



Research Paper

The Character of the Nigerian State and Its Influence on Her Political Leadership

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the character of the Nigerian State and how it impacts her political leadership. The work argues that the social forces, institutions, external relations and domestic patterns of accumulation and exchange bequeathed to the Nigeria State by Western imperialism have continued to vitiate opportunities for growth, development and democracy. Quantitative data were sourced and collated, while descriptive research design was adopted to describe the phenomenon of character of state and emergent leadership. The study revealed the essence of the colonial state by pointing out the most important principal features of its activities. It argues that the British institutionalized colonial rule in order to protect her capital and to use the colonial state as the servant of imperialism and to protect all those metropolitan interests which owed their existence to the continuation of imperialism. The study found that because the Nigerian indigenous capitalist state failed to evolve slowly, unlike in the developed capitalist states of Europe, the Nigerian post-colonial state was unable to perform an ideological function of presenting itself as neutral both in class struggles and other sectional squabbles in order to seek the unity of all classes in the society and legitimize the social order. The study recommended the reinvention of ethics and strong institutions rather than strong men and the devolution of powers such that the states would be more autonomous in order to reduce the powers at the centre, with the tensions it generates.

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I. INTRODUCTION

It has been observed that Nigeria politics continues to reflect and carry the seal or mentality of its colonial and neo-colonial experience, as well as the additional behaviour of the succeeding elites that lack proper co-ordination and a sense of nationalism. For example, Ihonvbere (1994) noted that the ruling elites have elevated the quest for primitive personal aggrandizement to the level of sole leadership objective. Ake (1996) and Ekekwe (1986) argue that this nature and drive of the succeeding political leadership is a reflection of the political economy and politics that gave rise to the ruling elite. This crop of leaders, lacking strong and viable culture of discipline, would find it difficult to control the resources of the state and engender peace and stability; and these leaders use politics as their primary instrument to build up their personal economic base (Alemazung, 2011). This leads to violent struggle for state power which has in turn, rendered impotent the state quest for nationhood, growth and development. It has been established that political leadership in post-colonial Africa has been generally authoritarian, non-legitimate or based on an erroneous conception of legitimacy as the acceptance by the international community.

It is worth emphasizing that the character of the post-colonial Nigerian leadership stems from the orientation of the colonizers. Ekekwe (1986) noted that the petty bourgeoisie took to self-preservation because they shared in the foreign bourgeoisie's (colonialist) economic interests and wanted to appropriate for

themselves, the colonial state and deploy state apparatuses to their selfish services. This is the dilemma of Nigeria's political leadership. And it is primarily those self-serving interests of these elites that breed political crises.

Nigerians are hardly ever known to quit public positions on grounds of failure, incompetence, neglect, scandal or moral integrity. Even in the face of obvious neglect and mismanagement of public resources, it is not in our character to quit the stage, and when forced to do so following rotten scandals, the leaders are let off the hook to flaunt their ill-gotten wealth and to warm their ways back to political relevance at various levels, using the same wealth to buy up the people. This has become the norm in the Nigerian political leadership since 1999.

It is therefore important to understand the dynamics of Nigeria's distinctive political economy and social classes in order to fully appreciate the crises of political leadership. In several ways, Nigeria is a victim of its history, coupled with growing corruption by the ruling elites. The social forces, institutions, external relations and domestic patterns of accumulation and exchange bequeathed to the Nigeria State by Western imperialism have continued to vitiate opportunities for growth, development and democracy.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Nigerian: An "Overdeveloped Bureaucratic State"

Nigeria maintains all the features and structures of the state described by Alavi (1972) as an "overdeveloped bureaucratic state". Going by this description, in an overdeveloped bureaucratic state, the institutions that have been of significant interest to the colonial government with long history of their establishment have been highly developed. These are exemplified by the bureaucracy, military and police. It is common knowledge that the central feature of colonial government was heavy reliance on those institutions; as colonialism demands a structure that provides for the control of all indigenous classes. The bureaucratic - military nature of the colonial state such as Nigeria is represented by the "institutionalized practices of an overdeveloped state (Alavi, 1972).

