



The Elite Theoretical Nexus in The Nigerian National Question

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Abstract: *This study probes the elite theoretical nexus in the Nigerian national question. It questions the dubious nationalism of the country's elite and highlights the indices of perfidies in the worldviews of these elites, particularly the political class. The theoretical framework of the study is of course the elite theory. The study found that the character of the national political elite in Nigeria is tainted by a tripartite notoriety. These elites advocate the indivisibility of the Nigerian union at the central level (because of the petrodollar that is statutorily pooled at the center which they crassly dismember as a class). At their home regional levels, they furtively patronize the agitations for autonomy that even border on insurgency. They finally go to the den of the dreaded agitators (and other societal infidels) to recruit their personal guards because they (the elite) have completely stolen the funds appropriated for state security purposes. The study concludes that for the Nigerian state to continue to survive as one nation, the political elite in Nigeria must commit to resolving the national question or at least bringing the inherent vexing issues to the barest minimum. It is recommended in the study that more concerted efforts be made by civil society organizations in calling the nation's degraded elite to order.*

Keywords: *The elite, Power Elite, Elite Theory, National Question, The Nigerian State*

INTRODUCTION

According to Fadakinte (2013, p.284), there is an imperial power at the centre of governance in Nigeria, which uses its powers in the most reckless and irresponsible manner. Who is this imperial power or who are they? Shaapera (2012, p.25) further contends that the Nigerian variant of state is incapable and incapacitated in ensuring "good life" for its citizens, as the chief end of the state. We therefore wonder in this study what has made the state so incapable or who / what incapacitated it? Then in the viewpoints of Adah & Abasilim (2015, p.275), development is said to be a predictor that determines whether a country is progressing or not. But a critical assessment of Nigeria's developmental trajectories, despite her abundance in human, natural and material resources reveals that the country is yet to achieve the desired expectations as clamored by her citizens. What is the relationship between the national question and development / underdevelopment in this country? Lewis (2006, p. 83) further highlights in a currently germane submission:

There is no question, however, that Nigeria has failed profoundly as a state, a nation, and an economy. Central authorities cannot provide stable governance, in the sense of effective legitimate rule and essential public goods. The country's boundaries may provisionally be settled, but the basis of political community -

the idea of Nigeria - is fiercely contested.

In fiercely contesting the very idea of a Nigerian nation, the national question is being further tabled. Lewis (2006, p. 89) thus posits that Nigeria's crisis of governance is equally conspicuous as ruling elites and public institutions have not provided essential collective goods, such as physical infrastructure, the rule of law, or legitimate symbols of state authority and political community. But the ruling elites have dubiously provided their own egotistical and even non-essential goods in the same state where their perfidies have obstructed the provision of essential collective goods for the generality of citizens. It is against this backdrop therefore that we interrogate in this study the elite theoretical nexus in the Nigerian national question. We principally utilized the secondary source of data in our analysis. Invariably, the research framework is the elite theoretical framework. The methodology of the study is logical argumentation.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study's theoretical framework is indeed the elite theory. Citing Haralambos & Heald (1999) therefore, Ibietan & Ajayi (2015, p.15) highlight that there are several versions of the elite theory, ranging from that developed by Vilfredo Pareto and Gaetano Mosca, to those of C.W. Mills, Floyd Hunter and Raymond Aron. Furthermore, Haralambos & Heald narrate that the earlier versions of the theory emphasized personal attributes of leaders, which aided their hold or dominance in power positions, while later versions dwelt more on the institutional framework of society. Still citing Haralambos & Heald (1999, pp.108-109) Ibietan & Ajayi (2015, p.16) further emphasize:

- (1) Elite owes its power to its internal organisation and forms a united and cohesive minority in the face of an unorganized and fragmented mass.
- (2) Major decisions which affect society are taken by the elite, and these decisions usually reflect the interest of the elite rather than the wishes of the majority.
- (3) The mass of the population is largely controlled and manipulated by the elite, passively accepting the propaganda which justifies elite rule.
- (4) Major change in society occurs when one elite replaces another. Pareto refers to this as "circulation of elites" and he noted that "all elite tend to become decadent". They decay in quality and lose their vigour. They may become soft and ineffective with the pleasures of easy living and the privileges of power.
- (5) The rule by a minority is an inevitable feature of social life and that the ruling minority is superior to the mass of the population who lack capacity for self-government and require the leadership and guidance of an elite. Mosca (in Haralambos, 1999: 109) hinged his argument on a historical claim that in all societies, there is "a class that rules and a class that is ruled". Mosca corroborated that "the first class, always the less numerous, performs all political functions, monopolizes power and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class is directed and controlled by the first".
- (6) Pareto typified modern democracies as merely another form of elite domination. Mosca averred that democracy could be government of the people, it might even be government for the people, but it could never be government by the people as elite rule remained inevitable.

