

Revisiting Indigenous Institutions for Leadership Revival in Africa

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Abstract: The crisis of governance in Africa has called for public outcry over the years. This crisis has eventually led to several challenges including leadership mistrust, climate change, economic recession, youth unemployment, violent conflicts, corruption, sustainable housing, transportation and cities, demography and the youth question, food security, population and city planning quagmires. Quite disturbing is the continual dependence on their colonial masters to champion the path of development even in the 21st century global arena. Hence, development continues to be a mirage in the desert as a result of weak and corrupt political leadership associated with the continent. Based on the foregoing, this paper dwelling on the descriptive and analytical methods revisited the indigenous institutions of Yoruba Obaship as a lesson for leadership revival in Africa. This becomes imminent as the present governance structure has failed to fully address the identified development conundrums. Indigenous institutions should be seen as what can be tagged “Tiwa N Tiwa” and so the lessons garnered can be used in reviving the culture of political leadership in the land. In the same vein, structural-functionalism approach was adopted to explain the imperativeness of indigenous leadership as subjects pay more loyalty to their belief system compare to the over-bloated modern democracy. The paper recommends a revivification of indigenous leadership styles, collaborative governance by both democratic and traditional institutions and incorporation of the indigenous virtues into the political leadership among others.

Keywords: Indigenous institution, Leadership, Democracy and Yoruba Traditional Institution.

I. INTRODUCTION

The recent developmental conundrums in African continent have spurred many to begin the journey to the world of both known and unknown as a recipe. This becomes imminent as today's governance through the modern structure has failed to entrench the overall transformation of the society. This has semblance with the line of argument supported by scholars in African countries. To put this succinctly, Wunch and Olowu (1990) argued that the tragedy that the contemporary Africa is facing stems essentially from the structural defective pattern of governance adopted by the African political elites since those countries attained political independence in the 1960s. This position was further expatiated in the work of Ayo (2002) when he critically ex-rayed the potency of Yoruba community affairs as an alternative to the state-led administration that has failed to deliver public goods even till the present 21st century

administrative pattern. Ayo (2002) argued that the form of governance in Africa is highly centralized and that efforts to decentralize has always been frustrated by the central governments. It is quite visible that for African countries that embrace federal structure, it is always the federal/central government that exercise overwhelming control over other sub-national governments (State/local). This is more or less antithetical to the ideal federal democratic arrangement and it is a reflection of what becomes of political leadership and even the frantic effort in addressing the developmental challenges. Adedeji et al (1991) in Ayo (ibid) argued that state control national resources and monopoly of decision-making power has retarded socioeconomic development in Africa. This problem cannot be isolated from the leadership style of many acclaimed democrats who have failed to provide the needed leadership in the area of policies that are born out of genuineness and public interest. Many of them are elected through democratic means but are driven by autocratic leadership style. They can therefore be described as autocratic leaders in democratic camouflage.

It is apposite to state that leadership is key to any goal in life and so the failure of African leaders could be ascribed as the major setback in addressing all the socio-economic, poverty, violence among other challenges facing the continent. The ongoing ‘imperial presidents’ syndrome’ in most of the African countries through seeking of third term in office by upturning the constitution through the instrumentality of legislative arm with no conscience has always generated concern for the continual survival of the continent. There are cases to support this as it is happening in Guinea, Ivory Coast and the recent events that culminated into ousting President Keita of Mali and his Prime Minister. In another development, modern political leadership can be said to be political commercialist and merchants. They are political intruders seeking to lick from the public treasury and the continual leveraging on the economic potentials of the country and thus, perpetuating themselves in power. One can simply argue that politicians in Africa have persist in impoverishing the masses and hence, poverty has been a seed germinating vote-buying, corruption and armed robbery. All these are quite rare in the African traditional society.

It is evident that many of these leaders do not possess the values and ethical standard which African indigenous institution are proud of. In the true sense of it, these values

range from transparency, honesty, integrity, hard-work and good character. Based on this premise, this paper unraveled some questions like what is the nature of traditional institution in Africa using Yoruba Obaship system, what is the state of modern governance in Africa today, what are the values of Yoruba traditional institution, how can we incorporate the values into the current modern governance and some other critical puzzles around this discourse. The paper is bifurcated into sections.

II. METHODOLOGY

This paper is qualitative in nature where data were obtained from secondary source of data collection. The secondary material includes quality and related books, journals, reports, newspapers, published and unpublished documents and articles. This becomes apt as result of the nature of the work.

