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Chapter Nineteen: Absent Fathers; First Lady Syndrome and the Nigerian Family Lessons from Saa-Aondo Iorngurum's <i>Regrets of a First Lady</i> Marcellinus Aondohemba Asen	290
Chapter Twenty: Reconstructing Nigeria's Belly Politics: The Search for a New Leadership Ideology John Tor Tsuwa	302
Chapter Twenty One: Good Governance and Linguistic Human Rights (LHR): Issues in their Protection and Use in Nigeria Mary Nguveren Ikima	317
Chapter Twenty Two: Winning the Game with Aces: A Strategy for Conflict Minimisation in Organisations. A.I. Ochugudu	331
Chapter Twenty Three: The Role of the State in Economic Growth and Development: Some Lessons for Nigeria Agba Terna Paise	349
Chapter Twenty Four: Leadership and Good Governance in Africa: The Playwrights Campaigns for Social Change Ben Due Iyav	359
Chapter Twenty Five: Women, their own Worst Enemies: A Comparative Study of Tess Onwueme's <i>Go Tell it to Women</i> and the <i>Reign of Wazobia</i> Regina Ode	375
Chapter Twenty Six: Promoting Women Participation in Politics in Nigeria: Challenges and Prospects M.M. Dura	391
Chapter Twenty Seven: Assessment of the Socio-Political and Religious Roles of Ator-a Tiv in Tivland Terna Afella	410

Chapter Twenty

Reconstructing Nigeria's Belly Politics: The Search for a New Leadership Ideology

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Introduction

The historicity of nation states shows that, at the heart of their socio-economic, political and cultural development lays leadership vibrancy that is determined by a leadership that is accountable, visionary and focused. This leadership not only emancipates its citizenry from the shackles of poverty and marginalisation but also mobilises its resources to galvanise development for the welfare of the people. In Africa, nationalist leaders like Nelson Mandela, Kwame Nkrumah, Julius Nyerere, Patrice Lumumba and even military leaders like Murtala Mohammed amongst others have also fought not only for the political liberation of their countries but also for their socio-economic development.

Despite this prominent and most important role performed by the political leadership to galvanise development and create good life for the people in many parts of the world, Africa has especially from the 21st century suffered from lack of focused and visionary leadership. In the case of Nigeria, Nigerian leaders not only personalise power, but also privatise the state for the purpose of primitive accumulation, clientalism and repression, which in turn disengages the people from public participation thereby giving Nigeria a bad image among the committee of nations.

According to Miller (2000: xviii), the very name Nigeria conjures up images of chaos and confusion, official corruption, military coups, repression, drug trafficking and business fraud. The Nigerian nation designed by alien occupiers and abused by army rule, has become a bruised elephant staggering towards abyss with the ground crumbling under its feet. Nigeria the acclaimed giant of Africa is therefore not a developing state but an under-developing state due to the malaise of political leadership.

Post independent Nigerian leaders like the colonialist before them have sucked out billions of dollars and stashed them in Western banks and in properties scattered throughout the world. The blame for Nigeria's lost generation and its underdevelopment level falls squarely on the shoulders of its people's leaders, corrupt military dictators and their civilian collaborators who have been overtaken by greed and incompetence. This dilemma of the Nigerian state was succinctly captured by Achebe (1983; 1) thus:

Nigerians are corrupt because the system in which they live today makes corruption easy and profitable; they will cease to be corrupt when corruption is made difficult and inconvenient ... The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership ... the Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which is the hallmark of true leadership.

Nigeria because of this malaise of leadership is suffering from a complete disconnect between political power and moral right, and unless you have access to power, you have nothing. The usage of political power in Nigeria is unrestricted and unchecked. This condition has disempowered Nigeria and Nigerians to the extent that, in the midst of abundant natural and human resources, Nigeria and Nigerians have become beggars. According to Udoidem (2006:187), the greatest disappointment that has traumatised our psyche as a nation is that, Nigerians have mismanaged their political independence to the point of self-destruction. This paper situates this mismanagement in the context of politics of the "belly" practised by the Nigerian leadership.

This paper therefore examines the nature of the Nigerian political

leadership and how the leadership has been able to galvanise development to improve the living conditions of the people or how its otherwise behaviour has crippled development strides and has dis-empowered the citizens. The paper will conclude by attempting to suggest a new leadership ideology that will reposition the Nigerian development process.

Conceptual Clarification: Politics

Conceptualising politics is in many instances problematic. This is due to the variegated perception of what constitutes a political act and a social act. In most cases, social behaviours like that of inter-group mobilisation shape and determine political act, as such it becomes difficult to have a single definition of what constitutes politics. This complication may account for why Lasswell as cited by Tsuwa (2005:3) conceives politics as an action that is determined by the ability of who gets what, when and how.

