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CONSUMERIST AND EPICUREAN TENDENCIES: THE BANE OF NIGERIA'S SOCIO-ECONOMIC AND POLITICAL WOES

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ABSTRACT

Human societies are necessarily founded on specific philosophical principles and ideologies. While such foundational principles may sometimes be implicit, they certainly embody the values of any given society and largely determine the trajectory of its social, political, economic, sciento-technological and religious development. Taking a critical look at the deplorable state of Nigeria's socio-economic system, this discourse finds justifications for branding it a consumerist economy. It advances the thesis that Nigeria's economic and political woes are causally linked to a deficient value system, that is, one that promotes consumerist tendencies. As a panacea to this predicament, the paper strongly advocates for value re-orientation. It basically highlights the imperative of cultivating and assuming a socio-cultural disposition that consciously prioritizes socio-economic development.

Keywords: Consumerism, Epicureanism, Socio-economy, Ideology, Worldview.

1. Introduction

The trajectory and rate of development and progress of any civil society or human organization are largely determined by the nature of its socio-economic and political structures. These aspects of the human society constitute its effective and basic management templates. The concept 'economics', from the Greek 'oikonomia', is a composite of 'oikos' (house) and 'nomia, nomos', (norm or law). Its etymology, therefore, links it to the rules of household management. By extension, it is concerned with the management of a wider household – the human society. Similarly, the word 'politics', from the etymological point of view, is a composite of the Greek words 'polis' and 'techne', meaning city or state, and art, skill, or technique, respectively. In simple terms, therefore, politics means the art of governing or managing a city or state. It is the art of organizing the human society. It borders on the practical administrative efforts at maintaining a balance between man's social and antisocial tendencies (See Okoro, 2011:33). Given the fundamental and decisive roles of these aspects of the human society, casting them into the wrong mold is invariably detrimental to socio-economic progress.

One of the basic assumptions of this discourse is that economics and politics embody decisive indices of the socio-cultural and political expressions in any human society or organization and so constitute a critical hinge on which national life revolves. Against the backdrop of this basic assumption, this paper essentially contends that Nigeria's socio-economic and political woes are causally linked to its deficient socio-economic and political templates. In other words, the decadent and deplorable state of Nigeria's socio-economic and political structures accounts for its setbacks since independence in 1960. Indeed, to the extent that Nigeria's socio-

economic principles and political ideologies are founded on a consumerist framework, its prospects of development remain grossly endangered.

In essence, this discourse aims at a critical assessment of Nigeria's socio-economic and political templates with a view to highlighting their unfavourable influences on the nation's prospects of development. As possible escape routes from this entanglement, the paper makes a number of recommendations including the development of strong political institutions, sciento-technological reorientation, development of altruistic mindset, political good will and, most importantly, jettisoning the consumerist world outlook.

2. Consumerism and Epicureanism: Degenerate Socio-Economic and Political Principles

The concept, 'consumerism', generally denotes a social and economic order that encourages the acquisition of goods and services in ever-increasing amounts (https://en.m.wikipedia.org). It is the belief that a society or individual benefits from using a large quantity of goods and services (See Crowther, 1995:248) Within the context of this discourse, consumerist tendency designates a disposition or world outlook that emphasizes undue acquisition of material wealth and the consumption of goods and services to the detriment of sustainable socio-economic development. To the extent that it entails an obsession with material wealth and material things, consumerism largely correlates with such concepts as materialism, acquisitiveness, shopaholism, avariciousness, greediness and covetousness. A consumerist society prioritizes consumption over production of goods and services. In such society, values, policies, and beliefs are basically driven by immediate, often selfish, material benefits and concerns of individuals.

While acknowledging that a few merits could be associated with consumerism, this discourse strongly contends that the demerits of consumerism outweigh its merits; hence it is branded a degenerate socio-economic principle. In fact, this paper wholly adopts the position of discourses that discourage consumerism. The *History Crunch* (2015-2021), for instance, identifies a number of negative aspects of consumerism including increase in environmental pollution, depletion of natural resources, development of low-quality products, the promotion of poor labour standards and pay for workers, and very minimal increase in happiness.

