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The Humanistic Imperative in African Politics

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Abstract

A thorough observation of the African continent reveals a continent bedeviled with several vices covering its socio-eco political ambiance. The continent is bedeviled with unemployment, poor infrastructural development, poor work ethics, corporate organizational irresponsibility, nepotism, factionalism, political 'godfatherism', tribalism, ethnicity, social injustice, lack of respect for both procedural and legal justice, religious squabbles, poverty, hunger, poor maintenance culture, insecurity of life and property and etc. The Machiavellian style of leadership has further deepened the African states into retrogression and epileptic development. However, African problems can adequately be solved with the interjection of morality in the term of Humanistic Ethical Paradigm and its two interrelated proposals which are: respect for human dignity as a basis for individual and social action and focus on character as the highest value in the assessment of human personality.

Introduction

The main objective of this paper is to interrogate African socio-eco-political situations and situate them within the purview of the concept of Humanistic

Ethical Paradigm as a necessary way of eliminating the present political and economic violence in Africa as a continent.

The African societies are bedeviled with various crises in their politics, economy, social and cultural experiments. The interactions of the Africans at various levels are obviously characterized with several inhibitions and crude form of violence. This is obviously visible in the fall of moral rectitude in both the leaders and the led. There is lack of moral conscience which is the foundation for all healthy holistic development in any nation in the world.

The continent is presently bedeviled with unemployment, poor infrastructural development, poor work ethics, corporate organizational irresponsibility, nepotism, factionalism, political ‘godfatherism’, political entrepreneurship, tribalism, ethnicity, social injustice, lack of respect for both procedural and legal justices, and religious squabbles, poverty, hunger, poor maintenance culture, insecurity of life and property.

Robert Mugabe underscores the African tragedies thus;

Africa is now home to the world’s largest number of least developed countries. The continent further boasts of the largest refugee population in the world. Furthermore, it is a theatre of endless conflicts, civil strife and gross human right abuses. Whereas standards of living in other continents have risen over time, in Africa, present standards of living are not better than they were two decades ago. High unemployment, inflation, civil strife, poverty, refugee crisis, desertification, disease, malnutrition- the list is endless-appear to be the only legacy the continent is capable of passing from one generation to the other (Mugabe, 1991:22)

The poor state of the continent has led to so many theories attempting to provide the reason the continent has degenerated to the state of repressive political construct and obvious irresponsibility to the plight of the masses.

Methodology

This paper gathers its source of materials from secondary data (Books, Journals, Newspapers, etc.) as the basis of delineating our subject of

discourse. In other words, there was no such case of engaging in primary collection of data through questionnaires.

This study also adopts a conceptual clarification of the concepts in our discourse and engages in an analytic and critical exposition of the subject matters. It should be therefore obvious that this work is a theoretical discourse though having its root in empirical events in Africa. The other subordinate concepts such as Machiavelli, Humanistic Ethical Paradigm, etc. are adequately analyzed in order to provide a strong basis for the development and transformational agenda for Africa.

Discussion

For instance in Nigeria, our peculiar problems have been ascribed to the absence of public spirited leaders.

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigeria character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigeria land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership. I am saying that Nigeria can change today if she discovers leaders who have the will, the ability and the vision (Achebe, 1983:1)

The description given by this great citizen of our 'great' continent is applicable to almost (if not all) African societies. This description was captured in the 1980s; it has however remained the same till date. This has set so many political thinkers and public analysts thinking whether African societies are making any progress.

Also, a foreigner, given his long tenancy in Nigeria, succinctly projects his careful observation about Nigeria (by implication Africa) in this manner:

In Nigeria, the blame for its lost generation falls squarely on the shoulders of its people's leaders—corrupt military dictators and their civilian accomplices who over the past quarter of a century

have humbled a once proud nation through outright incompetence and greed (Maier, 2000: xxx)

It is a uniform discovery of these thinkers that the major problem with Nigeria as it were the whole African continent is traceable to our impulsive leaders whose major goal is the accumulation of private property. Leaders I describe as suffering from 'hypertensive materialism'. That is, uncontrollable desire for material things.

This Scholar accurately captures the overall situations in most African societies.

