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Review article

The fallacy of western democracy in Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

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Nigeria remains a creeping giant today due to the alien and expensive political arrangement that creates the opportunity for elite conspiracy which impoverishes the masses and underdevelops the country. Using descriptive method of data gathering, the study reveals that western democracy cannot work in Nigeria irrespective of how educated the population is because of the deep seated corruption, primordial sentiment, ethnic and religious prejudice as well as lawlessness. A revolutionary leadership is needed to fashion out a workable and effective political system such as *African democracy* that would suit the Nigerian society and respond to the infrastructural needs of the masses.

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1. Introduction

Nigeria has been deceiving itself that it is practising democracy just because the military is out of office. This is not the meaning of democracy. The fact that scarce resources of the nation have been mindlessly wasted for flawed periodic elections which had been sending dubious politicians to public offices to fight for a turf as if Nigeria is a conquered territory does not mean Nigeria is a democracy. Democracy is a judicious application of a country's resources for infrastructural development for the benefit of all citizens irrespective of status, tribe etc. It works in the US, Canada, UK because the people share common values. We have no good values in Nigeria. Nigeria is only united in corrupt practices under the cover of a borrowed political system. The corrupt Nigerian politicians are giving birth to corrupt children who, after completing their education abroad with public fund, return to the

country to continue from where their fathers stopped. It has become a vicious cycle in Nigeria. But why should the country be run aground in the name of democracy? Some of the Asian countries now known as Asian Tigers because of their exploits in technology, economic growth and infrastructural development were not led by democrats. Examples of such selfless leaders were Mao Zen Dung of China and Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore. These leaders fashioned out a political system that suited their nations. A system that discourages waste of resources. No Asian nation has idle crowd of legislators at the center. In Nigeria, we have a bicameral legislature made up of 469 idle men and women who are constantly on recess. In addition to this motley crowd, 36 houses of assembly are in the states. This is political madness.

Some dubious Nigerians have taken politics as lucrative business-a gateway to quick wealth. Nigeria is an election nation as it always organizes elections due to the flawed process that makes most of them to be annulled by very few incorruptible judges. Renegade politicians spend hefty sum of money to rig elections to enable them occupy public office to loot. Is this the democracy the US, the UK, Canada and other countries are practising? Nigeria has been wasting her scarce resources for the upkeep of greedy and morally bankrupt politicians over the years. This accounts for why there is nothing to show for the many years of oil boom. In 2016 budget, the National Assembly appropriated over N115b to itself above the fund earmarked for capital investment (Premium Times, March 16th 2016). How can the nation develop with this type of stupid waste?

The current Nigeria president, Muhamadu Buhari, has demonstrated the capacity and courage to clean the Augean stable by fighting corruption. The US envoy, Zafar Shaarik, has noted that the anti- corruption war was on course and that the country would change positively (Daily Post, October 17th 2016) He, Buhari, is the only president that has prosecuted corrupt serving and retired senior military officers. A large sum of money and choice properties were recovered from them. Several corrupt politicians were also probed and large amount of money and palatial mansions recovered from them. Nigeria would have collapsed by now if not for President Muhamadu Buhari (Itse Sagay, 2016). The security agencies: the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), the Department of State Security (DSS), the Military and the Police have been revitalized and reinvigorated by the Buhari administration. The EFCC and the DSS have shown unprecedented enthusiasm in investigating several corruption cases, while the military is recording huge success in fighting terrorism. As the political arrangement in Nigeria encourages corruption, the judiciary has joined the fray. Judges have been receiving bribes to pervert justice with senior lawyers as facilitators. This is ominous and worrisome because when the citizens lose confidence in the judiciary, the country gravitates into anarchy or the state of nature as painted by Thomas Hobbes.

As the president is poised in restoring sanity and confidence in the judiciary, the diligent DSS officials carried out undercover investigation on some of the corrupt judges and were arrested. N360 million was found in the homes of three judges (The Vanguard, October 9th 2006). In the home of one of the judges under probe, a fleet of 15 cars including a Rolls Royce was found. Rather than commending the efforts of the dedicated DSS operatives, the senate condemned the arrest of the judges and vowed to amend the laws establishing the DSS in order to prevent it from investigating corrupt practices (The Guardian, October 12th, 2016). Judges these days are fraternizing with members of the public in birthday parties, wedding and burial ceremonies. This did not happen in the days of Justices Okwudifu Oputa, Kayode Eso and Samson Uwaifo, etc when there was honour and dignity in the judiciary. A corrupt judge is worse than several armed robbers because the deliberate miscarriage of justice can destroy a nation.

