

REPOSITIONING POLITICAL EDUCATION NIGERIA

Ameh Eke Zainab

Abstract

Nigeria has inherited a lot of structural problems from past colonial masters. (Problems of how to relate with one another and bad leadership among several other ills in our society). These problems have been compounded with several years of military dictatorship and misrule over the years. Out of the 45 yrs of independence, Nigeria has had about 30 years of military rule and the issue is compounded by the ill preparedness of the colonial masters and the distortions in the Nigeria state. This paper tried to look at these distortions to see whether they could be corrected because these distortions are creating problems for the smooth governance of the country and creating bitterness in some sections of the country. These constitute a threat to the unity and progress of the country.

Introduction

At independence in 1960, Nigeria inherited a weak social- political structure, a defective and unbalanced federation, intensification of ethnic, political and religious consciousness and rivalries, a subverted indigenous ethos of government and culture and above all, and inexperienced leadership. Most of the apparatus of state (a civil service not primarily geared to development, a police force alienated from the interest of the ruling class and increasingly torn apart by regional sentiments, a judiciary wedded to the protection of the interest of the power elite) could not meet or support the aspirations of an emergent state. The parliamentary constitution did not contain adequate provision for positive socio- economic transformation and national integration. It encouraged regionalism. All the political parties, important instrument for social and political mobilization were ethnically based.

The North/south conflicts which has been husbanded by the British as part of their divide and rule tactics were so pronounced that they impacted negatively on all political decisions. Within each region, minority groups which genuinely and legitimately complained about the domination by the majority groups and sought relief in the creation of states, were either ignored or ruthlessly suppressed. The British left unresolved a major problem of the structure of federation in Nigeria. From all indications, there was little doubt that independent Nigeria, despite the euphoria that greeted her birth was headed for turbulent and crises- ridden future.

Prevailing Political System/Problems

Ideology

Ideology is a set of doctrines, principles or guidelines through which a people or community conceives and perceives themselves and their environment. Ideology is the concrete adjunct to the philosophy of government. Nigeria inherited western education calculated to undermine the confidence of the Nigerian educated elite in their cultures, religion and way of life, thereby destroying the center at their existence. Western education thus served to alienate its beneficiaries from their cultural milieu in the process turning them into cultural hybrids. With this system of education, Nigeria inherited a lot from the ideas of Plato and Aristotle. An important aspect of this philosophy was the division of society into two basic classes- kings and subjects, rich and poor, and the ruler and ruled, with the ruled having no essential political role but constituting an exploitable class. The Nigerian educated elite who patronized the schools wittingly and unwittingly imbibed these ideas of society and increasingly began to see themselves as differentiated from the masses- the ruled. The result was the fragmentation of society into two broad categories- those who wielded political power and those who were exploited to maintain such power.

Nigerian Brand of Federalism

Nigeria federalism is a colonial creation. The British colonial administration failed to create a common forum to bring the southern and the northern protectorate together upon amalgamation in 1914. The protectorates were run as separate entities. Even then, a central legislative council allowed for

native Nigeria participation in 1922, the north was not represented in it. This political apartheid continued until the 1946 constitution -as" revised in 1954, which only institutionalized regionalism giving each of the four administrative regions (the colony of Lagos, western, Eastern and Northern Nigeria) increased latitudes to develop separately. This arrangement produced a more fragmented, rather than a united Nigeria.

Nigeria federalism has a convoluted democratic tradition; it has been characterized by prolonged military rule. It has relied almost exclusively on a single revenue base for its national income:- petroleum export earnings. Most of the federating units are recent creations within the central set up: and it has abundant irresponsible, if not irrational and grossly unpatriotic, ruling classes.

The Nigeria federal state becomes even more significant as the primary arena for the struggles and competition of the ruling classes because of its control of the massive revenue derivable from petroleum resources. Petroleum accounts for over 90% of national revenues. National reserves are estimated at 20 million barrels in 1992 with a production capacity of 2.0 billion barrels per day. All aspects of petroleum production and marketing are under the control and regulation of the federal state. Also it retains at least 50% of these revenues for central govt expenditures. In the circumstances, whoever controls the federal state has at his disposition tremendous power and material resources with virtually unlimited scope for private accumulation.