THE NIGERIAN STATE: A CONCISE CHARACTERIZATION

We define a state in this study as a politically constituted entity existing under a centralized government. And a specific state may still be imbued with some peculiar or even non-peculiar attributes or character. What then is the character of the Nigerian state? Citing Adejumobi (1991) therefore, Olaopa, Ogundari, Akindele & Hassan (2012, p.47) posit that the entity called Nigeria, born in 1914, after the amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates, was a by-product of a "fraudulent" social contract and not of a "negotiated will" of the wielded parts. In other words, they argue, Nigeria is a country formed through forceful amalgamation of its constituent parts without proper consultation about the willingness of these parts to federate by the colonial government. The sole rationale for the then colonial government's action was accordingly the expediency of savage commercial interests and economic imperialism (Olaopa, Ogundari, Akindele & Hassan, 2012, p.47). The problem however is that the colonial fraud has been succeeded by a more sinister domestic hegemony and the expediency of savage commercialism has continued unabated (several decades after independence).

Ojefia (2004, p.2) describes the character of the Nigerian state as interventionist and violent. It is not very clear to us what this characterization denotes but it is taken in this study to mean a retrograde attribute - an insalubrious representation. It is therefore a nonconcrete state in Nigeria in which the feelings of the subaltern citizens are immaterial. Democracy is accordingly promoted by the state without the system of government translating into the good life for the citizens. Development is further propagated but it keeps producing more of contradictions than comforts for the masses. At one end of the spectrum, the country was recently being celebrated as the largest economy in Africa. But while the occasioning partying was ongoing, the same country was called to order by the announcement of an acute economic recession and the remainder citizens other than the mendacious political and economic elite (the power elite) became bewildered.

Thus at independence the common enemy was eliminated and the masses were confronted with an indigenous ruling class which was content to inherit the colonial economy with no aim of transforming it (Fadakinte, 2013, p.280). Several decades down the line therefore the character of the state remains under tender with the elite dubiously bidding for the different parts of its reconstruction. The colonial economy even had an identifiable purpose geared towards the feeding of the imperial homeland (while availing the crumbs of the economic activities to the colonial subjects). In the postcolonial state of Nigeria however only warlocks and magicians may attempt a definitive classification of the direction of the national political economy. Thus, argues Fadakinte (2013, p.283) the nature and character of the Nigerian state, since independence cannot guarantee free and fair elections nor can it ensure violent and crisis free elections and this is because the character of the dominant class is not in tune with the liberal ideology. And that is also because the dominant class does not possess the democratic ethos, such as tolerance, class consciousness and democratic temper to engage in class competition and politics (Fadakinte, 2013, p.283). In both politics and economics therefore the state continues to dance in paranormal decibels.

The Nigerian state we opine further inhibits education. Hence, between investments in education and questionable funding of democracy, the state opts for the latter because of the entrenched interests in the polity that would loot the ostensible democracy funds. The loathing of learning by the state naturally leads to the enormous chasm between the qualifications obtained by the products of the nation's schools and the needs of the society (Anho, 2011; Asiyai, 2013; Ahmed, Umar & Paul, 2015; Francis, 2015). An educated artisan appears like an anathema in the country while certificated misfits roam the country even to the point of flaunting their dubious degrees as members of the highest legislative organs in the country. The leadership selection process in the Nigerian state has indeed continued to produce and accommodate even at the highest echelon of leadership, individuals with doubtful educational pedigrees. Such individuals have accordingly led the state consistently in the backward regard in national educational strides.

For instance, in the Nigerian state of the 21st century, there are no rooms on yearly basis for hundreds of thousands of young citizens who on completion of high school studies desire further education. There is also lack of alternative thoughts in the positive trajectories on how to engage the productive energies of these disordered adolescents. It suffices to conclude in the imaginations of the elites in educational planning that such broods do not belong to the educationally disadvantaged states in the country (Adesulu, 2016; Iruoma, 2017). Then among the most amazing solutions to have emanated from the national educational thinkers in the recent history of Nigeria (on how to move the state forward) in the face of unemployment and the burgeoning graduation of unemployable people by the schools, is the introduction of a new subject amalgam into the national school curriculum - Religion and National Values.

