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Nigeria: Between Development and Modernization – A Rhetorical Discussion

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Abstract

Political development is complex, difficult to evaluate, beyond objective factors and deliberately manipulable. Thus, it is not a situation of one society simply imitating another. The Third World countries can therefore not simply copy the West in order to develop. Modernization is change for progress. This study is largely theoretical, though with some sizeable doses of empiricism. This paper highlights the various forms and patterns political modernization has taken in Nigeria. In particular, democratization processes in Nigeria have usually involved constitution-making by some selected individuals with dictated and shallow or restricted terms of reference, the setting up of political parties which are selectively given official recognition and granted ridiculous modes of operation, setting up of an electoral body composed of government appointees and conducting of poorly organized, funded and secured elections.

Key words: Political development, Political modernization, Political change, Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP), National Economic Empowerment Strategy (NEEDS), Seven-Point Agenda, Transformation Agenda, Political Transition/democratization, Federal polity, Nigeria.

Introduction

The common thinking is that political development is a straightforward thing in which one country can easily imitate another. This is however not really the case. Indeed, political development or political modernization has been seen to be a complex, difficult to evaluate, beyond objective factors and deliberately manipulable. Therefore, developing countries cannot be expected to copy the West in order to develop. Modernization is, to put it simply, change for progress. This does not mean, nevertheless, that the so-called new states cannot learn from the tremendous developmental efforts of the Western European and North American countries and vice versa.

This paper refocuses on the political development stroke political modernization polemic and critically examines the problematic and relevant issues relating to them. The paper also highlights the various forms and patterns political development has taken in Nigeria, especially in the knotty area of democratization. Now, let us take the issues together, but beginning with conceptualizations.

Nigeria's modernizing federal polity

The concept of 'modernizing' can be subsumed within the modernization discourse. The modernization thesis or what Claude Ake (1982) has dubbed the 'political development theory' is an approach that dominated political analysis for well over two decades (1950s-1960s). However, David Apter in *The Politics of Modernization* (1965) distinguished between development and modernization.

Development, the most general, results from the proliferation and integration of functional roles in a community. Modernization is a particular case of development. Modernization implies three conditions – a social system that can constantly innovate without falling apart...; differentiated, flexible social structures; and a social framework to provide the skills and knowledge necessary for living in a technologically advanced world. Industrialization, a special aspect of modernization, may be defined as the period in a society in which the strategic functional roles are related to manufacturing (Apter, 1965:67 cited in Chilcote, 1994:225).

This implies that modernization is a special aspect of development of society which is continuously creative and yet remains stable. It also means a socially differentiated and functionally equipped and industrialized society. Thus, modernization simply connotes creativity, stability, differentiation and industrialization.

Also, political development has been conceived of as political modernization and political institutionalization. While the former involves increase in the operational variables of the polity in terms of rational orientation, structural differentiation and capability, the latter involves increase in participation, integration and representation (Tonwe, 1995:26-27, citing Varma, 1983:363-364). It is instructive that the political development syndrome has been viewed as encompassing equality, capacity and differentiation (Tonwe, 1995:26-27, citing Varma, 1983:342). Rational orientation implies that citizens should have reasonable and patriotic disposition towards the polity, its institutions and affairs, while structural differentiation means the proliferation and integration of political institutions and roles. As Nwabuzor and Mueller (1985:196) put it, “structural differentiation refers to the process whereby new roles and structures are created and old ones change by becoming more specialized and autonomous. A specialized structure is one which is principally responsible for the performance of one function.” Lastly, capability relates to capacity building and effectiveness of political institutions and officials to perform their roles and deliver the ends of government.

