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Twenty Four

AFRICAN LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL DIRECTION

Anthony Ugwu Onyishi and Kingsley Chukwuka Ezechi

Introduction

From the ancient states of Egypt, Ethiopia and Greece, the centrality and relevance of leadership have been differently echoed and re-echoed by philosophers and political theorists of different ages and times. In some of their treatises, the classical political philosophers and theorists unanimously agreed and strongly believed that leadership remained the only mechanism through which the common good and the general welfare of the citizens could be maximised. Here, Plato (1955) and Aristotle (1979) made it clearer that people with higher level of rationality were the only group that could be entrusted with the mantle of leadership if the common good and welfare of the people must be realized. They further advised that those without higher level of rationality but are leaders should endeavour to acquire such sense of rationality if they must be called leaders. They then admonished that leaders should not marry nor possess property as both negate the principles of good leadership.

Therefore, the centrality of leadership in the life of any institution or organisation cannot be underestimated. This stems from the fact that leadership gives meaning and directions to all the activities, goals and objectives of an institution or organisation. Put in another way, leadership helps to articulate, aggregate and pilots the entire human and material resources of institutions. Therefore, no institution can exist and function efficiently and effectively without the existence of leadership. As leadership is the soul and heart of any institution, we have diverse forms of leadership which to a large extent is based on the nature and character of such institution. For instance, we have family leadership, religious leadership, traditional leadership, economic leadership, social leadership and above all political leadership.

In the context of this work, the study will concentrate on political leadership as it is the base for which other forms of leadership operate and function. Political leadership is ordinarily state leadership. State leadership is the engine which drives the state. The nature and character of political leadership essentially determines the nature and character of the activities of the society. At this point, it is necessary to state that the material existence of any state to a larger extent determines the nature and character of political leadership which invariably gives meaning and direction to the political activities of a state. What this entails is that political leadership determines the

nature and character of policy generation, formulation, evaluation and impact. It is on the basis of this that one determines the level of development or underdevelopment of a state.

In light of this, the study will x-ray the nature and character of political leadership in Africa from the pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial era and use same to advance the course of political development in contemporary African states. Africa, as we have come to understand today, is one of the continents in the world that has been naturally endowed with diverse human and material resources. However, it is quite sad and unfortunate that the continent of Africa and its people have remained and continue to remain "hewers of wood and drawers of water". It is unbelievable that many years after political independence, the continent and its people have been associated with myriads of intractable problems which are detrimental to the general welfare and common good of the people. Worse still, the members of the ruling elite have turned the state and its institution as major instruments for primitive accumulation of capital. This study will then examine the nature of political leadership in the pre-colonial, colonial and post colonial African societies. It will also ascertain how the political leadership had functioned and continues to function. With this, the questions begging for answers are: What were the nature and direction of African political leadership in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial Africa? How has the nature and direction of African political leadership impacted the contemporary ones? Has this contemporary political leadership in Africa addressed myriads of problems plaguing the continent?

African Leadership

For this study, African leadership can be conceptualised as a distinctive leadership strategy through which political leaders in diverse states in Africa administer their respective states using the African traditional philosophy. By this, it is the use of the traditional value system in the governance of different states of Africa by the political leaders. This entails the adoption of the fundamental principles of love, brotherhood, oneness and solidarity in streamlining Africa, their people and the entire continent into the contemporary global context by the political leadership in different states in Africa. In line with this, it is the process of exploration and exploitation of the human and natural resources of Africa and Africans by the political leadership for the total development of the African people and the continent at large. It means giving meaningful direction to all the socio-economic cum political activities of Africa and her people by the governing class. With this, emphasis will be geared towards the enhancement of the common good and the general welfare of the African people by the political leaders in different states in Africa.

African Leadership and the pre-colonial era: A survey

As the nature of any organisation, institution and society is dependent on the character of its leadership, leadership then becomes the engine through which all the activities of such organisation and society are been piloted. Going by this, one can say that Africa's past glories and development were based on the frantic efforts of the leaders. So, several empires, kingdoms and states in pre-colonial Africa had in their diverse ways made significant contributions to world civilisation and development through their systems of leadership. However, there were lack of uniformity in the pattern and system of leadership in the pre-colonial African societies. This stemmed from the nature of the socio-political cum cultural context in which African societies see themselves and subsequently eke out their living, greatly determined the type of leadership which existed and the functions they performed. It is on this ground that some ancient states and societies will be briefly examined. Egypt remained one of the oldest states in Africa which has had its glories, philosophy, culture and institution borrowed by other states (Onyewenyi, 1993). As the cradle of world civilisation, Egypt had its leadership influences from the great pharaohs of different ages whose philosophy of governance and development were significant.