Despite Africa's vast natural resources, its people remain in the deadly grip of poverty, squalor and destitution while buffeted by environmental degradation and brutal tyranny. At judiciary or an impartial police force or civil service may exist in form but, in many cases, the substance has changed. Operating through non-official networks, the ruler gets his way by bypassing official structures, turns them into his own fiefdom by ensuring that anyone in a position of power in those institutions is either a relative or in some way beholden him. Generally, there is hardly any loyalty to the state itself, let alone to the development of the people. In many African countries the president does not distinguish between the national treasury and his own private bank account, or between the police force or army and his private militia (Nnoruka, 2003:173)

This is the situation of Nigeria political leaders who wedge the power of governance. The treasury of the nation has become the target of every one who desires to go into politics. As a matter of fact, the idea of politics is that of quick means of generating financial abundance and living in a paradise that is immune from human suffering, pain, poverty; in a world of complete pleasure for the politician and his allies.

Not only does the politician concentrate on amassing wealth for himself, also those who were party to his political enthronement, whether with the consent of the people or not, will be paid back from the nation's treasury.

With the current political situation in Africa, it is obvious that our problem is first and foremost that of political leadership. However, to my mind, I locate the problem basically as a moral problem which is the basis of unethical leadership practices in Africa. That explains why I argue in this paper for the interjection of humanistic ethical paradigm into our socio-eco political activities.

To my mind, we should desist from blaming our peculiar problem on colonialism and imperialism. Despite our wealth, the continent is still at the lower ebb of development, ravaged with different kinds of crises. The continent is rated as harbouring some of the poorest and most corrupt countries in the world. Africa is blessed with abundant human and natural resources both renewable and non-renewable. She is blessed with mineral, physical, biological and energy resources ranging from fishery resources, timber, water resources, wildlife, medicinal plants, mineral resources, ornamental, food and cash crops.

Despite all these, Africa is still reputed to be an un-developing continent. This is because those who are in position to judiciously and equitably distribute these resources live on the principle of radical political egoism, using political power for the advancement of selfishness.

Lamenting the sorry state of the African societies, this Scholar posits:

If we were to be very honest with ourselves, we surely would not find it too difficult to be convinced of the fact that Africans have been irresponsible and harmful to Africa in terms of self-governance (Agyeman, 2003:333)

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Machiavelli and Nietzsche: A Reinvention in African Politics

An observation of African leadership style and political land scale reveals a replica of Machiavellian Prince who should pretend to be good in order to access the political power in the state; and Nietzschean Superman who has killed the idea of God and thereby reinvented the Master Morality as against the slave morality that embodies the concepts of love, compassion and human sympathy.

Both Machiavelli and Nietzsche separated politics and morality contrary to the efforts of early political thinkers to grand politics on morality. Both Plato and Aristotle attempted the provision of viable social order for the polity advancing the need for a just society whose end will be the good of the people. They set out to provide a society that would promote harmonious peaceful co-existence among its people.

Machiavelli who wrote from the background of his days has been misinterpreted and wrongly applied by African leaders whether directly or indirectly.

A prince...must have no other object or thought, nor acquire skill in anything, except war, its organization, and its discipline. The art of war is all that is expected of a ruler;...The first way to lose your state is to neglect the art of war; the first way to win a state is to be skilled in the art of war (Machiavelli, 1961:47)

The fight for State's power of governance by the different political parties in Africa is conducted in the manner of Machiavelli's art of war. The statements such as 'do or die' election credited to the former president of the Fourth Republic in Nigeria, between 1999 to 2007, is nothing but a statement emanating from a disciple of Machiavellian Prince and Nietzschean Superman who has no regard for the people.

So he must never let his thought stray from military exercises, which he must pursue more vigorously in peace than in war. These exercises can be both physical and mental. A wise prince must observe these rules; he must never take things easy in times of peace, but rather use the latter assiduously, in order to be able to reap the profit in times of adversity (Machiavelli, 1961:47, 49)

This is the basis of warfare conception of politics in Africa. We do not intend to indict Machiavelli for our negative and warfare conception of politics in the continent but rather to analysis our politics in line with Machiavelli's immoral stipulations for political leaders.

The political leaders should ever be ready for war even in the time of peace. Africa political leaders tour this line of reasoning. That explains the reason behind political violence resulting from our elections. The massive election rigging is a further demonstration of Machiavellian prescription of warfare politicking.

...taking into account, he (the prince) will find that some of the things that appear to be virtues will, if he practices them, ruin him, and some of the things that appear to be vices will bring him security and prosperity (Machiavelli, 1961:50)

He opposes morality in politics believing that morality and politics are not compatible. This conception is extravagantly wrong because ethics/morality, attempt to promote good and virtuous behaviours in all interpersonal relationships in order to avoid situations described by Thomas Hobbes in the State of nature as 'war of all against all' (*bellum omnium contra omnes*), and 'man is wolf to man' (*homo lupus homini*).

