

THE NIGERIA STATE-CITIZENS RELATIONS AND DEMOCRATIZATION, 1979-2012

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the relations between the Nigeria state and its citizenry, from 1979 to 2012, in the light of state high-handedness. It exposes the extent to which the use of undemocratic approaches by various civil governments in Nigeria over the years has created avenues for suppression and massacre of innocent Nigerians. The central objective is to create consciousness in good governance by realigning the political leadership to the virtues that promote democracy and good governance, such as dialogue and persuasion, instead of intimidation and brutalization of the same people that government vowed to protect. It is therefore the position of this paper that, government should imbibe positive methods to resolving its face-off with Nigerian citizens, either as individuals or groups to provide for the social, economic and political development of the nation.

Keywords: Nigeria, Citizens, Relation, Suppression, Democratization.

INTRODUCTION

“The picture that emerges is one of massacre, an unrestrained punitive expedition...the event stands out as a monument of brutality and state repression.” This piece was drawn from Beckman’s study of the Bakolori crisis, Aloba (2001) as an interest catching opener to his discussion of the military massacre of the Tiv in Zaki-Biam, a settlement in Benue State of Nigeria. In this present study, Beckman’s same description of the military expedition against the Bakolori community in Sokoto state of Nigeria is used to point out that the 1980 experience remains a fashionable way that the Nigeria democratic governments relate with its citizenry. However, the theory of social contract presupposes that the power to govern a country, which is welded by the political leadership, is given by the electorate in exchange for social security, improved living standard in terms of freedom from disease, speech, inadequate food, poor health and infrastructure facilities, illiteracy, unclean water, etc. The way Nigeria governments relate with its citizens as exemplified in the series of aggressions and massacres is a breach of the social contract. The result can therefore be seen in the masses’ resistance to bad governance, which often expressed itself in different forms. The Niger Delta Militia, Oodua People’s Congress, Movement for the actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta and Boko Haram are some of the expressions that threaten national security. Threat to security in Nigeria has for quite some time been an obstacle to national cohesion and development. Brigadier-General Ogah (<http://nials-nigeria.org/pub>) points to the relevance of security to national development in Nigeria. He states:

The various Nigerian constitutions and the statute books and other legal enactments in place aimed at providing backbone to governance to enhance national security and socio-economic growth are still confronted with obvious challenges. The need therefore, for a peaceful and decent

environment to allow for harmonious coexistence and enabling climate for socio-economic and political advancement cannot be over-stated.

If successive governments in Nigeria do realize the importance of security to development and yet engage in acts of aggression and massacre, it becomes necessary to point out that security cannot be achieved through any means of insecurity, like the ones exhibited by governments over the years. This discussion can be understood better when one gives a deep thought to the meaning of security and its essence. According to Mbachu (2009), security revolves around national interest and is “the sum total of actions and measures, including legislative and operational procedures, adopted to ensure peace, stability and the general well being of a nation and its citizens.” This definition unveils the fact of the masses involvement directly, through opinion pool or indirectly, through legislations of their representatives in government policy decisions. This is indeed the essence of democracy; that there should be dialogue and persuasion in the relationship between the state and its citizens. Therefore, security should be citizens’ welfare driven, this is to say that the end product must be to achieve improved standard of living for the citizenry. Thus, any approach adopted by government for purpose of achieving national security, which destroys the very people for whom the security is sought is unnecessary.

This paper condemns the adoption of aggression to quell what government considers as threat to national security. The problems that government adjudge as security threats usually start as civil insubordinations to poor leadership, which can be properly exterminated through democratic methods such as dialogue and persuasion, in short-term and good governance, in long -term. However, the use of undemocratic means as aggression, repression and massacre by government has often resulted to their escalation and hence, engenders greater threats to security.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

Conceptual Clarification is a very valuable aspect in every academic discourse because it enables the writer to establish appropriate direction for his discussion, to ease understanding of his ideas. For this paper the following concepts are clarified: aggression, massacre and democratization.

Aggression is associated with violence, repression or subjugation of an individual or group to achieve an end. According to Durojaiye (1981) aggression, refers to the need to assault or injure another; to belittle, harm or maliciously ridicule a person or to fight and win. This paper defines aggression in political parlance as the forceful actions of government against its people, which negate their rights as encapsulated in the constitution. This is usually aimed at controlling the citizens’ emotions and desires so that they are not expressed. Thus, aggression creates an impression that government is fulfilling its obligations to the citizens and that they have no grudge against it.

The term massacre denotes mass murder. When executed by government, it is an extreme stage of government cruelty against its citizens. These two concepts are anti-democratization because they contravene the principles of democracy based on consultation, dialogue, fair-play and consensus.