Theoretical Exposition

Structural functionalism has been found useful and apt in the examination and comparison of political systems. This is because the approach sees every sector of the society as functional (Oluro and Bamigbose, 2021). The proponents of this theory include Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons, Gabriel Almond among others but the latter brought the theory to the centre-piece of political discuss. Gabriel Almond (1966) declares that every political system performs certain functions. Taking Easton's systems analysis as a starting point, Almond looks for the functions which could be included among the input and output functions of all political systems. Almond (ibid) further reiterated that the functioning of any political system may be viewed in terms of its capabilities defined as the way it performs as a unit in its environment. The concepts of regulative, extractive, distributive and responsive capability are employed as criteria to assess how a system is performing within its environment, how it is shaping its environment and how it is being shaped by it.

In a multi-ethnic society like ours, traditional institution has very important role to perform. It could be observed that prior the invasion of colonial imperialist, the African societies are governed by traditional authorities. Although, what was invoke then was the governance of independent nationalities with diverse customs and societal norms. These traditional authorities depend solely on the customs, moral values and traditions of such society. It is important to state that people respected and honoured their traditions. They were loyal and committed to them to the extent that the colonialists had to use the traditional rulers as intermediary. People tend to see the influence of traditional institutions and then, venerated such system. The advent of representative democracy immediately after independence shaped governance pedigree and then, promoted double loyalty both to the traditional institution and the modern state's governance. Citizens continue to experience divided loyalty. This cohered with Peter Ekeh (1975) Colonialism and the Two Publics in Africa: A Theoretical Statement that explained the bifurcation of historical

configuration of the post-colonial states of Africa instead of one public as applicable in the West. The resultant implication of this in the context of loyalty to African leadership legitimacy is the divisive loyalty to first primordial public and secondly civic public. Hence, this paper argued that the roles of primordiality encompassed in traditional rulership as a structure demands visitation in terms of her uniqueness and thus the revival and integration of such moral values into the civic realm enveloped in modern governance embedded in democratic system. However, Ekeh (ibid) alluded to this as pathology of post-colonial states of Africa as the loyalty to the ethnic affinity has impeding tendency on the growth of the civic/bureaucratic state that serves the purpose of socio-economic and political development. But the point that this paper tried to espouse is that this pathology can be dealt with by adopting the values and norms associated to the primordial realm in fashioning out the problems in the instrument of modern governance and address it.

Conceptual Discourse and Literature Review: Leadership, Indigenous institution, development and modern governance

It is important to state that conceptualization is key to social discuss as it helps to understand the perspective of the paper while literature review helps in understanding the lines of discussion as per the study.

Leadership is an integral part of managing societies. It should be established that several definitions have been offered as to the concept of leadership. This is because scholars have attempted its definitions from various angles such as traits, behaviour, influence, role relationships, interaction, patterns and occupations. Be that as it may, our concern here is to conceptualize leadership as an instrument of social, economic and political revitalization of African continent. The means through which human and materials are judiciously managed towards overall transformation of the post-colonial states of Africa. Leadership is the art of influencing and inspiring subordinates to perform their duties willingly, competently and enthusiastically towards a group objective. It is the process of influencing the activities of an individual or group in an effort to accomplish a desired goal irrespective of the situation at hand. Bernard (1938) defined leadership as the quality of behaviour of individuals whereby they guide people or their activities in organizing efforts. Tannenbaum, Weschler and Massarik (1959) viewed leadership as the interpersonal influence exerted in a situation and directed through communication system, towards the attainment of specific goals. Robbins (1980) viewed leadership from the concept of leader where he conceptualized leaders as those who have both the ability to influence others and administrative authority. In the context of this paper, leadership connotes the artistic and skillful manner of ensuring and assuring a stable community or state in order to promote and enhance the happiness of higher number of people or citizens in the state. Leadership means the deployment of democratic principles in governing a state with

adherence to the doctrines of rule of law, fairness, equity and justice.

Indigenous institution refers to the traditional administrative/political system whereby leaders with proven track of records are nominated, appointed and installed in accordance with the provisions of their native laws and customs. Indigenous or tradition institution is also a system whereby leaders emerge through hereditary means. Either indigenous/traditional institution in Yoruba precolonial society, the main objective is to preserve and protect the customs, traditions and cultural heritage of the people and manage possible conflicts and violence arising among or between members of the community by the instrumentality of laws and customs of the people.

Development is a multi-dimensional phenomenon and that is the reason behind divergent conceptions as nursed by different scholars and writers alike. Development implies advancement, modernization, improvement, or progress (Bamigbose, 2017). It cut across the social, economic, political and technological aspects of human endeavour. Todaro (2009) argues that development is not purely an economic phenomenon but rather a multi-dimensional process involving reorganization and reorientation of entire economic and social system. He further avers that development is process of improving the quality of all human lives with three equally important aspects. Todaro (2003) also views development as a multi-dimensional process involving major change in social structures, popular attitudes and national institutions as well as the acceleration of economic growth, the reduction of inequality and the eradication of absolute poverty.

