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POLITICAL CULTURE AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

Amidst perverted political culture that is injurious to any polity, Nigeria is building political ideology. If democracy must endure in Nigeria, there is the necessity of an ideal form of political culture into which the future generation of her ever-increasing citizens must be initiated. The termination of the former Republics by the military is traceable to porous political culture in the country. This paper engages the right kind of political culture for enduring democratic governance in any nation. Democracy is on a dangerous terrain if it lacks the resurgence of the ideal kind of political culture. The decapitation of corruption, irresponsible governance and all forms of political vices is only possible with the enthronement of a proper political culture.

Introduction

There is no polity without a belief system inherent in the people. The rising and the falling of a polity is a product of the kind of political beliefs, dispositions and orientations that run in the psyche of the people and their leaders. On the basis of this, we can conclude that the greatness of any nation is a product of the political culture that is prevalent in it. This paper, therefore, sets out to outline the faulty political culture in Nigeria and to proffer alternatives.

Theoretical and conceptual frameworks

Culture is a central concept to human existence. There is no human society without its own unique culture, which defines its way of life, dispositions, inherent beliefs and universal orientation in its own peculiar and unique environment. Tylor (1924) refers to culture as that complex whole which includes knowledge, beliefs, art, morals, law, custom, and other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. Culture could also be defined as the total way of life of a people, the social legacy that the individual acquires from his group (Kluckhohn, 1963).

Culture borders, from every definition, on the orientations and the dispositions of a group of people to life events, be it politics, religion, social, economic, and etc. Political culture implies a people orientations and dispositions to politics. It refers to the distinguished beliefs, values, attitudes, habits, and behaviour patterns that characterize a political community of any given people. Political culture is measured in terms of orientation to political action, which refers to the knowledge the individual has of political objects, events, actions and issues, whether or not he invests them with any emotional significance; how he evaluates them and whether he is sufficiently stirred to action by them. Political culture is thus the patter of orientations to political actions within any given society (Davis and Lewis in Mahajan, 1988).

Political culture is the commonly shared goals and commonly accepted rules (Marcridis, 1961). It is that part of the general culture that includes only the set of political beliefs held by an individual and those beliefs only constitute part of his entirety of beliefs. For Sodaro (2004), political culture is a pattern of shared values, moral norms, beliefs, expectations, and attitudes that relate to politics and its social context. It is the collective or shared disposition of the people to political values and common attitudes towards political events. It is the primordial orientation of the citizens of a given political community towards politics and how this affects their acceptance of

any political regime as legitimate. It involves the belief on how government, politics and economic life of a given community are to be carried out. Political culture involves the understanding and the commitment of a people to a shared way of organizing a political society.

The process of political socialization follows effectively as soon as a child is born into a political community. This gradual process could be carried out either directly or indirectly, knowing or unknowingly. This necessarily implies that a child born into a faulty political culture built on materialistic and warfare conceptions of social and political interactions develops naturally into it, and that will permanently lead to a lifestyle built on undue and unhealthy competitions for the child. Robert Dahl's profound analysis of political culture represents different political cultures:

> *Orientations to problem-solving - are the people pragmatic or rationalistic?*
> *Orientations to collective action - are the people cooperative or non-cooperative?*
> *Orientations to other people - are the people trustful or mistrustful?*
> *Orientations to the political system - are the people allegiant or alienated?*

A careful observation of the above polarity will help in discerning the kind of political culture prevalent in any society.

Political culture is broader than public opinion because it is enduring, not unstable, and transcends generations. It is the basis of all public interactions in the realm of politics. Political culture is never an agreement but rather the possession of common, communal or collective mutual perception of the rights and obligations, the rights and duties of government as a state's institution, the rules governing citizens' involvement in their own society. It is the general lifestyles of the people in politics as important echelon in the society. Almond

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and Verba (1963) buttress this point by their conception of political culture as the particular distribution of orientations or popular attitudes towards political objects among members of that nation.

However, it is important to note that political culture is never a static adherence to a way of life by the people of a political community. In other words, the possibility of change or transformation exists alongside with the idea of political culture. Different states in history have gone through political transformation of not just the system of government but the proper application of an ideal political culture that aided the betterment of the lives of their citizens. The peoples' orientations can change through conscious initiation of another kind of culture. This shows the dynamic nature of culture in general and political culture in particular. Thus, there is the possibility of demolishing the present wrong political culture in Nigeria through conscious efforts of the people and their leaders.

