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NIGERIA'S SECOND REPUBLIC (1979-1983) AND PLATO'S NOTION OF "PHILOSOPHICAL KING"

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Abstract

From time immemorial the desire to build a just, orderly, peaceful and progressive society has been uppermost in the minds of Nigerian leaders. But due to external and societal influences, the achievement of desired missions and visions has continued to remain a mirage. These influences coupled with high level of corruption, poverty and selfishness, lack of contentment, poor level of morality and money-politics, many Nigerian leaders have derail from their avowed visions and mission with the result that at the end of a leader's tenure little or no progress is made. This paper is aimed at carrying out a comparative analysis of the second republic leadership of Ex-President Shehu Shagari and Plato's notion of the "Philosophical king". The writer critically analyses Plato's notion of the philosopher king within the context Nigerian Political leadership. For the sake of lucidity and coherency, this research is both systematic and critical. It delves into the political theory of Plato employing expository method as well as comparative, historical, discursive and philosophical interpretivism. In conclusion, the study affirms that recent happenings such as looting of public fund by political leaders, insurgency, corruption, low level of governance arose as a result of ineffective leadership. The paper therefore, posit that Nigerian leaders can take a que from Plato's notion of philosophical king for a more focused, intellectual and committed leadership for the governance and selection of statesmen in Nigeria.

Keywords: Second Republic, Notion, Plato, Philosophical King, Nigeria.

Introduction

The major hub of the problem of contemporary Nigeria at all facets; government, industry, education and religion has been that of leadership. Chinua Achebe summarized this in his book *The Trouble with Nigeria* that, "the problem with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership". Governance and leadership require wisdom, tact and commitment. It demands unusual virtue, intelligence, education, a great deal of experience and many other qualifications which must be conglomerated harmoniously and utilized for the development of the country at large. Leadership failures in Nigeria has arisen largely from appointed or selected leaders themselves some of who have suffered intellectual incapacity, lack of discipline and political inexperience, not so much from the political institutions, not so much from the system (Ochulor, 2011). The Second Republic ushered in the regime of President Alhaji Shehu Shagari as civilian President in 1979. Among other things, there was uncontrolled expenditure by the Federal Government on imported rice and other essential commodities, which drained the limited foreign reserve which left the country with huge foreign debt of about US$15 billion as at 1984 (Adejugbe, 2002).

The significance of this study is hinged on the notion that good leadership is the web that holds any society together. Like a spider's web it is very fragile. It needs to be handled and nurtured with care, devotion and dedication. For most Nigerians however, the pressing problems of everyday survival remain the highest immediate priority. And how could such immediate priority get to us without effective leadership and management? Nigeria is undoubtedly endowed with abundant human and natural resources to address its problem. The solution for addressing its problem and to consolidate democratic governance in the federal republic lies in having a government that works on the principles of good governance and is most especially, accountable to the Nigerian people.The problem of the study is based on the ideology that the great minds of ages have established that the greatest problem of humanity is that of leadership despite the technological, scientific and economic advancement in the global context. In line with this, Albert Einstein avers that the society will die easier because of bad politics than because of bad physics. Nigeria has suffered a great set-back due to political ignorance and "I don't care attitude" of leaders in the game of politics. This is why this paper compares Plato's philosopher king with the Nigerian political leadership in order to see whether there are ideals in it that can elucidate the leadership problems confronting the country and how to resolve them.The research work will be narrowed on Plato's Political Theory with regard to leadership. The range of this work will embrace the second republic era in Nigeria political history. Plato's political theory is brought in to juxtapose it with Nigerian circumstances. So, within the limit of this work, attention will be given not only to Plato's political theory but also to Nigerian political situation. This is to draw attention to the challenge of leadership misdemeanors in the past as a lesson for the present and the future.

