



**POLITICS AND LEADERSHIP FATIGUE IN AFRICA.
A THEORETICAL APPRAISAL.**

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Abstract.

Colonialism cannot be forgotten in Africa because of the disorientation and dissonance it enforced. This scenario paved way for unbridled expropriation of human and material resources. But, by the beginning of the 1940s African nationalists rejected the colonial political economy, and demanded for self governance. The aftermath of their demand engendered a wind of change which swept most African states to statehood in the 1960s. Regrettably, five decades after independence, the continent is still experiencing a free fall in all human development sectors. Those who inherited political power, rather than ensuring inclusive governance have imposed pain and terror on their people. With an analytical method the paper argues that politics is squarely responsible for the leadership fatigue in the continent. It concludes that for Africa to have the right leaders they desire, the political institutions must guarantee popular participation.

Keywords-Leadership fatigue, political economy, colonialism, politics, industrialization.



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Introduction

Africa occupies a prodigious status in the world. Apart from being the second largest continent, it contains 22 percent of the earth's land surface. The Sahara desert alone is as large as the continental United States (Reader, 1999:4). It is unarguably a rich mosaic of multi ethnic groups with enviable mineral endowment. Rodney posits that 'Africa is well endowed with mineral and primary energy resources. With an estimated 9 percent of the world's population, the region accounts for approximately 28 percent of the total value of world mineral production and 6 percent of its crude petroleum output (Rodney, 1972:23).

All these have combined to make the continent the treasury of the world. The scrambles for its resources at all times by the industrialized countries greatly attest to its importance in the global political economy. This has inexorably engendered a seamless relationship among the industrialized countries such that global survival depends on the exploitation of the grandeur of the continent. Regrettably, Africa has not been able to use these unrivaled resources to suborn a good life for the people. The National Geographic Image of Africa noted that the mention of Africa conjures the stereotypical image of lush jungles and wild animals, poverty, famine, tribal warfare, deadly diseases, such as ebola and HIV/AIDS (Shraeder 2004:14). Sadly, this is in spite of five decades of political independence. It is against this backdrop that we shall theoretically examine the Politics and Leadership fatigue in Africa. The paper argues that the character of leadership in the continent reinforces the politics of exclusion and aggrandizement. This scenario has ultimately led to the suffocation of democratic ideals, maximization of personal wealth and lack of optimal policies that would ensure a qualitative and quantitative transformation of the continent.

The paper is divided into five sections for easy comprehension. Apart from the introduction, the second section attempts a definition of the two main concepts in the study: politics and leadership. Section three is a brief peep into Africa's. This is important because colonial distortions and destructions cannot be divorced from the crises of the past colonial epoch. The fourth section is an examination of leadership fatigue in Africa, while the last section is conclusion and suggestions.

Conceptualising Politics and Leadership

Politics have become a buzzword frequently used by many people in the society. This is more so as military incursions into politics tends to be witnessing a twilight. It's economic content has given it a phenomenal clout that attracts followers at will. Because it guarantees prominence and economic sustenance, particularly in the Third World, no weapon is beyond the ordinary in the prosecution of political goals. Here lies the root of brutality and intolerance in politics. But what is politics?

Simply put, it is a struggle for power, a process of governing men and women, and as Harold Laswell put it, it involves the process of determining who gets what when and how. According to Nnoli,

Politics is a set of social relationships associated with a central body, of varying legitimacy, whose function is to make and implement overriding decisions for the whole population in the interest of the latter (Nnoli, 2003:5).

'It is an activity that involves people with the sole aim of authoritative allocation of values for a society' (Anifowose and Enenmwo, 1993:3). This Estonian definition aptly underlines what Robert Dahl identifies as a '...persistent pattern of human interaction that involves a significant extent, power, rule and authority (see Okoli, 2003:3).

Political struggles as a social action would be meaningless without the control of the state. It is the bastion of development and the basis of all security, the protector of all rights, the guarantor of all privileges in the society, and the vehicle for the maintenance of any modicum of good living (Nnoli, 2004:76). The overwhelming power of the State makes it difficult for any rival power to emerge and pose a challenge to it in the society. In this regard, politics becomes an attempt to be in the highest position possible so as to wield state power. All other forms of power yield to it and are or , can be controlled by it. This explains its attractiveness (Dukor, 2003:16).