Apart from the Egyptian Pharaonic leadership, the Ethiopian emperors were acknowledged leaders of pre-colonial Africa, who contributed to world development through their diverse patterns of administration. Notably, Ethiopia's purposeful leadership that made the country withstood European colonial rule in the 20th century, leading to fending off attacks from Italy in the Italo-Abyssinia war of 1935. This made the country, the second in the continent, to escape colonialism (Rodney, 1972). Then the Igbos and the Yorubas in the present Eastern and Western Nigeria respectively. In the traditional Igbo society, there was no concentration of leadership functions on a single political unit rather functions by leaders were differently performed by different leaders in different institutions ranging from the family and its head known as the *okpara*. The others include the *ofor* title holders, the age grade, the *ozo*-title holder, the council of elders and finally, the village assembly. In the Yoruba traditional system, the *oba* heads the society with council of chiefs known as the *oyomesi*, the *bashorun* acting as the prime minister. The *ogboni* cult group ensured that both the *oba* and *oyomesi* never rule tyrannically. So, they act as a check on the activities of the *oba* and *oyomesi* in ensuring good governance in the society (Crowther, 1974). In all these societies, good governance was centrally anchored on ensuring the common good and general welfare of the people. People were the end of administration and not the means to administration.

The Colonial Era and African Leadership System

The colonial era was another remarkable era in which this study will examine trends in African leadership and political direction. By colonial era, we are concerned with a major era which was characterised by the foreign domination, enslavement, exploitation, oppression and subjugation of the people of Africa, their resources and the entire environment (Rodney, 1972). With this, Africa lost all aspects of their individual and corporate existence as a people to the colonialists. The colonialists on their part distorted and disintegrated the indigenous ways of life of the people by forcefully imposing foreign ways of life which had no relevance to the needs and aspirations of the people. Following this development, Africans from different backgrounds of life emerged and began to struggle for their freedom and total emancipation of their people and their nations. These Africans were essentially but exclusively indoctrinated under Pan Africanism. However, most of them especially the modern ones were oriented by the Pan-Africanist Movement. It is under Pan-Africanism that patterns of African leadership system and political direction began to emerge. This is what the study will focus on in greater detail.

Going by this, one can then ask: what do we mean by Pan-Africanism? Given the much scholarly works on the term Pan-Africanism, this study will only concentrate on the works of two scholars. First, Padmore (1956) who conceptualised Pan-Africanism as a dynamic philosophy and a guide to action for Africans and Africa. Second Legum (1962) who sees it as a natural reaction by Africans to the western policy of political domination, economic exploitation and division in the continent of Africa. From this, Pan Africanism became an ideological framework for the unification of Africans, and by giving them the impetus to struggle against political domination, economic exploitation and enslavement of the people, resources and environment of Africa by the colonialists. It was, however, the persistent agitations and struggles for political and economic freedom against the colonialists that necessitated the convocation of various Pan-African Conferences in different parts of the world. Notable among them was the 1945 conference. It was the fifth Pan-African congress which was held at the city of Manchester in October 1945. The congress not only attracted large accredited delegates from different states representing different national liberation organisations, it also ensured the direct participation of Africans in the affairs of the congress. With large participation of Africans from different shades of opinions, a manifesto of action for the end of colonialism and attainment of political independence was drafted (Ajala, 1974)

Following this development, African nationalists started holding series of Pan-African conferences in various African states. The first of such conferences was the conference of Independent African State (CIAS) which was held in Accra, Ghana between April 15th and 22nd 1958. The conference

under the leadership of Dr. Kwame Nkrumah emphasised the strategic importance of fostering higher spirit of oneness, unity and cooperation among various African states. A follow up to this conference was another conference tagged All African Peoples Conference (AAPC) held in the same Ghanaian capital of Accra between 5th and 13th December, 1958. In the conference, the delegates undertook to preserve among themselves African personality with distinct unity. Apart from these conferences, many other conferences were held. But in all these conferences, the central message has been the need for African states to unite in order to dethrone colonialism and enthrone freedom and political independence.

