

BORN FREE IN CHAINS: AN AFRICAN POLITICAL EPIC

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Abstract: This contribution is directed at the generic problems of an African nation-state and the profound discomfitures of the country's citizenry. The disconcertments of these citizens essentially emanate from some seemingly unending national miseries. The specific area of study is the West African Nigerian state where the average inhabitants are hypothesized to be born free in chains. The article is considered significant in the context of globalization since in the prevailing understanding there is ostensibly an immensely interrelated humanity. Still within the context of common humanity, the study area is the most populated nation in Africa and the seventh-most populated state on earth. The auguries of an enduring generic anguish in this location accordingly demands scholarly attention. It is envisaged that the attendant research disclosures would lead to further theoretical and empirical interests in the affairs of this unarguably besmirched polity. The article is intended as an intervention into why in the 21st century; citizens of some segments of the global order are still validly depicted as being born free in chains.

Keywords: Citizenship Question, Social Contract Theory, Nigerian State, African Affairs

Introduction

This paper draws impetus from Jean Jacques Rousseau's popular axiom that "man was born free but is everywhere in chains" (Panjabi, 2008, O'Neill, 2010, p.810; Fajonyomi, 2012, p.8). Rousseau was one of the trio-theorists of the social contract shade, with Thomas Hobbes and John Locke. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the social contract theory was used extensively by political theorists to propagate the philosophy that governments owed their legitimacies to the consents of the people. The social contract theorists believed that the people aboriginally created governments established their limits and allowed them to exist. Governments did not therefore owe their existence to God and kings in the estimation of the social contract philosophers. Governments were instituted by the people. Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau tried to illuminate how political contracts were instituted by men under the pre-political state. They had to describe this pre-political era and prove how it led to a social contract. In order to do this, they conceived the "state of nature", in description of the existence of man precedent to social or civil laws. The state of nature therefore depicted man as he supposedly existed on earth prior to society's

formation. Consequently, the real nature of man devoid of external content might only be obtained in the state of nature (Donaldson, 1978; Fajonyomi, 2012; Laskar, 2013; Rapaczynski, 2019; Brooke, 2020, Vallier, 2020; Friend, 2021).

The social contract theorists not only attempted to explain the state of nature and the formation of government by man but invariably canvassed governmental reform. In other words, since the social contract was used to transit from the objectionable state of nature into civic designs it is possible to be further used in moving man from an undesirable government position to an ideal state. What factors have inhibited this transition in the case study country? Why would citizens supposedly born free remain anywhere in chains? The theoretical framework of the paper is consequently the social contract theory. Hence, besides the classical pedigrees of Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau invoked in the contribution the “justice as fairness” thesis of John Rawls (a recent social contract theorist) is also raised (Rawls, 1997; Sen, 2006; Friend, 2021).

The article is subdivided into nine sections. The introductory segment provides a background to the research motivation and work-structure. The next section supplies an overall African framework for the presentation, as the specific area of study is the most populous state in Africa. The third part of the paper presents a pre-colonial account of the current Nigerian territory in the contexts of previous freedoms and new chains. The fourth division gives a condensed political history of modern Nigeria in tracking the route of the chains that eventually emerged. The part that follows offers a review of related literature to bring the contribution in sequence with extant influential research on political leadership and citizenship challenges in the study area. The sixth trajectory of the work interrogated the preliminary factors of promising nationhood and national economic success in Nigeria. The next division of the study considered the current conditions of perplexity and disorder in the study area nation. The eighth demarcation treats contemporary incapacitations and seeming national bleakness, in final demonstration of the article’s thesis. The ninth section offers a summation.

Contextualizing the African dimension

Africa is a continent with uncertain characteristics. The rest of the state-members of the international community indeed possess their fair shares of the troubles and auguries which portray human reality. However, Africa as a continental bloc of the planet appears to have become incapable of producing different successful states that can validly join the ranks of the world powers. African citizenship thus appears to be unceasingly marginalized at the domestic level. Under such scenarios, how would the African states then ascend to the portal of the world league? Leadership is everything in these contexts. Political leadership is central to the governance desideratum (Okeke & Onwuasoigwe, 2023). Nevertheless, the African leader appears fixated at the level of oratorical shenanigans presented as progressive performance. From Nigeria to Namibia, Mali to Malawi, Benin to Burundi, the African states hardly indicate incontrovertibly that human lives matter in their polities. Each year, the global human development report of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) features African countries at the back burner of the Human Development Index (HDI). This is “a composite index measuring average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development - a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living” (United Nations Development Programme, 2020, p.355).

All the states in Africa are still globally categorized as belonging to the developing regions of the world. UNDP's human development index is further categorized for all nations into, very high human development, high human development, medium human development and low human development specifications. In the 2020 report out of the 54 countries in Africa only Mauritius entered the very high human development division at the 66th position which is the least position in the group. The high human development segment which follows in the ranking order has seven African countries in the bracketed spots: Algeria (91), Tunisia (95), Botswana (100), Libya (105), South Africa (114), Egypt (116) and Gabon (119) (and the least position in the subdivision). Out of the 33 countries in the low human development compartment, only three (Afghanistan, Haiti and Yemen) are not African countries (United Nations Development Programme, 2020). Development is inconsequential when devoid of human development which is in deficiency in Africa. Development may have its technical indicators. However, a highly irrefutable but commonplace indicator of development or underdevelopment is a country's poverty level. Then the World Bank (2019) deposes that "despite significant accomplishments in the fight against poverty in recent decades, many African countries have the highest poverty rates in the world". The global poverty opponent further discloses that "the poverty rate in Africa has gone down, but the number of African people living in poverty has increased and global poverty will increasingly become African" (The World Bank, 2019). The United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (2021) highlights that "514 million Africans risk falling below extreme poverty line in 2021 due to COVID-19". The UN Commission further underscores:

While extreme poverty had almost vanished in North Africa, more than 50% of the population in Central Africa lived below the extreme poverty line. About nine out of ten extremely poor people in the world currently live in Africa... COVID19 will push an additional 5 to 29 million below the extreme poverty line. If the impact of the pandemic is not limited by 2021, an additional 59 million people could suffer the same fate, which would bring the total number of extremely poor Africans to 514 million people. Such numbers of Homo sapiens are invariably wriggling under the chains of poverty. They are nationals of various African polities, freely born by their progenitors but currently under the manacles of poverty. Cilliers & Kwasi (2021, p.38) remark that: Using the International Futures forecasting platform of the University of Denver, we find it is reasonable to expect around 4 percent annual average economic growth for Africa post-COVID to 2030. In this future, extreme poverty is likely to decline by only about five percentage points and, by 2030, a third of the continent's 1.7 billion people is still likely to survive on less than \$1.90 per day. Slow growth and high inequality means that sub-Saharan Africa is only likely to achieve the elimination of extreme poverty by mid-century.

The current study underscores the contention of Cilliers & Kwasi (2021) of sub-Saharan Africa being "only likely to achieve the elimination of extreme poverty by mid-century". Differently stated, about 566 million people in Africa are likely to remain under the chains of poverty by mid-twenty first century. Then an additionally troubling affair borders on the attitude of political leadership on the continent towards the human development and poverty challenges in their region. The continental political leaders appear more enamored by saber rattling than getting altruistically involved in the execution of sustainable development projects. Destructive internal conflicts thus abound in Africa.

Table 1 Illustration of African Position in the Current and Continuing Conflict Spots in the World

Conflict	Death Toll	Years	Country	Region of the World
Yemeni Civil War	233,000+	2014–present	Yemen	Western Asia
Iraqi Civil War	195,000–200,000+	2014–2017	Iraq	Western Asia
Rojava-Islamist conflict	50,000+	2013–present	Syria	Western Asia
Syrian Civil War	387,000–593,000+	2011–present	Syria	Western Asia
Boko Haram insurgency	51,567+	2009–present	Nigeria	West Africa
Mexican Drug War	150,000–250,000	2006–present	Mexico	North America
War in North-West Pakistan	45,900–79,000	2004–2017	Pakistan	South Asia
Kivu Conflict	100,000+	2004–present	Congo	Central Africa.
War in Darfur	300,000+	2003–present	Sudan	Northeast Africa
Iraq War	405,000–654,965	2003–2011	Iraq	Western Asia
War in Afghanistan	47,000–62,000	2001–present	Afghanistan	Central/South Asia
War on Terror	272,000–1,260,000	2001–present	Worldwide	Interregional
Ituri conflict	60,000+	1999–2003	Congo	Central Africa.
Second Congo War	2,500,000–5,400,000	1998–2003	Congo	Central Africa
First Congo War	250,000–800,000	1996–1997	Congo	Central Africa
Rwandan genocide	800,000	April–July 1994	Rwanda	Central/Eastern Africa

Source: Thompson (2021): <https://revisesociology.com/2021/03/03/ongoing-wars-and-conflicts-in-the-world-today/>

Table 2 Summary of Continental Stands on Table I Indicating African Position

Continental Demarcation	Number of conflict Spots	Percentage
Africa	7	43.75
Asia	7	43.75
North America	1	6.25
Interregional Impact	1	6.25
Cumulative	16	100

