasanjo, executed his programmes, especially as it concerned the hand-over of power to civilians. Perceptive observers are of the opinion that then Gen. Obasanjo acted fearfully and hurriedly in the discharge of these responsibilities. These are indeed, qualities unexpected of any leader.

The return of the country to a civilian administration under Alhaji Shehu Shagari, reveals the impact of lack of firmness of character and the consequences of the inability of a leader to call his subordinates to order. He was bereft of patriotism and was also a victim of high level policking and power-play. For instance, in an open letter to President Shagari, on 1st July 1981, Chief Awolowo observed that:

It is generally agreed that Nigeria is seriously ill. The economy ails critically, and the body-politic aches in every part of its organism. Everywhere, there is hunger, depression and discontent (Quoted in Obi-Ani p. 99)

In his reply to Chief Awolowo's letter on 3rd July, 1981, he stated;

While I acknowledge problems of adjusting to the new constitution by those privileged by election or appointment to operate it, it is not true that Nigeria is seriously ill or that its economy ails critically. In spite of the oil glut in the world, our reserves are still much higher than in 1979 when I took office. We relaxed import and have increased our production capacity. Industrial and commercial companies have all shown increased activities, turnover and profits (Quoted in Obi-Ani p. 100).

Paradoxically, by April 1982, President Shehu Shagari was constrained to acknowledge that the nation economy was truly in comatose. Austerity measures were introduced thereafter. It is most unfortunate for a leader to dismiss critics of his administration as antagonistic and subversive elements. This action is quite antithetical to good leadership. Perhaps, if Shagari had reacted promptly to Awolowo's letter by addressing the nation's economic problems, the economy may not have deteriorated so badly and the effect on the citizens may have been less debilitating. Again, a leader ought to exhibit firm authority and exercise his power over his subordinates. In this regard, the leadership of Shehu Shagari was an abysmal failure. He could not check the excesses of his ministers, especially Alhaji Umaru Dikko, the minister of transport who was also in charge of the presidential task force on rice importation. Although, Shagari and his deputy received clean bills from the Tribunal on the Recovery of Public fund set up by the BuharifIdiag bon regime, there is nothing that could exculpate President Shehu Shagari, in public view, of the fraud committed by a minister he appointed. One can go on to mention a legion of instance, where the leadership of the regime faltered, but suffice it to say that the leadership qualities of Shehu Shagari brought its own challenges, and was, in fact, responsible for the military coup that overthrew his regime. The country was gradually tilting towards a one party state with the level of fraud and manipulation that characterized the 1983 general election.

Major General Buhuri's ascension to power was enthusiastically applauded all over the country because of the rot in the civilian administration of President Shehu Shagari. In the first place the administration's resolve to fight corruption and restore orderliness in public conduct were appreciated by the masses who were already disappointed with the corruption of the civilian administration. Most of the top political office holders, were tried, convicted to serve long prison terms and made to forfeit some of the illegally acquired wealth to the government. Orderliness in public conduct was gradually permeating public life, the queue culture; punctuality and devotion to public service were forcibly engraved in the mentality of the people. However, some aspects of his programmes caused untold hardship on the citizens. Draconian Decrees were enacted; the austerity measures were too severe, there was mass unemployment as a result of the retrenchment exercise, among others. It is believed that he was more interested in steering the ship to safety than the preserving the lives of passengers on board. In other words, his economic recovery measures lacked human face.

On the whole, most Nigerians still speak with nostalgia of the administration's policy to inculcate good morals and public conduct on the citizens. They would want to argue that the hardship experienced during his administration were needed sacrifices to put the nation on the path of greatness, the confrontational posture on the country's relations with the neo-colonial powers would yield the country greater international respectability, honour and autonomy.

In relating his administration's performance to good governance, one would easily observe how the anti-corruption and anti-indiscipline stance of the leadership positively impacted on the society. It is widely believed that his overthrow was the handiwork of neo-colonial and neo-imperialist elements.

The regime of Major General Ibrahim Babangida is arguably one hinged on deviousness, inconsistency and lack of transparency. He appeared to operate on the sensibilities of Nigerians. He never kept his promise on any national issue. For example, the IMF debate and the transition to civil rule programme. In the debate the administration instituted nationwide on whether to accept the IMF loan or not, Nigerians spoke stridently and vehemently against the loan. But General Babangida ostensibly accepted the IMF conditions, through the introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme, apparently deceiving Nigerians. The programme of returning the country to civilian rule was not met. He continually postponed the hand-over date and eventually relinquished power to an Interim National Government, after the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election, obviously won by M.K.O. Abiola. It is believed the entire transition programme cost Nigeria more than 3 billion naira.

According to J.I Dibia;

The annulment of the June 12, 1993 election's dearly demonstrated the self- serving nature and lack of sincerity of purpose that characterized the whole transition programme of the Babangida regime (227).

This statement aptly describes the Babangida administration. The leadership he offered was responsible for the current woes of the country. Certainly, Nigerians enjoyed minimal good governance from his leadership. General Sani Abacha, sacked the interim National Government instituted by General Babangida as he stepped aside. Abacha's leadership offered little or nothing to the generality of Nigerians. His regime converted national wealth to family property and that of a few of his cronies. Nigeria's relations with her traditional allies came to an all time low. This was because of his intention to transmute from military head of state to civilian presidency.

Perceived detractors to his administration were incarcerated in jail and some surreptitiously stuffed- off their lives. His administration was autocratic and repressive. The vast majority of Nigerians were compelled to see in him a messianic image, because of the extreme pauperization they were subjected to. Consequently, he used national wealth to win influence over citizens. His attempts to fight corruption and corrupt practices were half- hearted measures. Nigerians groaned under severe hardship; scarcity of petroleum products, decay in social amenities and denial of fundamental human rights. Certainly, Nigerians did not experience good governance from his leadership it is ironical that his demise was described 'as good riddance to bad rubbish'. Thus Abacha's regime and leadership contributed their quota to Nigeria's problem.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This study has attempted to establish how Nigerian. Leaders had influenced the socioeconomic and political development of the country. It also highlighted aspects of the impact of their policies on Nigeria's foreign relation, It argues that the type of leadership Nigeria had affected service delivery and good governance. It would appear that the socio-psychological constructs of each leader determined performance and not necessarily laid down Social norm, political culture or national ideology. It is the View of this paper that good governance has largely eluded Nigeria due to the quality of her leadership. It is in this context that it concurs with Chinua Achebe that, "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership" (P.I) Leadership rests squarely on the disposition of the Head of -State or Government. To buttress this further, Achebe says "that the character of one man could ... change,... a people's social behavior was nothing less than miraculous" (P.I) Nigeria could change and enjoy good governance, if the person at the helm of affairs is upright, forthright and consistent. After all, it is said the fish begins to rot from the head'.

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