Unfortunately, President Buhari cannot stay in office beyond two terms. What will happen when he vacates office? Will a revolutionary Marxist take over from him or one of those corrupt, lily-livered politicians? Nigeria will be in perpetual doldrums if the president who will take over from this icon fails to sustain this laudable legacy. The nation actually needs a leader who may ignore the cliché called rule of law and do the needful. With a Machiavellian executive fiat, the crowd at the national assembly can be reduced to 36 senators in a unicameral legislature and the 36 houses of assembly can be reduced to six regional assemblies to avoid waste of scarce resources. The 36 unviable states can be collapsed into 6 regions to be governed by premiers. These officials can be elected in town hall meetings without wasting huge funds in the name of election. The funds that will be freed from this exercise can be directed to the building of infrastructure. The government can only build a utilitarian society if 98% of the population is made happier while the 2% forming the predatory elite class is made unhappy. This is what made Asian nations to be what they are today. What stops Nigeria from copying their political system and jettisoning the wasteful western constitutional democracy?

Nigeria cannot continue to waste her sovereign wealth on the tiny, predatory and insatiable elite in the guise of practising a dysfunctional western political system. After the tenure of the present administration, the next leader must be patriotically courageous as president Buhari. He must be prepared to step on both toes and heads, as the task ahead is arduously herculean-the real task of nation building. This becomes imperative given the dwindling oil revenue of the nation. We cannot prevent wastage if we continue to behave the way we have been doing over the years. The political system that would spend 20% on recurrent expenditure and 80% on capital projects is what Nigeria needs. It can be called *african* or any name. In supporting the assumption that western democracy is not the panacea for developmental problems in Nigeria, looking at how it is being practised in Nigeria and the political system adopted in some Asian states will not be out of place.

2. The Asian Tigers and their political system

Asian democracy is government of the people but not necessarily by the people. Asian political systems were built upon theory that reflects different priorities and needs. This accounts for the tremendous development recorded in the continent within few decades unlike Africa. Asia practises illiberal or Confucian democracy hence the leaders are described as dictators by the West. The leaders who built the Asian Tigers were not democrats but very patriotic and selfless. Such leaders include Mao Zen Dong, Lee Kuan Yew, etc. Democracy is just an ideology. The importance of any political system is not the sound of its concept, but the ability to bring out justice and order. Lee Kuan Yew believed that the ultimate test of the value of a political system is whether it helps that society establish conditions that improve the standard of living for the majority of its people. According to him, what most countries needed was discipline, not democracy as democracy does not necessarily lead to development (Time: Asian Different Drums, June 14th 1993).

Civil liberties are forfeited for social stability. Stability and basic welfare are the priorities. Very strong government is needed to curtail some political rights in the interest of society. The East Asian states made this point known very unequivocally in the 1993 UN Human Rights Conference in Vienna. They refused to put the rights of individuals above societal needs. This was their firm position. Checks and balances are disallowed from hampering the collective goals. There is strong bureaucracy fused with the ruling party. There is no separation of power, no accountability except strong cultural values which drive social cohesion and abhor individualism. If the government works for the interest of the society, why the need for rule of law, transparency and accountability? (Tokashi Inoguchi et al., 1997) Corruption is fought aggressively with presumption of guilt unlike in Nigeria where there is presumption of innocence as enshrined in the so-called rule of law or rule of men which encourages irresponsible public officials to engage in corrupt practices. Western liberal democracy would have been inimical to the economic growth and infrastructural development of the Asian Tigers as it undermines efficiency, stability and causes gridlock between institutions. Asian societies are inhospitable to liberal democracy (Huntington, 1991).

