The Crisis of Political Leadership and the Nigerian Democratic Paradox

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Abstract

The objective of this paper is to critically examine the implications of the crisis of political leadership, bad governance vis-a-vis the paradoxes of Nigeria's democratic experience and the way forward. The problems of Nigeria's democratic experience are multifaceted and it has to be addressed critically and fundamentally. This involves a critical examination of the myriad of problems such as economic problem, herdsmen-farmers clashes, religious bigotry, Islamic fundamentalism, ethnic chauvinism, cultural problem, and political instability, bribery and corruption in the contemporary Nigerian society. These multidimensional issues served as an impediment to sustainable development and the democratic stabilization of the Nigerian society. This paper adopts the analytical framework in examining the crisis of political leadership and the Nigerian paradoxical experience. This paper concludes that the notions of scientific, technological, political, economic, cultural, religious, ethnic and social change reflects the necessary desideratum for the dynamic process relative to the Nigerian democratic condition and how they can be amenable to Nigeria's democratic experience or otherwise. Secondly, the deep logical insight offered by philosophy into the problems of the Nigeria's democratic setting and the assault on Nigeria by her political leaders which include among other things the phenomena of Nigeria's paradoxical democratic problems of corruption, bribery, ignorance, lack of political ideology and economic instability could only be resolved by transformational leadership structure that is people oriented and by ensuring the democratic liberalization of the Nigerian citizens.

Keywords: Leadership, Crisis, Corruption, Nigeria, Democracy

1.1 Introduction

Political leadership in this new millennium requires dynamism, vision and creativity. The word "millennium" is defined as a future time of great happiness and prosperity for everyone (Hornby, 2010:536). Africans are seriously facing socio-political and economic hardship due to ineffective leadership structure. Leadership is what makes an organization or a nation. Without good leadership, an organization or a nation cannot survive (Kwaghe and Ecoma, 2016:13). The democratic system of Nigeria has turned out to be a real problem in a globalized world where democracy ought to strive. Nigeria's political leaders and their party affiliates are busying themselves looting the resources of Nigeria for their selfish gains. Promises are not kept by these political leaders. This has led to the myriad of crises Nigeria is already experiencing. Today, Nigeria as a country has been characterized by certain social vices such as bribery and corruption, bloodletting, lawlessness, kidnapping, armed robbery, economic sabotage, political instability, cultural chauvinism, religious crises along ethnic lines. Nigeria's democratic system has been hijacked by a selected few who think and run the country like their father's estates. Nigeria is being managed by a group of political leaders who are so hungry and they deemed it necessary to loot the country's resources only at the detriment of millions of Nigerian citizens.

Furthermore, liberal democracy, or whatever name you may like to call it must be built on the idea of the common good, purity of intention and honesty of purpose. There must be inter-subjective mutual recognition and collective identity of all equal consociates in the Nigerian contemporary society. Corruption, as one of the bane of sustainable development and economic growth must be discouraged in Nigeria. Democracy requires a test of legitimate expectation and a normative ideal social order. Order refers to stability in the possession of things; security against violence and a trust in others that promises will be kept (Hoffman and Graham, 2009:499). Democracy in a globalized world requires economic security, political participation, equal opportunity for all, promotion of fundamental human right as a universal core of our existential political estimation and the semblance of honesty and fairness. Nigeria's office holders should desist from their level of political brigandage and their economic sabotage in order to pave the way for the entrenchment of sustainable development, a good democratic experience that is devoid of any form of paradoxical juxtaposition. There should be an eloquent testing of the immeasurable role of all aspects of Nigerian citizens towards sustainable development and a genuine democratic culture devoid of any mirage or chimera. Democracy in Nigeria should not be business as usual. Nigeria needs a rethinking because after many years of democracy in Nigeria the implication has been a colossal failure. The failures of the political class, manipulation of the electoral system, the rising rate of ethnic, religious, and political violence and corruption have been the major factors responsible for the slow pace

of sustainable development in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general. The need for sustainable development and good democratic experience must be the utmost concern of all African countries. This paper is divided into nine sections. Section one is the introductory remarks. Section two focuses on the Nigerian state and the problem of economic crisis. Section three is anchored on the problem of ethnicity in Nigeria. Section four focuses on the problem of political leadership and the Nigerian democratic paradox. Section five discusses about Nigeria's democratic experience and the way forward. Section six reflects on Nigeria and the problem of religious crisis. Section seven is anchored on the problems of cultural crisis in Nigeria and section eight focuses on the evaluation and section nine is actually on the concluding consideration. This paper concludes that the notions of scientific, technological, political, economic, cultural, religious, ethnic and social change reflects the necessary desideratum for the dynamic process relative to the Nigerian democratic condition and how they can be amenable to Nigeria's democratic experience or otherwise.