Under this setting, Christian and Islamic Religious Studies would now come under one subject umbrella, in addition to national values, in a state where the national question has remained a vexatious issue, with religion being one of the most provoking components of the inherent anxieties. Of course this new trajectory of educational thinking in the Nigerian state must be viewed as a euthanasia tendency, within an overall context of a national incapacity to resolve the national question. The Christian groups in the country have been rejecting the policy (Ikuomola & Omokhunu, 2016; Nwachukwu, 2017; Onyedika-Ugoeze, 2017).

A critical aspect of the Nigerian state's character therefore is locatable in the colour of the affluence and affliction simultaneously emitted by the state (Ibeanu, 2008). Hence, we find in the same country a stupendous elite affluence in the midst of some egregious subaltern affliction. Then, the affliction of a specific region of the country crystallizes into affluence for the rest of the other regions. We are here alluding to national inequities and inequalities as amplified by the lingering Niger Delta conundrum. Shaapera (2012, p.25) opines that why the state emerged and consequently the chief end of the State is to ensure "good life" for a generality of members of the society. But unfortunately, the state, in concrete terms, is often seen, in

most cases and in most post-colonial African societies (such as Nigeria), as an instrument in the hands of a privileged few who perpetually dominate, exploit and subjugate the dominated majority of the citizenry. The state, Shaapera argues thus, serves the interests of a particular vested class structure rather than the generality of the masses.

THE NIGERIAN NATIONAL QUESTION: THE ELITE THEORY NEXUS

The national question indeed encompasses the divisive issues that tend to negate the nation-building forces in a putative nation state. Invariably, the occasioning struggles towards the diffusion of these negative forces come under the conceptual and empirical issues in the national question. Consequently, the national question in Nigeria also centers on the phenomenon denoted in Fadakinte (2013, p.284) as federal-unitarism and how the unitary forces have made the other people of the Nigerian federation to become mere spectators in the ostensible federalism. The national question is then fundamentally a political question. And all politics, argues Ibeanu (2008, p.9) is about managing or reconciling affluence and affliction, principally, though not exclusively through the instrumentality of the state power. Hence, in proffering solutions to the national question, the ambition of political theorists and practitioners would be the obtaining of increases in affluence and decreases in affliction (for all groups in the nation state). The national question in Nigeria, thus seeks among other issues, to reconcile the incidence of some groups' unjust affluence and others affliction in the Nigerian nation state.

But above all, the national question has remained highly pronounced in the Nigerian state because of the use of state power by the elite (the power elite) to continuously increase affluence for themselves and perpetuate poverty and misery for the less-privileged members of society. The disadvantaged, socially and economically deprived members of society in turn hang on to ethnicity as scapegoat but the major thorny issue is actually a nationally detrimental elite accord and group mendacity of the elite. In the Niger Delta region of the country for instance, the ignorant masses are full of bile against the other ethnic groups, for what they perceive as injustice against their region, in using the petrodollar emanating from their lands to develop the other sections of the country (to their own neglect). The truth however is that the elite of their region have historically conspired with the others from the other zones to loot nearly all the funds ever appropriated for the development of the Niger Delta (Ibeanu, 2008).

As a matter of fact, if this decrepit class had allowed the quantum of funds believed to have been ploughed into the development of the Delta to be so utilized, the Nigerian region would have today been among the best developed places on earth. But a visit to this area of the country easily reveals that it has (despite these pretenses to using the funds in the region) remained among the most underdeveloped places on the planet. It has also remained one of the sources of the continuing intra-national agitations in the country – a truly low point in the developmental map of the Nigerian state. Furthermore, in a historical context, from the Niger Delta Development Board, the Niger Delta River Basin Development Authority, the Oil Minerals Producing Areas Development Commission, to the current Niger Delta Development Commission, the Nigerian power elite have defied ethnic divisions to burgle nearly all the funds allotted to these interventions. And the national question festers from this specific region.