Ake (1995) explained that although, political independence in Nigeria brought some changes in the constitution of state managers, the character of the state remained as it were in the colonial formation - totalistic in scope and constituting a statist economy. It continues to carry on as an apparatus of violence, with a narrow social base, relying on coercion rather than authority for compliance. Failure of leadership is squarely blamable on the economic base of the state, as inherited from the colonialists. The colonial economy was highly influenced by the pecuniary interest and gains of the colonialists, and no consideration was given to the projection of the future development of the state. Ake (1995) argues that the colonial state exercised arbitrary and absolute powers and this rubbed off on the economic consideration. For instance, they ensured that colonies only produced the goods that served their immediate and egocentric interests. Gold Coast (at present Ghana) was colonized and made to farm cocoa which hitherto was a strange crop in that state. By 1865, Gold Coast had started the exportation of cocoa and became the world leading producer of the crop by 1901. This made it a mono-cultural economy such that by 1939, cocoa was responsible for 80% of its total export earnings. Despite the fact that Kenya was leading in the production of coffee, the colonial powers enacted the coffee Plantation Registration Ordinance of 1918 to make it unlawful for citizens to hold coffee farms. The aim of this was to ensure that there are indigenous hands available for slave labour making them independent and preventing the stealing of coffee from the farms of the colonialists as they could not legally own coffee.

The colonial legacy has been the bane of leadership in many African nation states, particularly Nigeria. Ake (1995) further observed that the colonial state was not unlike the Hobbesian pre-political state where every claim was arbitrary and every right is only power. In essence, while struggling to advance their interests, colonialists never worried about legality or legitimacy of norms. The politics of colonial powers was reduced to the "crud sees security as a function of power accumulation. This led to a mad drive for power. In all dealings, the basic interest became the acquisition of power. It became an article of faith sought at all cost. One could therefore add that the state has continued with the colonial frame-work, and hitherto serves as an instrument for personal aggrandizement or primitive accumulation of resources. To accumulate such sought after resources, power must be acquired. Politics therefore, became a matter of warfare because of the high premium placed on political power.

It is no wonder that the political elites of post-colonial Nigeria easily sought for collaboration with foreign capitalists for a share of the states' resources. This tool takes the dimension of Joint Venture Partnership with foreign firms to tap the resources of the state and in turn, build their own political and economic base.

Ake (1995) presents a more apt dimension to explaining the character of the neo-colonialist state of Nigeria. The gaining of independence was a matter of the colonizers handing over government to their chosen African successors who could be trusted to share their values and be attentive to their interests. Political independence therefore, became a "convenience for de-radicalization by accommodation; a mere racial integration of the political elite" rather than the heroic achievement it was supposed to be.

III. MATERIALS & METHODS

Research Design

This work adopts the Descriptive Research design. Descriptive research design aims at systematically obtaining information to describe a situation, phenomenon or population. More so, it answers the 'what, when, where and how' questions with respect to research problems. By the nature of this research endeavor this design is most suitable as findings from other researches and studies were examined. Description of political phenomena is fundamental to this exercise as it adds immeasurably to the knowledge of the shape and nature of the polity.

Nature & Sources of data

The data used for this study were qualitative in nature. So, this study solely depended on secondary data. Secondary data is the study of recorded human communication such as books, websites, paintings and laws (Babbie, 2010). Data were sourced from magazines, journals, internet, newspapers and textbooks that relate to the research variables.

Particularly, this research depended on the` research findings of others and published studies of previous authors. In some cases unpublished but corroborated information were relayed. It needs reiterating that to obtain data for this research; the study relied heavily on the immense pool of extant literature that border on the Nigerian leadership question.

Method of Data Collection

This work employed secondary data sources which involved research findings and results from existing work by other researchers in the form of existing records and materials. Records of the civil society coalitions for good governance, incidents of crises and reactions/actions of government are the major points that were extracted.

Method of Data Analysis

It is given that the nature of data collected determines the method of data analysis. For the purpose of this study, the qualitative content analysis method was adopted. Qualitative analysis is the analysis of information that is not in numerical form. The data comes in the form of texts obtained from various sources. The opposite of this is the quantitative analysis method. This is driven by statistics and largely dependent on the orientation and drive of the researcher. It is content analysis, primarily.

Qualitative analysis in this regard is quite dependent on the analytical and integrative skills of the researcher, together with a good dose of personal knowledge/information on the social context of the sources of the data under analysis. Bhattacharjee (2012, p.113) noted that it takes a creative and investigative mindset to engage in qualitative analysis of information based on ethically enlightened and participant-in-context attitude, and a set of analytical strategies.