Consumerism largely correlates with Epicureanism, that is, the pleasure principle advanced by Epicurus (342/341-270) in the classical period of philosophy after Aristotle around 307 BC. This period essentially featured a paradigm shift from fostering the prospects of an ideal society to emphasis on personal life and the immediate concerns of individuals. The socio-economic climate and historical conditions of this period constituted the major spur of Epicureanism. The fall of Athens and the decline of Greek civilization after the Peloponnesian war and the consequent absorption and annexation of the Greek cities into the Roman Empire occasioned a paradigm shift in the socio-political world outlook of individual citizens. Accordingly, there was a growing emphasis on the concerns of individual persons instead of public good or communal concerns. The Epicureans alongside the Stoics, the Skeptics, and the Neoplatonists, shaped the direction of philosophy in this period (See Stumpf, 1994:108-109). The Epicureans advanced a pleasure principle termed 'ataraxia' or tranquility of soul. For Epicurus, the pleasure principle constituted the basis of human acts. In his *Letter to Menoeceus*

Epicurus (1926) writes, "For we recognize pleasure as the first good innate in us, and from pleasure we begin every act of choice and avoidance, and to pleasure we return again, using the feeling as the standard by which we judge every good." Remarkably, Epicurus attempted to apply some moderation and set rational limits to his recommendations on pleasure by distinguishing various types of pleasure and the degrees to which they guarantee happy life. While discouraging pleasures that are short-lived, and those that have painful aftermath, he recommended the pursuit of those that bestow a sense of calm and repose. On this stress he (*Menoeceus*, 1926) further observes:

> When we maintain that pleasure is the end, we do not mean the pleasures of the profligates and those that consist of sensuality, as is supposed by some who are either ignorant or disagree with us or do not understand, but freedom from pain in the body and from trouble in the mind. For it is not continuous drinkings and revellings, nor the satisfaction of lusts, nor the enjoyment of fish and other luxuries of the wealthy table, which produce a pleasant life, but sober reasoning, searching out the motives for all choice and avoidance, and banishing mere opinions, to which are due the greatest disturbance of the spirit.

Despite his subtle attempt to refine the pleasure principle, Epicurus' identification of pleasure with the ultimate aim of human life remained very pronounced. He advanced a self-centered moral philosophy that addresses mainly the concerns of the individuals and places the individual's pleasure above social duties or civic responsibilities. In other words, Epicureanism essentially substitutes common good with individual pleasure and fosters an attitude that undermines national development. Epicurus emphasized the avoidance of pain and the maximization of pleasure. For him, the good life entails absolutely jettisoning every kind of discomforting experience including selfless service of fellow men or the society. In the context of this discourse, therefore, Consumerism and Epicureanism express self-centeredness and egocentrism. Both emphasize short-term plans and concerns to the detriment of long-term ones and their consequent benefits. Both tendencies, at least implicitly, undermine strategic developmental plans.

One easily identifies a semblance of the historical conditions of the post-Aristotelian period of philosophy in Nigeria's situation. Hence, the latter can be justifiably assessed against the backdrop of some philosophical responses to the events of the former. The post-Aristotelian period of philosophy was marked by a shift of emphasis from the formulation and development of speculative systems to an emphasis on more practical concerns, especially on the art of living. Instead of the pursuit of the prospects of social or community development, the period was especially characterized by the quest for the gratification of personal and individual needs.

The effects of the Peloponnesian war on Greece's socio-political climate have a striking resemblance of the effects of the civil war on Nigeria's socio-political conditions. With the fall of Athens and the decline of Greek civilization, there was a general loss of interest in public or national life and a new emphasis on personal life. With Greece becoming a mere province of the growing Roman empire, people's interests in public life began to wane and there was loss of interest in the promotion of an ideal society. The new emphasis was rather on making

the best out of individual's life and immediate concerns. The Epicureans provided a practical philosophical system that perfectly suited this mood. With their principal emphasis on *ataraxia* or the tranquility of the soul, they sought to meet the demands of this socio-political climate. The Civil war in Nigeria, otherwise known as the Nigeria-Biafra war, to a very large extent, cracked the wall of unity in Nigeria and considerably undermined unity of purpose among her citizens. In addition to fostering an implicit mutual suspicion among a heterogenous population, whose unification was a marriage of convenience effected by their erstwhile colonial masters, one other unfortunate consequence of the civil war was a conception of public goods, facilities, institutions, and resources as booties to be looted. In like manner, public service was seen as opportunity for self-aggrandizement and enrichment or opportunity to pursue the interests of one's ethnic group, often to the detriment of national interest.

3. Nigeria's Socio-Economic and Political Climate: The Status Quo

Consumerist and Epicurean tendencies, especially as exemplified in the pursuit of selfish interests, the satisfaction of immediate and temporal concerns to the detriment of future needs, are evident in virtually all the aspects of national life in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the system features an inconsiderate disregard for the nation's future and the judgments of posterity. A review of some indices of these consumerist and epicurean predispositions and their outcomes in politics, economics, religion, education, and social interaction would, to a very large extent, advance the thesis of this discourse.