Meaning and Nature of Leadership

The leadership question has been of interest from time immemorial from the early Greek philosophers such as Plato and Socrates to the plethora of management and leadership experts. It is argued that in this changing, global environment, leadership holds the answer not only to the success of individuals and organisations, but also to sectors, regions and nations. Despite the recognition of the importance of leadership, however, there remains a certain mystery as to what leadership actually is or how to define it. In a review of leadership research, Stogdill (2014) concluded that there are "almost as many definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept"At the heart of the problem of defining leadership lie two fundamental difficulties. Firstly, like notions such as 'love', 'freedom' and 'happiness', leadership is a complex construct open to subjective interpretation. Everyone has his intuitive understanding of what leadership is, based on a mixture of experience and learning, which is difficult to capture in a succinct definition. Secondly, the way in which leadership is defined and understood is strongly influenced by one's theoretical stance. There are those who view leadership as the consequence of a set of traits or characteristics possessed by 'leaders', whilst others view leadership as a social process that emerges from group relationships. Such divergent views will always result in a difference of opinion about the nature of leadership.

According to Ujo (2001), leadership is a reflection of good moral, characters, which include but not limited to knowledge, vision, courage, openness accountability, determination, transparency, uprightness, motivation and patriotism put in place by office holders to lead their people and or followers so as to achieve reasonable and positive societal development. Profound changes need committed leadership exemplified in transformational policies and

actions (Tolu, Kayode,&Ilepe, 2012:187; Ukaegbu, 2010: 23). Good moral leadership has core values of discipline, virtue, goals, visions, and the means to unite with followers to ensuring that such goals are achieved and shun moral vices. He also takes the responsibility of ensuring that people are mobilized to participate in the process of change, and encourages a sense of collective action. Omolayo (2005) describes leadership as an essential oil that keeps the wheel of government working without any difficulty. According to him, leadership makes the difference between success and failure in a country. It involves giving direction to citizens who are the critical assets of the nation.

Brief History of the Life of Shehu Shagari

Shehu Usman Shagari was born in Shagari village to the family of Magaji Aliyu and Mariamu in 1925. His name, Usman, means "Companion". He was raised in a polygamous family, and was the sixth child born into the family. Shagari was taught recitals at home and later went to a Quranic school at the age of four. However, he was obliged to attend elementary school at Yabo, a town close by. After, he went to the Sokoto Middle School and later to Kaduna college. After finishing secondary school, he was called on to become the new pupil-science teacher of Sokoto Middle School, shortly after, he was appointed the science teacher for Zaria Middle school. In 1945, after the end of World War II, he moved back to become the science and also history and geography teacher of the Sokoto Middle School. There, he was re-united with his extended family that lived nearby. Six years after, he was posted to Argungu as the headmaster of the new primary school there.

Starting from the late 1930s, a few Northern Nigeria political organizations started mushrooming. Shagari who was educated at Kaduna College, was already well versed in the early independence movement in Southern Nigeria as an avid reader of southern newspapers. He also held strong social views about development of Yabo, his district in Sokoto. In 1946, Shagari and Mallam Gambo Abuja started the Youth Social Circle, a political organization centered around Sokoto. They were supported by noble men such as Ahmadu Bello, Ibrahim Gusau, and Mallam Ahamdu Dabbaba. By 1948, a consolidation idea was initiated in the region to merge all the nascent political organizations under one group. The youth social circle of Sokoto agreed to the merger, and together with other groups formed the Northern People's congress. Later on, the organization became a political party and went on to win the national parliamentary election in 1959. Before 1959, Shagari was elected to represent the constituency of Sokoto Southwest. In 1958, he was appointed parliamentary secretary to the Prime Minister, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa. Shagari later went on to hold the positions of minister of Economic Development in 1960, minister of Internal Affairs in 1962 and minister of Works and Survey in 1965. However, the first republic was cut short by a military coup. Shagari returned to Sokoto to work on his farm and later to work as a Councilor for the Sokoto Native Authority. In 1970, as part of a movement to broaden the government, Yakubu Gowon made Shagari theMinister of Economic affairs and later of Finance.

Emergence of Shehu Shagari as President from 1979 to 1983

The Second Republic was born on 1st of October, 1979, when the military handed over power to a democratically elected government headed by President Shehu Usman Shagari. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) led by Alhaji Shehu Shagari won majority in the election, while the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo which had the second largest votes formed the opposition party. Eso (1996) noted that The real character of the

Nigerian political class was enacted during the Nigerian Second Republic which lasted briefly from 1979 to 1983.. During this regime the basic needs of humanity, food, housing, clothing and other basic necessities of life such as ownership of a vehicle became a preserve of the privileged few. There was the uncontrolled expenditure by the federal government on imported rice and other essential commodities, which drained the limited foreign exchange which left the country with the huge foreign debt of about US$15 billion by 1984 (Adejugbe, 2002).

