

Review

Leadership, followership and socio-political development in post-independence Nigeria

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In this study set against the background of political crises and general underdevelopment in Nigeria, leaders and followers are conceived as collaborators in the degradation of the social polity. Selfishness, corruption and ineptitude on the part of the leaders as well as ignorance, timidity; and, 'false consciousness' on the part of the followers which makes them to seek accommodation under any type of government, were discussed. We feel it will amount to mere wishful thinking to expect tangible development under this stifling situation. We noted that increasing political awareness fostered by the press, social media, trade unions and Non-Governmental organizations would soon open the eyes of the followers to work for the enthronement of responsible and committed leadership.

Keywords: Leadership, Followership, Social Contract, Collaborators, False-Consciousness.

INTRODUCTION

The Nigerian state that emerged at independence was an 'alien' one which was neither designed for, nor disposed to, any welfarist orientation. Its neo-colonial form and character as well as the selfish orientation of the emergent leaders (like their counterparts in many African states), whom Davidson (1993) euphemistically described as "pirates in power" (Davidson, 1993:243-265) saw to this. The state-centred neo-colonial economy encouraged the indolent ruling elite to be unduly reliant on State resources for private accumulation and so there was unbridled struggle to control the State and its machineries. Thus, thuggery, arson, election rigging and ethnic jingoism were regularly employed, in no-holds-barred manners, for political ascendancy and the control of the State in the First Republic (1960-1966). In all of these the masses were expendable pawns. The persistent crises and instability threatened to put the country asunder on several

occasions before the military took over the reins of government in 1966 (Dudey, 1973:1-86; Luckham, 1971). Even at that the persistent problems of distrust, intolerance and ethnic jingoism continued unabated leading inexorably to a fratricidal civil war in May 1967. The successful conclusion of the war empowered and emboldened the military to maintain a vice-grip on the State until 1999 (save for the period, 1979-1983-the Second Republic, and August to November 1993 – Interim National Government) when it reluctantly transferred power to civilians (Falola et al, 1994; Adekanye, 1999). It should be noted, however, that the ills of the First Republic manifested again during the Second Republic in more profound manners thereby providing excuse for the restive military political adventurers to usurp power until 1999. The bitter experience of the years of military rule turned many Nigerians to docile followers based on the opportunistic

philosophy of: "if you cannot beat them; join them". And ever since this has been defining the relationship between leaders and followers in the management of Nigeria's socio-political development. Before we proceed further we need to define and conceptualize the major terms to be employed in this study: these are; leadership and followership. This will then lead to a discussion of what is usually expected from leaders and followers. Finally, we shall analyse the performance of Nigerian leaders, bringing out in the process the consequences of such performance or non-performance (as the case may be) on the body politic. While the paper is based wholly on the Nigerian experience, examples from other countries would be invoked where and when necessary to buttress our assertions.

There are many definitions of leadership some of which are purely ascriptive while some are descriptive. In most cases 'power' and 'influence' looms large. According to Arnold Tannebaum (1968) sociological writers are generally agreed that "leadership is the exercise of power or influence in social collectivities, such as groups, organizations, communities or nations". (Tannebaum, 1968:101). Here 'exercise of power and influence' implies 'making things happen'. Thus the leader is a

person clearly distinguished from others in power, status, visibility and in any of a number of character traits, such as decisiveness, courage, integrity and intelligence" (Tannebaum, 1968: 105).

On a descriptive note we will like to define leadership as that exalted position that bestows on the occupant the power, influence and wherewithal to organize, supervise and order the society or body under his or her jurisdiction. Thus leadership does not exist in a vacuum. Where there is leadership there is also followership. This latter cadre consists of the majority of the people who are directly affected by, and sometimes parties to the actions of the former. To this extent, "leaders and followers are collaborators". The two concepts define and reinforce each other. "There can be no leading without following and of course, no following without leading" (Cecil Gibbs, 1968:92 – 93). This is because;

the expectations of the follower and the acceptance he accords the leader may be as influential in the production of the act of leading as are the resources of the leader himself (Gibbs, 1968:93).

Austin Ranney (1979) put the issue in a clearer perspective when he defined leadership "(as) not a thing possessed by certain favoured individuals but a relationship among leaders and followers that depends upon the nature of the group, its objectives, and the socio-

political environment within which it operates" (Ranney, 1979:253). Cecil Gibbs (1968) had identified four basic elements in this kind of relationship, they are:

1. the leader, with his characteristics of ability and personality and his resources relevant to goal attainment;
2. the followers, who also have relevant abilities, personality characteristics, and resources;
3. the situation within which the relationship occurs; and
4. the task with which the interacting individuals are confronted. (Gibbs, 1968:91).