1.2 The Nigerian State and the Problem of Economic Crisis

One very fundamental problem of the Nigerian State is economic problem. The economic state of any nation has to do with her level of productivity. The two problems facing the African continent are the problems of the inability to critically harness both the natural and human resources. The biggest problem in Nigeria's democratic setting is the problem of economic slippery or democratic instability. Nigeria, in terms of her human resources is facing the brain-drain syndrome. Many Nigerians are facing abject poverty due to economic sabotage by political office holders. Nigeria's democratic system is characterized by looting of the vast economic or natural resources the country is being endowed with.

1.3 The Problem of Ethnicity in Nigeria

Nevertheless, ethnicity is a category of people who identify with each other based on similarities, such as common ancestral, language, social, cultural or national experiences (Okaneme, 2018:11). Since Nigeria's independence in October 1, 1960, she has been facing one form of ethnic chauvinism or ethnic crises. It is worthy of note that ethnic crisis in Nigeria has a close link with various religious bigotry which Nigeria has been experiencing. Nigeria's paradoxes or the paradoxes of Nigeria's democratic experience along ethnic lines or border have been a hydra-headed problem. There have been countless ethnic crises since the existence of Nigeria as a country. These ethnic crises have resulted into man's inhumanity to man. The Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970 was caused by ethnicity or tribalism. Nigeria's civil war was based on ethnic lines which resulted in the killing of Aguyi Ironsi in 1966. Aguyi Ironsi of the East was murdered in a cold blood during the *coup de etat* of 1966. The issue of ethnicity in the Nigeria's democratic experience is a very

complex one and due to this complexity of Nigerian contemporary society alongside ethnic lines the issues of sustainable development and robust democratic system have been fundamental problems of Nigeria's democratic experience. Nigeria's democratic experience has been distorted due to the paradoxical state of Nigeria's existential and political domain. The paradoxical position of the Nigeria's democratic experience as a result of ethnic crises could only be resolved by human solidarity and accommodation. This call for solidarity and accommodation requires the principle of harmonious complementation (Asouzu, 2003:155). Nigeria's ethnic crises could only be resolved by all sense of harmonious cohabitation, responsibility, linguistic transparency, and accountability.

1.4 The Problem of Political Leadership and the Nigerian Democratic Paradox

Nonetheless, there is no gainsaying the fact that in Nigeria, the political leadership has exhibited a very poor character and trait from time immemorial and overtime. Leadership is a very important and cogent aspect of democracy not only in Nigeria but in other climes that it cannot be toyed with. Leadership is dynamic and therefore requires vision, tenacity and creativity (Okaneme, 2018:15). One fundamental problem of Nigeria's democratic experience is the problem of ineffective leadership, corruption and god-fatherism. The problem of ineffective leadership, corruption and god-fatherism has led to the failure of democratic values, democratic rationality and the failure of human wisdom. For Dukor:

> The abuse of the otherwise cultural and humanistic concept is fallout of the collapse of values, rationality and reason. It is a failure of human wisdom as a collective conscience and responsibility, substituting in its pace the jungle plurality, the hypothetical imperative principle and the survival of the fittest principle that caused the crisis of modernity and which found their way into the heart and minds of warlords, dictators, god fathers and politician who accordingly desire to conquer, subdue and lord it over the people (Dukor, 2007: vii-viii).

