

Collaborative Silence and Some Unguided Prerogative Utterances of Nigerian Leaders

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Abstract

This essay attempts to demystify the silence and non-prosecution syndrome surrounding unguided prerogative utterances of Nigerian leaders as a contemporary culture, which has continued to threaten the unity and stability of the country. In doing this, the silence and withdrawal of key Nigerian agencies, such as; the judiciary, the legislature, the anti-graft agencies and civil society groups, are highlighted to make the point clear. The essay philosophically discusses the reckless prerogative utterances of Nigerian leaders, while contending that certain aspects of Nigeria's political culture, such as; political immunity, recklessness of leaders, extra-constitutionality of political powers, abuse of executive veto, 'sacred cows' syndrome and the hatred of Nigerian leaders for the common man; must undergo reforms, if prerogative utterances of leaders must be prevented from destroying completely existing political institutions in the country.

Key Words: unguided, prerogative, utterances, Nigerian Leaders, judiciary, legislature, anti-graft agencies, civil society groups

Introduction

Noam Chomsky, is one among many author, who has provided one of the most generally acceptable academic definition and meaning of 'unguided prerogative utterances of leaders'. He looks at the concept of 'unguided prerogative utterances of leaders' as an abusive use of language as a political

machinery for confronting the political views of others while maintaining an illusion of exercising legitimate political freedom. Chomsky sees them as violence to democracy in the same way as dictatorship is defined by violence (2).

From an everyday dictionary understanding of the concept the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary has explained that 'prerogatives powers' refer to a set of "privileged powers", by which it meant such powers as; immunity, extra-constitutionality, extra-legality, declarative veto and powers of sanction; which are constitutionally or customarily granted to leaders to, from time to time, engage in actions or utterances that paint him as living above the law, whenever it becomes necessary to do so in pursuit of supreme national interests. The Oxford dictionary goes on to define "unguided utterances of political leaders" as those reckless, abusive or misleading comments, speeches and statements of political leaders which often exist to harm society (Oxford Dictionary 9th ed. 2005).

Abiola Akinwuta has rather taken a middle course by explaining that those 'utterances of leaders', which have here been called 'unguided', are a multiplicity of misleading statements including those of; political blackmail, hate-speeches, inciting comments, negative political propaganda and destructive political criticisms, just to mention but a few (48).

Lucinda and Oonegh have made a strong case in all of contemporary attempts by maintaining that throughout socio-political, humano-economic and politico-legal philosophy, Locke seems to have presented one of the most acceptable and all encompassing definition by defining 'unguided prerogative utterances of political leaders' as; the diversionary deployment of 'prerogative powers' to harm society by means of a despotic application of unacceptably inhuman and misleading political utterances and attitudes in politics and society (4).

'Unguided prerogative utterances of leaders' are by this fact a threat to the growth of political institutions; And all of social, economic, legal and political philosophy, have been vehement in condemning all 'unguided prerogative utterances of leaders' as; 'illegal', 'unconstitutional', and for the most part, they all agree on 'unguided prerogative utterances of political leaders', as the 'abusive' exercise of prerogative powers through the deployment of indecent and unacceptable political utterances, which must be prosecuted as a

violation of the law and the constitution whenever they come to the notice of society (<http://www.legal-dictionary.org/prerogative..>).

Yet, most contemporary states, including Nigeria, have preferred to endanger the growth and strength of political institutions by remaining complacent to the reckless, illegal and unconstitutional actions and utterances of top political leaders, especially, present and past presidents of Africa and its third world counterparts.

The current essay is, therefore, a critical exposition of ‘unguided utterances of Nigerian leaders’, while pointing out from Nigeria’s political culture, some primitive elements of political powers, such as; political immunity, recklessness of leaders, extra-constitutionality, executive veto, extra-legality of utterances, sacred-cow syndrome and royal nature of political powers; pointing out also the key agencies in the country, such as; the judiciary, the legislature, the anti-graft agencies and civil society groups; which must undergo total reforms, if unguided prerogative utterances of Nigerian leaders, must be stopped from destroying existing political institutions in the country.