Politics

As an art of organizing the human society, politics borders on the process of acquiring and exercising power, and is typified by election and electoral processes. The underlying currents of politics in Nigeria, including the political institutions and political systems and styles have all been tainted by such negative tendencies as acquisitiveness and profligacy. It is a political system in which the leaders function more as disinterested hirelings than true patriots. Politics in Nigeria is often marred by irregularities, violence and varied forms of malpractices. Election and appointment into political offices in Nigeria are often not on the basis of merit or the capacity for service delivery, but largely determined by factors bordering on favouritism, tribalism, nepotism, sectionalism, ethnicism, and similar self-serving principles and motives. This, to a very large extent, accounts for the high level of mediocrity and incompetence experienced at the corridors of power and militates against efficient service delivery and socio-political and economic progress.

Notably, ethnic heterogeneity has significantly affected the socio-political climate in Nigeria and indeed accounts for the incessant ethnic and inter-tribal conflicts witnessed in the country. This is especially given the failure of the political leaders to foster true federalism, which entails equal participation of the federating states and regions in governance as well as equitable distribution of the nation's natural resources and opportunities. The amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates in 1914, during the British colonial rule in Nigeria, under the leadership of Lord Fredrick Lugard, was obviously for administrative convenience and efficiency. The original prospect was to ensure efficient management of such a heterogenous society with diverse, linguistic, cultural, religious, and even political orientations. Unfortunately, the prospects for adopting a federal system of government in such a multi-ethnic society have not been reasonably actualized, especially as citizens have

continued to advance solely the concerns of their native regions, territories, and tribes, often to the detriment of collective national interests.

While there is an intricate link between politics and governance, a very subtle distinction could be made between them. Whereas the former highlights the process of securing political power and authority, the latter borders more on the art of wielding such power and authority for the common good. In Nigeria, politics often envelopes and beclouds governance. The political climate in Nigeria features an undue emphasis on politics to the detriment of good governance. It is often the case that as soon as one is elected into a public office, his or her concerns are directed to the next election into another office. Instead of giving his or her best at the moment for the good of the people, he or she focuses on setting up machinery for winning another election. This is indicative of a political orientation that is basically profit-oriented, self-serving and bereft of sense of sacrifice and patriotism.

The erroneous conception of positions of authority as opportunities to amass wealth and springboards for rising in social status instead of service to humanity, is a typical index of consumerist tendency. The drive behind the political ambitions of many Nigerians is self-enrichment from the national coffers. Little wonder, people posit unimaginable and unthinkable actions in order to secure such positions of authority. Against this backdrop, one understands why all manner of vices and malpractices characterize elections in Nigeria: violence, thuggery, 'Godfatherism', murder, assassination, massive rigging, lack of transparency, etc.

More still, Nigeria's socio-economic progress is largely impeded by very high cost of governance and misappropriation of public funds. One hardly finds sufficient justification for the outrageous number of political office holders at different levels of government in Nigeria. Of course, unnecessary duplication of political offices and parastatals is a common place in Nigeria. In like manner, the wasteful and extravagant lifestyle of political office holders, as well as unnecessary and superfluous borrowing by the government continue to plunge the nation into deep state of indebtedness and impoverishment.

While it may not be very appropriate to assess Nigeria's progress with the standards of the sciento-technologically advanced and industrialized nations of the world, the nation still lags behind even when judged by her own standards, that is, its prospects at the time of independence. Nigeria is unarguably endowed with enormous natural and human resources. These resources have been largely underutilized and grossly mismanaged. In fact, Nigeria's economic setback is largely a function of poor organization and mismanagement. Regrettably, Nigeria's fiscal policies often border on irrelevancies and non-fundamental socio-economic and political concerns. Chinua Achebe (1998:1) had rightly averred that "the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership." Indeed, Nigeria's economy has been bankrupted by sixty-one years of imprudent management by series of corrupt government and stakeholders. Greater percentage of the nation's crude oil, for instance, is still refined abroad due to insufficient functional refineries, and re-imported as finished products with a consequent hike in price. This arrangement, of course, undermines economic progress. Other unfortunate indices of mismanagement include poor policy implementation, political instability, social insecurity, moral decadence, production of substandard goods, impoverished educational system, substandard healthcare services, to mention but a few.

Poor policy implementation in Nigeria finds concrete expression in government's approach to privatization. The positive prospects of privatization are subtly undermined by the wrong perception of public service or civil service as an opportunity for self-aggrandizement and enrichment. Contrary to such expected merit as more efficient management, the privatization of public establishments and institutions in Nigeria often results in the enrichment of a few capitalists. Such is the case with numerous other policies and programmes of government. The implementation of poverty alleviation programmes, government's approach to internally generated revenues, policies on foreign loans and grants, government's attitude tothe rule of law are nothing to write home about. Government's support for farmers in the form of loans, grants and subsidies, funding of small and medium scale enterprises, scholarship schemes, and even the distribution of physical cash and food items as relief materials have all been undermined by such corrupt practices as nepotism, favoritism, tribalism, ethnicism, embezzlement, and so on. In fact, government's approach to, and the manner of, implementation of many of its policies obviously stifles economic growth and progress.