There also exists the possibility of a country having political sub-cultures which implies that some sections of the society hold their own unique political beliefs and orientations different from national political beliefs and orientations. In stable societies, the political culture is homogeneous, but where differences between one group and others are marked, there is said to exist a political sub-culture. Political sub-culture is not a distinct set of attitudes, beliefs and values, but a set of attitudes, some of which are in common with other sub-cultures (Ball in Mahajan, 1988).

Also worthy of note is the fact that political culture cannot be devoid of the nation's peculiar historical experiences and that of its political leaders. For instance, the political cultures of the nations (African in particular) who were products of colonialism have this common conception of politics in a warfare term. In other words, the stupendous attack on the colonialists is translated to their own polities after their independence. Nigeria and most African countries stand out in this warfare paradigm in politicking. The United States o America model of democracy stands out in the 21st Century as an ideal form of democracy because the American States have a long history of

democracy rooted in the ideals of freedom, equity, equality, respect for fundamental human rights, citizens' sovereignty, and etc. Democracy is as old as America, therefore the citizens have consciously or unconsciously gone through the process of political socialization which is, according to Almond (1960: 7):

The process of induction. Its end product is a set of attitudes, cognitions, value standards, and feelings toward the political system, its various roles, and role incumbents. It also includes knowledge of values, affecting and feelings toward the input demands and claims into the system, and its authoritative output.

The historical input in political culture cannot be overemphasized. For instance, the Nigerian state is a victim of false marriage in 1914 at the colonial registry spearheaded by Lord Lugard and backed by the authority of the most respectable Queen of England. The common identity that the colonial masters wanted to foster has not been possible till date because the coming together of the Northern and Southern Protectorates was without the consultation with the people. We cannot also doubt the fact that the amalgamation was done basically to enhance easy governance of the Nigerian state which has a lot of economic advantage for the colonial masters.

However, the disparity in the ways of life of the Nigerian people stares the country in the face till date. The traditional Nigerian society favoured monarch, except the Eastern region which is the domain of the Igbos. Forcefully bringing these people together under the Western form of democracy has only produced violent political sub-cultures which have remained the bane of democratization and economic development in Nigeria till date. Nigeria, simply put, is a product of the amalgamation of more than 250 ethnic groups without their collective agreement to form a nation-state.

The cultural imperative in politics is evident in the fact that colonial domination, geographical location, religious biases, ethnic cleavages which influence culture in general also input the same effect

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on the political beliefs and orientations of the people in a society. The political culture of any society is measured by public opinion and attitudes survey of the people realized through the assessment of the determinate factors which are awareness, expectations and political participation. In other words, in order to discover the political culture of the people, the people's awareness of politics or government as a State's institution of governance, their expectations from the government and the level of their involvement in politics are the major factors that will be considered.

Types of political culture

The three types of political culture are Parochial, Subject and Participant. *Parochial Political Culture* entails low political awareness, low expectations by the people from the government, and low citizens' participation in their political processes. *Subject Political Culture* entails higher levels of political awareness and expectation, but with a low citizens' participation in political activities. *Participation Political Culture* revolves around high level of political awareness, high level of expectation and also high level of citizens' involvement in their political processes.

The Nigeria State is organized within the purview of Subject Political Culture which means there is a high level of awareness of politics by the citizens, and their expectations of what the government must deliver as the dividends of good governance is equally high; whereas, the polity is deemed as the domain of the few elites who have on their own accord seized governmental power to the detriment of the lives of the average Nigerians. In other words, while most Nigerians are political in orientation, their level of participation in politics is low.

Democracy in Nigeria and the Faulty Political Culture

The aficionado's nationalists gave the impression to the Nigerian masses that independence (self-governance) was their escape route out

of the pathways of poverty and under-development. There was a general desire for independence except for the Northerners' dissent for reasons best known to the students of history.

The name, Nigeria, was coined by Flora Shaw in 1897 under the British government. In aspiration for self-government in Nigeria, three political parties representing the three major ethnic groups in Nigeria were formed namely NCNC (National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon) – which later became National Council of Nigerian Citizens, AG (Action Group), and NPC (Northern People's Congress). These parties won elections along ethnic or regional biases in the MacPherson Constitution of 1959 elections.