Despite the fact that some Asian leaders are dictators, they have been at pains to ensure that there is greatest satisfaction for the greatest number of citizens. This is utilitarianism that is unheard of in Nigeria where only the government officials are made happier. The US has spent enormous resources in building liberal democracy in Philippine but many Philippine nationals want to relocate to Singapore even without rule of law but because of its fledging economy and great infrastructures. (CNN: Lessons for Leaders, March 28th 2015) It is now an undisputable fact that benevolent dictatorship is better than liberal democracy given the exploits of the Asian tigers and the underdevelopment and massive corruption in countries like Nigeria and the social disorder in the West such as the unholy gay marriage. The citizens of East Asian states are enjoying superb and world class infrastructures such as good roads, bridges, tunnels, stable electricity, good hospitals, good schools etc. But they lack rule of law because their patriotic and selfless leaders are dictators, not democrats. There is longevity of regimes that prevents wasteful elections. What is the usefulness of rule of law without basic amenities of life? If Nigerians were to choose between rule of law and basic amenities, 90% would prefer basic amenities because the agonizing pains occasioned by the absence of social infrastructures is worse than not having rule of law.

3. Pitfalls of liberal democracy in Nigeria

Liberal democratic experiments since 1979 has not taken the nation anywhere. It has been the story of wastages, mismanagement and corruption. The nation has been wasting scarce resources in the name of practising a political system that has failed to address our needs. Liberal or western democracy cannot thrive in a mere

geographical location as Nigeria is not yet a nation as angrily observed by Chief Obafemi Awolowo (1947). Without unity the ethnic and religious differences would perpetually negate liberal democracy. Election is always a war in Nigeria because different ethnic groups want their kinsmen to get into office. This makes elections to be violent and bloody (The Punch, March 25th 2016). This will continue to be the case even if every Nigerian is a PhD holder since we are not mature and ready for the Western type of democracy. Some very responsible people are scared from contesting and this accounts for the reason why morally bankrupt people are in public offices to commit infractions against the voters. The country has been wasting huge funds to conduct elections and some of them have to be repeated if ordered by the court. Funds that can build infrastructures are wasted in the name of conducting elections. There is a need for the longevity of regimes to save the huge funds wasted for frequent elections.

The constitution on which the democracy stands is faulty. Rigid adherence to it will not move the country forward. It prescribes a bicameral legislature, hence we have 109 senators and 360 representatives. To keep them in office costs a fortune. Former CBN governor, Lamido Sanusi, said 25% of the nation's budget was gulped by the national assembly (The Vanguard, December 4th 2010). In the 2016 budget, it got over N100b. It is like we spend N2b on the national assembly to look after N1b. What a tragedy! The country is wasting her patrimony because liberal democracy insists on separation of power and checks and balances. The 36 houses of assembly are sources of wastes in the states. Some state governors in the past were always throwing largesse at the greedy legislators in order to pocket them. How long can we continue with this? Is this all about democracy? Which people-oriented laws have they enacted? Do we really need these idle people as lawmakers at a stupendous cost? The ex-governors among them are receiving pension from their state governments in addition to their salary and jumbo allowances in the national assembly. Some members don't even attend the plenary sessions. Which type of waste is this? There is huge corruption in the national assembly. According to former president Obasanjo, the national assembly is an assembly of thieves (Thisday, July 26th 2016).

The rule of law in our democracy encourages corruption because of the presumption of innocence. Even if a politician is caught red-handed in a sting operation by security agents, he or she is treated as innocent till the prosecution proves beyond reasonable doubt that infraction was committed. This is a negation to the corruption war and lily-livered leaders cannot fight the war successfully. This brings out the hero in President Muhamadu Buhari. He is the first leader to wage war against corruption in Nigeria courageously. The EFCC and the DSS have been very diligent and zealous in this herculean task. The revelations from their investigations and the recoveries made so far underscore their professionalism and patriotism. When high profile public office holders are committing infractions they don't think about rule of law, but when they are arrested and detained, they sing with rule of law and the senior lawyers who benefit from the proceed of criminality would join the chorus as if the rule of law is a criterion to commit a crime. At the end, bail would be granted with the proviso that a serving or retired federal civil servant with the rank of a director who owns a house worth N200m at Abuja stands as a surety. But how can a director in the civil service own a house of N200m? Corruption in liberal democracy! But common people are detained for misdemeanor and senior lawyers are quiet. This is a serious pitfall to liberal democracy in Nigeria and is responsible for the underdevelopment of the country. It is worrisome that some people are complaining about the manner with which the anti-corruption war is fought. We should support the president and the security agencies irrespective of the tactics employed to rid Nigeria of corruption. If we miss this golden opportunity of supporting the anti-corruption war embarked upon by this rare icon, the citizens will surely regret this later.