Economy

There are intricate ties of relationship between politics and economics. Given the mutual influence they wield on each other, as soon as the structures of one begin to crumble, the collapse of the other becomes inevitable. Unfortunately, neither the political structures nor the economic structures are formidable in Nigeria since the prospects of both are vitiated by mismanagement; hence the continuous nose dive experienced in both sectors. Nigeria's economic and socio-political climates are not only tainted by corruption but continually bedeviled by deliberate acts of selfishness, dishonesty and duplicity.

Nigeria is richly endowed with a wide variety of different natural resources, greater percentage of which has not been maximally utilized for the advancement of Nigeria's economy. Indeed, every state in Nigeria has at least a deposit of solid mineral. In the table below, Nigerian embassy in the Netherlands (2021) presents a profile of the solid mineral deposits in Nigeria.

S/N	STATES	NATURAL RESOURCES
1	Abia	Gold, Lead/Zinc, Limestone, Oil/Gas & Salt
2	Abuja	Cassiterite, Clay, Dolomite, Gold, Lead/Zinc, Marble & Tantalite
3	Adamawa	Bentonite, Gypsum, Kaolin & Magnesite
4	Akwa Ibom	Clay, Lead/Zinc, Lignite, Limestone, Oil/Gas, Salt & Uranium
5	Anambra	Clay, Glass-Sand, Gypsum, Iron-ore, Lead/Zinc, Lignite, Limestone, Phosphate & Salt
6	Bauchi	Gold, Cassiterite (tine ore), Columbite, Gypsum, Wolfram, Coal, Limestone, Lignite, Iron-ore & Clay
7	Bayelsa	Clay, Gypsum, Lead/Zinc, Lignite, Limestone, Manganese, Oil/Gas & Uranium
8	Benue	Barite, Clay, Coal, Gemstone, Gypsum, Iron-Ore, Lead/Zinc, Limestone, Marble & Salt
9	Borno	Bentonite, Clay, Diatomite, Gypsum, Hydro-carbon, Kaolin & Limestone

S/N	STATES	NATURAL RESOURCES
10	Delta	Clay, Glass-sand, Gypsum, Iron-ore, Kaolin, Lignite, Marble & Oil/Gas
11	Ebonyi	Gold, Lead/Zinc & Salt
12	Edo	Bitumen, Clay Dolomite, Phosphate, Glass-sand, Gold, Gypsum,Iron-ore, Lignite, Limestone, Marble & Oil/Gas
13	Ekiti	Feldspar, Granite, Kaolin, Syenite &Tatium
14	Enugu	Coal, Lead/Zinc & Limestone
15	Gombe	Gemstone &Gypsum
16	Imo	Gypsum, Lead/Zinc, Lignite, Limestone, Marcasite, Oil/Gas, Phosphate & Salt
17	Cross River	Barite, Lead/Zinc, Lignite, Limestone, Manganese, Oil/Gas, Salt & Uranium
18	Jigawa	Butyles
19	Kaduna	Amethyst, Aqua Marine, Asbestos, Clay, Flosper, Gemstone, Gold, Graphite, Kaolin, Hyanite, Mica, Rock Crystal, Ruby, Sapphire, Sihnite, Superntinite, Tentalime, Topaz & Tourmaline
20	Kano	Cassiterite, Copper, Gemstone, Glass-sand, Lead/Zinc, Pyrochinre& Tantalite
21	Katsina	Kaolin, Marble & Salt
22	Kebbi	Gold
23	Kogi	Cole, Dolomite, Feldspar, Gypsum, Iron-ore, Kaolin, Marble, Talc & Tantalite
24	Kwara	Cassiterite, Columbite, Feldspar, Gold, Iron-ore, Marble, Mica & Tantalite
25	Lagos	Bitumen, Clay & Glass-sand
26	Nasarawa	Amethyst (Topaz Garnet), Barytex, Barite, Cassiterite, Chalcopyrite, Clay, Columbite, Coking Coal, Dolomite/Marble, Feldspar, Galena, Iron-ore, Limestone, Mica, Salt, Sapphire, Talc, Tantalite, Tourmaline Quartz&Zireon
27	Niger	Gold, Lead/Zinc & Talc
28	Ogun	Bitumen, Clay, Feldspar, Gemstone, Kaolin, Limestone & Phosphate
29	Ondo	Bitumen, Clay, Coal, Dimension Stones, Feldspar, Gemstone, Glass-Sand, Granite, Gypsum, Kaolin, Limestone & Oil/Gas
30	Osun	Columbite, Gold, Granite, Talc, Tantalite & Tourmaline
31	Oyo	Aqua Marine, Cassiterite, Clay, Dolomite, Gemstone, Gold, Kaolin, Marble, Silimonite, Talc & Tantalite
32	Plateau	Barite, Bauxite, Betonite, Bismuth, Cassiterite, Clay, Coal, Emerald, Fluoride, Gemstone, Granite, Iron-ore, Kaolin, Lead/Zinc, Marble, Molybdenite, Phrochlore, Salt, Tantalite/Columbite, Tin & Wolfram
33	Rivers	Clay, Glass-Sand, Lignite, Marble & Oil/Gas
34	Sokoto	Clay, Flakes, Gold, Granite, Gypsum, Kaolin, Laterite, Limestone, Phosphate, Potash, Silica Sand & Salt
35	Taraba	Lead/Zinc
36	Yobe	Soda Ash &Tintomite