A coalition government was needed, since none of the parties won the majority score that was required to form the central government. NPC and NCNC formed the coalition government at the national level. Alhaji Abubakar Tafawa Balewa of NPC emerged as the Prime Minister, while Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe of the NCNC emerged as the Governor-General. Nigeria fashioned a system of governance after the Westminster parliamentary democracy based on the electoral process and the equality of all. However, in principle, there has never been such a thing as the equality of all in Nigeria till date. This was the beginning of ethnic politics in Nigeria democracy.

Ethnic Chauvinism

The faulty foundation of Nigeria political culture is located in the consistent appeal to ethnicity chauvinism in political activities. Ethnic pluralism that ought to be a major driver of national development in Africa, given the diversities of the skills and specialty of the different ethnic groups has become the major impediments to national growth in Nigeria. (Mazrui and Michael (1984: 235) put this poignantly:

By institutionalizing ethnic pluralism in Nigeria, the British created not only the potential for a competitive democracy but also the framework for later violence.

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Ethnic chauvinism has become a strong force in Nigeria's political culture, blurring political reasonability, and hence, promoting persistent non-co-operativism among Nigerians in national issues. The collapse of the first republic is not unconnected to ethnic chauvinism demonstrated in violent political manipulation of the masses by the early nationalists. Since the political culture of a nation determines the stability of its polity, it seems reasonable to argue that political instability in Nigeria is traceable to its adherence to ethnic nationalism, as against true nationalism that upholds the ideal of a nation-state without any proclivity toward ethnic chauvinism.

The second republic witnessed a replay of the events in the first republic especially in the formation of political parties along ethnic cleavages, which led to a miasma political experience, economic quagmire and anomic social system. In the fourth republic, the most dominant political parties were also formed along ethnic biases. AD (Alliance for Democracy) was dominated by the Yorubas, PDP (Peoples' Democratic Party) had an inclination towards Northerners' formation (it seems to have been transformed beyond ethnic biases at present), and ANPP (All Nigeria Peoples Party). The fourth republic has not been totally purged of ethnic underpinning. This is evident in ethnic militia in Nigerian society till date. Ethnic chauvinism as part of Nigeria's political culture has been transmitted from one generation to another.

Also closely related to ethnic chauvinism is nepotism (favouring relatives) and cronyism (favouring personal friends) in the process of implementing policies or allocating social benefits. This makes government a private privilege or benefit of some people, while others are denied. Government's appointments and contracts are dished out on the platform of nepotism and cronyism in Nigeria. This has gone so deep in the Nigerian society, such that Nigerians carry in them the notion of ethnic biases in almost all interpersonal relationships. Even, the Federal and State Universities have what they refer to as Catchments areas, which are States whose indigenes will be

given a preference in admission process, thereby further broadening the idea of ethnicity in government academic institutions.

Political Warfarism

The Nigerian State has come to conceive warfare as part of its political culture. This was one of the legacies bequeathed on Nigeria by the nationalists, who were freedom fighters whose understanding of politics is an attempt at gaining self-governance from the colonialists through the use of aggression whether mentally or physically (whichever was minimal). They would embrace the definition of politics by Theodore *et al* (2008) as the conflicts and struggles over the leadership, structure and policies of governments. The conflict and struggle with the colonial masters in the pre-independence was transmitted into conflicts and struggles with one another. For instance, the NCNC and AG pressed for self-governance, which was opposed by the Northerners. This resulted in a violent attack of the northern leaders and the accusation that they were agents of colonialism and of social eco-political domination by the British government. The northerners responded that the southerners' quest for self-governance was not for the collective good of the nation, but rather the attempt at overshinning one another. The bitterness and acrimony continued outside the House. The supporters of the NCNC and AG in Lagos hauled insults and abuses at the northern delegates. The Lagos newspapers subjected them to vitriolic criticism and ridicule (Nnoli, 2003).