It is within this prism that we can appreciate Max Weber definition of Politics as the operation of the state and its institutions, a means of striving to power or striving to influence the distribution of power among individuals and groups within a state (see Anifowose and Enenmwo, 1999:2). While it is a truism that political struggle is a universal phenomenon, however, it is moderated by the historical transformations and values of the society. These values determine the disposition and nature of politics and those who control state power. Therefore, nuances of political culture, allocation of resources, consumption and distribution of power can be located within these transformations. Politics is a social activity which involves decision making; it cannot be separated from leadership. What is leadership?

Leadership is the ability to mobilize resources for the attainment of set goals. It is purely goal-oriented. The New Lexicon Webster's Encyclopedia Dictionary of the English Language, defines a leader as someone who acts as a guide, while leadership is the quality deployed by a leader (Cayne, et al, 1992:562). What distinguishes a leader from rulers or from the crowd is the quality he/her exudes which enable him/her to accomplish a task. The rare quality of a leader, which Uchendu identifies as agency of leaders (Uchendu, et al, 2010:26), makes them primus inter pairs and burden bearers. Hence, Field Marshal Montgomery sees it as the capacity and will to rally men and women to a common purpose (see Jemibowon, 1988:129). Ekeke also posited that:

Leadership is the unique ability of a group or individual to see a positive world that lies beyond tomorrow to excite others in the possibilities of anchoring what is seen,



and have (most of) them willingly participate or cooperate in ensuring its achievement of completion with available resources (see Akani, 2013:577).

Leadership, therefore, entails the ability to philosophize, be visionary, high level of dynamism, creativity and humility. Non-possession of this leadership trait is to be on the threshold of a dead end. Nzimiro (1986), Plato (1982) and Machiavelli (1513) emphasized that leaders must be men/women of uncommon character. For Nzimiro, therefore a leader must be a creator... of a great ideology, possess the real revolutionary trait of unbounded love towards people... (Nzimiro, 1996:10). Alarmed by the condemnation of Socrates to death in 399BC, Plato averred that unless leaders begin to possess a philosophical disposition, humanity would not see an end to crisis. The importance attached to leadership as a minimal condition for the turn-around of any organization, community or state cannot be overemphasized. It is, therefore, not amazing that within 90 years from 1900 and 1990, there has been 221 definitions of leadership (Issa and David, 2012:143). A leader is motivated and challenged by the mundane problems of his followers, abhors stiff-necked attitude to popular demand, not held hostage in the cocoon of dogmatism, but always progressive and futuristic in thought.

African Colonial Past

To all intents and purposes, colonialism in Africa was a complete dissonance and a disservice to the continent. This is because of its inhibition and suppression of autocentric development. Its primary motive was hidden in an obscurantist and superficial justification couched in the ideology of racism, and the immutable inferiority of Africa. Therefore, the idea of the civilizing mission becomes relevant to introduce a pre-logical people to modernity.

But it must be understood that European industrialization precipitated a new vista whose social, labour and industrial relations needed external inputs such as markets, raw materials and employment. Indeed, colonial adventure becomes a channel to acquire the raw materials for industrial production and settle the social discontent of the proletariat created in the wake of industrialization. The obvious threat these people posed to industrial development can be gleaned from John Cecil Rhodes warning that '...my cherished idea is a solution for the social problem', to settle the 40 million inhabitants of United Kingdom from a civil war, we colonial statesmen must acquire new lands to settle the surplus population, to provide new markets for the goods produced in the factories and mines (see Akani, 2004:7).

Cecil's concern to save the United Kingdom from a civil war has given credence to the conclusion of scholars such as Chiweizu (1978), Rodney (1972), Ake (1981), Maathai (2009) and Yehoah (1997) that Africa's colonial experience was far from being benign, it was unequivocally unfriendly. Chiweizu noted that:

When Europe pioneers industrial capitalism, her demands upon the resources of the world increased... tremendously. In addition to obtaining spices and manpower for her mines and plantations in the America's, Europe set out to seize for her factories the mineral and agricultural resources of the world (Chiweizu, 1978:35).

The achievement of this objective was characterized by blatant blandishment and brutality of inconceivable proportion. The Berlin conference of 1884 – 1885, gunboat diplomacy, subjugation of traditional potentates and destruction of pre-capitalist social formations were part of the grand design to institute a colonial state. The colonial state was primarily concerned with the fulfillment of the agenda of colonial imperialism. Its establishment coincided with the historical zenith of virulent racism, which permeated government policy reason with a premise of African inferiority. African culture... had no redeeming value; only a wholly new African might be worthy of the colonial order, tailored from imported cloth (Young, 2012:6).