S/N	STATES	NATURAL RESOURCES
37	Zamfara	Coal, Cotton & Gold

Despite the super-abundance of natural resources in Nigeria, her privileged position among the oil producing countries in sub-Saharan Africa, and as the largest economy in Africa, a considerable number of Nigerians still wallow in abject poverty. In 2018, a CNN report (June 2018) based on a projection by the *World Poverty Clock* and compiled by *Brookings Institute*, indicates that Nigeria is the country with the largest number of people living in extreme poverty, with an estimated 87 million Nigerians, or around half of the country's population, living on less than $1.90 a day. In a similar report,"2019 Poverty and Inequality in Nigeria", *The Nigerian National Bureau of Statistics* (*The World Bank*, May 28, 2020), based on data from the latest round of the *Nigerian Living Standards Survey* conducted in 2018-2019,indicated that 40 percent of the total population, or almost 83 million Nigerians live below the country's poverty line of 137,430 naira ($381.75) per year.

A critical look at the turn of events strongly suggests that the discovery of oil in Nigeria must have contributed to the economic downturn witnessed in Nigeria. The oil boom experienced in the nascent days of her nationhood negatively affected the narrative of Nigeria's prospects of development as it presented a false sense of socio-economic security. It fostered the consumerist tendency and fanned into flame the sinister embers of indolence as the nation basked in the deceptive euphoria of oil rents. The landmark celebrations that characterized this period, including the FESTAC '77 (Festival of Arts and Culture held in Lagos Nigeria from 15th January to 12th February, 1977), were more or less parades of the nation's wealth and depletion of the natural resources with very minimal long-term plans for the rainy days. In fact, the exhaustion of the available natural resources without adequate plans for future economic sustenance laid the foundation for Nigeria's economic woes. The proceeds from the supra-abundant oil revenues were not properly re-invested to boost the economy. This approach to life in the face of abundance was quite untypical of the African. The typical traditional African man does not eat his seedlings. He keeps and preserves them for the next farming season no matter the level of hunger in the land or famine experienced. This was never the case with the founding fathers of the nation. It suffices to say that while that month-long international lavish celebration showcased African culture, music, fine art, literature, drama, dance, and religion to the world, it was a carnival founded on consumerist and epicurean principles and foundation. Little wonder, a country that had known a glittering past in terms of economy now experiences frequent economic recession.

More still, the centralization of oil revenue, though with some merits, has mainly created a federal system that features an extremely strong and corrupt central government with very weak federating regions. Thus, the discovery of oil in Nigerian barely enhanced socio-economic growth and political development in Nigeria. Of course, the struggle to control these resources from the center still generates ethnic conflicts and insurgencies. Besides, the gradual departure from oil-based economy to green economy and solar powered machineries has a dwindling effect on the value and price of oil. This may spell doom for the Nigerian economy that is largely dependent on crude oil. There is therefore an urgent need to diversify Nigeria's economy by exploring other means of revenue generation such as agriculture, forestry, and human capital development.

The world is partly sustained by the mutual exchange of goods and services through exportation and importation since no nation is absolutely self-sufficing. Indeed, mutual economic interdependence and collaboration make for sustainable socio-economic progress and growth. However, many nations exercise caution by establishing regulations guiding importation and exportation. To the extent that the ban on importation of some goods is aimed at discouraging redundancy, encouraging creativity, boosting the production of and patronage for locally manufactured goods, it could be a catalyst for socio-economic progress. Unfortunately, Nigeria's implementation of its policies on importation leaves much to be desired. The rich and some public office holders in defiance of all regulations on importation still smuggle proscribed goods into the country. This is often driven by the unbridled desire of such public office holders and the rich to demonstrate affluence and their high social status by flaunting foreign and expensive goods. To be sure, 'foreign' is never synonymous with 'superior'. Sometimes local products are better adapted to immediate environmental conditions and consequently more effective. In addition to enhancing cost effectiveness, therefore, support for, and investment in the production of locally manufactured goods invariably culminate in quality boost and effective service delivery. Of course, there is an urgent need to improve the quality and quantity of essential goods and services to curtail the crave for importation.