It is however within the institutional framework of eliminating colonialism and enthronement of freedom and independence, that the study examines some African nationalists and their political direction within their states and the continent at large. Put in another way, one can say that African nationalists, having achieved independence, their leadership styles will be analysed in the context of the post-independence era.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored within some salient proposition from the Marxian Political Economy perspective of the post colonial state. In line with the classical Marxian theory as contained in *The Contribution to the Critique of the Political Economy in the Selected Works* (1968), the economy is the base or the substructure while politics, law, religion education, culture, etc. are the superstructure. By this, the economy is the determinant of every aspects of the society. Therefore, politics as one of the aspect of the society which is been shaped by economy has reciprocal effect on the economy. Here, it is politics which determines how economic activities or resources are explored, organised, exploited and subsequently allocated to different areas of the society. Based on this, the Marxist theory has further been developed to take into consideration the uniqueness of the neo-colonial state in its analysis. The unique nature of the post-colonial state first stemmed from the pattern of colonial domination and subjugation of these former colonial states by their colonialists. The colonialists, because of their economic interests dominated the colonised state and then, discouraged and distorted the people's indigenous socio-economic and political ways of life. The effect of this on the colonial state was the enthronement of weak economic base. With the attainment of political independence, the ruling indigenous elite in the colonised state inherited the weak economic base and started to operate on it. However, the inability of the indigenous political elite to change the weak economic base established by the colonialists, made them to use the state and institutions as major instrument for primitive accumulation of capital. This made the state and its institution to

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continue to become a means of capital accumulation by the ruling class (Alari, 1973, p. 146; Ekekwe, 1986, p. 12; Miliband, 1977).

Using this as a theoretical framework of analysis, one can state that the absence of strong economic base in the contemporary African states has made the political leadership to continue to use the state and its institutions as major instruments of primitive accumulation of capital. Because of this, Africa and its people has become the centrepiece of global analysis when issues of poverty, corruption, war, political crises, human trafficking, brain drain, high debt burden, low economic activities, low level of human development, poor educational development, bad leadership and other negative occurrences are examined and studied. So, the continuous use of the state and its institutions by the contemporary African leadership for personal and parochial interest has increased myriads of problems which have and continue to bedevil the continent of Africa and its people.

Post Independence Era

Sekou Toure

Sekou Toure was one of the African nationalists who fought and struggled to end colonialism in Guinea and the African continent at large. With his Pan-Africanist orientation, he was able to mobilize the masses of Guinea and then first formed the first trade union organisation in Guinea, the "Syndicate au personnel des PTT" in 1945. Then the people by forming the first political party in Guinea known as Pan-démocratique du Guinea (PDG-Democratic Party of Guinea) in 1947. The party through the leadership system won series of elections in Guinea which culminated in achievement of political independence in 1958. At independence, the PDG became Guinea's ruling party with Toure as both the party leader and the president of the Republic. Because of the peculiarities of African states, he formed his administrative agenda on socialism. According to him, socialism in Guinea was not and could not be different from socialism in other countries. Socialism has one meaning- scientific socialism and is not without nationality and could not be the property of a single country" (Touré in Otite, 1978, p. 171). Apart from this, Toure was one of the founding fathers of the first continental organisation, the organisation African Unity (OAU) which became the organisational structure, not only for African unity and solidarity but also for the termination of colonialism and neo-colonialism in Africa.

Nyerere

Julius Nyerere was another Pan-Africanist who championed the course of development in his native country and the continent at large. Through his activities, he united two countries, Tanganyika and Zanzibar in December 10th 1963 to become one country- Tanzania. He equally helped to eliminate

ethnicity which was a major problem in the new states of Africa. As a frontline nationalist, he led the struggle for the political emancipation of African states especially countries in Southern Africa. Apart from this, he was one of the founding fathers of the continental organisation- the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in 1963. Using the traditional African institutions, values and ways of life as institutionalised mechanisms for the development of the entire continent, he introduced African brand of socialism- the African socialism. As ideological and practical instruments of development, African socialism was based on the African traditional values and principles of communalism, brotherhood, familyhood, equality, freedom, mutual trust and respect

Nkrumah

Another creative thinker, philosopher and leader who struggled for the freedom and political independence of his state, Ghana in 1957, were Kwame Nkrumah. He attended many Pan African conferences in and outside Africa. From there, he was very instrumental to the convocation of much other Pan African conference in Africa. Through such conferences, Nkrumah spearheaded the formation of the first continental body OAU in 1963, at Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It was through this organisation that many Africans were first united and then struggled for freedom and political independence. Apart from this, Nkrumah's quest for total liberation and advancement of the continent of Africa continued. Through his book *Consciencism* (1964), he evolved consciencism as a "philosophy and ideology for decolonisation". As a philosophical and ideological instrument of decolonisation, consciencism was described as an attempt by Nkrumah to blend Marxist socialism into African traditional communism and egalitarianism by reconciling them with Islamic and Christian influence thereby making consciencism to be the guiding doctrine and philosophical means of the national liberation process (Obasi, 2002, p. 85)