IV. RESULTS & DISCUSSIONS

It has been argued that the character of the Nigerian State stems from the legacies of the colonial government. The colonial government of Nigeria spanned between 1900, the period of revocation of the Charter of the Royal Niger Company, and 1960 when Nigeria gained independence from the colonial government. This independence has however, been described in various quarters as flag independence. Thus, the instruments of state coercion, military, police, courts and prisons were created and a new administrative bureaucracy was set up.

We however need to know the nature and essences of the colonial state in order to understand the socio-political structure of Nigeria and the class politics it engendered in the society.

First, we have to reveal the essence of the colonial state by pointing out the most important principal features of its activities.

Britain institutionalized colonial rule in order to protect her capital and to use the colonial state as the servant of imperialism. It was also to protect all those metropolitan interests which owed their existence to the continuation of imperialism (Ekundare, 1973; Toyo, 2002).

The colonial state was therefore, not a product of antagonistic interests among social classes, i.e., the colonial state did not emerge because of lack of unity of interests among social classes in the society nor because the society was torn apart by irreconcilable contradictions. Indeed, the colonial state was not an instrument of any indigenous social class that developed to mediate between social classes whose interests were irreconcilable. The colonial state was basically an agent of imperialism, an instrument of economic exploitation.

Thus, the colonial state played a major role in the process of restructuring the colonial social formation in order to facilitate or induce commodity production and surplus accumulation (Ekekwe, 1986; Akinterinwa, 2007).

The colonial state was used by the metropolitan bourgeoisie to restructure the pre-capitalist economy. Like the way the liberals will define the role of the state, the colonial state maintained law and order, provided defence against attack and preserved the way of life of the colonial society; of course in a manner that made it conducive to capitalist expansion. In short, the colonial state represented the capitalist class in metropolitan Europe, with a vested interest and in maintaining their dominance inside colonial society (Brett, 1982; Schraeder, 2004).

V. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Nigerian Post-Colonial State as an extension of the colonial formation

The period of the nationalist movement was a period of intense class struggle, the struggle between the dominant indigenous social class and the metropolitan bourgeoisie. In other words, the dominant indigenous social class and the colonial state were engaged in a battle for the control of state apparatus.

However, immediately after independence the class character of the nationalist leaders began to show in their activities particularly when they began to assume political positions of authority. They appeared not to bother about the abject conditions of their people and the inherent injustice which colonialism had created in the societies. The petty-bourgeoisies now in position of political authority focused more on relations of distribution and were more desirous of imbibing the life style and privileges of colonialism than in abolishing its injustice and oppression of the Nigerian masses (Ekekwe, 1986). Thus at independence the common enemy was eliminated and the masses were confronted with an indigenous ruling class which was content to inherit the colonial economy with no aim of transforming it.

The deformation of the post-colonial political class

Also, at independence Nigeria began to evolve a political class, a class that was made up of those who took over from the colonial state hierarchy. Members of the class were mere agents of western capital who came to power to execute policies that were necessarily geared towards promoting the interest of metropolitan bourgeoisie like the way the colonial state did.

Post independent Nigeria therefore evolved a political class, which was created by colonialism but with its own trajectory of development based on the unleashing of capitalist forces (Turner, 1980; Drake, 2010).

The carryover of the colonial capitalists' mentality

Colonialism, as a historical factor in the development of the Nigerian State made her own variant of capitalist formation to possess some unique characteristics. Thus, the Nigerian capitalist formation is devoid of certain similarities, which do not make her to be quite the same with other capitalist states of Europe, where the state is the "classic state in the sense that it is the instrument of the capitalist class to maintain its domination over the other classes in the society" (Nnoli, 1986:63). That was because as at that time, the capitalists had evolved from the civil society and the capitalist class had already gained dominance over the local economy and they used that opportunity to dominate the political process as well, thus evolving into an elite group.

In spite of the institutionalization of the capitalist mode of production, at independence, the level of economic and capitalist social values or cultural development were low with very weak liberal political traditions. All this serves to retard the growth of the masses' political consciousness and activity and as a result, the masses, level of participation in social and political affairs was low. This was because the civil society associated with the institutions of state power which support and reinforce institutions had not emerged at independence. Unlike in Europe, where civil society emerged before the capitalist state was formed, the Nigerian post-colonial capitalist state emerged when the society was just making an inroad into the civil society (Nzimiro, 1986; Seligman, 1992). Thus, four critical characteristics of the Nigerian postcolonial state can be seen from the above description.