Added to this was the problem of distribution which led to large-scale corruption on the part of party functionaries and other public officers.. According to Bako (1998), on the contrary during the Shagari regime there was an army of idle full-time legislators who because of the small number of laws to pass or of lack of a will to analyze public policy issues before them, they had to look for jobs to keep themselves busy. These included setting up of ad-hoc committees to provide opportunities for disturbing private sector institutions and organizing overseas tours etc. Indeed, there was a bazaar of human activities, of little relevance to the governance of the country.

Ali (2013) lamented that Shagari regime had no sense of direction in tackling the country's economic problems and foreign debt incurred by the Shagari administration was estimated at $15-16 billion. Orewa (2002) supported the assertion of Ali that from the early 1980s, the standard of living of Nigerians continued to degenerate, even as the cost of living keeps rising spirally. Prices of some essential commodities inflated above the reach of the low income earners. Infrastructures including facilities provided by the community to help those in need gradually collapsed. The World Bank underlined the importance of social infrastructural services and the need for adequate social infrastructures which helps to determine a country's success or failure in diversifying production, expanding trade, coping with population growth, reducing poverty, or improving environmental conditions (Adejugbe, 2002). Good infrastructural services raise productivity and lower production cost. Infrastructural services also help the poor and the whole society to contribute to environmental sustainability.

Orewa (2002), pointed out that the Shagari administration was characterized by inadequate infrastructural services adversely affected manufacturing activities. Most manufacturers and commercial establishments had to generate their own electricity and sink bore hole to ensure their private water supply. The extra cost on production was shifted to the consumers. Inadequate clean water, poor sanitation and pollution were the order of the day in the urban areas. There was shortage of housing accommodation in the urban areas due to overpopulation caused by rural-urban migration. Only a small percentage of households particularly in the suburbs of the urban centres had refuse disposal services.

The supply of electricity which is the force behind the modern economy started to become erratic during the Shagari regime. Energy utilization is often used as a developmental index. Electricity generation in Nigeria was almost the exclusive preserve of the National Electric Power Authority (NEPA), a public corporation which generated about 99.5% of the total electricity consumed. Transportation which played an important role in a country's economic life and the overall economic development of a state became truncated. The various transport modes in Nigeria namely; road, water, rail and air were poorly maintained. Shagari again was elected, on August 6, 1983, to a second term in office. Again his keenest rival was Chief

Obafemi Awolowo. Awolowo made a prediction as to the ills which would befall the country if the polls were rigged. As he rightly predicted, ills did befall the country and returned the country to military rule. On first January 1984 the military seized power and ruled the country for another thirteen years. The military in its central command image concentrated so much power at the central government and weakened the component units.

Plato's Notion of "the Philosophical King"

Plato (427BCE-348BCE) the disciple of Socrates was born into a well- to- do Aristocratic family. He admired Socrates and became his pupil at the age of twenty. His life ambition was to become a politician, but he became disillusioned and disappointed by the way his master, Socrates was treated by the politicians in Athens that he gave up the idea of becoming a politician. The death of his teacher in the hands of Athenian government and the defeat of Athens deepened his antidemocratic predilections. He could not understand how a man like Socrates, such a good man, such an excellent philosopher and moralist could be put to death by the Athenian authorities. He became convinced that the only remedy for the ills in the society was to educate future politicians to become philosophers so that they will be able to give up the elementary distractions of life and as Baruch de Spinoza later stated in his Ethics "betake themselves to a new quest so as to attain a finer living" both for themselves and the society at large.