To accomplish its historical mission, the colonial state was interventionist, acquired an absolute and leviathan character and flagrantly anti-people. In fact, it was an organization:

Dedicated to the promotion and advancement of the interests of a foreign financial oligarchy in the colonial territory. Its immediate task was, therefore, to conquer the colonized population, hold down the conquered people and set up a Capitalist mode of production in the territory... (Nnoli, 2003:57).

Predictably, the activities of the colonial state disrupted social continuities, brought incoherence and disarticulated the continent's political economy. Through the introduction of forced labour, cash crops (rubber, palm oil, cocoa and groundnut), African economies were gradually externalized and subsequently tied to the Capitalist world system (Wallerstein, 1993:5). Crowder noted that 'the railways were all directed to the coast, with no link between them, of different gauges, so that a rationalization of the railway system of West Africa today is impossible (see Ake, 1981:45). In Congo Democratic Republic, King Leopold saw the mineral rich country as the 'magnificent African cake' (Nugent, 2012:11).

Whatever political, judicial, administrative and economic policy introduced by the colonial state only deepened capitalist penetration, and domination of African social formations. It is within this scenario that the colonial state can be seen as the precursor of development of underdevelopment, and arrogant celebration of the capitalist ethic. Ake averred that 'the colonial economy was characterized by market imperfections and monopolies: this characteristic of colonial capitalism is an important element in the link between colonization and underdevelopment (Ake, 1986:46). It is important to emphasize that the attainment of the goal of colonialism would have been inconceivable with a conscious development of African economies. Hence, competition was discouraged, imperial monopoly became the norm, with the displacement and destruction of local initiative. The net effect of all these processes was that African economy became peripheralized only to exert a satellite influence at the fringe of global capitalism. Its vulnerability can be seen from the inability of the economy to withstand the vicissitudes and shocks emanating from the Capitalist world system.



Predictably, the contradictions of the colonial economy led to an examination of its legitimacy and relevance. This was pioneered by the educated elites who later constituted the nascent bourgeois class. Through their nationalist activities, they vehemently demanded an end to imperial rule, thus paving the way for their prominence. By the time their agitation snowballed into political independence a neo-colonial strategy had been put in place to continue the exploitation of the continent through the inheritors of power. Abagan lamented that:

...what our colonial experience bequeathed Africa was a structurally and ideologically defective state. It also created an elite torn in two directions by divergent values. The state was created for the purpose of exploitation, the values of exploitation, subjugation and domination were institutionalized... (Abagan, 2010:165).

Although, the nascent bourgeois class that inherited political power from the colonialists were full of populist and sometimes revolutionary convictions, yet they were not completely differentiated from the exploitative past. Maathai revealed that 'the new nation states were given a name, flag, and a national anthem, and handed over power to a select group of western educated elites most sympathetic to the colonial administration (Maathai, 2009:44). This new ruling class was only interested in inheritance than in revolution, and it was inevitable that its policies would locate development and amenities to the convenience of the dominant class (Ake, 1981:89). That colonialism left Africa with a stunted capacity to grow, limited manpower, saddled with contradictions and imperfections was part of the grand strategy to keep the continent within the orbit of economic subservience.

Leadership in Africa .

African post-colonial states did not emerge from a void of a static past, but from a social formation whose values were tilted towards exploitation and possessive individualism. More importantly, those who inherited political power compromised with these values, and anchored their position on a fallacious assumption and illusion.

1. They convinced themselves that with political power it would be easy to solve other related problems.
2. They also felt that their western education gives them the legitimacy to lead the people out of colonial bondage.