Highlight of Some Unguided Prerogative Utterances of Nigerian Leaders

In Nigeria, unguided prerogative utterances of Leaders, is a politically motivated abuse of prerogative powers. Successive military leaders in the country, did what they did, arguing out their ill-fated utterances as a kind of military diplomacy. Under successive democratic regimes, it has been fashionable to rationalize abusive utterances as advanced political rhetoric.

Successive Military Leaders in Nigeria and the Rationalization of Prerogative Utterances as ‘Military Diplomacy’

On this long list of actors, is the then Military Head of State between 1966 and 1975, General Yakubu Gowon. His denial of the reign of peace by his 1966 rejection of the pre-civil war Aburi Accord through his ruthless declaration of the accord as “needing further examination” is a case in point. Although this utterance greatly provoked the already agitated Biafran nation, and it is believed to be a contributive cause to the country’s genocide here called the country’s civil war of 1966 -1969; it is quite surprising that Gowon himself believed his highly militarized utterance to be right, being for him, true military diplomacy borne out of necessity to prevent a worst case scenario (Ojukwu 2).

A seemingly major reason for this extreme political rascality was possibly his assurance of immunity and awareness of his unreserved veto as a sitting Head of State. Hence, it appears at first sight that it was his prerogative to declare war on an unyielding enemy of the state, the Biafra faction. But the war itself, which his unguided prerogative utterances helped to cause, could not be said to be in the public interest as all prerogative utterances are expected to be; but in the interest of the military party which put him in power as a Military Head of State. Gowon clearly believed, though wrongly, that it was his prerogative to keep the country united by means of a genocidal war, even when other options were also available, but it is hardly justifiable to achieve same through an international conflict in which ten million Nigerians and Biafrans lost their lives.

'Absolute power', it is often said, 'corrupts absolutely'. This is true in all cases of abusive use of prerogative powers under successive military governments in Nigeria. Tyodzua Atim is apt to say that by bringing the country's civil war to an official end with his "No Victor no Vanquished" speech, Gowon was making positive diplomacy seem to be the right political attitude to be adopted by leaders in the country (Atim 133). But not long, after words, the Political Bureau reports that Gowon went back to his old self. He, in those subsequent post-civil war years of oil boom, re-enacted the pre-civil war drama when he engaged the country in another political tension through another politically provocative comment, which to this day, seems to have canonized the culture of 'reckless spending' among serving leaders in the country (32).

The situation is one in which Gowon's greed for power caused him in his post-civil war oil boom year of 1974, to do as he did, by "suspending indefinitely" the transition programme, which was meant to bring in a democratic government in 1975. In the words of Onuoha Brain, the money meant for the transition soon entered into wrong hands and made his government so corrupt. Consequently, in defense of allegations of corruption against his government before a coalition of foreign media, Gowon is held to have said that "the problem with Nigeria is not how to make but spend (waste) its resources" (19).

Gowon clearly thought it was his prerogative to do or say just anything that he wanted to as a leader. In Gowon, like several other leaders in Nigeria, there seemed to be this neo-colonial imperialism in his thought-pattern that whether his acts or utterances did anything negatively, meant nothing to

him. So long as being a Military General and a serving Head of State allowed him to stay strong in power and in control of the oil wealth of the country, he was content with such unguided prerogative behaviours.

Several other instances of unguided and reckless prerogative gestures and utterances of military leaders, took place during the remaining years of military rule in the country. Elogo Omame believes that notable among them was the politically destructive declaration by the Babangida's administration in 1986 that 'economic recovery in Nigeria should be thought about as a gradual process' (3).

Babangida said this at the heat of tough economic sanctions on the country. Majubaolu Olufunke Okome has clarified that these sanctions were mainly because Babangida's so-called Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and its 100% emphasis on 'local content', deeply hurt the international markets as it cut off most of European and American markets from exporting into Nigeria. Hence, economic recession soon set in because, back at home, the Babangida's administration could not effectively manage local industries. Consequently, when his administration was challenged over the harsh economic realities in the country, Babangida defended his administration by making a highly philosophical argument that 'economic recession anywhere must be seen as a gradual process' (62-78).