Governance as a concept connotes the act of ruling. It is simply the process through which decisions are reached and implemented. Governance in the traditional African society lies in the utilization of the customs and norms of the people based on different nationalities. The rule of the game rests on ascription which is traceable to the family lineage or the cultural affinity of the people in the land. Governance in the Yoruba-Nigeria is segmented based on different communities and land. These are the Oyos (Oyo empire), the Ife under the leadership of Ooni of Ife, the Akure under the Deji, Egbas under the rulership of Alake, Ado Ekiti under the Ewi of Ado among others.

Modern governance however refers to the colonial days as well as the introduction of democratic governance into the land of Africa. The democratic system advocates the respect of the rule of law, fundamental human rights, free, fair and credible election for leadership change, political stability, constitutionalism, checks and balances and bifurcation of the art of governance devoid of unnecessary infringement of institutional powers.

Indigenous Institutional System of Africa

Town administration is key to understanding the peculiar attributes of the society of Africa. It is incontrovertible the fact that independent African states have mechanism and

distinctive manner of presiding over their subjects prior the advent of the colonial masters. The colonial imperialists only came to build on the existing arrangements. In fact, many have argued that the coming of the whites had caused a lot of damage to the ways and manners of organizing and coordinating the African states. That the unfortunate arbitrary boundaries created by the colonial exploiters are nothing but one of the serious challenges confronting the people of Africa. Though, as argued by Tocqueville (1945) in his comprehensive book 'Democracy in America', he observed that there is high degree of variability that characterize the townships, though certain characteristics, principles, norms and practices were common to them. This can also be said about the African societies. In fact, the perfect example is Nigeria. All cultures and societies are embedded in historical traditions (Ayo, 2002). This historical tradition also incorporates both ecological variables and the sociocultural particularities of the independent nationalities of the African state.

The institutional arrangement in African precolonial societies is categorized into what Ayo (2002) referred to as autocephalous communities/communities with strong government and acephalous/those without government or stateless. Davidson (1969) aptly observed that whether one is referring to areas that have developed strong kingdoms (such as the Oyo empire among the Yoruba of Nigeria, or the Wolof of Senegal, or the Ashanti and Tallensi of Ghana, or those communities which tried to sustain the ideal formative community of founding ancestors during remote times (e.g. Igbo and the Tiv of Nigeria and the Nuer of the Sudan), there are still certain common characteristics (kinship and age-sets) which link these two seemingly opposing groups together.

In terms of administering the communities prior the colonialists, the communities based on their historical evolutionary trajectory do select their community head like in Yoruba land, kings/obas are selected by consulting Ifa oracle on who to become the next king from the royal family/families in the community. This process is immanent in the land and must be sacred without any manipulation on the part of the kingmakers nor the Ifa priest. There is usually transparency, commitment, dedication and honesty in the whole process as any contravention can mean doom for such community.

Challenges of Modern Governance in Africa

The state of Modern governance in Africa can be referred to as a period of mis-governance. Mis-governance as used in this context means bad or weak governance or what can be tagged catastrophic governance (Joseph, 2003). Joseph (2006) has identified that the principal challenges facing Africa are internal rather than external to the continent. These challenges are multidimensional in nature.

One of the challenges facing governance in Africa is endemic corruption. This has eaten deep into the body-politic of Nigerian society. It has really crippled the economy of the

state. This was well captured in the words of Joseph (1987) in his article titled "Prebendalism". He affirmed that the term was adopted from the writings on decentralized patrimonial systems of Max Weber. He referred to prebendalism as the systemic conversion of public offices to serve the interests of office holders and their political, clan, and ethnic communities. This to him reflects the fundamental dynamic of their country's politics. To Ekeh (1975), the unique politics of Africa is characterized with ethnicity, nepotism and corruption. Corruption is the subversion and perversion of the law. The Nigerian public offices are characterized by mismanagement, misappropriation and embezzlement of fund meant for the public. The unfortunate act of corruption has been a serious threat to national development. Bratton and Van de Walle (1994) in their own view described the corrupt tendency of African state as a form of patrimonialism as pontificated by Max Weber (1922) in his work "Economy and Society" as political domination. This is relatively juxtaposing the form of political leadership whereby power flows from the ruler who based his direction on personal discretion.

In addition, the seeds of religiosity and ethnicity had seriously subjected the continent of Africa and individual countries into unending crises. This is reflecting in the body-politic of heterogeneous societies of the continent. The case is the Nigeria that housed more than 250 ethnic groups with the dominance of several religion beliefs and practices. Although, the constitution of Nigeria stipulated that the country is secular state.