Politics according to George-Genyi (2008:120), does not only mean the retention of power, but it involves the use of such power for the control and distribution of wealth. This description of politics suits Easton's description of politics as involving the authoritative allocation of scarce values and resources. In whatever form we define or describe politics, the core ingredients of politics involves interaction between parties both at the individual and group levels with the major aim of appropriating resources and wealth. Politics is an action that uses the stick or carrot to induce or coerce individuals or groups to gain or relinquish their hold to the avenues of resource control and distribution.

Politics because of its authoritative allocative element might some times especially when the contending resource is scarce be conflictual and highly contested for. Politics therefore might be war without bloodshed or might be with bloodshed, it may also involve disagreement to agree, it may be a clash of ideological perspective or a manipulation of sentiments to achieve goals.

In whatever context politics is conceptualised, it is used here to narrate its class character and its ability of coercive manipulation to appropriate and accumulate societal wealth for distribution. To this, politics is conceived as the interplay of governance and administration and manipulation of policies to acquire and allocate values by an individual or a group of people.

Belly Politics

Defining belly politics is a herculean task because this conception is a considered opinion of a new variant of politics practised by third world politicians. Politics as can be summarised from the above description is the authority to allocate the wealth of the society for the growth and development of the society. Belly politics therefore entails the usage of this authoritative power to allocate these resources personally to those in authority. Belly politics is personalised or privatised politics, a condition where the political leadership conscript the resources of the nation and feeds fat on it with their allies without considerations to the general growth and development of the society. Commonsensically, belly politics can be considered as corruption emanating from leadership greed and primitive accumulation, a situation where the political class neglect and disempowers the people and concentrates on sucking dry the societal treasury.

Leadership

Leadership is perceived as a collective endeavour to govern or direct the affairs of a polity. The role of leadership can be found in its ability to order those sums of wants, needs, aspirations and expectations of the people and convert them into achievable ends. According to Burns (1997:266), leadership is people centred and focuses on satisfying collective public expectations.

Leadership involves service to the people. Selfishness therefore becomes banal and unacceptable for the leader and his/her followers. It is argued that, when leaders accommodate and fashion their policies in accordance with the views of the followers, the tendency to crip into authoritarianism is defeated. Leadership therefore involves concrete and sincere rule directed and determined by the people. As a result of this, integrity, competence and good performance are basic ingredient in leadership.

In analysing Nigeria's belly politics, this paper adopts Richard Joseph's democratic theory of prebendalism whose major argument centres on political power that is corruption-centred. According to Omo (1993:16), at the core of prebendalism is clientelism which brings out a patron-client relationship. According to him, in a prebendal democracy, state offices are

secured through examination or as a reward for loyal service to a leader.

An X-ray of Nigerian politics shows that, to be a leader is to be in charge of the state treasury, which is used for personal power and to enrich illegitimately party faithful in order to sustain a corrupt lifestyle. This analysis captures Nigerian belly politics and how it has sustained corruption and subverted accountable political system in Nigeria.

A Historical Overview of Pre-colonial Leadership in Nigeria

It is heartbreaking and a truism to note that Nigerian leadership lacks ideological base. Nigeria just like many other African countries has been a follower nation because of the dearth of ideology of its leaders. In pre-colonial societies, socio-political leadership was based on African indigenous values and Islamic political systems. Where the leader in association with a traditional council of state rules, the monarch acts within the confines of the law and not above the traditional council. This however does not rule out the fact that some leaders became corrupt with authority and acted in gross disregard of the laws. This however was an abnormality. In Islamic settings for instance, the legitimacy and credibility of the leader depended upon the leaders' ability to rule with or in accordance to the shariah, in this case, the shariah law according to Abubarka (2005:3) was supreme.

In most diffused or non-centralised societies of Nigeria, the leader who was usually the eldest person acted on behalf of the people. The choice of the elders to act was based on their wealth of wisdom, experience and great knowledge of the culture and tradition of their people. In Tiv societies for example, it was believed that the elders through their Tsav or akombo (witchcraft) were in close association and interaction with the ancestors and as such do not take irrational decisions. In these pre-colonial societies, decisions were based on consensus and non-consensual decisions were not binding on the people. According to Atanda (1985:87), most of these leadership was based on gerontocratic system where the people were supreme. The common theme within these systems as was found amongst the Tiv, Ijaw, Isoko to mention a few was the centrality of checks and balances, which served as a guide against abuse and administrative inefficiency. Uroh (2004:57) argues that, most segmented or decentralised

societies operated republicanist societies. He pointed out the case of the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria as a clear example where the society was not administered by a monarch but by the whole community and by everybody. According to him, the high point of decision making in Igboland was that of consensus building. Allocation of authority, status, rights, wealth, income and other scarce resources were done by consensus through haggling's and trade-off. The consensus was to make sure that citizen's needs are not jeopardised.