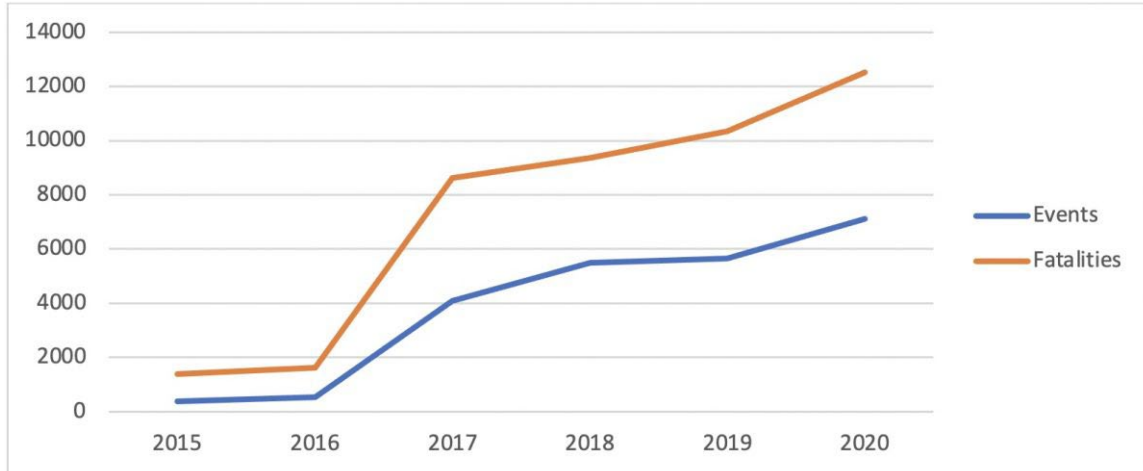
Source: Authors’ abstract of Table I

At the continental level therefore, 43.75% of the current or continuing conflicts on earth either occurred or are ongoing in Africa while the same percentage represents the Asian situation (43.75%). The African continent is accordingly seemingly in competition with Asia for troubled spots in the world. But where Hauge (2019) asks in economic performance contexts, “should the African lion learn from the Asian tigers?” this contribution also ponders: shouldn’t the African lion also learn from the Asian tigers how to perform economic wonders? The ostensible Afro-Asia race must not be limited to conflict spots’ possession. The North American continent possesses only one spot (6.25%) in the illustration on current and continuing conflicts location in the world and the same percentage (6.25%) reflects the interregional struggles against terrorism of which Africa yet has substantial coverage and occurrences. Ejiogu & Mosley (2017, p.1) invariably perceive a linkage between “local neocolonialism and terrorism in Africa”, suggesting that “the consequences of the interaction of dominant economic and political structures in the society considerably incite the transformation and activation of latent ideologies of socioeconomic liberation accommodated under various typologies of terrorism”.

Mroszczyk & Abrahms (2021, p.1) then disclose that “terrorism on the continent of Africa has been rising sharply over the decade, as non-state (terrorist groups, militias, rebel

groups, etc.) have increasingly targeted civilians in their campaigns of violence. From Somalia to Mali and Nigeria to Mozambique therefore, the continent has repeatedly witnessed grisly acts of violence targeting its civilian populations”. Mroszczyk & Abrahms (2021, p.1) further highlight: In 2015 there were 381 attacks targeting civilians in Africa resulting in 1,394 fatalities. This number rose sharply throughout the years and by 2020 there were 7,108 attacks targeting civilians resulting in 12,519 fatalities. The threat of terrorism has grown so much on the continent that by 2020 seven of the top 10 countries in the world in terms of terrorism risk were in Africa (See Figure 1).

Figure 1: Demonstration of Rising Trend of Terrorism in Africa



Source: Mroszczyk & Abrahms (2021), <https://www.e-ir.info/2021/04/09/terrorism-in-africa->

Terrorism’s chains have accordingly been added to the extant scenarios. However, from the wider African contexts the work returns to the specificities of a case-study country focused on the most populated state in Africa.

A pre-colonial account of the current Nigerian territory

According to the U.S. Library of Congress (n.d) “the history of the Nigerian people extends backward in time for some three millennia and archaeological evidence, oral traditions, and written documentation establish the existence of dynamic societies and well-developed political systems whose history had an important influence on colonial rule and has continued to shape independent Nigeria”. The U.S. Library of Congress (n.d) still narrates that “Nigerian history is fragmented in the sense that it evolved from a variety of traditions, but many of the most outstanding features of modern society reflect the strong influence of the three regionally dominant ethnic groups--the Hausa in the north, the Yoruba in the west, and the Igbo in the east”.

After the Napoleonic wars (1803-1815), Britain increased commercial links with the Nigerian hinterland. The consequent British assertions to a West African area of control obtained international acceptance in 1885. The following year, the Royal Niger Company (RNC) under the leadership of Sir George Taubman Goldie was chartered by the British authorities but the charter was revoked on the 31st of December 1899 by the British Government (and the sum of £865,000 paid to the corporation as recompense). The previous areas of the RNC formally came under the control of the British authorities. The

Southern and Northern Nigeria Protectorates were created by the British government on 1 January 1900. In 1914, the territory became amalgamated as the Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. The administration of the location however, continued to be undertaken under the Southern and Northern Provinces and the Colony of Lagos.

Western educational influence and modern economic development increasingly proceeded in the southern demarcations than in the north. The consequences of these early scenarios have continued to be felt in Nigeria's political affairs. As aftermath of World War II, and accelerated Nigerian nationalism, agitations for independence persisted in the country. Subsequent constitutional arrangements were legislated by the British Government. Nigeria moved towards self-government on increasingly federal and representative bases. The British colony became an autonomous federation on 1 October 1954. By this time a great wave of independence agitation was spreading across Africa and on 27 October 1958 the colonial authorities eventually consented to Nigeria becoming an independent territory on 1 October 1960 (Geary, 1927; Mann, 2007; Falola & Heaton, 2008).

A condensed political history of modern Nigeria

The country accordingly obtained independence from Britain in 1960. Following her British antecedents and heritages, the system of government at independence was explicitly parliamentary. However, the traditional ethnic inclinations of the ostensible nationalists who now emerged as de facto national leaders in government made this system quite incongruous and awkward. Parliamentary debates were needlessly combative. In government and outside the realms of state affairs, identity issues were conceived along sectional and ethnic orientations. The three major political parties were only popular along ethnic divides and never succeeded in transforming into effective national movements. The Northern People's Congress (NPC) was dominant in Northern Nigeria and was led by Sir Ahmadu Bello (Sarduna of Sokoto). The National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) dominated political affairs in Eastern Nigeria and was led by Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe. Action Group (AG) which was led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo was in control of Western Nigeria. The Nigerian tripod-federalism at this time rested on this East, West, and North trajectories. The three major ethnic groups in the country, the Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo were also aboriginally found in the North, West and East of Nigeria, respectively.

The parliamentary system of government initially had Dr Azikiwe as Governor-General and subsequently the ceremonial President. Sir Ahmadu Bello chose to remain in Northern Nigeria as Premier and seconded Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (his Second in Command in the northern political bloc) to the central political sphere as Prime Minister of Nigeria. Chief Obafemi Awolowo was the Leader of Opposition in the coalition government formed by Azikiwe's NCNC and Balewa's NPC. Where nationalism prevailed as the mantra for independence-struggles among the emergent political elite, the new post-independence chants were framed on ethnic identities. The new leadership members of the nation have also transformed into different versions of colonial masters. They were manifestly immodest in their public office lifestyles and palpably insatiable in attempting to take over the perquisites of office bequeathed to them by their colonial predecessors. But in the process of positioning to efface each other, a highly covetous and comparatively malicious class played into the hands of some impatient and obsessive band of youthful military officers. The clique of soldiers toppled the post-independence government on 15 January

1966 (Diamond, 1988; Olumide & Ekanade, 2011; Vaaseh & Ehinmore, 2011; Basiru, 2014).