To this day, no leader in Nigeria seems to take economic improvement of the country seriously, believing it their prerogative decision to improve or not to improve the economy at their own whims and caprices. Yet, such an understanding of prerogative powers is purely diversionary and harmful to the socio-economic progress of the country.

Successive Democratic Regimes in Nigeria and the Rationalization of Unguided Prerogative Utterances as 'Advanced Political Rhetoric'

In one such instances under successive democratic rule the incumbent president Olusegun Obasanjo, while on one of his campaign trail went on to effect another political damage believing within him that it was his prerogative task as incumbent president of the country to deliver good election turn-over for his political party in the said election, even if that meant shutting down the whole country to enable him have this victory. In the circumstances, Obasanjo went all out in this ugly drama, to overstretch the limits of his prerogative powers as an incumbent president by declaring

the said 2007 election a “do or die” election (Alade 01). According to Dayo Alade;

When president Olusegun Obasanjo proclaimed the 2007 election a “do or die” affair, while on a campaign trail, no one knew he meant deploying the Army, Mobile Police, Anti-Riot Squad, Nigerian Customs and the INEC to collude with the ruling PDP to ensure election victory at all costs(2).

His comment got understood by opposition All Nigerian People’s Party (ANPP) as an intention of the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP) to mass-rig the said election no matter what it takes. Hence, both the ruling PDP and the opposition ANPP, took turns to recruit political tugs, snipers, ballot-snatchers, agents of intimidation, collaborators with election bodies and coercive security teams, ahead of the much to be feared election (Alade 3).

The “Do or Die” Mantra” eventually paid off as the ruling PDP won almost all the political seats in the 2007 elections. But it soon introduced the impunity of Pre-Election Killings, which took many lives, including the assassination of Chief Harry Marshall and A.K. Dikibos of the opposition ANPP.

In a different drama, this time, following emotional frustration by opposition All Progressive Party (APP) in the 2011 election that the ruling People’s Democratic Party (PDP), completely rigged them out of the 2011 general elections (Smith 1-2); The presidential flag-bearer of the opposition APP in the election, former Military Head of State now President Muhammadu Buhari, was reported to have in an inciting post-2011 election comment, steered (incited) political violence when he said that “Nigerians should rise and defend their votes” (Tayo 2)

Consequent upon Buhari’s post-2011 election reckless comment; in the Northern part of the country, his utterances resulted in a post-2011 election violence in which 10 NYSC members and hundreds of others died and properties were destroyed in large scale including Buhari’s own residence. Buhari did all of this, believing it was his political prerogative as an intending president in the said election to protect the country from imposition of leaders (Adam 4).

Nduyihe and Idonor have explained that the then leadership of President Goodluck Jonathan, went on to form a 12-man panel of investigation. But the prosecuting machinery was limited by the all too often assumed political immunity of present and past presidents in Nigeria. The committee ended up making only a recommendation; eventually, the probe panel submitted their report criminalising all forms of ethno-religious violence and inciteful comments, which was never implemented, hence, it embolden Buhari to do worse things (2).

Consequently, in one such episode, this time as a presidential flag-bearer of opposition All Progressive Congress (APC) in the 2015 election; General Buhari is reported to have said in his Hausa version of an interview with the media that “if there should arise a repeat of the 2011 mass-rigging drama in the 2015 election, then, “both the dogs and the baboons shall be soaked in blood” (Ezikiel, Umoru and Akinrefun 1).

According to Ezikiel, Umoru and Akinrefun, the saving grace is that Buhari’s opposition APC turned out to win against the incumbent PDP as it was expected. In the absence of this, it is difficult to tell the scale of violence that would have characterized the repeat of the 2011 election in 2015 (1).

Whenever a system is too quiet to restrain their leaders, the unrestrained act of one leader soon becomes a ‘political culture’ for others to emulate. Accordingly, Ukwu Jerrywright has pointed out that this was the case with the political figure of former Vice President of Nigeria, Alhaju Atiku Abubakar, who is held to have quoted Franz Fanon in those tensed moments which preceded the 2011 election that “those who make peaceful change impossible make violent change inevitable” (Ukwu 4).