It is also argued and can be seen that, in some pre-colonial African societies, traditional rulers exercised considerable degree of power and authority in their domain. This high degree of power and authority were derived from customs and traditions recognised and revered by their communities. For instance, the Alago's of Nassarawa State believe that, all lands are exclusive reserve of the Osana of Keana who has the sole right to give it out to whom he so wished. According to Sambo (1987:396), these leaders were considered symbols of unity and protectors of the socio-political institutions of their people.

It can therefore be argued that, pre-colonial African leaders and their societies believed and operated a social contract democracy where the people, their custom and collective goals were supreme. The leaders were strictly for community services and development. Decisions were consensual and no single individual no matter the degree of socio-political and economic power could appropriate the resources of the society to himself or his allies. Even in the case of the Osana of Keana mentioned above, custom forbids him from amassing wealth and such land's for his private usage at the expense of his people.

X-raying African /Nigerian Post Colonial Leadership

Colonialism brought with it a monopolistic power structure. During the colonial days, the white colonial masters held a monopoly of power justifiable on the basis of racial superiority and weapons. The leadership system introduced by the colonial authority was not only arbitrary and oppressive, but it was also domineering and conscriptive in nature. The so-called modernisation that colonialism brought changed traditional societal values of collectivism and introduced individualism along with the

capitalist principles of monopolistic capital accumulation. With colonialism, political equality and consensual decision became a misnomer.

It is worthy to remind ourselves once again that, in pre-colonial systems, African political models did not allow absolutism or tyranny as powers of the leader was not their personal preserve but were those of the community. With the build up to independence, the nationalist leaders replaced this Africanise system with monopolistic and individualistic practice introduced by capitalism.

According to Wilmot (1979:8), the political parties formed in the build up to independence like the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), Northern People's Congress (NPC) and the Action Group (AG) were indisciplined and without principles. They were based on the ideal of individualism and neighborhood. For instance, the NCNC was built around Nnandi Azikiwe and the sub-nationalism of the Igbo's, the NPC was built around Tafawa Balewa and Hausa/ Fulani sub-nationalism, and AG was centred on Awolowo and the Yoruba sub-nationalism. These sub-nationalistic parties created a problem of collective and consensual leadership in the country.

According to Hembe (2005:21), the political class that took over from the British soon splited up into various factions, each struggling to dominate first, the wealth of its region of origin, and secondly, to use this regional dominance as a spring board for the acquisition of non-regional wealth.

The leadership that took over power at independence therefore lacked a collective sound leadership ideology to mobilise local resources for development. The Nigerian leadership just like it existed in many African nations have continued to invite the competitive and spoliation of today's world powers. In 1884-1885, world powers had decided to partition Africa and set it on its road to economic disintegration, political enslavement, and moral degeneration. Since then, Africa according to Aluko (2001:5) has gone through a pang of slavery, colonisation, economic domination, imperialism, neocolonialism, European metropolitan peripherisation, and political manipulations that had led to sustained intra-ethnic wars, political violence and underdevelopment.

Many African leaders have continued to sell the conscience of their countries to the ideas, philosophies and inducement of the West. According to Aluko (2001:5-6), when slavery was popular in the world, African leaders readily embraced it as a vehicle to wealth and power. When colonialism replaced slavery, they pawned their kingdom dukedoms, and empires to the colonising powers. Now, they follow privatisation, deregulation, liberalisation, globalisation and other capitalist shibboleths as their governance ideologies, political risorgimento and resurgence.

According to George Hegel as cited by Uya (1987:15, and Iyo 200:114), with the granting of independence, it was discovered that, the negro, particularly of Africans are in want of an ideology and self control, this condition is capable of no development or culture. Africans at independence therefore accepted and became merchandise earmarked for abuse and use as hand labour. Udoidem (2006:187) therefore argues that, when Nigerian politicians speak, the electorates do not understand, and when the electorates speak, the politicians do not listen or understand.

It can be argued that Nigerian politicians concentrate on their belly and do not have a political language to extend to the needs of the people. There is no common collective memory that will result to a common Nigerian need and leadership. At independence, Jibo (1982:3) observes that, the government became the provider of all services and the maker of all millionaires like the Abiola's, Dantata's etc. Occupying government power therefore means that it will effect socio-economic change to the benefit of those in it.