Revenue Allocation and Resource Control

Revenue allocation or the statutory distribution of revenue for the federation account among the different levels of government has been one of the most contentious and controversial issues in the nation's political life. So contentious has the matters been that none of the formulae evolved at various times by a commission or by decree under different regimes since 1964 has gained general acceptability among the components units of the country. Indeed, the issue like a recurring decimal has generated a lot of controversies since independence. The history of this problem evolved from the British decision to amalgamate the southern and the Northern protectorates in 1914 which was dictated more by the need to subsidize the cost of administering the vast Northern protectorate from the resources of then relatively rich southern counterpart, rather than a desire to create a united country by the colonial masters.

Resource control struggle has been at three levels, inseparable practice:- (a) the state versus communities (b) north versus south: and (c) centre versus regions/ state. It should not be too difficult to tell under which of these successive policies and measures fall that have plagued us. Constitutional talks and constitutions federal character, land use Decree/ act, off- shore/ on shore, derivation principle, fiscal federalism, ecological funds, census, quota system etc.

Resource control is a case of appropriation of community resources by the state for the use of private persons and groups controlling .the patronage system; directing public funds into private number accounts abroad 'which is why it is official policy to 'negotiate' with the Abacha family to keep hundreds of millions of dollars rather than bring them to book' - [Otobo This day Friday. June vol. 11, page 15]. (Lifting of crude oil, award of exploration blocs and marginal fields bunkering, importation of refined petroleum product etc just to concentrate on the oil/gas sector that the Niger Delta is known for). This is the center versus regions/state tussle. The center should have a much smaller percentage since Nigerians work and live within states and local governments.

The Nigerian project has up till now been reduced to constitutional and political games over resource control by a small class of persons dotting the whole country, who have acquired uncanny skills in and competence at exploiting plural nature of respective communities. In this wise, there are no such things as a northern interest, middle belt interest', south east interest', south -south interest', south West interest etc instead there are individuals and groups of persons from these areas seeking political power and privileges perquisites of office- holding that their villagers do not enjoy or share. This explains why several decades of Northern domination' for example, there is still mass poverty there. To this extent, the communities in the Niger Delta area just complain of inequality in the use and distribution of ostensibly national resources.

Religious, Ethnic and Political Conflict in Nigeria

The recurring incidences of violent religious, ethnic and political conflicts in some parts of

the country have become a major national problem in contemporary Nigerian society. These various crisis are so frequent and devastating in the country that they are threatening the existence of individuals and the nation at large. Ukpabi (1999: 106) noted that problems have been encountered by the various groups in the country in their efforts to fashion a workable interaction between power and consent, freedom and obligation as well as between the nationalists themselves and the nation state to which they belong.

Besides, the increasing religious intolerance which has been fuelled by the growth of religious fundamentalism and fanaticism, has all represented potential threat to peace and stability. Okwueze (1995:165) observed that Nigeria is one of the countries where religious crises has wrecked much havoc on the advancement, unity and prosperity of her citizens, and the development of the nation as a whole. He noted that between 1980 and 1995, no less than fourteen convulsive religious conflicts had occurred in the country. Since 1995 till today, more than twenty five religious riots had taken place in the country. The British colonial rule and the administrative policy of Sir Fredrick Laggard and his successors laid a foundation for inter- religious hostility in the country. After the conquest of Northern Nigeria and the imposition of the indirect rule system by the British in the P¹ decade of the 20th century, the colonial administrators deliberately restricted the activities of the Christian mission in the north. This was to ensure political stability in the north and to sustain the cooperation of the emirs.

However, the attempt to extend the influence of Christianity and western education in the areas that were predominantly Muslims gave rise to inter- religious hostility and consequently bloody religious riots in some parts of the northern Nigeria. Ethnic conflict is brought about as a result of competition for scarce political and economic resources. Nnoli (1978:8) observed that a conflict is an important aspect of ethnicity. He noted that this is inevitable under scarce valuable resources, particularly in societies where inequality is accepted as natural, and wealth is greatly esteemed.

In Nigeria, the fear of being confined to the button of the interethnic ladder of inequality generates divisive and destructive socio-economic competition which has anti-social effects. For instance, political appointment, revenue allocation, promotion in the armed forces, citing of industries and provision of social infrastructure often generate intense competition and hostility among ethnic nationalities that make up Nigeria federalism.

Administration/ Bureaucracy

The phenomenal growth in the size and responsibilities of the civil service bureaucracy, and in particular, the realities of the social, economic and political situation within which it operates have made this institution to become embroiled in many serious problems. Today, an average Nigerian perceives the civil service negatively. All kinds of vices are associated with this institution. These include red-tapism, rigidity and conservatism on the one hand and corruption, inefficiency, nepotism, ineffectiveness, wastefulness, laziness, absenteeism, high- handedness and insensitivity on the other.