There is clearly nothing in this statement that connected the conduct of the 2011 elections with importation of illegal arms into the country, before, during and after the 2011 elections in the country. Yet, it is a statement of fact that those pre-2011 election comments by politicians all made the atmosphere in the country so politically tensed that people were not sure of the uncertainties ahead.

May be as an act of politicians; may be as a political accident; but somehow, Navy reports soon afterwards began to make almost daily-based arrest of this or that vessel heading for Nigeria with illegal arms. Vice-President Atiku might have, as a presidential aspirant in the election, thought it to be one of his prerogatives to give Nigeria the requisite political change.

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But it is hardly the case that he would be justified using 'threats' to accomplish same, without facing the wrought of the law.

The case is one in which, 'unguided prerogative utterances in the country', whether they be those of 'leaders' or those of 'citizens yet to practice the said culture when they become leaders', as utterances, they only operate to change society negatively and not positively. Therefore, to ignore the sweeping and manifold ways in which political language is used to position people in relation to one another in the political state is to have a partial and distorted conception of political societies (Earl 19). This is made worse when countries like Nigeria simply sits, fold its hands, does nothing and pretends as if there are no manifold ways by means of which language is used to distract the polity.

Conclusion

To think of unguided prerogative utterances of political leaders in Nigeria is to admit in existence, a collection of political speeches, comments, political gestures, political signs, political codes, political symbols, political attitudes and utterances of leaders; all of which operate to confirm the fact that political leaders have misused or abused their prerogative powers without conceding to judicial or legislative prosecution; This non-prosecution of recurrent victims, is clearly a problem in contemporary Nigerian. The problem as Ukwu Jerewwright observes may be captured as follows;

The Nigerian political class and elites; out of desperation, regularly over heat the polity with careless utterances and comments that are capable of dividing the nation. These comments are usually before an election when the stakes are usually high for who goes for what in the politics. Rightly so, these comments are condemned by many political observers, analysts and commentators because of their inciting nature, devisive tendencies and also violent tones (Local News 1)

Nigerian political leaders, being an elite group and members of the political class, their reckless unguided prerogative utterances are hardly taken

seriously, let alone the country making proactive moves to prosecute them as culprits promoting such an unhealthy political culture. More than this, the problem is even more endemic than first meets the eye, being in issue that unguided prerogative utterances is a culture which is practiced both by leaders and citizens of Nigeria without any thoughts of prosecution.

In Nigerian, citizens are constantly heard, as it has been coined in the local pidgin language, '*chancing*' one another while in training for what eventually becomes the leadership culture of 'unguided prerogative utterance of leaders; They keep '*chancing*' thus: "Do you know who I am?", "We shall see when the time comes", "Who do you think you are?". This so-called '*chancing*' among the ordinary citizens, is what becomes perfected as 'unguided prerogative utterances of leaders', when citizens eventually become leaders. How, then, can such a political culture be uprooted from Nigeria, unless through the good will of political leaders, the cooperation of ordinary citizens, and the effectiveness of key Nigerian agencies, such as; the judiciary, the legislature, the anti-graft agencies and a coalition of civil society groups in the country? .

First of all, the failure of election conducts in 1965, 1975 and in 1983, brought upon the country a multi-faceted kind of political impunity, expressed as the country's many years of military rule. It is, therefore, surprising that the leap from colonialism to military rule in 1966; and then, from military rule to democratic rule in 1999, seem to have changed nothing in the country's political history. Politically, the country has all the agencies, including the judiciary, the legislature, the anti-graft agencies, civil society groups and other agencies, which drive and direct the course of democracy, but all of these to no avail.

This essay has, up to this point. examined 'unguided prerogative utterances of Nigerian leaders' through the country's post-colonial, military and democratic era, contending in the process that, certain aspects of the country's political culture that both aid and abate the culture of unguided prerogative utterances of top political leader, such as; political immunity, recklessness of leaders, extra-constitutionality of political powers, abuse of executive veto, 'sacred cows' syndrome and the hatred of Nigerian leaders for the common man; MUST undergo REFORMS, if the prerogative utterances of leaders in the country must be prevented from destroying completely the few existing political institutions still surviving the country.

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