Azikiwe

Apart the above mentioned leaders, Nnamdi Azikiwe were another African leader who sacrificed much of his energies for the emancipation of his continent. Through his activities, he formed the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon in 1944, which he used to mobilize the masses towards fighting for their freedom and political independence. On the ideological cum philosophical levels as stated, he believed that Africa could be liberated by those who believed in the concept of a renaissance Africa. He then outlined the five principles which were the bedrock for the political emancipation of Africa. These included: spiritual balance, social regeneration, economic determinism, mental emancipation and political regeneration. It was through these that he struggled for Nigeria's freedom and political independence in 1960. In addition to gaining political independence for Nigeria, he brought princess Alexandria,

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who represented the queen of England at independence to Nsukka where the foundation stone of the University of Nigeria was laid in October, 1960. Zik inspired many African nationalists and participated in some of the Pan-African conferences which led to the formation of the Organisation of African Unity in 1963.

Challenges of Contemporary Political Leadership in Africa

One of the striking challenges of contemporary leadership in Africa is the personalised nature of rule on the continent (David & Issa, 2012). The individual-centric nature of political leadership, rather than an institution-centric variant, as is prevalent in other industrialised clime explains why when a credible and visionary leader emerges and leaves the scene owing to death or completion of tenure, all the gains made by his administration are reversed or sabotaged by the incoming ego-centric leader. The ego-centric leader tend to either abandon the thriving and progressive policies of his predecessors for his own white-elephant project, or outrightly terminates or replaces the policies because they are likely to grow the middle class who will someday challenge their authority over some public policies. In fact Ake and Onoge put it this way:

Political leadership is parochial rather than national; and corruptly converts national resources into its project of primitive accumulation. Ethnic diversity is manipulated to stay afloat to the detriment of national cohesion. There is an embarrassing lack of national heroes. The failure was usually explained either by the easy manipulability of the cultural pluralist background, or by the "two publics" antagonism (Ake & Onoge 1995, cited in David & Issa, 2012, p. 149).

African Leadership and Socio-economic Development challenges

The continent of Africa has been bedeviled by so many socio-economic and development challenges which are self inflicted due to poor leadership. The development index and indicators emerging from the continent shows that leadership is apparently absent. In the recent human development index (HDI) of 2018 by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) shows that Africa as always, ranks bottom of the list. For instance five countries from the continent ranked the lowest at the bottom amongst the countries ranked globally. These countries are: Burundi (0.417), Chad (0.404), South Sudan (0.388), the Central African Republic (0.367) and Niger (0.354) in that order. While the top five countries in the global HDI ranking are Norway (0.953), Switzerland (0.944), Australia (0.939), Ireland (0.938) and Germany (0.936) respectively (UNDP HDI, 2018).

The Global Competitiveness Report was instituted to assess the ability of countries to provide high levels of prosperity to their citizens. This according to the report depends on how productively a country uses available resources.

Therefore, the Global Competitiveness Index measures the set of institutions, policies, and factors that set the sustainable current and medium-term levels of economic prosperity. In light of this, it is pertinent to note that most of these European countries that ranked very high on the report lacked natural endowments and resources which are lavishly deposited in Africa. The only thing they have harnessed and put to good use is their human capital through purposive and fruitful leadership.

The reason for the above ranking absurdity is because the post-colonial states of Africa have often concentrated so much on natural endowments without a corresponding concentration on her human resources. Natural resources are often transient and ephemeral (Ruz, 2011; Irwin, 2018). This we have seen from natural resource forecasts of several nations of the world. But human resources is a continuum. With this, they do not know how to prioritize in order to direct state policies appropriately. Due to the fact that there has been an over concentration of African leaders on their vast mineral deposits, they seem to have paid lip service to their human resources/capital. For instance, countries such as Singapore have no known natural resource endowment (Singapore Exhibition and Convention Bureau, 2016). But they have concentrated on their human resource and capital, by harnessing and developing them judiciously. The Ministry of Communication and the Arts explained their human development success this way:

Without natural resources, Singapore's success depended almost exclusively on its citizens. Education played an important role in creating our very own national unity. It helped build social cohesion. A meritocratic education system that provided equal opportunities to all ensured that every Singaporean could develop his or her potential to the fullest (MICA, 2012)

Consequently, today Singapore is ranked 9th on the Human Development Index of 2018. The state driven concentration on natural resources have made African leaders manipulate state institutions in their favour for primitive accumulation. With this, resources meant for providing public utilities and other infrastructure was non-existent, as they have been cornered by the patronage and cronyistic systems and networks in the state.