...there are two ways of fighting: by law or by force. The first way is natural to men, and the second to beasts. But as the first way often proves inadequate; one must needs have recourse to the second. So, as a prince is forced to know how to act like a beast.....one must know how to colour one's actions and to be a great liar and deceiver. Men are so simple, and so much creatures of circumstance, that the deceiver will always find someone ready to be deceived. A prince...need not necessarily have all the good qualities...but he should certainly appear to have them (Machiavelli, 1961:56)

This possibly explains the reason falsehood is conceived as the hallmark of politics in Africa. Developed countries of the world could prosecute a public office holder for distorting the truth. But in Africa the art of truth distortion is seen as an art of political ingenuity.

Machiavelli posits that the ruler should pretend to be compassionate, faithful to his word, kind, guileless and devout (patriotic). Whereas, according to him, these qualities will undermine his political authority. He should pretend to be all these in order to win the confidence of the people.

From Machiavelli's point of view, the ends justify the means. He argues that the main purpose of politics is the cruel possession of political power not giving cognizance to the method or means of attaining political authority.

The present decade of democratic governance in several African states attests to the Machiavellian crude and rude pursuit of political authority as the ultimate goal of politics. Contrary to Machiavelli and his African disciples' practices, the ultimate goal of politics is rendering service to the citizens whose consent is germane to the realization of the democratic processes. But at present, the consent of the people is less important in the political processes in most African states.

For Nietzsche, the slave morality is a weak morality that is not fit for rulers. In order to ensure ruthless immoral values in the society, Nietzsche postulated the death of God removing the sense of a supersensible being who will judge all immoral acts.

With these styles of leadership discussed above, the Africa societies returned to the Hobbesian jungle where man begins to prey on his fellow man in the bid of self-survival. The people became disconnected from the state given the nefarious activities of these unethical, Machiavellian political leaders. This kind of leadership style proposes individualism as against the African disposition to communalism which is a system characterized by the idea of brotherhood and oneness. The individualistic nature of this leadership style deliberately led to the disconnection between the people and their elected leaders who wedge the State's power of governance.

This scholar underscores this perfectly.

The people of Nigerian either do not understand the sanctified institution of the State nor do they have any commitment to it. The Modern Nigeria state and its socio-economic formation lack an organic relation with the traditions of the people. It has not vibrantly integrated individuals, groups and institutions in such a way as to create polity expressing the aspiration of the people (Dukor, 1991:62)

This non-integration of the people into the state, in most Africa countries, led to the total separation of the people from the state, everyone seeking to survive on his/her own.

In this bid of self-survival adventure, morality becomes a derogatory construct in our socio-eco political lexicon. Those who eye political positions do so as a means of escaping from the general poverty the political leaders submerged the country into through miss-governance and misappropriation of public funds.

The leaders obviously have no respect for the lives of fellow citizens resulting into assassinations of several political activists and fellow political aspirants. This is still the Machiavellian concept of war as a central value in African politics.

The crude looting of national treasury is the exercise of lack of respect for human dignity (the citizens whose lives should be bettered through equitable distribution of social wealth and burden).

However, how do we remedy these unfortunate situations?

...the greatest obstacle to the development of our country is immorality, corruption, dishonesty, fraud, embezzlement of public funds, selfishness etc. it is only a moral regeneration that can cure our country and remove the greatest obstacles obstructing her development (Omoregbe, 2003: 387)

Africa must begin to pay attention to morality as one of the major ways of curbing immoral and illegal practices in all strata of our society. Our quest for development must not neglect the ethical imperative of development.

Edo Utok points out this poignantly in respect to Africa development.

What is required for Africa to develop is more than the acquisition and application of scientific knowledge. Development has an ethical component which Africans could neglect at their own peril (Utok, 1998: 279)

Conclusion/Recommendation **Humanistic Ethical Paradigm**

Our society should begin to embrace this concept as a way of introducing ethical culture in our interpersonal relationship across socio-eco-political and cultural milieu in Africa. The application should transcend across all age groups and institutions be it social, educational, political, economy and etc.

This mental consciousness of the imperative of morality in any society can begin to pave way for our desired holistic development.

There is a need for our society to embrace this concept in order to build a stable social order which is a pre-condition for development. We need this concept to be able to build a socio-eco political system void of corruption and oppression of man by man be it Leaders Vs Leaders or Leaders Vs Led or Led Vs Led.