Many ministers who have served the country have had little or no preparation for their jobs. Some lacked understanding of the political system or showed little sympathy for the feelings of the people outside their groups, Many lacked the ability to formulate meaningful policies and engaged in acts of corruption and extreme vanity in their behavior.

Leadership/Corruption

The three important agencies of the government are true legislature, the executive and the judiciary. These three arms of government have been performing below expectation. There have been series of conflicts and coalitions between the members of the executive and the members of the judiciary. The impeachment weapon was given to the legislature by the constitution to check the excesses of the executive. This is to be used as a last resort for grave and disgraceful misconduct unbecoming of members of the executive. But impeachment procedure has been embarked upon for political misconduct very much against the spirit of the constitution. The executive have been accused of gross misuse of power and privileges, public distrust and assault on public confidence. The appointment and removal of judges leave much to be desired. Both processes are left essentially in the hands of the politicians- this situation cannot guarantee independence and impartiality of the judiciary. Corruption is seen as the bedrock of Nigerians political failure. Corruption is perceived to be a product of the excessive materialism generated by our individualized capitalized order which emphasizes the struggle to acquire wealth by leaders without regard to the collective interest and

welfare of the larger society.

It is hardly necessary to go into specific enumeration of instances of corruption in this country. The Nations former chief law enforcement officer now facing trial has by all the allegations leveled against him indeed worsened the image of the police. This merely attests to the local adage that the rottenness of a fish starts from its head. If the EFCC's assertion that the former National chief of police Tafa Balogun had billions of naira (public funds) starved away in various Nigerian bank accounts is true, then Nigerians are bound to wonder what hope there is in leadership. Indeed, the case of the police chief would have quietly died the Nigerian death' but for the chain effect of the Osuji-Wabara bribe saga. Nigerians have refused to be excited about any such scandals. They have lost confidence in the system and are skeptical about the outcome of such temporary celebrated cases because of the litany of such past case that were put aside after a while. The case of Makanjuola, the former permanent secretary of the ministry of Defense who allegedly enriched himself and defrauds the nation of multi- million naira was merely visited with a termination or dismissal from the service. He was not brought to court for justice nor was he locked up to give back what he allegedly acquired corruptly.

In 2002 Nigerian Newspapers were agog with pictures and stories of a former state governor who purchased a scandalous sprawl of mansions in choice areas of Washington DC and London ostensibly from public funds. The case was taken up by the Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Code of Conduct Bureau. Ever since the case has gone into a coma. The 1st excuse was the constitutional immunity clause covering him as a state Chief Executive. He has since been voted out of office in the 2003 general election. Yet he goes about today free and shamelessly displaying affluence. In fact the present Headquarters of Nitel in Abuja which is said to have been rented by this government agency from tax-payers money for 450 Million Naira is traceable to him.

The celebrated burial given to late Afolabi-a Former Minister, despite the fact that he was arraigned in court for corruption sent wrong signals of acquiescence on the part of government. The fact that nothing was heard again of the case even for the living culprits further confirmed this. Such hanging cases are a legion and they give an impression that the present administration is either **unwilling** or incapable of fighting Corruption to a halt. They also give an impression of selective justice on the part of the government.

Times were when even the National Assembly during Honorable Na'Abba's tenure, displayed before television camera the sack of money given to some parliamentarians as bribe from the Presidency. With the case of bribery against the National Assembly and the Minister, one wonders if this is a 'born again' approach or selective vendetta. That perhaps accounts for why, in some circles, the #55,000,000 bribe saga is not a big deal.

If all these are coming from the leadership, where then is the hope of the ordinary Nigerian? What is the guarantee of a just and peaceful future as the rich gets richer even fraudulently by milking the poor tax payers. Politics, election and governance seem to have become an investment which must yield atrociously high dividends by any means and to the detriment of the electorate. This should not be so.

Government should convince the citizens of this country of its seriousness in addressing corruption by I⁵ of all embarking-on a self cleansing exercise. Cleansing should begin from the leaders. In 1975, General Murtala Mohammed showed his seriousness by publicly diverting himself of all that he believed he illegally acquired. The present administration of President Olusegun Obasanjo should do same. From him, the searchlight could then move to the cabinet and other lesser mortals. -If this is done, it will no doubt, send a signal of commitment to the eradication of corruption.