The military takeover was tragic and inopportune in diverse proportions. It was from one dimension, a bloody rebellion in which the Prime Minister of the country was killed and also murdered was the influential Premier of Northern Nigeria, Sir Ahmadu Bello and many other senior politicians and military officers. A non-aligned reading of the coup accounts would suggest that the insurrection was jointly led by Majors Emmanuel Ifeajuna, controlling the Western Nigerian and Lagos operations (Lagos was then the capital of Nigeria) and Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu, in charge of Northern Nigerian operations. Both Ifeajuna and Nzeogwu were Igbos from the present Anambra and Delta States of the country respectively. But Ifeajuna also had immense western Nigerian influences in his university days and post-graduation teaching careers prior to enlisting in the army. Nzeogwu was not conversant with his Igbo roots and spent his formative years and adulthood in Northern Nigeria (Ademoyega, 1981; Obasanjo, 1987; Siollun, 2009; Onyema, 2013; Oliver, 2014). Siollun (2016) describes the coup events of 15 January 1966 and their knock-on effects as follows:

On 15 January 1966, a group of young, idealistic, UK-trained army majors overthrew Nigeria's democratic government in a violent military coup. The coup leaders described it as a brief and temporary revolution to end corruption and ethnic rivalry. Instead, it made them worse. The coup exposed the vulnerability of the Nigerian state, and how simple it was to use soldiers to attack the government, rather than protect it. No notable Igbo Nigerian leader was murdered by the coup plotters, except Lt. Col. Arthur Unegbe who was Quartermaster-General at the Army Headquarters. But the ill-fated revolution was invariably foiled by another Igbo, Major-General Aguiyi Ironsi who was the General-Officer Commanding the Nigerian Army (GOC). He also subsequently became the Head of State of Nigeria after the military assembled the remainder of the deposed government's key actors and advised them to surrender power to the army. The assumed head of the decapitated government at this time was yet another Igbo man. He was the Senate President, Dr Nwafor Orizu, who executed the formality of conceding power to the military through the Igbo-born Major-General Aguiyi Ironsi (Madiebo, 1980, Teniola, 2015, Siollun, 2016). It was accordingly not hard for Nigerian northerners to arrive at the supposition that the coup plot was sponsored by the Igbos. What followed was the 29 July 1966 counter coup staged by Northern Nigerian army officers targeted at Igbos and in which General Ironsi was killed. Also murdered alongside Ironsi was the Military Governor of Western Nigeria, Lt Colonel Adekunle Fajuyi who was hosting the visiting Head of State in his region on the night of the coup d'état. Lt. Colonel Yakubu Gowon was selected as Head of State by the July coup plotters.

Table 3 A Record of Military Coup D'états in Nigeria's History

Date	Usual Description	Coup Interpretation / National Impact
15 January 1966	The January 1966 Coup	The first civilian government was toppled.
29 July 1966	The July Counter Coup	Revenge mission against the alleged ethnic masterminds of the January 1966 coup.
29 July 1975	The 1975 Coup	Toppling of the General Yakubu Gowon Regime and the installation of General Murtala Muhammed as Head of State.

13 February 1976	The Dimka Coup	Murtala Muhammed assassinated and his Second in Command Olusegun Obasanjo becomes Head of State after the attempted Change of government was foiled.
31 December 1983	December 1983 Coup	General Muhammadu Buhari and others overthrew the civilian regime that was inaugurated by the Obasanjo administration.
27 August 1985	The Babangida Coup	The Chief of Army Staff in the Buhari regime, General Ibrahim Babangida led his co-plotters to overthrow Muhammadu Buhari.
17 December 1985 (Announcement of a botched plot)	The Mamman Vatsa attempted Coup	More than 100 officers from the Nigerian Army, Air Force and the Navy were arrested on 17 December 1985 in connection with the contentious coup attempt. On 6 March 1986, eight of the officers, inclusive of the alleged leader of the plotters General Mamman Vatsa were executed.
22 April 1990	The Gideon Orkar Coup attempt	42 of the coup planners including Major Gideon Orkar identified as the leader were executed on 27 July 1990.
17 November 1993	The Sani Abacha Coup	Nigeria's Defence Minister, General Sani Abacha, compelled the country's Interim Head of State Chief Ernest Shonekan to hand over to him and he became President.

Source: Authors' Compilation (2021)

The nation then entered into an orgy of military coups and counter coups (and phantom coup narratives) that chained the fortunes of the country to the consequences of violent takeover in a problematic political system (Nyangoro, 1993). The allegation of Igbos' sponsorship of the January 1966 coup plot and the counter coup of July 1966 were followed by nationwide anti-Igbo killings, particularly in Northern Nigeria that have severally been categorized as pogrom or genocide (Korieh, 2013; Desgrandchamps, 2014; Heerten & Moses, 2014; Anthony, 2017; Moses & Heerten, 2017; Lodge, 2018; Onuoha, 2018; Anyaduba & Maiangwa, 2020; Omaka et al, 2021). The peripatetic Igbo people forcefully migrated back to their native locations in Eastern Nigeria. But Lt. Col Chukwuemeka Odumegwu-Ojukwu as Military Governor of Eastern region of the country persuaded the Eastern Nigerian refugees to return to their various business locations in the nation, especially in Northern Nigeria, in the quest for Nigerian oneness. However, the killings continued more ferociously to the regret of Ojukwu. It was under these circumstances that Ojukwu led the Eastern region (largely consisting of Igbos) to pull out of the emergent Federal Republic of Nigeria under the brand name of the Republic of Biafra. Under Lt. Col Yakubu Gowon as Head of State, the Nigerian side insisted that the country must exist indivisibly. Then the Nigeria-Biafra war (1967-1970) ensued (Madiebo, 1980; Korieh, 2013; Desgrandchamps, 2014; Omaka, 2016; Onuoha, 2016; Julius-Adeoye, 2017).