Remarkably, too, Nigerian government, at different levels, largely depends on loans for mere recurrent expenditures like payment of workers' salaries, servicing of debts, as well as unwarranted allowances for public office holders, including wardrobe and furniture allowances, procurement of fleet of very exorbitant exotic cars, maintenance of outrageous number of special assistants and advisers, unnecessary body of stakeholders, undue pension schemes for retired government officials, and the execution of white elephant projects. This arrangement not only occasions economic leakage but plunges the nation into perpetual socio-economic and political quagmire.

Perhaps these identifiable hitches and obstacles to Nigeria's socio-economic progress are consequent upon some negative effects of Nigeria's colonial history, especially the notion of public service as an opportunity to partake of the "national cake". The erstwhile colonial masters had enticed the indigenous people with opportunities and positions of public service as reward for loyalty. They had presented such opportunities as compensation and rare privileges granted only to those who danced to their tunes and whose actions were in consonance with their whims and caprices. This had long-term negative effects on generations of Nigeria's political leaders and stakeholders of Nigeria's economy. As already observed, it fostered a degenerate sense of leadership, the conception of public service as opportunity for self-enrichment, depraved sense of social responsibility, and militates against the spirit of sacrifice and patriotism.

Religion

A critical look at the practice of religion in Nigeria reveals that religion in Nigeria, as in many countries in Africa, is unfortunately tainted by socio-economic and political decadence. In fact, the basic prospects of religion including being a platform for the glorification of the divine and the author of life have been grossly vitiated.

The moral blight cast on the Nigerian society by the depraved socio-economic downturn finds expression in a number of unwholesome practices including manipulation, false worship of a true God, the conception of religion as a lucrative business venture, staging of false miracles, fetishism, the use of religion as a basis of exploitation of gullible members, and even as a means of evading social responsibilities and hard work. In Nigeria, corruption has dealt a heavy blow to religion. Little wonder, in spite of the rapid proliferation of churches and mosques, evil still multiplies. The practice of religion, as a case of "pie in heaven when you die", lends credence to Karl Marx's (1970) idea of religion as the opium of the people. The people who have no stake in politics and have no direct access to the benefits that accrue therefrom, the downtrodden and the less privileged, resort to divine assistance. At best, it has become a refuge of the poor.

Religion in Nigeria has literally become a business enterprise and a platform for climbing up the ladder of social status for many religious leaders. Religion has become tainted, too, by the perilous and sinister mire of socio-economic decadence. For the rich it provides a platform for the exhibition of wealth and affluence; sometimes it is a camouflage and safe haven for evil people who offer their ill-gotten wealth as donations and project support. The perception of religious institutions as opportunities for self-enrichment and means of achieving cheap popularity is no less indicative of the self-centered disposition which epicureanism fosters.

Social relationship

On the strength of his conviction that man is a social animal, Aristotle (1962:28) argues that "he who is unable to live in society or who has no need because he is sufficient for himself must be either a beast or god." Man's pursuit of his selfish interests to the detriment of the common good smacks of inauthenticity, not only because his essential nature is constituted of gregarious instinct but also because he derives genuine fulfilment from his being a member of the human society.

Selfishness and egocentrism, as practical hallmarks of consumerist and epicurean tendencies, find eloquent expression in interpersonal relationships. In such relationships a number of antisocial behaviours and social evils hold sway and consequently threaten social security. Such social vices and corrupt practices as fraud, child abuse, human right abuse, drug abuse and addiction, sexual harassment, youth restiveness, thuggery, cultism, diverse forms of violence, extortion, are indicators of a deficient economic and socio-political climate. With the increasing rate of economic decadence, the gap between the rich and the poor continues to widen as the days go by. Stifling of the freedom of speech and peaceful demonstrations, proscription of trade unionism and the truncation of social justice are progressively gaining ascendancy in Nigeria's socio-political sphere.

The market economy, which Nigeria's socio-economic climate promotes, has conditioned the minds of many Nigerians with consumerism, materialism, unhealthy rivalry, individualism and indifference to the common good. This fosters all kinds of social evils and anti-social tendencies including exploitation, injustice, insurgency, violence, and especially mutual mistrust among the ethnic groups in Nigeria. In fact, so long as the pursuit of individual concerns and ends remains paramount, transparent and sincere intersubjectivity is jeopardized. An attitude that solely emphasizes concerns for the gratification of immediate needs and personal pleasures obviously has the tendency to stifle socio-political progress and the common good. It may also amount to a very dangerous conception of others as mere

means for the actualization of one's selfish ends. Social relationships or intersubjective engagements that only foster the selfish benefits of one party or ethnic group is, to say the least, parasitic. Objective interpersonal relationships would rather aim at fostering the mutual gains of the all the parties involved as well as the promotion of common good.