With this mentality, Africa, or Nigerian leaders not only personalise power but also privatise the state for the purpose of primitive accumulation, clientelism and repression of all forms of opposition, which disengages the people from public participation. With independence, the control of state power in Nigeria therefore became synonymous with wealth and security. Politics became a zero-sum game with an avalanche of violence and political instability. This crisis of leadership soon led Nigeria into military rule and later into thirty (30) months of Civil War. The military with its coercive capability suspended all democratic tenets and ruled with executive recklessness. Corruption and private power practice was instituted. Extra judicial killings and massive looting became normal

official duties.

According to Wilmot (1979:16), instead of channeling the enormous revenues from oil to development, the military became distributive and luxurious in consumer goods. The military bourgeoisie were primarily commercial and comprador rather than industrial. For instance, their Udoji bonanza was only given to their allies and it increased inflation and worsened poverty conditions. The forceful introduction of the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) by the Babangida administrations and the Sani Abacha \$50 billion loot was also a clear military compradorian policy designed to enrich the military class and impoverish the Nigeria populace.

The military as a leadership option to resolve the Nigerian leadership crisis did not provide the needed result as the military became dictatorial and more primitive in its policy of national wealth confiscation and regional survival than First Republic political leadership. After many years of military exploitation and wealth subversion, Nigeria returned to democratic or better still, civil rule in May 1999.

Democracy entails peoples rule. A state of state legitimacy, which is nourished by accountability and collective conscience. Ake (1992:1) contend that, democracy means popular power; rule by the "demos". The questions however with the return to democratic governance in Nigeria is that, has the Nigerian leadership democratised? or has the leadership continued to practise privatised politics or what this paper calls politics of the belly? Has the return to democracy met the aspirations of the people?

The Nigeria Political Class and its Belly Politics: An Insight

As Nigeria and Nigerians become poorer and poorer, her leaders become more richer and more criminalised. Corruption, official thievery, dereliction of duty, citizen's neglect has formed the basic tenets of Nigerian political leadership. In Nigeria, a microscopic political class lives in populous affluence and happiness while a larger population lives in abject poverty and penury. The Nigerian leadership has democratised according to Ihunna (2004:125), individual wealth accumulation and the sharing of the "national cake".

For instance, between 1999-2007, the banana peel led to the impeachment of four Senate Presidents. The furniture and car allowances

rocked the operation of the National Assembly during the same period. Governors like D.S.R Alamiyeseigha of Balyesa State, Joshua Dariye of Plateau State amongst others were swept away by corrupt practices, while others like Peter Odili, James Ibori, Abdulahi Adamu and Boni Haruna are still being prosecuted for various offences by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). In 2007, Hon Patricia Ette, the then speaker of the Federal House of Representative was swept away by corruption scandals just like Senator Nicholas Ugbani, Hon. Ndudi Elumelu amongst others who were fingered in the #6.2 billion rural electrification power sector scandal. According to Ogunlana (2007:11), Tafa Balogun was prosecuted for carting away #17 billion, ministers like Fabian Osuji, Mrs Grange and Arch. Yakubu Adukuwere also swept away by corruption scandals. Recently in Benue State, 12 local government chairpersons were suspended for embezzling the excess crude oil revenue given to the local governments to the tune of #320 million.

Political leadership in Nigeria according to Tsuwa (2009:5) is base on the amount of money a politician is able to cart away from the local, state or national treasury. The political class uses state apparatus like the military, police, judiciary etc for personal aggrandisement; as such, the leaders are above the law. The case of President Obasanjo who subverted all court rulings during his tenure between 1999-2007 is a clear example. During this period, the law was blind when the political gladiators were involved but very active when the lower class or those outside the ruling clique were involved. For instance, while people were arrested by the Nuhu Ribadu led EFCC, clear cases of political thievery like the #73 billion roads construction funds by Chief Antony Anenih and the over #3 billion Nigeria Ports Authority funds by Chief Bode George amongst others were not mentioned. These corrupt practices made Nigeria to be listed by Transparency International as one of the most corrupt country in the world in 2003 and 2nd position in 2004.

The Nigerian political leadership is like that which Nicolo Machiavelli described in *The Prince*. To Machiavelli, political leadership is all about domination over men, a situation where the leader acquires the state by the arms of others or by personal courage, when this is done, the prince (leader) exercises absolute control over the resources of the state and

personalises his rulership. In Nigeria, there exists power politics with economic dimensions. Access to political power gives access to economic power and when the political class captures these two, the people are seen as a piece of pliable matter in the hand of the ruling political class. The Nigerian politicians therefore manipulate the political process to achieve this.