Nigeria, Angola and Norway share similar characteristics in that they have rich endowment of oil resource. But while Norway has produced from and within itself leaders who paid proportional attention to both her natural and human resources, the two named African countries have not done the same. In March 2019, the Norwegian commenced the process stopping the exploration of her oil and gas resource for the sake of posterity, after the nation's Sovereign Wealth Fund saved up to \$1trillion from the sale of the resource (Milne & Sheppard, 2019). They did this, because of the knowledge that the crude oil resource is transient and ephemeral. But Angola and Nigeria might seize to

exist if they stopped exploring their crude deposit the same way Norway has done. Norway is ranked 1st in the world in the HDI of 2018. Life expectancy in Norway is over 80 years. But in Nigeria and Angola, they are 53 and 61 years respectively.

Salient Political "isms" and Leadership Patterns Undermining Africa's Development

Apart from the above explained challenges facing Africa, there are some obnoxious political 'isms' and patterns that have greatly undermined development on the continent. These are: cronyism, nepotism and favouritism, patrimonialism, prebendalism and godfatherism.

Cronyism points to an act of state leadership of giving sensitive political positions (ministers, directors of departments and agencies of government) or awarding of contracts for developmental infrastructure to friends without requisite qualification and technical knowhow. It is a brazen case of enthroning mediocrity to the utter disregard for meritocracy. This act of state leadership accounts for poor infrastructural development on the continent.

Nepotism and *favouritism* depicts a leadership pattern of rewarding individuals who are related to the political leadership by blood or ethnicity. This is one of the reasons that accounts for divisive politics in most countries of the continent. Ethnic tension and clashes all over the continent have been based on divisive politics and allocation of state resources based on filial and ancestral bonds and connection. Examples abound in Central African Republic, Rwanda, Angola, Algeria, Sudan, South Sudan, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Benin Republic, Nigeria, just to mention a few, where clashes of ethnic dimensions have taken place due to real and perceived marginalisation of one ethnic group and favouring the another on nepotistic grounds. With such intermittent clashes truncating governance in the continent, development will continue to be a mirage for the expectant.

Africa also has a leadership pattern where political office holders look up to the apex political leader for robotic direction. When the leader decides to be unresponsive to the plight of the people, so will others at the lower rung. This political phenomenon is known as *patrimonialism*. In most African nations, especially Nigeria, when the apex leadership appears to be non-committal and unresponsive to acts of political and economic corruption, the agency/institution set up to investigate and prosecute such acts also becomes robotically unresponsive. This definitely accounts for why there are weak institutions and strong individuals in Africa on one hand, and the rule of man as opposed to the rule of law on the other. Oppositions of any kind are largely intolerable in a patrimonial state. This stems from the indigenous African traditional belief of considering elders as being always right and should not be questioned. Thus, to remain politically relevant and not being cut-off from state

largesse and resources, lower political office holders must align their views with that of the apex leadership of the state. Following from this political leadership perspective, development becomes an anathema to the continent.

Godfatherism and *prebendalism* are some of the most enduring political 'isms' on the continent. This depicts a system where a highly placed political individual in a state (godfather) conscripts and ensure the political ascendancy of another (god-son) into a political position in the state. In this political relationship, the god-son is in most cases, operantly conditioned to do the biddings of the godfather throughout his stay in the position. This is also analogous to a patron-client relationship in prebendalism, where political appointments and relationships are based on personal relations rather than personal merits.

The above analysed 'isms' are largely responsible for the seeming clueless, planless and directionless political leadership on the continent. Their inglorious manifestations have derailed the ship of leadership in the continent, stifling growth and development in its wake.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study has examined African leadership and political direction. This was done by examining the patterns of leadership in pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial eras. Beyond this, the study evaluated the leadership qualities of some great African leaders who helped decolonised the continent from the shackles of colonialism through the afro-centric organisation called Pan-Africanism, as they went further to lay the foundation for the continent's self rule and government through their respective countries.

The study therefore recommends that African leaders must realise that all the above 'isms' and unconstitutionality will not lead Africa to the promise land. They should prioritize human resource development over natural resource because without a knowledgeable and productive population, a nation is doomed to fail, no matter the quantum of mineral endowment it may have. Also, the state and its institutions should not be used for private accumulation; rather it should be used for the common good of the people. In sum, African leaders should not only establish a strong economic base and institutions that will promote the development of the continent, but should also promote trade within Africa so as to give life to the newly created African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA). It is only through these that Africa and her people will be given a pride of place in the international system.

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