In his famous book, *The Republic (473)*, Plato therefore proposed an ideal state. In this his ideal state, Plato attempted to lay down fundamental principles for the creation and sustenance of a strong and virile state based on justice. Justice, according to Plato, obtains when each component of a system performs its function without interfering in the function of others. This is what is referred to today as the principle of subsidiarity of responsibility which much later was developed further by John Locke as the principle/doctrine of the separation of powers. His ideal state or utopia comprises three classes analogous to the three parts of the soul. These are the guardians (rational part), the soldiers (spirited part) and the artisans (appetitive part.) The guardians have the onus of providing political leadership and are required to master philosophy; the soldiers are responsible for securing the territorial integrity of the state, while the common people or artisans take care of the economic needs of the citizens. Our major focus is on the guardian class or the "philosopher king" in order to identify any proposal that might be beneficial to the quest for good leadership within the Nigerian political clime.

For Plato, a ruler must be suitably qualified both in education, moral and age before taking up any official appointment. They should be such that in them knowledge and wisdom meet together. They were to have dual aspect of philosopher and king. Onyeocha (1996:44-45) quoted Plato's Republic thus:

> *I said: until philosopher are kings or the kings and princes of this world havethe spirit and power of philosophy, and political greatness and wisdom meetin one, and those commoner natures who pursue either to the exclusion ofthe other are compelled to stand aside, cities will never have rest from their evils-no, nor the human race, as I believe – and then only will this our statehave a possibility of life and behold the light of day (p.44-45).*

Plato believed that the guardians (the ruling class, who must be philosophers) correspond to the rational part of the soul (i.e. reason) and are able to produce the ideas that can rule the whole state. Plato thought that the possession of private property and nuclear families among the guardian class is bad, because the purpose of the city is the good of the whole, not the happiness of one class. Both wealth and poverty are harmful, and in Plato's, ideal state neither will exist.

Plato also believed that the state is like a ship, and that it is not everybody that can be the captain of a ship. Only those who have undergone special training in navigation can be captains in ships and so can direct a ship. He even asked who should be the captain of a ship? Is it the most famous man or the person who knows the science of navigation? To talk of democracy for him therefore, is like talking of everybody coming to direct a ship. That is the democracy that one can call participatory type of democracy because everyone who has attained a certain age is a participant. Yet the point he made is that only those who have undergone special training and education (in philosophy) can rule a state.

With this allegory, Plato is not only stressing the idea that specialization is key to the running of the Republic, but also that philosophers were unappreciated in 420 BC Athens, and thus useless because the world would not use them and their knowledge. At the same time, philosophers must possess qualities that enable them to rule; for instance, they must be able to recognize the difference between friend and foe, good and bad. Above all, philosophers must "love wisdom" (Nichols; 1984, 254), as the rule of the wise leads to the reigning of justice, as philosophy becomes sovereign. The philosopher kings have virtue as they have knowledge, and thus, according to Plato, their rule is justified.

Evaluation of Shuhu Shagari's Leadership and Plato's Notion of Philosophical King

Nigeria is a country where religion thrives in the form of Christianity, Islam and African indigenous religion. Both the governed and the leaders are adherents of one religion and the other. Since most public officers claim to be either Muslims or Christians they are usually sworn with the Holy Quran or the Holy Bible as they subscribe to the Oaths of Office and Allegiance. In the opinion of Sarafa (2010), paradoxically, Nigeria is also a country where amorality thrives. At all levels of governance, amorality has been a prominent feature of Nigerian politics during the President Shehu Shagari regime which is contrary to Plato's notion of "the philosophical King" republic. Hence, the country remains grossly undeveloped despite its huge resources. Official corruption, mismanagement of fund, favouritism, nepotism and all forms of amoralities remain the blight of Nigerian politics. Consequently, the level of poverty and insecurity has reached a high crescendo as the gaps between the rich and the poor continue to widen.

Plato further demonstrated serious concern for morality when he recommends death penalty as punishment for leaders found guilty of the embezzlement of public fund. Like Plato, the place of morality was also paramount to the social contract political philosophers like Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Spinoza and David Hume. In his social contract theory, Thomas Hobbes for instance, tells us that prior to the advent of morality and political society, men were in the state of nature- a state where a morality thrives and where there is no sanctity for human lives neither was there respect for justice (Yanpei, 2005). A state of war of all against all characterised by chaos, conflict and insecurity, a state where in which human life was nasty,

brutish and short. To terminate the state of nature, the ruler, the Leviathan, is given virtually unlimited power to enforce morality and with an iron hand. In short, the western tradition of political philosophy, from Plato to John Rawls, teaches that morality and politics are inseparable.