This warfare conception of politics continued, leading to the rigging of the elections in the young democratic dispensation in Nigeria. This gave room for military intervention in 1966. Politics in Nigeria is still about conflicts and struggles over the leadership of the polity. This has gone beyond verbal assault to physical assassination of fellow politicians. The military incursion in politics brought a new dimension to Nigeria political culture. The callous disposition of the military was brought into the Nigeria politics till most recent Abacha

brutal regime that was terminated in 1998. According to Obi (1999: 134):

...the causes of Military coups in the developing world especially Africans are linked to the weakness of the political structure and processes in post-colonial states, the prevalence of economic crises, and the institutional role of the Military as the custodian of national defence.

The porosity of the democratic system gave room for military incursion into Nigerian politics, which led to the erosion of the major democratic values essential for nation building and societal welfare. This terminated the maturation of the democratic dispensation. The military is not trained in the arts of dialogue and this makes the possibility of any form of compromise impossible. From 1966 to 1979, Nigeria's politics was militarized until the second Republic between 1979-1983, when the polity had a break from gruesome military rule, only to resume another set of brutal military regimes between December 31st 1983 and 1998.

The politicians of the fourth Republic seem to have learnt the warfare paradigm from the military, given that the arts of brutal assassination of fellow politicians still continue till date with the suspect going unscratched. In some cases, there is no suspect and no further investigation. However, the fact that most of the current politicians were the appointees of the military rulers explains the reason the killing is still ongoing. This warfare paradox in Nigerian political culture inhibits the practice of democracy where opposition is essential and the citizens' freedom to participate actively in the political process is a necessity.

This warfare conception of politics is not just at the Federal and States levels, the local government, which is the base of grassroots politics, also is involved. This reveals the fact that the Nigerian State is entrenched in this faulty political culture.

The Loss of People's Sovereignty

One of the general problems of Nigerian political culture is that the people have no relevance in the enthronement of their political leaders. This is traceable to the traditional system of government of the amalgamated protectorates, especially in the West where the Obas wedge a political power that entitled them to the post of the next personalities to the deities; and in the North, where the Emirs held the same power that placed them above the people. The Eastern part was more of equalitarian society. Notwithstanding, the Obis still had advantageous power. Although there were checks and balances, the people still worshipped their traditional rulers.

The transition from traditional system of government to democratic government placed the elites (the aficionado's nationalists) in the position of supreme authority as the freedom fighters that had the power and the courage to confront the colonial masters. This made it possible for them to buy the peoples' loyalties. They were equally respected by the traditional rulers. The people became stooges in their hands, as they appeal to their sense of ethnicity in the process of vying for political positions. ,The elites and their accomplices had mastered the arts of gaining political power without recourse to the peoples' consent.

The demise of the first Republic was caused mainly by the disputed federal elections of December 30, 1964 which was accounted to be neither free nor fair. The peoples' voice was not heard through the electoral process, as the politicians of that Republic engaged themselves in the political battle of who wins who. For the future of democracy in Nigeria, the voice of the people must be restored in our polity. The continual neglect of the peoples' voice could engender social unrest, which could lead to the final collapse of the fourth Republic. According to Mosuro (1997: 11),

Democratic principles rest its supreme power in the people collectively giving them the power to choose their own leaders. In this case the common people are the source of political power

earns £64,766 (N14,896;180). In other words, a Federal Legislator in Nigeria is paid more than double what a Member of British Parliament earns per annum. Senate President alone takes =N=250 million quarterly or N83.33 million per month (www.nigerianelitesforum.com).

This explains the reason vying for political positions has taken a militaristic dimension. From independence till date, Nigerian politics has been meshed in crude accumulation of wealth and materialism. For the future of democracy in Nigeria, the political culture of wealth acquisition in Nigeria politics must be totally decapitated. Until then, democracy has no definite enduring future in Nigeria. According to Laski (1967: 216),

> *There is nothing inherently wrong in the notion of private property. There is a sense in which it may be so held as genuinely to express personality and to contribute to its enrichment. But,...it must be derived from personal efforts organized in such a way as to involve an addition to the common welfare. It must never be so large in amount that its owner exercises power by reason of its sheer magnitude; it must never be so small that its possessor cannot be himself this best.*

We do not accept Plato and Marx's abolition of private property or wage as an alternative, but rather that moderation should be introduced into the kind of rewards or allowances the politicians get for their works in government. Their earnings should not impoverish the country, whether directly or indirectly. Neither do we argue that the politicians should go hungry.