The democratic woes in Nigeria are increasing rather than decreasing. It is worthy of note that if ten years of democracy is not serving Nigeria as well as she deserves, the more vital reality is that its dysfunctions are increasing rather, than decreasing (Oguejiofor, 2001:26). The paradoxes of the Nigeria's democratic experience are multi-faceted. Nigeria is facing a myriad of economic, socio-political, cultural, religious and ethnic problems which are adversely affecting the democratic agenda of Nigeria as a nation and her quest for sustainable development. It is germane to note that politics is best thought of as the pursuit of the common good (Mackenzie, 2009:5). The principle of the common good is the ultimate

objective for the sole formation of the political state. Nigeria's democratic experience has become a jig-saw puzzle. Politics in Nigeria has been the interest of a selected few. Politics should be deeply rooted in the collective interest of all in the Nigerian society. The problem of Nigerian politics is the problem of bad governance, ignorance, corruption, ineffective leadership and lack of political ideology and lack of sustainable development. Nigeria's democratic experience is characterized by winner's grab-it-all; this is the politics of bribery and corruption. Nigeria's democratic experience has become so paradoxical due to the problem of bad leadership, lack of political foresight and ideology. Nigerian politicians are not ideologically inclined thereby they have failed in their leadership positions. A leader must be equipped with the principle of we-consciousness. He must have a sense of belonging. He must be meticulous and morally bound in the course of his leadership duty. A leader must be accountable and transparent. A leader must be rational, knowledgeable in political affairs and must be people oriented. Nigeria's office holders are not people-oriented; they are self-oriented. They are governed by political schizophrenia (Maathai, 2009:185). The failure of governance in Nigeria's democratic experience is caused by greed and political corruption. This failure of governance in Nigeria in particular and Africa in general has been term a tragedy of Africa. Politics has to do with ideas that can govern the real world's situation; ideas rule the world. For Okere:

> The modern world has witnessed the expansion of government responsibility in virtually all spheres of living, alongside the shrinking of the individual's capacity to satisfy his needs or protect his rights but the less the individual can do for himself the more the government is supposed to do for him. So even though there probably never was an originating social contract historically today people understand governance as a contracting partnership with the people… People will undertake to support – government that is cede their individual independence and powers to the extent that government undertakes to take care of certain needs and rights of the people- needs and rights we call the public good. It is the failure to provide these needs and the gradual destruction of the hope of ever for realizing them that result in the woes and tragedies. Thus the tragedy of Africa can be termed a failure of governance (Okere, 2004:5).

Furthermore, Nigeria's democratic agenda must begin to toe the path of equal right of democratic citizens to vote and participate in any democratic setting. It is worthy of note that democracy, on the other hand, is the right held universally by all citizens to have a share of political power, that is, the right of all citizens to vote and participate in politics –

the right to participate in political power can be thought of as yet another liberal right – indeed, the most important one and it is for this reason that liberation has been closely associated historically with democracy (Fukuyama, 1992:43). Nigeria's democratic experience should embrace political prudence (Ryan, 1996:212). Nigerian leaders lack political wisdom. According to Ryan:

> Prudence is the knowledge of events and affairs that comes from wide experience and reflection and from recapitulating the experience and reflection of others as recorded in history. Prudence is essentially experiential, its method is historical – whether it is a matter of retrospective reflection upon our own experience or upon that of mankind in general – and its object is sound judgment in particular cases the best evidence of prudence is continual good judgment. Prudence is a genuine form of knowledge, yet it is always knowledge of particulars; it is knowledge of how things have worked out in the past and what has happened, not of how they must work out nor of what must happen (Ryan, 1996: 212-213).

Nigerian citizens should be treated as human beings. It is germane to note that the human being is the Lord of the world (Kersting, 1992:349). Nigeria's Democratic experience lacks the principle of freedom and equality. The principles of freedom and equality are two sides of the same coin. However, just as freedom requires legislation, so does the principle of equality demands universal laws (Kersting, 1992:356). Nigeria's democratic experience must press on the ideals of the common good. Accordingly, Asouzu posits that:

> The common good offers us a clear platform to show concretely our commitment to the joy of being as the ultimate transcendent foundation of meaning in our actions. We can talk of the common good in two ways. First, we use the term common good to refer to the ultimate authenticating anthropological basic constant of human life. In this case, we are referring to that ultimate common foundation that gives legitimacy to all human actions. Second, the common good refers to the authenticating foundation of interpersonal relationship in society expressible in all those socio-empirical goods and services we own in our common upkeep which is necessary for well-coordinated and contented existence (Asouzu, 2004:380).