Omoregbe (2003) argues that, "religion without morality is not a religion; law without morality (immoral law) is no law, just as government without morality is no government". Therefore, any group of people that come together to form a government without morality is nothing but a gang of criminals on a large scale (Omoregbe, 2003). This indeed is the crux of governance problem in Nigeria. Religion has failed to influence the behaviour of many Nigerian leaders. Put differently, leadership in Nigerian at all level have refused to be influenced by ethics and principles of their various religious inclinations. For example, the bane of government in Nigeria is corruption and both Muslims and Christians form the majority among the corrupt officials in ex-President Shegari's regime of 1979 t0 1983. Even, some of the corrupt officials openly display their ill-gotten wealth not only in the public at social gatherings but also in mosques and churches across the nation through donation to the course of religion, even in abhorrence to the injunction of God Sarafa (2010).In sum, many political leaders have failed to promote good governance in Africa (Omoregbe, 2003). Thus far, the argument is that since religion promotes morality, and morality oils the wheel of good governance, it is arguable that religion, morality and politics are interlinked.

Nigeria is in need of a philosopher king(s), a leader(s) who is/ are versed in knowledge and wisdom. Nigeria is in need of messiahs and University men but not men who are "educated or political rascals". We must admit that the Nigeria University system has not acquitted itself too expressively enough, in this regard in the past. The earlier philosopher kings start holding political offices in Nigeria the better. This is because no one can give what he does not have. It is high time leaders became qualified both in education and knowledge before they are givenpolitical appointments. Criteria for qualification into leadership positions in Nigeria ought to depend on the level of education, knowledge, character and morality of the individual in question. Leadership, according to Plato is not just a game but an art which demands a high skill of intelligence. It is a craft which requires a penetrating insight into the fundamental principles and other subtleties involved. Just as a medical doctor knows the rules and laws of the art of medicine, so should a good statesman organize political activities through laws if he has the philosophical knowledge. Nigeria is in need of such a true philosopher king who will recognize the value and dignity of life and take this great country endowed with free natural resources to a greater height (Ozumba, Okafor &Udom, 2011). At this juncture, we would like to use Plato's "Allegory of the cave" which illustrates what the nature of the society would be. Many Nigerian leaders during Shagari regime at that time were at the dark side of the cave and as such, in conflict with the eternal truths. They are emotionally motivated by self-gratification. They are intoxicated by power which some of them ruthlessly acquired and ruthlessly kept. They are really in darkness and as such, exploit the poor and the least favoured.

But in spite of all these, we believe that the saviours of this corrupt society would be the philosopher kings. The philosopher kings are the liberated ones. Ezebuilo (2005) wrote about the philosopher kings thus:

> *They know what justice, truth and good are; they are not selfish. As such, they would govern according to the rule of the law. In spite of their profound knowledge of the eternal truth, they should return to the cave, for the purpose of bringing knowledge to those who cannot distinguish their right from their left. From this point, one could attest that the city state could not be governed by low class citizenry (pp:12-13).*

In the view of Achebe (1983), Nigeria's leadership problems started in 1960 when the colonial power, manipulated the transfer of powers to an obscure set of Nigerians perhaps based on the "cynical belief that they do not have the intellectual stamina and will to dismantle the skewed economic and administrative arrangements bequeathed the country by the departing British administrators". What needs to be urgently done now is to replace this ignorant and selfish leaders with true philosopher kings and Nigerian ivory towers, religious groups and philosophers must play a role analogous to Plato in Athens, and king- markers of the traditional monarchical system of the past. They should spread in advance, general enlightenment and a desire for excellence in the entire constituency of the nation, including those who will aspire to national leadership.

At this junction one can say without any fear of contradiction that the solution to the nagging Nigeria leadership problem was long proffered by Plato in his "Republic." Nigeria as a country will progress only when true philosophers become kings or kings become philosophers. We can attain this project in our society by restructuring our educational policy, societal ethos and ethics as well as setting our leadership priorities right. We have to keep in sight the set aims of Nigeria education as contained in Nigeria Policy on Education document (p.7) which include the building of (1) a free and dynamic society (2) a just and egalitarian society (3) a united, strong and reliant nation (4) a great and dynamic economy and (5) a land of bright and full opportunities for all citizens."