The newly independent state of Nigeria thus became entrapped in a civil war, chained by the vagaries of domestic warfare and heightened interethnic animosities occasioned by war. At the end of the civil war in 1970 the soldiers remained in power, handed over to civilian politicians in 1979, subsequently sacked the "bloody civilians" in 1983 and returned to power. There were other feeble claims of planning to permit the civilians back to power but the ostensive attempts never came to fruition until 1999 (Agbese, 2018; Diamond et al, 1997). Since then it appears as if the army's interest in overt partisan political participation in Nigeria has died away. However, it remains uncertain if the assumed democratically elected Nigerian leaders are more patriotic than the previous soldiers (Elaigwu, 1988; Lewis & Adetula, 2006, Ibiamu & Banigo, 2019). It is extremely contentious to classify

either of the parties as sleazier than the other. In reality, the nation's politicians are usually brought into public office through unquestionable circumstances (Awopeju, 2011; Okeke, 2014; Agbu, 2016; Adigun, 2019). The military also usually came to power through illegitimate means.

The phenomenon of godfatherism at this time (1999 onwards) became a primary part of party politics and elections in Nigeria. Public office holders were merely selected and anointed by godfathers for the endorsement of voters in spurious elections (Albert, 2005; Olarinmoye, 2008; Adeoye, 2009; Hoffmann, 2010; Chukwuemeka et al, 2013; Ndubuisi, 2018). Chukwuemeka et al (2013, p. 193) elucidates that "in a political setting, the godfather concept is an ideology that is championed on the belief that certain individuals possess considerable means to unilaterally determine who gets a party's ticket to run for an election and who wins in the electoral contest". It seems fiction-patterned but "while the fictional godfather is characterized as a shadowy, dare-devil recluse, who combines immense underworld financial muscle with near mythical powers of enormous proportions, the Nigerian type added the characterization of conceit, ego, loquacity, pettiness, envy, strife, crudity, and confusion" to his preoccupation (Albert, 2005, p.79). The consequences of the godfathers' tendencies are the keeping of the nation's citizens in chains thrown across their harmless jugulars by irresponsible leaders.

Review of related literature

Enormous research efforts have indeed been expended in attempting to identify the central points of Nigeria's challenging character. Consequently, Achebe (1982) concluded that the trouble with Nigeria was simply and directly attributable to leadership malfunction. In this seminal submission Achebe succinctly demonstrated that the nation's elite group was functionally myopic and operationally imprudent. Joseph (1987) subsequently accused these ostensible leaders of prebendalism, referring to a distasteful system whereby state officials convert national resources into prebends (allowance paid by a cathedral or collegiate church to a member of its clergy, or the property or tithe that is the source of this allowance). Prebendalism amply illustrates the *weltanschauung* of political leadership in Nigeria. Osaghae (1998) derisively depicted the country as a crippled giant. Osaghae's research leads him to the thesis that Nigeria's complexities and hindrances are not recently constructed but are traceable to structural impairments from the times of colonialism in the country. But in the 21st century, colonialism which ended in the Nigerian location in October 1960 may not validly continue to be held liable for the enduring deficiencies of the state.

Akinola (2006, p.26) conclusively traced "the persistent socio-economic and political crises pervading Nigerian society to the problem of 'disconnect' between Nigerian leaders and the rest of the Nigerian society". Akinola (2006, p.2) earlier argued that "the misfortune of the post-independence development paradigm in Africa is that it is 'monocratically' centralized, separating African leaders from the rest of African people". Still from the results of Akinola's research it is further highlighted as follows: The 'disconnect' from the roots is manifested in several sectors of Nigerian landscape – constitutional, administrative, educational, political, economic, social, judiciary and security. Consequently, several reforms adopted by successful governments (military and civilian) in Nigeria had failed woefully to increase the standard of living of the majority of the Nigerian people as the

level of poverty is still as high as 57.8% in the country in spite of the excess revenues of N641.23 billion from crude oil in the country's Fourth Republic

Onuoha (2008) thus adds that in Nigeria, all forms of economic ideologies have been supposedly implemented to move the economy forward without success. Fajonyomi (2012, p.35) infers that in Nigeria, "the state has gone to sleep". Sequel to the crippled giant depiction of the country by Osaghae (1998), Fajonyomi (2012) calls the nation a sleeping giant. Kukah (2012) in Idike (2014, p.161) "describes the Nigerian nation as being on autopilot". The country is accordingly likened to "a ship, aircraft, or spacecraft with a control in the steering system set to keep it on a steady course, whereby the leaders exhibit preset or instinctive behavior, a condition in which they are not fully aware of what they are doing, as they act in habitual and unthinking ways, and operate without guidance or control".