This has crippled the governance process in Nigeria. According to Obasanjo as cited by The Guardian newspaper;

There has been persistent deterioration in the quality of our governance leading to instability and the weakening of all public institutions. Good men were shunned and kept away from government; while those who should be kept away were drawn near... our country has thus been through one of its darkest period. (The Guardian, May 30, 1999).

Nigerian politics is therefore based on lies told by candidates and existing governments to popularise their interest or regime. Dividends of democracy are displayed on the radio and televisions while in practice, taxpayers monies are looted and diverted to personal concerns of those in power.

The political class in Nigeria today has destroyed collectivism and instead created an urban anarchy, which has helped them in the pursuit of personal hegemony. Democracy is utilised by the Nigerian political class to pave way for unrestricted material exploitation to the tune of that which had existed between the nation and the colonial imperialist. Because of its quest for political wealth creation, Nigeria's class has reduced the political space to accommodate only an unproductive but distributive class.

Many reasons are adduced for this ill-focused and belly centred political ideology. Dobel (1999:154) attributed this disrespectful attitude to the nature of politics, which makes the leaders go in pursuit of individual successes to the neglect of the collective good. Despite the fact that this can be questioned on the ground that with qualitative and purposeful leadership, people see nothing wrong with politics and its leadership, it will also be pertinent to agree that, when public needs are not met, people detest politics and its leadership. In Nigeria, the nature of politics is questioned because,

the political leadership has failed to galvanise development.

According to Ihunna (2004:124), political ills are reinforced by political leadership such as rising disinterest in public morality, increase corruption, citizen's neglect and lack of security, which now promote the disdain with which it is currently held. Political leadership in Nigeria therefore reinforces the sad nature of politics. It can therefore be argued that, the politics of gangsterism, god-fatherism and coercion practised by the political class creates condition favourable for siphoning public funds.

According to Adedeji (2003:61) the seeds of "authentic democracy" are yet to germinate in the psyche of the Nigerian political class. In the same vein, Ake (1990:2) argues that,

African has no chance of attaining meaningful economic growth and development unless it first moves squarely into modalities of governance that include political accountability, participatory politics and free market economy.

The democratic principles of free choice, freedom of expression, human rights and popular rule among others are yet to become part of Nigerian political lexicon. The political class does not have economic democracy; the leaders appropriate the resources to themselves. It has also being argued variously that, lack of penalizing laws for political corruption has exacerbated the crisis of political leadership. Even with the introduction of the EFCC and ICPC, the Nigeria political class has emasculated them as the power of "immunity" has prevented the prosecution of those in power.

Constructing a New Leadership Ideology for Nigeria

From the above it has become very clear that, the Nigeria political class has failed in galvanising development for the good of the generality of the people, instead, its lack of collective ideology has resulted to its personalisation of power and all that accrue to it.

For Nigeria to reclaim her lost glory as the giant of Africa, the political class must return to itself, find its own views, chart a different economic path from deregulation, privatisation, globalisation and use its power as the main engine of growth through effective planning. To do this effectively, Ihunna (2004:120) suggests that, the implementation of a non-political leadership system is most appropriate. This is politics-less leadership where

decisions are not based on the nature of politics but by needs of the society. This will eliminate the negative frills of politics from the public domain, it will permit power and its prudent exercise that largely aims at the common good.

The ruling class most as a matter of necessity accept political opposition and allow it to operate without intimidation or coercion. If political opposition is permitted, there will be room for checks and balances. The political parties should also ensure their internal democracy to allow people to make choices in the political process.

Inferring from Franz Fanon's argument (cf Tsuwa 2009:4), since the political leadership is violent and oppressive to the people, violence is needed by the masses to reconstruct the leadership ideology of collectivism rather than of individual sadism. The underlying argument here is that, we need to distil leadership of its penchant for self-serving interest and reinvent it into a community serving mechanism even if it involves violent means to chest out failed leadership. For an alternative political leadership to be effective, there must exist positive minds in a positive environment which according to Oladokun (2004:159) will possibly produce positive leadership values for the mind to cultivate positive leadership qualities which will stimulate general development to empower Nigerians.

Concluding Remarks

This paper concludes that, the Nigerian political leadership has become insatiable in amassing personal wealth. This has created a dilemma of development as the leadership has failed to galvanise development but instead has looted the resources of the nation with impunity. This condition has created the need for the construction of a new leadership ideology that will destroy this belly politics and replace it with a people-centred leadership that will take care of the needs of the generality of the people. This paper therefore a non-political leadership ideology and were necessary, the leadership be forced out.

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