1.5 Nigeria's Democratic Experience and the Way Forward

The following factors must be put into consideration if Nigerian democracy is willing to attain its greatest height. These include:

- Establishment of industries.
- Employment opportunities.
- Provision of infrastructural facilities – good road network, telecommunication services, good or adequate water supply, electricity supply, provision of health facilities and good educational system.
- To guarantee justice and fairness, law and order.
- Promotion of fundamental human rights.
- Implementation of good economic policies that is people- oriented
- There must be good electoral system.
- The possibility of national security should be encouraged.
- Elimination or reduction in bribery and corruption.
- Elimination of any form of violence that is politically, economically, religiously and ethnically motivated. Violence can only destroy the human race.
- We must continue to imbibe the normative principle of harmonious cohabitation in order to ensure peaceful coexistence.
- There should be no political domination among the three organs of government; the executive, the legislature and the judiciary. There should be checks and balances and the possibility of the independence of the judiciary.
- Equity and equality of opportunity for all.
- There must be the principle of freedom and liberty enjoyed by all Nigerian citizens.
- The oppressed minority groups should be protected.
- Multiculturalism should be practiced. Nigerian society should allow ethnic plurality for the sake of inter-subjective mutual recognition.
- African political leaders should be honest and corruption-free. Political and economic policies should be geared toward the upliftment of the collective happiness of all in the Nigerian society.
- Strong economic footing and political ideological foresight should aim at enhancing national development or sustainable development. Development that is comprehensive or all-embracing or all-inclusive.
- Plethora of social vices such as herdsmen-farmers clashes, kidnapping, drug abuse, ritual killing, political assassination should be discouraged and eliminated.

- Nigeria's foreign policies and international relations with other nation-states in the world should be strengthened to pave the way for stronger economic and political ties.
- There should be good economic condition and existential political condition in order to totally discourage the brain-drain syndrome currently facing Nigeria in particular and Africa in general.
- Our educational system is dysfunctional and should be reorganized and strengthened or improved upon in order to forestall a vibrant society where its democratic citizens are not only highly or well-educated but rationally and politically responsible to themselves and to others. Responsibility presupposes that deliberate human actions are scrutinized rationally.
- Finally, Nigerian democracy must begin to embrace a strong political will that can drive the economic system and the political system positively.

Worthy of note is that Nigeria's democratic experience is devoid of the integral socio-political true existence. The three vicious triangles of problems which form the roots of African malaise are: 1) Religions, moral and human (Macro-triangular) problem; 2) Political, economic and social (Medio-triangular) problem; 3) Ignorance poverty and disease (micro-triangular) problem (Nwankwor, 2013:338). Nigeria's political mumbo-jumbo and political irresponsibility has led to a serious form of an economic morass. According to Nwankwor:

> True leadership would imply the choice of the best, tested and trusted manpower and energy for the organization and management of socio-political and economic affairs. It would also entail the employment and utilization of able and capable, true and reliable, hardworking and industrious, knowledgeable and wise, God-fearing human resources for the reordering, re-organization and re-structuring of the present socio-political, economic and cultural debris (Nwankwor, 2013:339).

Moreover, leadership then is geared towards global human existential excellence and not merely of sectarian profit oriented enterprise which Nigeria's democratic system is already experiencing. This is a tragedy to our humanity. Democratic principle and the democratization of Nigeria need transformational leadership for sustainable development to thrive (Nwankwor, 2013:340).

1.6 Nigeria and the Problem of Religious Crisis

Nigeria's socio-political true existence has been shattered by plethora of religious bigotry. A prototype example of religious crisis in Nigeria is the Islamic group or sect called "Boko Haram". The contemporary issue of religious bigotry or fanaticism caused by the Boko Haram sects has both religious and political undertones. Unfortunately, the emergence of the fundamentalist group called Boko Haram is characterized by terror and terrorism. Terror and terrorism is a global threat that is ready to pull down the globalized world if not properly checked. It has been said that religion which derived its name from the Latin word *"re-ligare"* is a means whereby the human person can interact or communicate with his creator; the supernatural being and other gods. Religion that supposes to be an instrument of unity or a uniting force is tearing humanity apart. The notion of religion has been misconstrued by many. Religion is the system of symbols by means of which society becomes conscious of itself (Ritzer and Stepnisky, 2014:99).