Thus there is a high degree of overlap in the conceptualization of the twin concepts of leadership and followership. This is to be expected because followers are supposed to mirror or act in some degree like leaders since it is from their 'constituency' that would-be leaders are nurtured and propelled. But it must be emphasized, as Akin Akindele (1993) has rightly done, that, "... no one truly attains real leadership without first securing the respect and the goodwill of those to be led" (Akindele, 1993:138). And we must add that this can only be accomplished through fair and just means that would elicit enduring love and affection from the followers.

This brings us to the variety of leadership relations as categorized below:

1. patriarchal leadership which engenders dependence, love and reverence;
2. tyrannical leadership which thrives under a climate of fear and coercion; and
3. charismatic leadership in which the interpersonal intercourse is based on love and affection.

It is this last variety that is considered most appropriate for developing countries like Nigeria (Falola (1990:159 – 173). But, unfortunately the greater part of Nigeria's post-independence life was saddled with tyrannical leadership as represented by military rule. Since the military rulers usually forcefully seize leadership positions, the followership could hardly exercise serious influence over its conduct in office. And even when civilians took over, as from 1999, the way and manner in which the leaders emerged favoured the elite who had the wherewithal in terms of funds and influence to rig their way (through sham elections) to power. Without doubt, in the process the masses of the people, who constitute the followers, were marginalized and made almost irrelevant, except as mere electoral tools. Rather than mount pressure on the leaders in order to assert their influence for the general good the followers readily resign to fate and flow along with any government in power. Without doubt, low literacy level, lack of political awareness, poverty, ethnic politics and what Osundare (2012) referred to as 'false consciousness' are important factors responsible for the easy capitulation of the followers. False consciousness, according to

Osundare (2012), “comes in this way: the Nigerian people protect thieves among their rulers because they feel their own time is coming. If you are a potential thief, it is not likely that you will criticize a thief that is stealing at the moment. All you will be praying for is for him to step out so that you can take his place”. (Osundare, 2012:41). We shall now turn our attention to expectations from leaders vis-à-vis the realities on the ground and the part the followers have been playing in the whole process.

Many writers on Nigeria’s political life are wont to blame the prevalent corrupt practices and underdevelopment on the leaders. While we agree that most of the nation’s leaders have proved to be corrupt and inept over the years, it is our belief that both the leaders and followers are culpable somewhat in this matter. In this paper set against the background of the all pervading decadence in virtually every aspects of national life in Nigeria, an attempt will be made to show how bad leadership, timid and compromising followership have impacted negatively on its development leading inexorably to the dashing of hopes.

Even the renewed hopes of a better run socio-political entity brought to life by the transition from military rule to democratic governance in 1999, were soon dashed by the overbearing disposition of the Olusegun Obasanjo administration. The way and manner it deployed government apparatuses to manipulate the political environment – a development reminiscent of the unsavoury happenings during the dark days of military rule – did not help matters. This was the situation that brought to life the Alhaji Musa Yar’Adua’s government in 2007 which was run by an ethnic cabal which serviced sub-national interests when fatal health challenges incapacitated and later claimed the life of the president. It took the robust intervention of the National Assembly at the prompting of pre-democracy groups headed by, Save Nigeria Group (SNG) – a populist – oriented Non-Governmental Organization – for power to be wrested from the cabal and transferred as appropriate to the Vice president, Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, first; as Acting President and later as substantive president.

Great Expectations and the Dashing of Hopes

When people are elected, selected or ‘steamrolled’ into leadership positions there are justifiable expectations from those to be led i.e. the followers. For instance, in Nigeria when people are voted into power or when they bulldoze their way to power through coups (as it was in the days of military rule) or rigging of elections, the followers expect them to at least function for the upliftment of their socio-economic situation and also to create the appropriate enabling atmosphere for the realization of goals and ambitions. This is more like John Locke’s theory of the ‘social contract’ (Sarbine and Thorson, 1973:490-498) in which followers surrender some powers and privileges to

leaders who are to use such for the well-being of the people and the positive transformation of the social polity.

Unfortunately what we have had in Nigeria over the years has been a legion of hard-hearted and unresponsive self-seeking leaders who managed to ‘capture’ leadership positions through bribery, false promises, rigging of elections; and, violent means as in the cases of coups and countercoups. It is to be expected therefore that such bankrupt and decadent leaders can only replicate bankruptcy, ineptitude, selfishness and corruption – all leading to the dashing of hopes and political disillusionment. This has been the bane of the Nigerian state since independence.