Election is a do or die affair in Nigeria as noted earlier because it is a gateway to quick wealth. Contestants spend huge amount of money to buy forms and campaign. No sane person would waste his or her hard earned money for election if the aim of seeking public office is to render selfless service to the electorate. The then ruling party wasted public funds to canvass for votes before the 2015 general elections. These funds were removed from the treasury under the guise of arms procurement to fight the terrorists in the North East (The Punch, April 19th 2015). All these cannot happen in Asia, where we have smart, patriotic and ruthless dictators who have zero tolerance for corruption. So where are we with our liberal democracy now? The current president knows what to do to change the ugly face of Nigerian politics, but the faulty constitution and some useless Acts of parliament are standing as impediments. Our values must be changed. We must drop our individualistic tendencies for societal stability. We must let go of our primordial and ethnic sentiments to attain national unity. Nigeria must be clinically re-engineered so that it can be divested of all the negative clannish tendencies to pave way for integration and social cohesion. Unfortunately, a president who sees the constitution as a holy book cannot achieve this. Only a

leader who can demystify the constitution and do the needful will be successful in this task and he would have laid a solid foundation for the type of democracy that will turn Nigeria to Singapore or Malaysia. This is the *african* democracy. Absolute power has not corrupted absolutely in Asia. It has worked and it is still working. The only exception is in North Korea where we have a psychiatric case.

Another serious problem with the liberal democracy as practised in Nigeria is the bloated size of government. The useless law says that ministers must be appointed from the 36 states. There are 469 federal lawmakers and the states have houses of assembly as noted earlier. This is wasteful. Nigeria cannot be compared with the US in terms of wealth. The state of California is richer than three countries in Africa including Nigeria. This is the reason why the recurrent expenditure is higher than the capital investment. Does democracy mean that all the resources of a country be wasted in running a government at the expense of building infrastructures? Democracy does not also mean the massive importation of items that can be locally produced. This weakens our currency. The thought that there is democracy in Nigeria that will be as strong as it is in the West is an anarchic fallacy. What we have here is elite conspiracy that underdevelops the country and pauperizes the masses which the current president is at pains to change.

4. Concluding remarks

Liberal or constitutional democracy is responsible for the underdevelopment of Nigeria because it is a lawless society. Nigerians don't need civil liberty and political rights. But they need solid and superb infrastructures: stable power supply, good hospitals, good road networks, bridges, potable water, good schools etc. Of what use is the liberty to insult the president or governor when there are no basic amenities that make life interesting? The absence of these amenities is more traumatic than a situation without political rights. So it is preferable to have infrastructures and let go the so-called rights. Nigeria needs economic and infrastructural development like any of the Asian Tigers, not wasteful liberal democracy. Between 1979-1983 and 1999-2015, the only gain from the so-called democracy was the corrupt enrichment of the political elite class at the expense of the impoverished masses.

Nigeria will never make meaningful progress if we continue with this western democracy and waste our patrimony on bloated federal and state governments, bloated national and state legislatures where corrupt politicians are recycled. Even at the risk of committing intellectual suicide as a political scientist, it should be clearly stated that Nigeria obviously needs a Machiavellian dictator who can crush all the institutional impediments for it to attain prosperity and greatness. Heaven will not fall. There should be longevity of regimes to avoid wasting scarce resources on frequent meaningless elections. A courageous and patriotic president like Muhamadu Buhari be fully supported in his efforts to reposition the country. Stiffer punishment like death sentence be given to public officials convicted for corrupt practices to deter others. Presumption of innocence be discarded from our legal system and be replaced with presumption of guilt. Nigeria should adopt the Asian political system that boosts development in the continent.

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