Political development and political modernization

The concepts of political development and political modernization are often used interchangeably (Nwabuzor and Mueller, 1985:190). Similar to the definitions above, Ronald Chilcote (1994:224) believes that modernization implies industrialization, economic growth, increasing social mobility, and political participation. Varma (1975:302) seems to expand this conceptualization when he says that the principal aspects of modernization are urbanization, industrialization, secularization, democratization, education and media participation. Modernization is therefore a very broad concept, involving many things. The concept has as such further been described as “a multi-faceted process involving change in all areas of human thought and activity” – whether psychological, intellectual, demographical, social, or economical. Modernization, thus, is regarded as a comprehensive phenomenon which brings about radical change in the field of economic development, mainly in the direction of industrialization and material advancement, changes in the nature and content of the political systems and also changes in the social and psychological spheres of life (Huntington, 1965 cited in Varma, 1975:302-303).

Similarly, modernization, as defined by one of its chief proponents, Wilbert Moore, refers to “the process whereby societies or social institutions change or move from traditional or less developed ones to those that characterize the developed ones” (cited in Offiong, 1980:20). Thus, modernization relates to societal or institutional transformation from a lower to a higher level of development. The key word about modernization, therefore, is ‘transformation’ or ‘change.’

In addition to Wilbert Moore's position above, A. Organski – 'The Stages of Political Development,' Daniel Lerner – 'The Passing of Traditional Societies', Marian J. Levi, Jnr. – 'Modernization and the Structure of Society' – (two volumes), and others assume that the Western World – specifically the United States of America (USA) – is the vanguard of the development syndrome, with traits like 'industrialization,' 'secularization,' 'technology,' 'democracy,' and 'individualism.' Others include high social mobility, equality, universal education, mass communications, increasing secularism, and socio-cultural integration; in its economic system, the modern society experiences a further technological revolution, massive urbanization, and the development of a fully diversified economy; its political institutions are those of democracy and modified totalitarianism, and, in either case, a specialized bureaucracy is used to carry on the expanding functions of government (Ake, 1982; *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol. 24*, 1998:1013).

Juxtaposed against these traits of modernity are attributes of traditionality such as 'backwardness' 'primitivism,' 'kinship' 'ruralism,' 'handicraft,' 'superstition,' 'religious view of life,' which are said to be found in new societies. Other attributes here include the point that the social structure of the traditional society is described as hierarchical, class bound, based on kinship, and divided into relative few effectively organized social groupings; its economic base is primarily agricultural, and industry and commerce are relatively underdeveloped; its political institutions are those of sacred monarchy, rule by a nobility and various forms of particularism (Ake, 1982; *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol. 24*, 1998:1013).

Besides, societies are assumed to be at polar extremes. New societies (Third World) are said to be 'traditional' while the Western societies, presumed to be the advanced ones, are 'modern.' Not only are societies at polar extremes, traditional societies will have to imitate the modern ones in order to develop. Thus, Westernization is equated with modernization and therefore development.

But can Westernization actually be equated with modernization? This can hardly be correct. If anything, it would be a case of Western ethnocentrism. For instance, Bernard Karsh and James Abbeglen inform us that Japan's industrial drive was a case of entrepreneurs employing entirely their own relations to work in their firms (cited in Offiong, 1980:35 and 49). What can be more particularistic than this? Even in Western countries like the United States, the use of family and associational connections to gain favours, privileges and positions is public knowledge. This is also a clear case of particularism.

Furthermore, the US combines modern and traditional features. Huntington argues that the US "combines the world's most modern society with one of the world's most antique polities" and seems to be advocating for it the sort of disciplined centralism and distancing of the 'masses' that he also prescribes for the 'developing areas'

(Huntington, 1965:429 cited in Nwabuzor and Mueller, 1985:211). Japan is equally very traditional in many respects (Offiong, 1980:48). For example, the Japanese, like their Chinese counterparts, have not forgotten their traditional self-defence sports like Judo and Karate; sports that have spread wide across the world, including Europe and America. Thus, societies are combinations of both modernity and tradition.

Moreover, many highly urbanized settlements abound in many of the new states. In Nigeria, for example, Lagos, Ibadan, Enugu, Kaduna and Kano are highly urbanized cities and towns and should rank highly among others in the world. And in other parts of Africa, cities and towns like Abidjan in Cote D'Ivoire, Cairo in Egypt, Nairobi in Kenya and Johannesburg in South Africa are very large urban centres like London, Berlin and New York in Britain, Germany and the US respectively. Finally, the largest democracy in the world is India. Therefore, 'urbanization' and 'democracy' are not attributes limited to the West or the so-called modern states alone.