Implication for Contemporary Nigerian Leaders

In the view of Plato, justice could only be found in the city state if and only if the city-state is governed by philosopher kings. This is because it is only the philosopher kings who have knowledge of the best system of government. Plato stressed the point that the elite, who are to rule, must be exceptionally endowed with rationality. They must be trained in the sciences and in philosophy. The selection of the ruling class must be based on the natural intellectual ability. It should not make much difference whoever possesses this quality. The strenuous training of the "guardians' in music, gymnastics, science and philosophy is however, not without reason. The rigorous training is meant to free the elite from prejudice and corruption. It is only in this way that they should be in the better position to distinguish what is good from what is bad. The candidates will know then the highest good, what justice is, and the eternal truths. This is aimed at the good of the state and the citizens (Ozumba, Okafor &Udom, 2011:6).

Leadership, according to Plato is not just a game but an art which demands a high skill of intelligence. It is a craft which requires a penetrating insight into the fundamental principles and other subtleties involved. Just as a medical doctor knows the rules and laws of the art of medicine, so should a good statesman organize political activities through laws if he has the philosophical knowledge.

In the buildup to the 2023 general elections, Nigeria is in need of a true philosopher king who will recognize the value and dignity of life and take this great country endowed with free natural resources to a greater height. They should spread in advance, general enlightenment and a desire for excellence in the entire constituency of the nation, including those who will aspire to national leadership. Youths should be prepared intellectually and morally now for future leadership positions. This was exactly the aim of Plato's academy at Athens where the future leaders were trained in the art of philosophy to enable them carry out their leadership functions well. Aside from money-politics, godfatherism and visionlessness; intellectualism, intuitiveness and committed leadership should be considered in the election of leaders.

Conclusion / Suggestions

It has been affirmed in this paper that recent happening in such looting of public fund by political leaders, insurgency, corruption are directly related to leadership. In essence, Plato's notion of philosophical king can bring great relieve if applied in the selection of statesmanship in Nigeria. One will always wonder whether our poor-quality leadership is not a reflection of poor quality followership. This is on the ground that mediocre leaders emanate from the society. The submission of this paper therefore, is that a critical look at leadership in Nigeria shows that failures and foibles of leadership is reflected in different degrees, depending on the extent to which we manifest the bestial attributes of our leaders. Aside from other considerations, Nigeria is in need of philosophy of education that is capable of producing the kind of leaders and followers needed for her development.

This study is not advocating the same kind of communism that Plato advocated, but we contend that Nigeria's representative democratic leaders ought to be qualified both in academic experience, moral and other qualities mentioned above before being allowed to take up a leadership position. In other words, they should all possess the dual aspects of philosopher and king before they will seek and be given political appointments since no one can give what he does not have.

One of the ways to attain this is to take a second look at Justice Uwais Federal Panel's electoral reforms and recommendations fused with current political reforms. It is also necessary that philosophy, politics and history be taught right from the primary and secondary schools and at tertiary levels. There is also need to ensure that philosophy becomes a mandatory course of study in all the Universities in the Northern part of the country where for years it has been cleverly skipped from the academic curricula.

Political leaders should endeavour to provide selfless service which is based on public interest. This can be achieved if the leaders show honesty in dispensing public duties and declaring any personal interests that may conflict with public duties. The leader must be disciplined and committed to serving the people. What Nigerians deserve, therefore, is transformational leadership- in the real sense of the word. It is an involved, complex process, yet an important one that binds leaders and followers together in changing the society. The followers have deep respect for focused leaders and generally have a high level of trust in them. Transformational leaders have the ability to inspire their followers and have a strong commitment to serve the people. They guide people from darkness to light. Leaders who fit into this category celebrate the success that they and the followers have been able to achieve because they were all committed to the dream.

For 2023, it is believed that intellectualism, morality and ethics, selflessness, drive and focus will be considered in the elections of political leaders at all levels in Nigeria.

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