Political Corruption

Political corruption has been at the root of Nigerian political culture from independence till now. It is the use of governmental power by government officials for illegal personal gains. It involves taking advantage of governmental power at one's disposal, whether direct or

indirect in achieving personal gains in an illegitimate manner. Iroanusi (2006: 72-3) gives an insightful rendition of the event in the second Republic,

> *In spite of Shagari's establishment of a Code of Conduct Bureau and a Code of Conduct Tribunal, as well as his firm promise to the nation to ensure probity and account-ability in public life, his administration may perhaps, continue for a long time to represent the one of the most corrupt, most graft stricken period when public officeholders tremendously succeeded in elevating profligacy and public treasury looting to an art form. The period also witnessed the build up of the nation's foreign debt from a lowly N3 billion in 1979 to a substantial and staggering N21 billion by the fall of the administration in 1983.*

This is the common experience in Nigerian politics. The national Newspapers are littered with cases of financial allegations against Federal legislators, Governors of States, State legislators and grassroots politicians (local government Chairmen and Councillors). Political corruption is an unethical behaviour by those at the levels of governance. This is not new in Nigerian politics and the politics of many African nations. The collective treasury is operated as the personal purses of the politicians and thus the looting of the treasury is a daily experience in the Nigerian State.

The Future of Democracy in Nigeria

Lewis' (2006) summary of the nature of democracy in Nigeria is worthy of note.

> *Nigerians are broadly discouraged by the performance of their political system, and do not generally believe that they have reaped the "dividends" of democracy. Nonethe-less, a large majority of Nigerians continue to prefer democratic government over all other options, and many Nigerians remain*

patient about the anticipated benefits of the democratic system. Further, Nigerians are most critical of the government of the day, and relatively less discouraged by the performance of the general regime of democracy. These popular attitudes suggest that Nigeria's new democracy remains fragile, and suffers a growing deficit of popular confidence. However, Nigerians are not ready to abandon the democratic system for non-democratic alternatives such as military rule or a domineering presidency.

In order to save democracy in Nigeria and present the future generation a healthy political culture that will aid the holistic development, Nigeria needs an alternative political culture. More so, as the present fourth Republic has suffered many attacks from the international communities with the prediction that Nigeria will disintegrate by 2015. The present political culture (dispositions and orientations) needs to be addressed as quick as possible so as to avoid the disintegration of this country or the eventual intrusion of the military again.

The other reason that necessitates the quick fix in our political orientations is the fact that political socialization - the transmission of political values from one generation to another - is a reality in any society. If there is no conscious attempt at changing these current values, beliefs and practices in Nigerian politics, then we can be sure that things will get worse and future of democracy in Nigeria will become gloomier until the final collapse of the fourth Republic.

Recommendations

First, we need to evolve national leadership that has a holistic view of Nigeria as a collective entity of several ethnic groups beyond its own ethnic cleavages. This will help to curb the practice of nepotism and cronyism.

Second, political warfarism should have to give way to the understanding of politics as a quest to serve the people. That is the understanding political leaders in most advanced countries have.

Third, politics is all about the people. Democracy is the rule by the demos (the people) through their votes and through the deliberate consultations with them at the point when decisions affecting the country at large are to be taken. Therefore, the people must be considered at the point of decision or policy making.

Fourth, the executive should fix the salaries and the allowances of the legislatures subject to public opinion. This has to be addressed once and for all in Nigerian politics. The glamour and gluttony around the corridor of power has made it an attractive place for all including those who are political illiterates. Politics is a professional area meant for those who are equipped for it. That explains why Plato advocated for the fusion of political power and philosophical prowess into the hands of the philosopher-king who has the knowledge of the Forms through mental contemplation.

Fifth, the anti-graft commissions should not be politicized. The commissions that have been set up to handle official corruptions committed by political leaders and their bureaucratic counterparts should be given freehand to carry out their responsibility.

Sixth, all Nigerians should become whistleblowers. We must rise to the task of saving our democracy from the hands of gluttonous, parasitic and materialistic leaders who are committed to siphoning the treasury of this country.

Until all these issues are religiously addressed, the future of democracy in Nigeria is endangered because its present perverse political culture will continue *ad infinitum* leading to the final disintegration as proposed by the international political seers.

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