First, a capitalist state was being formed when the society was not sufficiently in the civil society. In other words, quite unlike the developed capitalist states of Europe at that time, the Nigerian dominant social class aimed first at capturing state power prior to those of socio-economic powers.

Consequently, the economic and internal bases of the postcolonial state were weak and the state became very fragile. It continued to depend on metropolitan power for support in order for it to maintain domination over the people and also to help in its other tasks such as establishing the structures and institutions of capitalist state formation with its concomitant values and ideologies.

Third, the postcolonial state was not strictly one that emerged to mediate between indigenous classes whose interests were irreconcilable. In other words, the postcolonial state was artificial because it did not possess the autonomy to function, and it depended essentially on external forces to maintain class hegemony.

Fourth, the Nigerian social formation had not sufficiently developed well-defined class structures. In other words, at independence, there was no clear-cut alignment of all the class forces, which meant that, state formation process had just begun. In addition, the non-arrival of the people into the civil society makes the

dominant social class not to achieve their position of pre-eminence on a strong economic base. Rather, the achievement of such position was because they had championed the struggle against foreign domination (Williams, 1980).

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that because the Nigerian indigenous capitalist state did not evolve slowly as it happened in developed capitalist states of Europe, the Nigerian post-colonial state could not perform an ideological function of presenting itself as neutral both in class struggles and other sectional squabbles in order to seek the unity of all classes in the society and legitimize the social order.

For the reasons above, the post-colonial state which should be a system of special organs and agencies, to engage in the exercise of power was so weak that it could not perform any ideological function and could not represent a particular class and therefore could not establish any hegemonic order. In other words, the post-colonial state could not demonstrate leadership, intellectualism and therefore did not possess the capacity for domination.

Consequently, the different elements of the petty-bourgeoisie could not agree on any actions of the state. Thus, the interests of the different factions of the petty-bourgeoisie became antagonistic and democracy, like the state, was used to serve the interests of particular factions. This situation therefore transformed political power into an element that is analogous to a material possession and was made to be rooted in force. Indeed, this scenario explains why political power co-terminated with violence and constraints, making itself meaningful in physical, economic and social weapons (Friedrich, 1974; Collier, 2010).

The above manifestation of crisis of state, explains two phenomena about the post-colonial state. These are, namely, that first, because the Nigerian society had just begun the process of state formation, the dominant class split into factions to struggle for state power and second, state power became the most useful instrument in the society with which to acquire and wield control. Indeed, the way factions violently struggled for power showed that in the immediate years after independence, state power was the ultimate.

In the immediate years after independence again, politics became a competition with intense anxiety in which the struggle by the factions was done with fraud, repression, coercion, intimidation, brute force and even physical combat. And all these were possible because the factions to the struggle had their struggle reinforced precisely because there was no sufficient restraint on the abuse of power as the state had not really emerged to mediate between the factions (Ake, 1988).

Thus, state formation process became characterized by fragmented dominant class whose struggle for power exposed a contradiction as a concomitant part of the development of a capitalist state formation. The contradiction was between conformity and consensus. This was the contradiction that explained why the factions could not obey the rules for the bourgeois politics of "one man, one vote". Hence, the factions could not tolerate opposition and were hostile to competition, competition that ought to be an element of liberal democracy.

The Nigerian post-colonial state immediately after independence lacked internal cohesion and, also, with no enduring institutions to form the basis of a stable regime.

Consequently, factions had to struggle for power and whichever faction won power privatized the office. Those who won political power used it as a private tool. Thus, anything that affects the prospects of power in Nigeria is contested bitterly, lawlessly and violently and therefore whenever it is election time, factions become lawless, with no regard of law and they engage in the use of private armies and thugs (Ake, 1988; Collier, 2010).

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Reinvention of ethics and strong institutions rather than strong men

There is need to reinvent ethical values of governance, advocates for strong institution that would enhance good governance devoid of corruption, political crises, instability, incompetence, sit tight leadership style, lack of accountability, political bickering leading to the enthronement of maladministration and mismanagement of public resources.

Devolution of power

The over concentration of political and economic powers at the federal level should be reviewed. The states should be more autonomous in order to reduce the powers at the centre, with the tensions it generates, so that the centre will stop the constant bullying and harassment of the citizens and coercing the states. In other words, Nigeria should adopt true federalism, where the states of the federation will enjoy high degree of autonomy. With that arrangement, the present federal-unitarism will cease to exist and there will be no imperial power at the centre, which uses its powers in the most reckless and irresponsible manner.

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