First, the economy has been subjected to several impious experimentations and unethical practices such that a potentially buoyant Nigerian nation now rank as one of the leading nations in the ‘poverty’ club. When this is viewed against the backdrop of the abundant resources (human and material) with which this country is endowed the charge of reckless leadership would not be hard to sustain. Second, the sharp practices, stealing and other fraudulent practices that the leaders usually engage in have not set good precedents. The resultant ripple effect has been a society that thrives on official corruption, armed robbery, kidnapping, drug peddling and insecurity. People now use their positions and connections to steal government money or parlay it into profit yielding ventures for private accumulation and also to extort money from hapless individuals. The Independent Corrupt Practices Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) established by the Obasanjo administration have not been able to stem the tide of corruption because of double standard in their operations. It is common knowledge that staunch supporters of the incumbent regime could get away with virtually anything while its critics and hapless minnows are constantly harassed by these bodies.

Third, we cannot but agree with Mallam Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, Governor of Central Bank of Nigeria who, at a public lecture delivered at Abuja on Saturday 20th October 2012, averred that one major problem with the quality of leadership in the country is that there is no conscious effort to groom successors and so people come to office unprepared. In his words:

This country ... has failed because of lack of mentoring. People come into positions unprepared, without guidance and they try to learn on the job and it has happened to the most sensitive positions and the most sensitive offices that you can think about in the nation (Sanusi, 2012).

However, it is ironical that the followers who are supposed to be desirous of good leadership have consistently, through their conducts and orientations, been negating the

evolution of same. Bayo Afolabi (1995) captured the scenario appropriately when he observed that,

... is it not the masses that encourage their rulers to steal public fund? Do we not regard our leaders as failures if they get to power and refuse to get wealthy quickly? Can a honest – but – poor politician ever contest and win in Nigeria? ... when the so-called masses expect to be bribed before they vote for politicians they are directly or otherwise digging their own mass graves! Illiteracy is no excuse (Afolabi, 1995:25).

Osundare (2012) reinforced the above observation in a personality interview with TELL Magazine when he asserted unequivocally that:

It is the common people who are the followers that are used for rigging elections; it is they that are manipulated one way or another. When rulers steal our money, it is they who go out to demonstrate for them. (Osundare, 2012:41).

This lends support to the saying that a people gets the kind of leadership that it deserves.

Finally the neglect of the educational sector and the inability of the leaders to generate employment opportunities for employable men and women have widened the circle of people involved in sharp practices, fake businesses, prostitution (formal and informal) kidnapping, thuggery, hired assassins and visionless drifters. Honest and hardworking individuals who have not struck it rich are now objects of derision while criminally-minded social misfits who have managed to amass wealth through dubious means soon become community leaders or opinion-moulders and are often rewarded with chieftaincy titles, National Honours and honorary Doctorate degrees. Thus, when such people manage to find themselves in leadership positions, as it is often the case, we know what to expect.

In the advanced countries of the world, honest, selfless, consistently good, responsive leadership and supportive followership have transformed such societies for good by imbuing in the citizens corporate responsibility, a high degree of patriotism and national pride. For instance the U.S is usually referred to as 'God's own country' not because it is spiritually ordained as such but because the leadership echelon at every strata of that society have created the enabling conditions for the actualization and consummation of individual hopes and aspirations. The articulate and discerning followers too have been

capitalizing on this tradition not to settle for anything short of good leadership.

The U.S example discussed above can also be replicated in Nigeria if the right calibre of people are put in leadership positions. This brings to mind the wonderful progress recorded in the old Western Region under the leadership of late Chief Obafemi Awolowo who served as the Premier of that Region from 1955 to 1959. Although his period of stewardship was short, the achievements, which spanned nearly all facets of human endeavour, but most profoundly felt in the educational sector, have outlived the sage. His counterparts in the Northern Region (Sir Ahmadu Bello) and Eastern Region (Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe) are also believed to have provided responsible and responsive leadership marked with tangible progress in their domains. Also, the example of General Murtala Mohammed has often been cited as representing disciplined, orderly and responsible leadership with a clear vision of how to reorientate Nigerians' attitudes generally. The six months for which the Murtala dispensation lasted is still being remembered with nostalgia by many Nigerians. While the style or goal-achieving strategies of that regime might appear too regimental and so uncomfortable for many, we cannot deny the fact that for that brief period Nigeria was on the path of sanity somewhat.