Education

The standard of education in Nigeria is unarguably low. There is no gainsaying the fact that the observable steady decline in the quality of education in Nigeria is also causally linked to poor economy. To the extent that education is merely conceived as a means of securing one's daily bread, its basic end is largely undermined. Authentic knowledge acquisition process ought to aim basically at integral human capital development. While it basically aims at integral human formation, proper education must foster sustainable development. In other words, it must aim at meeting the needs of the present without compromising the concerns of the future. This has not been the case in Nigeria since the educational outcomes have not altogether sufficiently culminated in the advancement of the common good.

The high level of decadence bedeviling the educational sector in Nigeria especially as seen in the public institutions of learning find expression in lack of necessary educational facilities, high level of moral decadence, frequent strike actions, epileptic and unsteady educational programmes, poor remuneration of teachers, frequent distortion of curriculum, and constant hike in school fees. Such poor, decadent, deficient and certificate-oriented educational system hardly equips people with the necessary skill and disposition for governance or leadership. The end products of such educational system are often half-baked graduates who acquire certificates without the requisite knowledge. Such graduates do not make meaningful contribution to the nation's prospects of development and progress.

4. Towards Changing the Narrative of the Endangered Socio-Economic and Political Systems

National Re-orientation: Developing a new Socio-political Consciousness and Profound sense of patriotism

A new wave of national consciousness, value re-orientation and proper education on civic responsibility constitute decisive concerns for socio-economic and political progress in Nigeria. There is an urgent need for reassessment of fundamental human values with a view to promoting effective leadership and followership. Government must embark on vigorous national orientation campaigns aimed at promoting national values, cultivating and instilling a sense of patriotism and national pride, especially in younger people. Thus, the minds of the younger generation would be disabused of the wrong notion that the nation's resources are mere booty to be shared or plundered. By the same token, positions of authority would be rightly conceived as opportunities to serve and contribute to national development. This positive drive would also foster the idea that there is dignity in labour and hard work. It would hopefully negate the trending tendencies among contemporary Nigerian youths that correlate with consumerism, including materialism, get-rich-quick syndrome, unbridled quest for the satisfaction of ephemeral pleasures, profligacy, and squandermania.

The promotion of a new socio-political consciousness, as advocated here, aims at prompting the people to take interest in how they are governed and the activities of their leaders. It is an advocacy for active participation in politics and governance. The society is our collective

patrimony; its administration is our collective responsibility. Indifference to political concerns of the society is a culpable negligence of civic responsibility. As a matter of fact, sovereignty belongs to the people, the electorate, and not the few elites or aristocrats in the corridors of power or at the helm of affairs. A profound sense of social responsibility, good will, and patriotism would require that the present generation hands over a better Nigeria to the next generation of Nigerians. Hence, conscious and deliberate efforts must be made to save the sinking ship of Nigeria's economy and polity at large.

The enhancement and fortification of the nation's social and economic framework at all levels remain of paramount importance as these constitute the bedrock and critical determinants of national growth and development. As a matter of urgency, the electoral processes at all levels of government in Nigeria must be reviewed with a view to ensuring free, fair and credible elections. As critical drivers of national life, leaders or public officer holders must be men and women of proven integrity, honest, transparent, sufficiently enlightened and socially oriented. Such public office holders must emerge through due process; they must be chosen on the bases of competence and capacity for service delivery. When elected or appointed into public offices, such leaders must be held accountable for their actions and inactions bordering on the people's welfare. Their pledge to ensure the security of human lives and property must not only be in principle but demonstrated in practice.

The Nigerian government, at different levels, must be proactive by taking positive steps aimed at fostering national unity and bolstering the nation's socio-economic fortunes. For instance, given the heterogenous nature of the nation's population, periodic national dialogue or constitutional conference ought to be a necessary feature of the nation's administrative programmes. As a federation, the general interests of the confederating states must always be taken into consideration in the formulation of policies and in appointment into public offices. To strengthen the gains of democracy, too, there must be equal participation in governance. In other words, as against the present status quo, there must be equitable distribution of employment opportunities.

As a means of ensuring accountability, it may be necessary for political office holders to make a public declaration of their assets prior to their assumption of office. Also, the remuneration of public office holders, which is at the moment outrageous, must be cut down. The national orientation agencies must strike a balance in their mediatory roles by engaging the government and intimating them on the actual needs of the people and not just communicating government policies to the people. The agency must inspire a new sense of national consciousness aimed at making the people take interest in governance, disposing them to hold their leaders responsible, and consciously demand their rights through every possible legal means, including peaceful demonstrations, trade unionism, and strike actions.

Establishment of Efficient and Effective Government Institutions

The cankerworm of corruption has eaten deep into the fabrics and thus weakened the foundations of many government institutions in Nigeria. Such institutions have consequently become mere cosmetic establishments and instruments of self-aggrandizement for a few individuals. This, of course, spells doom for the nation's socio-economic and political development.