And so, every ethnic region in the Nigerian nation state claims to be marginalized by others. In the various political parties in the country however the party members have usually peaceably allotted party offices to all the ethnic blocs. Under such scenarios the national question becomes amicably answered. The issue of federal unitarism disappears. But once a government is formed at the center, the agitations about the ethnic group that would form the next government would begin in earnest. In the meantime, the plundering of national resources would also commence, including the diversion of egregious amount of funds for the next election. From the sidelines, the masses are instigated to see everything from the viewpoints of inter-ethnic struggle, which is actually a ruse propagated by the elite.

Odeyemi (2014, p.4) thus argues that a major blunder committed by early post-independence leaders in their state-building effort is that the state is paternalistically conceived. The state he contends became an omniprovider of an overwhelming plethora of services, many of which could have been efficiently provided by the private sector. But if this was describable as blunder, we opine that there must have been something deliberate about this blundering. The post-independence Nigerian leaders were indeed mainly double-faced patriots with nation building tendencies that were tainted with egotism and ethnicism. Their successors have even proved to be worse than their forbearers in these regards. According to Akude (2007, p.12) therefore:

The failure of the Nigerian state could not possibly lead to its collapse because it takes a conscious action on the part a disgruntled section of a fragmented elite to bring a state to collapse. The Nigerian political elite is still united in the philosophy of personal enrichment through access to state power, and a conscious attack on the state could possibly deny the elite this opportunity.

Hence, here is an elite group in Nigeria enamored by the possibilities of becoming global players. They have created all sorts of national visions for this purpose yet the national question in their home state remains unanswered. The truth therefore is that a socially, politically and economically weak Nigerian state cannot by the mere imagination of her power elite become an indisputable global player. The crisis in the educational sector in the country has continuously festered because the children of the Nigerian elite are born to go to school abroad (even in neighboring West African countries). Then from their Diaspora residences these elite offspring spew hate speeches homewards, thereby complicating the national question at the home front. In a nutshell, answers to the national question are sought by nation-building (Mkandawire, 2009, p.13). And this can only become feasible with the leadership of a conscientious elite or by their generic defeat.

And indeed, among the most debilitating and retrogressive phenomena of the modern Nigerian state must be counted the kleptocracy of the national elite. Then incidentally on this issue of elite thievery is found a profound and egregious reflection of federal character in Nigeria, as no nationality or ethnic group in the polity has failed to produce its own hideous share of such perfidious antiheroes. Sen (2010, p.9) highlights that basic infrastructure and social services which are taken for granted in many countries are pitifully bad or weak in Nigeria. The truth however is that the elite (the political elite) have continued to have access to these basic services, without ever displaying deep consternation that several decades after Nigeria's independence in 1960, these same services are not available to the other citizens. As Nigerian roads became absolutely impassable, the Nigerian elite resorted to flying in the air, using their private jets that were purchased with ill-gotten wealth.

Thus, successive governing elites in Nigeria are not accountable to the citizenry (Ibietan & Ajayi, 2015, p.17). The character of the national political elite is accordingly tainted by a tripartite notoriety. The crooked members of the class advocate the indivisibility of the Nigerian union at the central level (because of the petrodollar that is statutorily pooled at the center which they crassly dismember as a class). But at their home regional levels they furtively patronize the agitations for autonomy that border on insurgency. Then it was the unfeeling thieving-tendencies of the elite-group that fundamentally exacerbated the relative deprivation, which accentuated the separatist activism in the country. And the elite finally go to the den of the dreaded agitators and other societal infidels to recruit their personal guards (because they have completely stolen the funds appropriated for state security purposes). A major reason that has been responsible for Nigeria's socioeconomic stagnation remains the phenomenon of corruption (Ogbeidi, 2012, p.1). And we add here that it has also remained the major reason behind the festering national question. Hence the Nigerian political elite have remained the chief apostles of corruption in the country.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION(S)

The political elite in Nigeria, it is concluded in this study must commit to resolving the national question or at least bringing the inherent vexing issues to the barest minimum. The wealth of this ostensibly rich country must be translated to individual greatness for as many Nigerian citizens and Nigerian regions as possible. The power elite must do away with double-faced patriotism. Their ethnic patriotism must of national necessity be collapsed into a pan Nigerian loyalty. Resolving the national question in the country does not therefore sound like rocket science to us in this work. We consequently submit that what it requires is an irrevocable commitment on the part of the national political elite to do away with their mind-boggling and mindless thieving of generically owned resources and accept that all Nigerian peoples are entitled to a portion of the affluence that is believed to be found in the current nation-state. We finally recommend more concerted efforts by civil society organizations in calling the degraded elite to order.

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