However, it is unfortunate that the emerging leadership orientation could not be consolidated before Mohammed was felled by the assassin's bullet. This brings us to one of the major factors that militated against the evolution and consolidation of responsible leadership culture in Nigeria. This was the recurrent nature of coups and counter coups between 1966 and 1999 which did not give room for continuity and the much needed time and space for potential leaders to learn on the job; and, also for the followers to internalize such traits that make for good leadership. The corrective regime image which the Mohammed administration laboured to propagate for the military diminished with each coup. As observed elsewhere,

The most striking feature of the coups has been the recurring allegations of corruption, economic mismanagement, social neglect and maladministration usually levelled against deposed military regimes (Murtala's coup against Gowon and Babangida's putsch against Buhari are cases in point). Such allegations have been levelled in the past against civilian administrations. Is it then not the case of the kettle calling the pot black? (Ajayi, 1995:16-17).

Therefore the military's claim to reformism or modernization only operated at the level of rhetoric. The hard facts on the ground revealed a society that was

progressively bastardized (through impious experimentations), pauperized and totally disoriented. Members of the civil political class who took over the reins of leadership from the military since 1999 and who should have provided a better alternative have, through selfish pursuits, corrupt practices, prebendalism and compromise, traded-off such opportunities. In a moment of pique, Osundare (2012) remarked that "Nigeria currently has no leadership ... but a political head" (Osundare, 2012:42). In an incisive analysis of Nigeria's predicament, Toyin Falola (1990) had made the following far-reaching observations which we consider to be a realistic reflection of contemporary Nigerian society:

- (a) a leadership that has a country wide acceptability is yet to emerge;
- (b) the political structures which can give rise to a good leadership is yet to emerge;
- (c) a leadership that is patriotic enough to withstand and combat the manipulation and domination of our society by external forces has not emerged;
- (d) the leadership has been unable to provide solutions to problems of instability and underdevelopment;
- (e) the leadership has been all too willing to prevent successful transfer of power through the medium of organized election, to mobilize support among their 'people' (notably their ethnic groups) to cover up their failures and inadequacies; to coerce the people – especially organized and semi-organised groups like students, trade unions, university teachers etc. who attempt to struggle to defend their rights (Falola, 1990:159 – 160).

But we must also add that the followership in Nigeria has been generally timid, compromising and easily susceptible to the bogey "of sectional differences which had been used in the past to build up the myth of rivalry, animosity, hostility and suspicion amongst the Nigerian ethnic groups" (Alao, 1995:18). These traits have been providing a favourable climate for bad leadership to flourish. However, it is gratifying to note that increasing political awareness fostered by education, the press and social media (facebook, twitter, etc) as well as the robust activities of trade unions and Non-governmental organizations could eventually lead to the emergence of a radicalized and assertive followership that would someday begin to take the leadership to task over its handling of the affairs of the nation.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The thesis has been posted that both the leadership and the followership cadres should be held accountable for Nigeria's deplorable situation. While expectations from followers are high they have not deemed it fit to install competent leaders or to shun usurpers. Instead people are always seeking accommodation in any government (good

or bad) in order to satisfy primitive accumulative instincts. This constitute the rationale for considering leaders and followers as collaborators in the degradation of the Nigerian State.

For the desirable leadership type to emerge in Nigeria it is our considered opinion that the society as a whole would have to be totally overhauled in terms of orientation and affective attitudes from bottoms-up. This is very important because it is from the ranks of followers that would-be leaders are chosen or elected (i.e. under democratic dispensations). The socio-cultural milieu and the prevailing societal idiosyncrasies are very strong factors in the moulding of potential leaders. This, therefore, makes it imperative for citizenship and leadership training social institutions, like the family, school, Man O'war and similar paramilitary organizations, social clubs, religious bodies and government agencies like the National Orientation Agency (NOA) and the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), to be more alive to their responsibilities.

Furthermore, progressive and selfless leaders either at regional or national levels should be celebrated as a way of drawing attention to their exemplary leadership qualities which succeeding generations should be encouraged to emulate. Also, honest, virtuous and patriotic deeds (not only in the realm of sports) should be duly recognized and adequately rewarded. And recipients of national awards who, in the course of time, proved to be unworthy of such honour through their conducts, should be stripped of such awards. These will send the right signals to the generality of the people.

In the final analysis the most important way to ensure responsible leadership in Nigeria is to completely democratize the process of attaining such positions. This has the advantage of making the followers responsible for enthroning the kind of leadership they want. And in the event of poor or misguided judgment leading inadvertently to the enthronement of bad leadership the 'recall system' – an essential attribute of democracy – can be resorted to in order to replace the decadent leadership through constitutional means.

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