National Political Reform Conference

Obasanjo's idea and type of a national conference is a misnomer that will soon turn into a complete fiasco. It will no doubt go the way of the other conferences of his. By the way Mr. President is yet to tell the nation what became of the justice Oputa- led Human Right Violation Investigation commission that held the nation still bound for several months on end, gulping down while it lasted hundreds of millions of Naira and thousands of man-hours that could have been more effectively utilized.

The National political Reform conference, NPRC has proved that the representatives drawn from the various segments of the nation only represented their individual ethnic groups and personal

interest, while national interest were grossly and conspicuously sidelined. Why should the demand for 25% derivation formula be turned down, for instance when the excruciating misery that is the lot of Niger Delta people, as a result of indiscriminate oil exploration, is glaring to all.

There is, nothing to inspire hope about a conference whose delegates qualified by no other merit than being known or liked by the powers that 'Be' not public acceptance, trust or ability to represent their people well. Not only that they are a product of a selection process instead of an election, the procedure was totally arbitrarily something of an imposition on the people. This situation, as would be expected, rubbed off on the caliber of people picked for the conference. It simply turned out to be a recycle of the same old block that has consistently been on the saddle in the different levels of conference and governance since independence. Martins Mbaji would have to say that it has become a common knowledge that most of Nigerian problems came about as a result of the fact that we have too much dead woods among the political class.

Political Education

Political education is a process of mental and psychological liberation, the concretization and sensitization of the citizenry with a view to increasing their meaningful participation in the political processes of the nation. Political Education enables individuals or groups of individuals to understand the nature, structure, organization of society as well as their position within the society and the role they are expected to play in order that society can attain positive progress and development. Political education therefore seeks to identify and remove all obstacles or forces which hinder a clear understanding of and the objective reality which informs an individual existence and effective participation in the affairs of the nation. Thus political education is a process of mental liberation which breaks down apathy and the culture of silence of the vast majority of Nigerians.

Repositioning Political Education in Nigeria

With all the present political problems discussed extensively in his paper Nigeria needs a repositioning of her political Education. There is a need for re-ordering, restructuring, over hauling, reforming our political education that can bring a positive change in the quality of politics by changing the range of human needs that infringe upon the political process.

This is achieved by uprooting people from their physical and psychological isolation, alienation, apathy, cynicism and indifference about political happenings in both their immediate environment and the nation in general and inculcating in them new political habits and attitudes which ensures their active participation in national affairs. Political education need to be repositioned to facilitate the transformation of Nigeria's political environment from a largely negative one to one in which the people are enlightened to be politically conscious and organized into popular formations for the defense of democracy and social justice. To this end, repositioning political education in Nigeria would mean:

Educating Nigerians about their history and political development,

Educating Nigerians to realize that democracy is an indispensable precondition for national development:

Educating Nigerians about their rights and duties as citizens of the federal republic of Nigeria;

Educating Nigerians about the change of apathy and political silence;

Raising the consciousness of the Nigerian masses to realize that their poverty derives from exploitation, domination and lack of democracy in the nation.

Educating Nigerians against ethnic, religious and sectional bigotry and manipulation ;

Educating Nigerians to identify, expose and reject corruption in all facets of Nigeria's national life.

Educating Nigerians to identify with the Nigerian nation and to reject manipulations or acts which threaten the identity, integrity and solidarity of the nation.

Recommendations

Nigerians should view government as their agency, and government officials as public

servants not masters, and it is their own national duty to intervene and correct such officials when they do wrong or abuse their position.

Nigerian civil servants and other public officials should be aware of their roles and duties as servants of the people and always act in that capacity.

The outcome of the National political Reform Conference should address the issue of true federalism where each region should control the resources it rightly owned. The conference should think Nigerian in order to resolve the deadlock on the resource control issue.

All politicians should refrain from over-heating the polity. And for the youths, they must not allow anyone to make them sacrificial animals to be killed at the Altar of the ambition of selfish politicians.

Nigerian leaders should fully commit resources to the pursuit of the principles of social justice for all citizens. To this end, they should be shining examples of accountability, transparency, equity, and discipline in the society.

Conclusion

Democracy is best facilitated by good leadership. Bad leadership corrupts democracy through vicious manipulation of electoral and financial procedures.

Therefore, to ensure the sustainability of a democratic society for Nigeria, political education need to be repositioned in order to be able to raise patriotic, dedicated, honest and highly competent leaders who are equally determined to give effective leadership by example. For true democracy, political leaders must decisively, resolve to give Nigerians a new lease of political life through honest, and dedicated leadership and not bad, ineffective, incompetent and corrupt political leadership.

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