Democratization is a very complex concept because many people base its definition on very wrong perceptions. Many people discuss democratization in a manner to portray it as

synonymous with the establishment of democratic structures like Executives, Legislatures and the Judiciary. It is wrong to subsume that once the military have handled down power to civilians, democratization has taken place.

Rumel (www.hawaii.edu/powerkills/democ.htm) contends that democratization is a process through which a political system becomes democratic. This definition brings about several issues bordering firstly, on explaining the meaning of democracy as relating to the idea of the masses' government, secondly, explaining the process to achieve democracy, which has to do with the right to vote by all adults in regular elections through which the leaders are periodically determined and thirdly, being the acceptance of certain so-called democratic rights, particularly the right to vote, the right to have one's vote count equally, the right to run for the highest office, and the right to organize political groups or parties. Finally, there is above the state a law to which all authorities adhere, that provides the framework for democratic rule, and that protects democratic rights.

Democratization thus, signifies attempts to measure the quality of democratic governance in a country. It is the institutionalization of democratic culture that has to affect every aspect of the citizens' life. This explains why the author of this paper categorizes world democracies in to minimal and consolidated democracies. The former being one that operates in defiance of the norms of democracy such as free and faire elections and respect for the rule of law and thus, engenders social crisis. The latter relates to government that is established and operates on the basis of democratic principles, which provide the enabling environment for security and development to thrive.

Unfortunately, hardly have African countries experienced consolidation of democracy in their countries principally due to lack of commitment to democratic culture. Therefore, it is no wonder that successive governments of Nigeria continue to intimidate, brutalise and massacre the citizens of this country, even when there exist the option to engage in dialogue for amicable settlement.

Aggression, Massacre and Democratization in Nigeria

The practice of democracy is continually being regarded as nascent by the Nigerian political leaders perhaps, as a way of freeing themselves from their failures or wrong doings. There has been military interference in the process of democratic governance in Nigeria for quite some time in the past. However, since the enthronement of the Olusegun Obasanjo civil administration in 1999 up to Goodluck Jonathan's presidency in 2012, democracy has not been disrupted by the military again, and so, the period is long enough for democratization of the nation. However, the brutal aggression and massacre of Nigerian citizens witnessed in the Bakolori Irrigation Project, during President Shahu Shagari government in 1980 continued to hold sway in Nigeria, under the Olusegun Obasanjo government of 1999 to 2007 and the present Goodluck Jonathan administration in 2012.

The Bakolori Irrigation Project led to loss of farm land belonging to several farm families located in the flooded Bakolori reservoir, without alternative suitable agricultural land in their immediate surroundings. Yet government refused to honour its cash compensation payment that had been promised to peasants. Instead, government basing its argument on the dictates of 1978 Land Use Decree, which stipulates that all lands belong to the states and whoever requires the use of such lands must apply to government for lease which lasts for 99 years, insisted on finding alternative land for them. The farmers however, rejected the heavily

eroded and characteristically very poor alternative land given to them. Another area of conflict was in the effect of thrusting large-scale technology on peasants. Land was taken from the peasants, redeveloped for large-scale irrigation and subsequently handed back to them with the crops to cultivate as wheat, rice and vegetables. The River Basin Development Authority exercised direct control of the project on behalf of the state, which include; redevelopment and redistribution of land and the provision of inputs. This policy conflicted with peasants' own priorities and crop preference (Sumit 1990).

The struggle that started in 1974 assumed a fierce character in the dry season of 1980. Roadblocks were mounted and guarded by detachment of peasants who were armed with cutlasses, bows and arrows. They stopped contractors from operating for several months, obstructed the current farm operations and demanded compensation for lost crops and land. They also demanded freedom to choose the kind of crops to be grown, the cultivation methods and timing. Government responded so inhumanly, by clamping down on peasants, deployed the military to the area and they brutally suppressed the rebellion, burning villages, killing and wounding hundreds of men, women and children (Yahaya, 2002).

Aggression is only fashionable within the military circle. Its dislike by Nigerian people explains why they clamoured for a return to democracy after the ouster of the Shehu Shagari administration in 1984 that characterised a long period of military interregnum. The aspiration of the citizenry to date remains a government they could participate in, one that listens and cares, and that which develops them. It is not in any way, a government that would turn around to annihilate them, as did the Olusegun Obasanjo government, when it killed people in the Niger delta creeks, ordered the massacre of the Udi people in Bayelsa state and literally wiped off the human race in Zaki-Biam of Benue state.