Unfortunately, a few years after independence, they discovered to their chagrin that political independence was a farce. Owugah pointed out that 'by separating politics and economics, they made it easy for the colonial power to grant political independence. The colonial power was conscious of the fact that for as long as they kept their grip on the nation's economic power, political power was meaningless (Owugah, 2014:5). Africa's economic bondage sustained by neo-colonial forces would have been dismantled if the ruling class had imbibed the agency of leaders or the unique ability to mobilize Africa to achieve set goals. Sadly, within a few decades, the hopes and aspirations of independence fizzled out with deepening discontent and frustration of the masses. They quickly used their political power to consolidate and sustain an economic network, which guaranteed their perpetuity in office. Dissent and opposition were resisted with crude force. They distanced themselves from the people and this dichotomized the society. African Leadership Forum (ALF) observed that:

The political elites of Africa do not communicate sufficiently with the masses and even when they try, the gap between them in material terms is such that communication is difficult and even rendered meaningless, especially as the elites are often too remote from the aspirations of the people (ALF, 1998:7).

With the control of the state, they ensured the establishment of extractive political and economic institutions which consolidated their political and economical dominance. Gradually, they weakened democratic institutions and acted beyond the law. Faced with the contradiction of their actions and the looming debt trap, they could not resist the promptings and conditionalities of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (WB/IMF) dictated Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). The attendant economic decline and instability made the 1980s to become the lost decade (Meredith, 2005:368). Many scholars who have examined African post-colonial epoch such as Ake (1996), Maathai (2010), Ayittey (1999), Shraeder (2004) and Young (2012) have come to the conclusion that the dreams of the post-colonial era were shattered (Maathai, 2010:45). The leaders strengthened the unitary colonial state apparatus and expanded its scope enormously (Ayittey, 1999:92).

Their obsession with power resulted to disregard of electoral regulations with impunity. Electoral struggles were reduced to a sham, and an opportunity to hang on to power with an appeal to primordial sensibilities. Ake was right when he declared that democratic elections in Africa can be summarized as the:

'Democratization of disempowerment': a process whereby newly established multiparty political systems mere allow rotating and competing class factions of the African bourgeoisie to exploit the proletariat and the peasantry who remain disempowered from the political process (see Shraeder, 2004:119).

A periscope of the political landscape of Africa from 1960 to 1990's would notice that it is laden with coups and counter-coups, needless bloody wars, unbridled ethnonationalism and grand corruption. Ostensibly, these have brought a disconnect between the rulers and the ruled, spending decades controlling state power in breach of constitutional requirements, have made them self-aggrandizers, self-perpetrators, self-opinionated, self-absorbed, self-serving and self-indulgent (Uchendu, et al, 2010:179). Between 1956 and 2001, there were 80 successful coups, 108 failed coup attempt and 139 reported coup plots. (Falola and Njoku, 2010:26). Clarke also noted that 'Africa's dreams of modernity turned to nightmare as 70 coups in 32 states marked the 37 years period from 1960 to the overthrow of President Mobutu Sese



Seko in 1997 (Clarke, 2010:21). The motivating factor that flipped these coups and counter-coups was the desire to control power and its economic benefit. In this process, maintenance of a sycophantic lieutenant, primordial tendencies, sophistry, sustenance of a Messianic complex became veritable means of **governance**. **The aftermath** was that politics was simplistically reduced to the struggle for private accumulation of wealth. To become wealthy, therefore, without the patronage of the state was likely to invite the unpleasant attention of those who control state power:

Political power was everything; it was not only the access to wealth, but also the means to security and only guarantor of general well-being (Ake, 1996:7).

It is in this sense that Ake declared that 'African politics has been constituted to prevent the pursuit of development and the emergence of relevant and effective development paradigm and programmes (Ake, 1996:1). The leaders of this anti-democratic and corrosive political system can only but be inept and corrupt. Transparency International estimates that:

Corruption siphons off 20 – 30 percent of funding for basic service provision. In 1991 United Nation Organization estimates that the ruling elites drained more than \$200 billion out of Africa (ALF, 1998:1).

In the same vein, the African Union seriously lamented that:

Acquired wealth was liberally squandered on luxury and excess, with the culture of corruption pervading all levels of society and costing around \$148 billion annually (25% of African GDP). The new elite controlled players entering the political firmament rapidly adopted the habits of their predecessors, leading us to wonder if we are looking at a form of internal 'sub-imperialism' (see Clarke, 2010:22).

This can only surface in a political system where there is manifest leadership fatigue, institutional failure and official policy to dwarf democratic triumph. With pervasive regime – violence, blockade of avenues of civil expression, display of contempt and disregard for the wishes and aspirations of the people's, civil unrest became a desideratum. The intensity of the civil wars and its barbaric destruction of human capital prompted the UN Development Programme's 2003 Human Development Report to describe the 1990s as 'a decade of despair' (Williams, 2011:1).