The country's auto-conductor designation has since endured. The "Nigeria Working Group on Peacebuilding and Governance (NWGPG), "a group of Nigerian civic and thought leaders", subsequently "came out with a categorical statement that Nigeria was not being governed and as a result on autopilot" (NWGPG, 2020). The group further highlights that "confidence towards the Nigerian State was very low heightening the divides in the Federation and creating widespread demands for dialogue and consensus building on restructuring which the Government had been stone deaf to". Eghagha (2021) additionally demonstrates: Nigeria is on autopilot. The state is drifting. We can see this with half an eye. We can feel this even if we are numb to bad news. We do not get a feeling that anyone is in charge of things, of governance, of policy formulation and implementation. There is something sinister going on, whether by design or default, we are not sure. The psychology of the leader's presence is not felt by the people.

Despite its bigoted undertones it is incontestable that the former United States President, Donald Trump included Nigeria among the nations he disdained as shithole countries (Daily Beast, 2018; Umez, 2018). What merited the Nigerian state such classifications? It may not be sufficient to merely plead bigotry under such circumstances. Lewis (2006) had earlier scorned the country as a dysfunctional state. Lewis (2006, pp.83-84) posits:

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. The country's boundaries may provisionally be settled, but the basis of political community—the idea of Nigeria—is fiercely contested. Economically, Nigeria has experienced a steady decline since the oil windfall peaked more than twenty years ago. Slow growth and a rapidly rising population have yielded dramatic increases in poverty.

Threatened by these issues, Lewis (2006, pp.83-84) further narrates, "Nigerians have repeatedly attempted to overhaul the nation's politics, resulting in cycles of civilian and military government and perennial efforts at institutional change. But according to Lewis (2006, pp.83-84): The country's restiveness and economic deterioration are especially poignant when considered in light of its opportunities and assets. The restoration of civilian rule suggests new opportunities for addressing problems of governance and the economy. Democratic reforms, however, are hesitant, uneven, and factious, beleaguered by economic stagnation and rising social conflict. Recent trends attest more powerfully to the intractability of the problems than to the prospects for renewal.

The Nigerian problematic is indeed seemingly intractable and possessing onrushing trajectories. According to Campbell (2013) the Nigerian nation dances on the brink and it has become in the process among the most religious nations on earth and also one of the most violent countries on the planet. Nigerian administrations have severally been described as kleptocracies – referring to regime types characterized by corruption in which government or public officials seek personal gain at the expense of those being governed (Nnamuchi, 2008; Page, 2016; Campbell, 2017; Campbell, & Grane, 2017; Das, 2018). Page (2016, p.1) asserts that “in Nigeria, billions of dollars each year flow illegally from public coffers into private hands”. Campbell & Grane (2017, p.1) underscore: Kleptocracy has historically dominated the political economy of Nigeria...Nigerian kleptocracy has deep, pre-colonial roots, and successive regimes and administrations have used it as an instrument of political control. After the 1967–70 civil war those in government—both military and civilian—appropriated for their personal use oil revenue that under law belonged to the Nigerian people. The leaders of Nigeria prioritized the oil industry over other industries and centralized control of oil revenue, allowing senior officials to steal billions. This rooted a tradition of state theft that has lasted to this day.

The current essay is a comparatively pivotal contribution bordering on a country and her citizens born free in chains. Prior to the country’s colonial experience the peoples of the current Nigerian territory were largely bona fide citizens of independent states (King, 2001; Onyeozili & Ebbe, 2012; Mayowa, 2014; Archibong, 2019). Following colonization, the people and their territories came under colossal subjugation. But decolonization and independence ostensibly restored the lost liberties of citizenship to the people and they were assumed to have become freely born again. In the Nigerian case however, a fundamental assumption of this freedom-status is the existence of a country. In contradiction to this supposition, Achebe (2012) indignantly declared that the country had even ceased to exist in Nigeria – concluding that in Nigeria, there was a country. Along these same lines, the literature review begins to indicate in the Nigerian case the actuality of a territory of initial promising nationhood and national economic success inhabited by supposedly free citizens. Currently however, both the territory and its peoples are seemingly under the chains of cultural lethargy - a widespread *weltanschauung* imagining that deep-seated and positive societal changes ultimately result from incremental random actions and even inactions.

Preliminary factors of promising statehood and national economic success in Nigeria

At independence in 1960 Nigeria was the biggest free black nation on earth. It was “perhaps also the most important single nation in Africa, particularly Africa south of the Sahara. The struggle for the country’s independence which properly began in 1900 ended in 1960” (Weaver, 1961, pp.146-148). Invariably, people whose independence struggle lasted six decades would know what to do with the needed freedom when obtained. Hence, Nigeria’s address on formal arrival at the international scene (as the 99th member of the United Nations) indicated surefootedness on the side of the country and suggested preparedness for purposeful political leadership on the part of the ruling elite. The country’s “Maiden General Assembly Statement at the United Nations” was eloquently delivered by the new nation’s Prime Minister, Balewa on 7th October, 1960. It was redolent of a country where leaders and citizens were aware they had a lacuna to fill in international affairs (Permanent Mission of Nigeria to the United Nations, 2015).