More so, for the goal of society to be achieved-that of satisfying the needs of its people through mutual co-operation among them-there is a need in contemporary Africa societies to access all human beings on the basis of this concept.

This paradigm has two interrelated parts:

- (i) Respect for human dignity as a basis for individual and social action. *The Humanistic Imperative in African Politics*
- (ii) Focus on character as the highest value in the assessment of human personality.

The first part refers to paying attention to the value (dignity) or importance of fellow human beings whenever one is to act either individually or collectively in the society. This part should be embraced to the detriment of the politics or economic of violence which does not regard the humanity in others.

The economy of violence is a process whereby goods and services which are injurious to the health of innocent buyers are manufactured and distributed. While the Politics of violence entails the process of maiming, assassinating, blackmailing etc during political processes.

If Africans embrace this idea of respecting the humanity in others, we will be able to see a complete deterioration of the ideas of both immoral business practices and unethical, corrupt, violent political practitioners.

Both our informal and formal educational institutions should begin to train citizens (from the early age till adulthood) on the importance of respecting the humanity in others. This is the basis of the humanistic ethical paradigm. It forbids us from treating 'others' as mere objects to be overcome in our bid for self-survival. They are fellow human beings in the boat of life whose company is necessary for the realization of our personhood.

This first part is similar to the second formulation of Kantian Categorical Imperative.

Acts so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end and never as means only (Kant, 1978: 29)

This formulation accommodates the possibility of emphasizing ourselves above others; however it discourages us from undermining the humanity or dignity of others through our personal pursuits.

The second phase of the humanistic ethical paradigm enjoins us to focus on characters as the highest value in the assessment of human personality. An immoral man should not be exalted in our polity but rather should be punished so as to deter those who may likely want to embrace his path.

The opposite seems to be the case in the present African societies where men and women (especially embattled political leaders who have been indicted for corruption) go about gleaning chieftaincy titles as though our society seems to have a lot of respect for corrupt public office holders. It as though the chieftaincy titles are compensations for the evil done to our societies or the reward for not being caught and jailed.

What this further does is a total demolition of ethical imperatives in our society. This is because these corrupt leaders who are rewarded with chieftaincy titles as, perhaps, a recognition of their smartness at embezzling public funds, become models to youths that are believed to be the leaders of tomorrow. This has been the way corruption has been bequeathed on us as a peculiar legacy from one generation to another in Africa.

The humanistic ethical paradigm enjoins us to celebrate human character in our assessment or evaluation of a person rather than the wealth of the person. In other word, our major consideration will be the method/means of acquisition of wealth and not the wealth itself.

To my mind, we are not supposed to eulogize former corrupt political leaders, whether military or civil, who have failed in our assessment of human character as a determinant basis for public office holders. They should be resisted because they have only succeeded in perpetrating corruption as a constant experience in our social-eco political milieu.

In the same vein, business mogul whose wealth is discovered to have been generated through immoral practices or possibly through his association with political leaders who must have transferred the nation's wealth to him as a capital for business transaction should not win our respect/praise either.

In the spirit of traditional African society, these corrupt leaders are not persons (i.e real human beings). This is because the attainment of personhood is related to the idea of discharging certain community/society-demanding moral responsibilities. Thus, one is a person if one lives within the dictate of the moral values in the community.

For Wiredu and Gyekye, the acquired status of personhood is understood not simply as a matter of gradual socialization but as attaining and practicing values that lead to the well-being of one's community.

Gyekye argues:

...the judgment that a human being is "not a person, made on the basis of that individual's consistent morality reprehensive conduct, implies that the pursuit or practice of moral virtue is intrinsic to the conception of personhood in African thought...the evaluative statement opposite to this is he "is a person" means, 'he has a good character, he is peaceful not troublesome, he is kind, he has respect for others; he is humble (Gyekye, 1997:50)

The implication of this is that the people that should attract respect are those who have through their impeccable characters and moral rectitude contributed to the good of the society positively. The people that have not or that did not abuse the political power entrusted into their care are the real persons in the African sense. Such people should be rewarded and venerated or possibly be hero worshipped as against this present hero worshipping of corrupt leaders with chieftaincy titles by traditional rulers, awards of recognition by corporate organizations and national titles by the Federal Governments.

In conclusion, to my mind the careful application and implementation of Humanistic Ethical Paradigm as a new value in our socio-eco political lexicon in Africa will lead to a complete overhaul of the present immoral political and economic constructs in our society.

- (i) Respect for human dignity as a basis for individual and social action.
- (ii) Focus on character as the highest value in the assessment of human personality.

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