All the problems mentioned above, were within the ambit of amicable settlements. For instance, in the Niger delta, the issue was that of resistance to poor policy following excessive oil exploration, which gave birth to spillage and fraudulent utilization of revenue derived from oil by the Nigerian government. Consequently, the youths became engaged in arms struggle with government, when their cries were evidently not being heard by government. Instead of adopting democratic approaches in dealing with the issue, the government resorted to military warfare against the people. So the problem in the Niger delta had to last long, as far as inappropriate measures continued to be applied by government. For President Umaru Musa Yar Adua, who took over the mantle of leadership from president Obasanjo, the Niger delta problem could better be resolved through dialogue. This culminated eventually in granting amnesty to the militants and reintegrating them into meaningful social life.

In Udi, just as in Zaki-Biam, innocent Nigerians were slaughtered by the soldiers under order from President Obasanjo. Everybody condemns the killing of human beings, whether civilians or soldiers in both Udi and Zaki-Biam. However, there is no rationale behind the almost complete erasure of human lives in those places because few people of the areas were alleged to have killed some soldiers. One expects government to investigate the issue to uncover the culprits in the specific cases and determine what the soldiers themselves became engaged in, outside of their official mission, which might have generated such anger against them.

This irresponsible attitude of government is understood on the premise that African and indeed Nigerian leaders have a wrong idea of what political power is all about. To them, it is

not power to serve but power to subjugate the same masses who surrendered power to them. This is why democracy here, in most cases, is nothing different from military rule. But civil leadership sharply contrast military leadership and as Kukah (2000) citing Ake avers:

The military addresses the extreme and the extraordinary while democracy addresses the routine, the military values discipline and hierarchy, democracy values freedom and equality... the method of the military is violent aggression, that of democracy is persuasion, negotiation and consensus building.

It is the failure to realise the difference between these two extremes that creates the staggering relationship between government and the masses, in which the masses are annihilated or massacred.

Therefore, the more problematic security issue in Nigeria today, the Boko Haram would not have taken the present dimension if government was truly democratic at the very early instances. It on record that until the Boko Haram leader was killed extra-judiciary, the group was not a violent one. It started as a non-violent breakaway group, persecution and aggressive crack-downs from the security services brought about their violent response. It was at first a small and controllable problem, but the issue escalated in 2009 after heavy crackdowns were ordered by President Yar Adua. The crackdown was brutal and disproportionate; around 700 innocent people were killed, some of them publicly executed on suspicions that they were member of Boko Haram (Sani, 2012). The killing of their leader, Mohammed Yusuf actually made the group increases its rate of violet activities (Ajah, 2011). Following the killing of their leader the movement went underground but emerged a year later with renewed attacks. Even at this point the situation was controllable, yet the government response was again heavy-handed.

On Wednesday October 31, Amnesty International strongly condemned the government of Nigeria for poor handling of the Boko Haram problem, a situation which results to massacre of suspected members of the sect (BBC News, 2012). In report of the Presstv Nigerian soldiers are said to have shot dead about 40 people during a raid against Boko Haram militants. The violence broke out late Thursday November 1, 2012, when government troops stormed four areas in the north-eastern city of Maiduguri, considered as the militants' stronghold and forced males in their teens and early twenties out of their homes in Kalari, Gwange, Sabon Lamba and Gomboru neighborhoods and shot them dead before sending their bodies away to the hospital (Presstv, 2012). It was confirmed at the general hospital in Maiduguri that 39 bodies were brought by the soldiers, all bore wounds from fresh gunshots

It is no doubt that members of Boko Haram have caused serious destructions; of lives and properties of innocent Nigerians. The people of Nigeria, the Nigerian government and indeed the international community condemn Boko Haram for its atrocities in Nigeria. It is therefore illogical that the same actions which government condemn are being carried out against suspected members of Boko Haram. Worst still is the fact that such cases are not proven, as the arrests are not made during gun battle between soldiers and members of the sect. They are the result of house to house search by military men. It is therefore possible that some of the boys arrested and slaughtered are not and do not have anything common with members of the sect. The Nigeria government has been blamed for not been able to protect its citizenry in the light Boko Haram killings and destruction of properties. Thus, it argued that the quantum

arrest and slaughter of youths in the northern part of Nigeria, precisely Maiduguri might well be an attempt by government to face-mend.

The President of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan has repeatedly asked members of Boko Haram to reveal the issues that constitute their grievance. This paper is of the opinion that such question is unnecessary because Boko Haram issue is not like that of oil spillage in the Niger delta, which the government of the late President Musa Yar Adua addressed by settling the youths there. Boko Haram issues are not peculiar to what the generality of Nigerian citizens are facing.