In 1958 (shortly before independence in 1960) crude oil was discovered in commercial quantity in Nigeria (Usang & Ikpeme, 2015). Despite all the vicissitudes of the global oil industry, Nigeria is still the leading oil producer in Africa, producing “around 2 million barrels per day between 2015 and 2019” (Carpenter, 2020). Additionally, the country is currently endowed with 203.16tcf of proven gas reserve (Department of Petroleum Resources, 2020). Egege (2021) further demonstrates that “Nigeria has abundant solid mineral deposits” which include, bentonite and baryte, bitumen, coal, gypsum, talc, iron ore, lead/zinc, gold, rock salt and granite. According to Egege (2021) “there are gemstones mines in various parts of the country and the typologies of the precious stones extend to sapphire, aquamarine, ruby, tourmaline, emerald, topaz. Others are; garnet, amethyst; zircon, and fluor spar, and these stones are among the best in the world”. But the paper is reverting to where these auspicious indications of solid statehood and national economic prosperity have taken the country

Current conditions of perplexity and disorder in the nation

A list of the most phenomenal Nigerian personalities of all time (any list of such description) is highly likely to contain the name of an American-trained (Nigerian-born) journalist called Dele Giwa. He personally brought fresh style (reintroduced style), stamina, audacity and authority into the profession of journalism specifically, and reinstated razzmatazz into citizens’ engagement with government in the country (military government for that matter). Giwa was murdered via a letter bomb while with a guest in his study at his home in the Ikeja area of Lagos, Nigeria on 19 October 1986 at the age 39. He remains the only Nigerian ever, to have been killed through a letter bomb. Before his death, Giwa in one of his timeless journalistic pieces dismissed Nigeria as God’s experiment in the impossible (Obi, 2002; Adinlofu, 2008; Osinaike, 2018; Gadu, 2019). Detractors of Giwa may accuse the cerebral columnist of impropriety, preposterousness or even blasphemy. This paper’s interests are only in the appositeness of such depictions and their possible immutability.

Perplexingly, Nigeria metamorphosed into one of the most corrupt countries on earth. Uche (2021) hence reports as follows: The Corruption Perception Index (CPI) 2020 report published by Transparency International indicates that Nigeria occupies the 149th position out of the 180 countries surveyed, as well scored 25 out of 100 points. With the current ranking, Nigeria is now the second most corrupt country in West Africa with Guinea-Bissau the only country more corrupt than Nigeria in the sub-region. It can be recalled that in the 2019 report, Nigeria was ranked 146th out of the 180 countries surveyed, scoring 26 points out of 100 points.

According to Chen (2020) “corruption is dishonest behavior by those in positions of power, such as managers or government officials and includes giving or accepting bribes or inappropriate gifts, double-dealing, under-the-table transactions, manipulating elections, diverting funds, laundering money, and defrauding investors”. These are the deforming tendencies that characterized everyday existence in the public and private sectors of independent Nigeria (Rotimi et al., 2013; Akanle & Adesina, 2015; Hope, 2017; 2018; Aluko, 2020). The postcolonial stature of the country thus became chained to these propensities. The nation turned out to be ostensibly reborn at independence but with enduring sleazy deformities.

All of a sudden, Nigeria became internationally well-known for terrorism and violent disorder. Consequently, in the mid-2010s Nigerian-born terrorist organization, Boko Haram overtook ISIS, “the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria” as the worldwide deadliest extremist group. Since the birth of the insurgent sect (Boko Haram) in 2009, it has dislodged 2.3 million citizens from their native lands and killed tens of thousands of others (Pisa & Hume, 2015). Citing United Nations (UN) sources, Sanni (2021) asserts that “an estimated 1,366 incidents of explosive hazards were recorded in the past five years (from January 2016 to April 2021) in Nigeria’s Northeastern states of Borno, Yobe and Adamawa, as the three conflict-torn states have seen devastating attacks by Boko Haram terrorists over the years”. The country’s “Borno State has been most impacted with reports of victim-activated devices detonated in 76 per cent of the Local Government Areas (LGAS). Adamawa and Yobe states were also affected as victim-activated devices have been detonated in 52 per cent of the LGA” (Sanni, 2021).

In 2020 alone “there were 422 total civilian and non-civilian fatalities and casualties’ from the Boko haram-induced occurrences in the country. Following the Nigeria-Biafra war also, “bomb of various calibers were buried and some exposed in different parts of the country, particularly in the Southeastern States, where the Nigeria civil war was intense. Some of these bombs were detonating accidentally with attendant injury and death to victims. The police department in these regards, recently “recovered and demolished 21 mortar bombs, 39 Howitzer bombs and 248 artillery shells at Oruk Anam LGA Akwa Ibom” of the country (Sanni, 2021). Besides the “armed conflict against the Boko Haram terrorist group in the northeast of the country, there is insecurity and violence in the northwest; the conflict in the central area known as the Middle Belt and parts of the northwest and south, between nomadic Fulani herdsman and indigenous farming communities. There is the prevalence of organized gangs or cults in Nigeria’s south; general repression of minority and indigenous groups; killings during evictions in slum areas; and widespread police brutality” in the same Nigerian state (Callamard, 2019).

Contemporary incapacitations and seeming bleakness

Despite all the formal optimisms, the embedded shenanigans and official figures therefore, the Nigerian economy is currently incapacitated. It is ranked the 27th-largest economy in the world by nominal Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and the 24th-largest by Purchasing Power Parity (PPP). It is the largest economy in Africa (Duntoye, 2020). But the citizens of this same ostensive economic giant suffer from profound economic discomfitures. Egwuatu (2021) reports that the country’s currency (the Naira) recently “weakened to a four-year low in the parallel market despite the efforts by the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to bridge the widening gap between the official and street rates”. Quoting “a Bloomberg’s report”, Egwuatu (2021) disclosed that “parallel market dealers were offering the naira at N502 per dollar, up from N500 the previous week, the weakest since February 2017. The rate widens the spread between the official and the parallel market rate to 22 per cent, and Nigeria has devalued its currency thrice since March 2020 as lower oil income, which accounts for about 90 per cent of the country’s dollar earnings put pressure on external reserves”.