1.7 The Problem of Cultural Crisis in Nigeria

There is crisis of identity and cultural chauvinism as far as Nigeria's democratic experience is concerned. Cultural chauvinism presupposes the crisis of identity that is facing the Nigerian democratic state. What we are experiencing in Nigeria's democratic setting is the crisis of identity which has led to the loss of every sense of our humanity. Africa's bane of development is that of socio-political instability due to ineffective leadership and economic problem. There should be effective and transformational leadership structure. Good governance and the establishment of institutional structural framework should be encouraged in Africa and Nigeria in particular. The general welfare of the African peoples should be the top most priority of African political leaders. The viable alternative of moral imperative or ethical leadership should be encouraged for African development to thrive.

1.8 Evaluation

It is worthy of note that political leadership in Nigeria should aim at ensuring the alleviation of poverty and improvements in human well being which are of critical importance in the development of human potentials and the realization of goal of life (Cyril, 2021:9-10). However, political leadership should also aimed at improving human existential condition because poor human condition in Nigeria truncates the interiority of the being of the individual and consequently breeds social monsters (Emeka, 2021:92-93). Political leadership in Nigeria requires the normative principle of social order because social order must be changed with a new mission and vision by Nigerian leaders. Nigeria desparately needs fresh ideas and new crops of leaders in the entire strata of Nigerian leadership structure (Usman, 2012: xx). In this 21st Century Nigeria's democratic experience is expected to overcome the present political quagmire, economic crises and

ethnic–religious crises. However, the emergent African political leaders, instead of working for national cohesion, further worsened the political quagmire by using ethnic jealousy and conflict for their selfish ends (Oguejiofor, 2001:34). Many African political leaders have seen corruption not as a dishonest means of existence. In many African countries, it is no longer possible to convince the populace that a person can be honest as a high government official (Oguejiofor, 2001:36). According to Oguejiofor:

> In a constant situation of political instability and social uncertainty, those who have influential official positions take it as their chance to secure their future and that of their hangers on and the capacity of such leaders for corruption is almost unlimited. This furthermore makes the whole socio-political edifice shaky. Those who come next have even more selfish reasons to be dishonest. The structure becomes all the weaker such is the vicious circle that engendered leadership and which has become a far cry from the service it should be giving and being self-serving, arrogant and unscrupulous, constitutes ironically a cog in the wheel of progress in Nigeria's democratic experience (Oguejiofor 2001:37).

African leaders have developed a lack of political foresight. African leaders have exhibited palpable lack of foresight. The Nigeria's democratic experience is a paradox that reflects little hope for the Nigeria's citizens. In a situation of instability, corruption and embezzlement of public funds, there is little hope that the economy of the new independent African State could draw a breath of life (Oguejiofor, 2001:38-39). The possibility of true democracy in Nigeria has been a mirage because the political class has continued to take the Nigerian people for granted. African political leaders lack the political will to drive sustainable development in the Africa. Democracy, which Nigeria desires to practice, should be based on constitutionalism. The Nigerian history clearly has a dishonest beginning (Okoye, 2009:105). Any society that is rudderless, not having firm, stable leadership is doomed. Our socio- political true existence and true brotherhood cannot exist in Africa under the present political and economic arrangements. Our political belief and economic practice should be anchored in a common ideological paxis (Chukwu and Madubuko, 2009:117). It is worthy of note that a genuine political union cannot emerge on the African continent in the absence of a common ideological praxis: an ideology aimed at the total freedom of the African people, with a fully integrated economy (an economy that is operated in the sole interest of the African people) at its core (Erumerba, 1985:192).

1.9 Concluding Consideration

Having critically examined the implications of ineffective leadership in Nigerian politics and the paradoxes of Nigeria's democratic experience, it is germane to assert that the way forward for Nigerian democratic agenda is transformational leadership structure that is people oriented and result oriented. This paper concludes that the notions of scientific, technological, political, economic, cultural, religious, ethnic and social change reflects the necessary desideratum for the dynamic process relative to the Nigerian democratic condition and how they can be amenable to Nigeria's democratic experience or otherwise. Secondly, the deep logical insight offered by philosophy into the problems of the Nigeria's democratic setting and the assault on Nigeria by her political leaders which include among other things the phenomena of Nigeria's paradoxical democratic problems of corruption, bribery, ignorance, lack of political ideology and economic instability could only be resolved by transformational leadership structure that is people oriented and by ensuring the democratic liberalization of Nigerian citizens.

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