The issues border on bad governance, whose indices are apparent in the country: corruption by people in government is very high, the masses have no enough and good food, there is high disease scourge, unemployment level has assumed high proportions. Added to the above is the fact that there are no roads to link even the major cities, not to talk of rural roads to boost agriculture and improve rural income, yet government has resorted to the removal of fuel subsidy, which raises the pump price of the product beyond the ordinary, thereby worsening the poverty situation in the country. The question therefore is; Does Boko Haram requires telling the President all these things? Will that make more meaning than the loud cry of the entire Nigerian citizens? Certainly, the non-challant attitude of the government towards the plight of Nigerians is a product of its resolve to use power to oppress its citizens for selfish interest.

There are two issues that greatly disturb the author as he writes this paper. The first has to do with Boko Haram's continued menace; that is its real objective in the present. When Boko Haram started, it was understood to be a war against bad governance, and it actually targeted government establishments. Over a long time now, it has changed to directing its arms against innocent and helpless Nigerians, even school children, especially their fellow northerners. The second is the role of the international community and specifically, the United States of America that has been the harbinger of world-wide democracy but becomes very selective in terms of the areas it discusses issues connected to democratization. People are suffering in most countries of the world in the name of democracy, in which case, what is going on in such countries, including Nigeria is not democracy or put mildly, its abuse. However, American continuously launched attacks against terrorism in countries of the Middle East, without little thought that the abuse of democracy, especially in Africa and Latin America carries as negative consequences on their citizens as terrorism. The above statement should invoke an imagination of the number of people that have died in Nigeria as result of bad government, aside from the killings by Boko Haram and army crackdown on suspected members of the sect.

Implications of Aggression and Massacre for Democratization

There is no doubt that aggression and massacre of Nigerian citizens by government have far-reaching consequences on democratization process. If democratization is seen as instituting a government based strictly on democratic principles and bearing in mind that democracy is all about good governance, then the implications of these antecedents of bad governance as aggression and massacre would begin from the masses withdrawal of political sovereignty. This withdrawal of power to govern makes such government illegitimate in the opinion of the citizens of that country and it can even result to a revolution. These are the issues that led to the masses' revolutions in the Arabs' world, which toppled the undemocratic government of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya. Just as in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, instead of engaging in

dialogue with the masses, the governments of Syria, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, to mention a few, have committed themselves to repression of popular opinion and are beset by the masses' revolution.

In Nigeria, the result of the masses' withdrawal of sovereignty has always generated more skirmishes between the citizens and government as exemplified in the militants' destruction of oil pipe lines in the Niger delta, the bombing of Force headquarters in Abuja by Boko Haram, the secession attempt by the Movement for the actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra in Eastern Nigeria, etc. There are other indirect ways through which the masses vent their anger against government in Nigeria. These methods which include armed robbery, drug trafficking, religious and ethnic conflicts, kidnapping of fellow Nigerians for ransom, etc are meant to cause social instability and prove that the government is inept.

When these things happen, government becomes more than ever, incapable of providing development. As it is evident in Nigeria today, infrastructure facilities have totally collapsed, poverty rate has assumed unimaginable proportions, there is high disease scourge and poor health facilities. Yet, the masses' attempts to change government have always ended in futility due to electoral fraud. Elections are openly rigged by agents of the same government that the masses do not accord legitimacy. The youths who are also victims of government failure have offered themselves for service of election rigging as thugs, who apparently snatch ballot boxes during voting.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper discusses government aggression and massacre of Nigerian people in the context of government and citizens' relationship from 1979 to 2012. Using the government aggression and massacre of the Bakolori, Zaki-Biam, Udi and Boko Haram crackdown, the paper holds that illegality has not anywhere in the world, proved to be a useful instrument for quelling illegality. Rather, such methods have generated further crisis as seen in the overthrow of 'democracy' in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya, and in the current revolutions in Syria, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain.

In Nigeria, such methods have given birth to ethnic and religious organizations as the Niger Delta Militia, Odua People's Congress, Movement for the actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra and Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta and Boko Haram, whose activities have often caused the nation's social economic and political destabilization. This state of affair explains the withdrawal of sovereignty by the Nigerian masses and the concomitant lack of development of the country since independence in 1960.

It is therefore concluded with a central position that unless the Nigerian political leaders imbibe positive spirit of democratic governance, which could instil values of selfless service, collective work and dialogue, the much preached and protected world-wide democracy would be a mirage in Nigeria. Expectedly, Nigeria may turn into any of the Arabs countries where democracy is either undergoing the process of uproot or has been uprooted.

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