Unemployment level in the country is among the worst in the world and those mainly affected are under 35 years old. According to Akinwotu (2021) “Nigeria’s vast, rapidly growing population of 200 million people has a median age of just 18. Many of its young

people have seen their prospects quickly diminish in recent years”. Furthermore, “since 2015, Nigeria has endured one of its worst economic slumps in a generation. Two recessions since 2016 – driven by a combination of the government’s economic policies, a collapse in oil prices, and the Covid-19 pandemic – have inflicted prolonged misery” (Akinwotu. 2021). Citing the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS), Akinwotu (2021) underscores:

The unemployment rate has quadrupled since 2015 to become one of the worst globally. At the end of 2020, 23 million people or 33% of working age people looking for work, were recorded as unemployed and younger people were worst affected. Almost half of working-age Nigerians under 35 are either unemployed or underemployed. A shadow has been cast over the young, reinforcing the sense that greener pastures lie elsewhere.

Nigeria’s official inflation rate as released by the Nigerian Bureau of Statistics (NBS) is even contested by the chained citizens (Oyekanmi, 2021). NBS in Oyekanmi (2021) posits that “the consumer price index, (CPI) which measures the inflation rate increased by 17.93% (year-on-year) in May 2021 and this is 0.19% points lower than the rate recorded in April 2021 (18.12%)”.

Figure 2



Source: National Bureau of Statistics (2021)

Oyekanmi (2021) still deposes that the faithfully monitored “food index dropped from 22.72% recorded in April 2021 to 22.28% in May 2021, indicating the second consecutive decline”. Several commentators however dismissed the reports as hogwash, opining that the reality on the ground suggest spiraling inflationary pressures of worse proportions in the country (Oyekanmi, 2021). Figures are claimed not to tell lies but not in Nigeria. According to Kazeem (2019) “the state of Nigeria’s lack of accurate data is such that even the president does not know the country’s population size. In the absence of reliable data

from the government, global institutions including the World Bank and International Monetary Fund have been the most consistent suppliers of estimates and forecasts”. In the viewpoints of the Economist Intelligence Unit (2021) (an arm of the influential The Economist Group) therefore, “Nigeria’s near-term economic outlook is clouded by high inflation, mass unemployment and rampant instability, policy choices by the central bank will continue to create macro-imbalances and the government will be unable to get a handle on multiple security crises bubbling-away across Nigeria and this creates a growth profile that falls well behind potential”.

Kazeem (2018) had earlier highlighted that “a new report by The World Poverty Clock showed Nigeria had overtaken India as the country with the most extreme poor people in the world. India had a population seven times larger than Nigeria’s. Nigeria then had the largest extreme poverty population of 86.9 million. India had 71.5 million” (Kazeem, 2018). But from the updates of Ezezi (2020):

The latest report by World Poverty Clock has shown that more Nigerians have been plunged into extreme poverty since November 2019. The latest figure shows that over 105 million Nigerians now live in extreme poverty – from 98 million in October 2019. The figures represent 51% of the population. Nigeria, according to the World Poverty Clock, has a total population of 205,323,520 people with 105,097,856 in extreme poverty representing 51 per cent of the population.

Nigeria’s generic state performance is accordingly currently seemingly bleak. The internally generated statistics are fundamentally fabricated, so the true position in all its trepidations is even largely unknown to the ersatz state managers. Paradoxically, statistics of immense credibility about the Nigerian state only emanate from abroad. Then under the social media orthodoxy the focus of the world is increasingly on the chained-freedom contradictions of everyday existence in the African state. Contemporary political leadership in the country therefore elected to decree the social media out of existence in Nigeria. Predominantly to this effect, a bill titled “bill for an Act to make provisions for the protection from Internet Falsehood and Manipulations and for related matters 2019” has since passed second reading in the Senate of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Elumoye, 2019). Action on the immensely contentious proposal has since remained stalled but the political elite remain undeterred.

Akinpelu (2021) underscores that as government “continues its move to be able to determine what Nigerian media organisations publish and broadcast and the medium they use for such, it has now included ‘all online media’ among the media organisations it seeks to be able to censor”. Essentially, the type of issues that freely beget mass media attention in Nigeria (up to the coverage of the president’s vehement official and personal positive dispositions to such effects) is that statutorily demarcated routes must be maintained for the movement of cows from the Northern to the Southern states (Aborisade et al. 2021; Adani, 2021; Jimoh et al.2021). Hence, the Nigerian authorities have “earmarked about N1.13 billion for cattle grazing projects even as it insists on the recovery of grazing routes for the entitled mammals across the country”. The beasts are born free too in this African political classic.

Conclusion

This paper has demonstrated that citizenship is still enmeshed in immense social contract-related bankruptcies in some locations on earth, supposedly operating in freedom. Current

conditions in such areas thus invoke the memories of the state of nature. The essay is additionally an elucidation on the foibles of the postcolonial state, particularly in Africa South of the Sahara. The work is not precisely an indictment on specific administrations in the case study country but a holistic censure of national and continental tendencies and maladies, demanding justice as fairness in the politics. Finally, the thesis of the paper rotates around the answer to the inquiry on why in the twenty-first century a nation and her citizens are still classifiable as born free in chains. Findings of the study then suggest that the principal reason for this continuing possible classification borders on cultural lethargy in the location - a pervasive worldview supposing that fundamental societal changes eventually follow incremental random actions or even inactions. Under this scenario where government is the primary offender, citizens and followership constitute the other culprits. To break the barriers of this prevalent weariness in such locations requires a resort to the precepts of the ancient and enduring social contract theory.

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