Another unfortunate incident in the Africa continent is weak institutional framework. This can be seen as the most bureaucratic pathological problem confronting the African state. The institutions are bulldogs that cannot bark and hence, the unrealistic developmental deficiency. The institutions that are responsible for maintenance of law and order and the adherence to ethical standard are quite ineffective nor non-existent in most of the African states.

Likewise, the economy of many African states is very weak and finds it so difficult to compete in the global market. The economy of the developing world is continually at the mercy of the global economy. The untoward circumstances occasioned by the wave of globalization have further crippled the already collapsible economy.

In the same vein, divisive loyalty and citizenship question that are part of the hallmarks and motivations that spurred up this paper constitute another cog in the wheel of the post-colonial state of Africa. Quite unfortunate is the problems of loyalty to ethnic consanguinities at the expense of the modern government. This is evident in the leadership configurations at all levels of government whereby the positions are shared alongside these bifurcations for loyalty and legitimacy motives on the part of the subjects. The question of citizenship is another catastrophe evidently shown in Nigeria where 'certificate of origin' has become the other of the state and reflecting in appointments and even admission which had relegated merit and thrown it to dustbin.

Incorporating Traditional values into modern governance

Sowunmi (2017) disclosed that Nigeria is made of many ethnic groups, the majority of which are Hausa from the north, Yoruba from the west and Igbo from the south. Among these ethnic groups are numerous tribes totaling 371. All the aforementioned ethnic groups have their culture and traditional system of administrations, the system of administration differ from community to community and society to society (Osifo, 2017; Isaac, 2018).

The value of Yoruba or Ile-Ife people revolves around Omoluabi/Omoluwabi tenets. The Omoluabi is a philosophical hermeneutic and an indigenous Yoruba ideology of the precolonial era. This ideological inclination believes very much on diligence, transparency, honesty, good conduct, humanistic nature, trust, genuine love, selflessness, understanding and sacrifice even at personal cost for mutual or communal benefits. These values constitute the onus of Omoluwabi in Yoruba society. It is within this ideological tenacity that the Yoruba societies encourage social groups and organizations responsible for deliberating community's issues and rendering of helps to the people. These social groups also believed that what affect others affect all of them. This is needed in multi-ethnic societies like Nigeria. Quite unfortunate is the waning tendency of the principle in Yoruba society owing to the transatlantic slave trade, Yoruba tribal wars and colonialism and neocolonialism and the military interregnum that disrupted Nigerian self-styled democracy accompanying with corruption and political violence. The unprecedented and massive growth and development in science and technological innovativeness has also crippled the influence of Omoluabi principles in our society. These principles to some reasonable level do not suffer universal challenge. Even as accentuated by Dasylva (2004) that there is what is called universal cultural correspondences which suggest that there is denominator that unifies all cultures.

Hence, the African leadership conundrum can be addressed through the deployment of Omoluabi philosophical view of life. It is high time that African leaders embrace the ethos and ethical standards of the African society in a more proactive way having underscored the failure of modern democratic system as an antidote to developmental failure.

In spite of the crisis associated with religiosity in Nigeria, the accommodation and tolerance of the Yoruba religion system through the variety of festivals that tend to attract many and sundry are seen as very commendable values and hence, be incorporated into modern governance as a recipe to the identity catastrophe engendered by heterogenous differences. Religion provides a practical ground on how to live together in a diverse, multicultural, global and cosmopolitan world (Abimbola, 2006). The religious factor serves the motive of bringing together and promotes harmonious relationship. Though, Ogungbemi (2017) pointed out that socio-economic development of any group lies heavily on their scientific and technological advancement. Hence, the religious factor can

serve as the factor of bringing talents and potentials together in a more cooperative and understandable way.

III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This paper has critically examined leadership conundrum in Africa by deploying the Omoluabi philosophical principle as the only recipe. This becomes imminent as the modern democratic codes had failed to provide any meaningful socio-political and economic transformation of the continent. It revealed the productive days of Africa when though it was transitional but there was systematic progress. Based on the available evidence however, this paper recommended the following;

- i. That African leaders need to emulate the most founding fathers of the continent in their patriotism
- ii. That Omoluabi philosophical tenets should be emphasized in today's governance practice.
- iii. That traditional rulers should have constitutional roles beyond local advisory roles in most of the African countries like Nigeria
- iv. That traditional approach should be deployed in the fight against corruption in the continent
- v. Those African moral values should be revisited and embraced in reviving leadership declination in the continent.
- vi. Above all, more attention should be given to indigenous knowledge if Africa must progress among the comity of nations

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