In an ideal constitutional democracy, checks and balances are necessary features of the executive, the legislative and judicial arms of government. As watchdogs, each ought to ensure that the other does not overstep its boundaries in the exercise of political power and authority. Unfortunately, this has not been the case in Nigeria; hence the abuse of office and disregard for the rule of law frequently experienced in Nigeria to the detriment of the nation's prospects of achieving good governance and national development. Conscious efforts must be made to change the narrative, else the nation would continue to wallow in darkness and struggle at the lowest rung of the ladder as far as the highly competitive global economy is concerned.

Observably, the experience of socio-economic and political stagnation in Nigeria is sometimes not a function of policy formulation, but especially lack of the necessary will power for policy implementation. Indeed, a good number of institutions of government are established in Nigeria with a view to ensuring good governance. Such institutions include National Agency for food, Drug, Administration and Control (NAFDAC), Independent Corrupt Practice and other related offences Commission (ICPC), Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), Standard Organization of Nigeria (SON), and National drug Law Enforcement Agency (NDLEA). These institutions and similar administrative bodies and agencies of government ought to be sufficiently empowered, and reasonably independent in order not to be mere stooges, puppets or magic wands in the hands of those at the helm of affairs and in the corridors of power.

Diversification of the Nation's Economy

The negative effects of oil boom in Nigeria, as alluded to above, are not so much a function of the discovery of oil as they are of the attitude towards it. It was an attitude badly tainted with a consumerist and epicurean tendencies. The sudden discovery of oil with its attendant riches fostered corruption as many leaders succumbed to the temptation of amassing enormous wealth from the oil rents. There is, therefore, an urgent need for attitudinal change in Nigeria. The problem was simply and squarely the effect of mismanagement. To change the narrative, the manner of implementation of socio-economic policies and programmes must be re-visited. Lack of long-term planning and false sense of security occasioned by the immediate benefits of oil posed a considerable threat to the prospects of socio-economic development in Nigeria. As already observed, over-dependence on oil proceeds spelled doom for the country. It culminated in the negligence of other sectors of the economy and vitiated the disposition to explore alternative sources of national income and revenue. For instance, such agricultural products as cocoa, coffee, cotton, groundnut, kola nut, plantain, rubber, sugarcane, timber, and palm oil, have not been sufficiently utilized. Diversification of the nation's economy development strategies would significantly help in consolidating the gains of the nation's economic strides. In other words, in addition to meaningful re-investment of oil revenue, the exploration of alternative sources of national income would help boost the nation's economy. In addition to the tendency among the leaders to squander the available resources, there is often a clamor by the oil-producing regions to receive preferential treatment in terms of revenue allocation. In as much as the federal government's prospect of controlling the oil resources of the nation for equitable distribution has some merits, conscious efforts have to be made to ensure that the oil-producing regions do not feel marginalized, neglected or unduly exploited. The revenue allocations for such areas ought to be reasonably fair vis-à-vis what is generated from such areas. In fact, improved revenue allocation and significant employment

opportunities for such areas would serve as incentive for their contribution to national income, assuage possible grievances issuing from their perceived exploitation, and compensate for possible losses and environmental pollution associated with the processes of tapping these natural resources.

5. Conclusion

The abundant human and natural resources in Nigeria have been grossly mismanaged and underutilized. It is unfortunate that a nation so richly endowed and rarely experiences natural disasters still ranks among the underdeveloped nations of the world as greater percentage of its population still wallows in abject poverty. The nation is rather perpetually entrapped, besieged and frustrated by man-made disasters, incompetent and egocentric leadership. This is a tale of lack in the midst of abundance.

While some elements of truth exist in the allusion made to the negative effects of indirect rule system of the colonialists as the seed of indifference and the perception of public service and public utilities as mere opportunities of self-enrichment, this does not wholly justify over six decades of socio-economic stagnation; hence, the urgency of socio-economic and political reorganization. National reorientation, a profound sense of patriotism, altruism, improved sense of social responsibility, and sufficient commitment to the promotion of public good would make for a better Nigeria.

Given the fundamental roles of the economic and political aspects of the nation's life, an improvement on them is tantamount to taking a bold step in the right direction. Identifying the consumerist and epicurean tendencies as obstacles to Nigeria's socio-economic and political progress, this paper basically advocates for attitudinal change with a view to fostering a new sense of national consciousness. A practical import of this would be the assumption of a disposition that seeks to grow the economy instead of always taking away from it, a disposition or world outlook that prioritizes production over consumption. All hands must be on deck to ensure a better economy, people-oriented political strides, better living conditions, and a progressive world outlook. Indeed, a progressive attitude of mind is a critical social need in Nigeria and would make for a Nigeria strategically positioned for socio-economic and political progress.

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