In fact, Africa experienced thirteen major armed conflicts, the highest total for any region of the world. Besides the millions of people lost in this combustible cocktail, it is estimated that these wars have cost Africa well over \$700 billion in damages since 200 alone (Williams, 2010:1). The pain hoisted on Africans by a lacklustre leadership has subjected the continent to the mercy of imperialist countries. This uncharitable situation prompted Ali Mazuri to state that:

African leaders have a housekeeping view of political power with a minimalist sense of purpose characterized by more governance than leadership, more verbosity and less vision, governing without leading, maintenance without movement (see Uchendu, 2010:35).

Today, African development has remained 'blunted, halted and turned back' (Shraeder, 2004:324). The majority of the states are classified within the failed state category, often described as lame leviathans, burgeoning terrorist insurgency and with faltering economies. For over five decades after political independence what one sees in Africa's basket of achievement is official deceit, pockets of authoritarian nostalgia (Ihonvbere, 2011:36), littered with ill-conceived, ill-timed, ill-executed, mistaken and misdirected (Saine, et al, 2011:14), basic amenities beyond the reach of the masses. While other states were entering the 21st century with a positive record of achievement, Africa entered with a dependency mindset, millions of devastated and hungry people.

It is germane at this point to mention that African leaders have within their limited capacity embarked on some projects that would facilitate its political and economic independence. But these laudable visions have been nipped in the bud because of a lack of glaring political will to succeed, an emphatic consciousness to reject unwanted external interference and poor mobilization of the civil society.

Conclusion

In this paper, we argued that colonial imperialism was harmful and limited African development. Europe's contact with Africa was not necessitated by any altruistic convictions, but to get unimpeded access to the continent reservoir of essential resources so that its industrial crises can be settled. To achieve their avowed aim, the colonial state was instituted with absolute , which facilitated the disarticulation of African economics, and supervised the drain the continent's resources.

By the time of political independence, African economics were on the threshold of a precipice, burdened with a litany of debilitating colonial legacies. Unfortunately, those who inherited political power from the colonialists, made little or no effort to dismantle these legacies. Rather, they adjusted them to advance their political fortune. Having tasted political power and realizing that they had a tenuous economic base, they monopolized state power at their behest and gradually the state lost its autonomy, became weak and partial. This development led to anathematization of dissent, suffocation of democratic ideals and leadership in perpetuity. Because the leaders were beyond the constraints of state institutions it became possible for state resources to be determined through a neo-patrimonial formula with the majority wallowing in penury.



By the 21st Century, Africa's abysmal and facile performance have become a concern to the international community. According to Anyanwu and Njoku:

Africa has lost the twentieth century and in order to recapture its destiny in the twenty-first century, the new wave of leadership in Africa has to manage internal differences such that the choice of war to settle them will become an unacceptable option. (Falola and Njoku, 2010:30).

The triumph of legendary corruption and weak public institutions are the aftermath of undemocratic leadership in Africa. As Obama emphasized, with strong institutions and a strong will, Africans can live their dreams..... Africa doesn't need strongmen, it needs strong institutions (Uchendu, et al, 2010:37). Strong institutions abhors interminable rulership, the use of logic of force, and welcomes the force of logic. The danger of not having strong institutions that would democratic ensure triumph is because,

...weakly institutionalized states have worse apparatus for eliciting information about the situation on the ground. Thus, weak state structures are detrimental to the informational basis on which rulers make policy decisions, which implies that even policies resulting from development-enhancing intentions may fail

<http://politiceconomy-breakfast.wikiseholars.columbia.edu.../Africagrowth.pdf>
Accessed on 20/5/14.

In conclusion, therefore, for Africa to come out of their cocoon of underdevelopment, cycle of despair and despondency, African must essentially a leadership that would enable would ensure good governance. In accomplishing this task, therefore, strengthening the continent's democratic institutions, and developing an unshakeable political will to succeed becomes indispensable. This is of immense importance because as Reverend Jesse Jackson enthused, 'One cannot expect to ride to freedom in Pharaoh's chariot' (see Stith, 2008:184). We cannot but agree with President OlusegunObasanjo, former President of Nigeria that:

Our recovery must therefore begin with a recuperation of those values which are the foundation of every human society, which is in turn the foundation of social creativity (ALF, 1998:9)

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