In addition, the claim of extreme regional polarity between traditional and modern societies fails to take account of the reality or existence of what some writers have termed 'transitional' societies, among which are some of the so-called traditional societies; for example, Argentina, Brazil, and South Africa. According to *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol. 24* (1998:1013), the social system of the transitional society is typified by the formation of new classes, especially a middle class and a proletariat, and conflict among ethnic, religious and cultural groupings; its economic system experiences major tensions as the result of technological development, the growth of industry, urbanization, and the use of rapid communications; its political institutions are typically authoritarian, although constitutional forms also make their appearance.

These features help to further describe the nature of certain states, irrespective of whether they are categorized as traditional, modern or transitional. Some people would see ex-President George W. Bush as an autocratic leader who would drag his people to war against their wish and world opinion. Bush defied even the United Nations (UN) and attacked Iraq in 2001. He deposed Saddam Hussein, the former Iraqi president and he was tried and jailed in America. Meanwhile a puppet government had been installed in Iraq and the place is virtually ungovernable with constant insurgency attacks and suicide bombers, killing and maiming people, including US soldiers and other occupation forces. In contrast, many people would see late President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania and ex-President Nelson Mandela as leaders who ran humane and democratic governments in their respective 'traditional' or 'transitional' states.

Apart from this, conflicts arising from cultural differences are also not limited to transitional states. As in Nigeria, Cote D'Ivoire and Rwanda, for examples, where religious and ethnic conflicts are common, so you have race relations conflict in the

US, linguistic problems in Canada and ethnic differences in Spain. Thus, while whites and blacks are at loggerheads in America, the French-speaking people of the Province of Quebec almost seceded from the rest of the English-speaking Canadians sometime ago. Similarly, the members of separatist Basque Party are still struggling for self-determination in Spain.

So far, this work has tried to make the point that modernization is simply about change; that its popular thesis is guilty of Eurocentrism or Western ethnocentrism; that there are ancient features, urban centres, democracies, authoritarians, particularistic and industrial traits, cultural conflicts and other transitional attributes in both the so-called traditional and modern, or Third World and Western societies. And on the assumption that not only are societies at polar extremes, and that traditional societies will have to imitate the modern ones in order to develop, the point needs to be made and strongly registered that development is not a simple straightforward or uni-directional (one-way) matter! Rather, it is a complex phenomenon!! Political development or change is influenced by a plethora of factors.

Political life is shaped by a wide variety of factors, including social and cultural conditions, economic organization, intellectual and philosophical influences, geography or climate, and historical circumstance (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol. 24, 1998:1013*).

And not only is political change a complex, non-single-factor approach, it is also important to note that all political systems are unique as products of history and creations of the peculiar forces and conditions of their environment. A second problem that confronts comparative analysis is the difficulty of devising measures of political development. Another difficulty is that political change is not simply a reaction to 'objective' factors such as economic forces but also the product of conscious manipulation (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica Vol. 24, 1998:1013*). In sum, political development is complex, difficult to evaluate, beyond objective factors and deliberately manipulable. Thus, it is not a situation of one society simply imitating another one. The Third World countries can therefore not simply copy the West in order to develop. This does not, however, mean that the so-called new societies cannot benefit from the experiences of the west and vice versa.

These difficulties of analysis have therefore prevented the emergence of any satisfactory theory to explain the processes of political change or growth such as the ones we have briefly discussed above, that is, the 'traditional,' 'modern,' and even the 'transitional' processes. Thus, we may be inclined to excuse the writers on these processes, that is, the modernization theorists who did independent, unteleguided research, culminating in the political development or modernization thesis as considered above.

Accordingly, we can then attempt to channel, re-define or re-direct modernization towards positive goals or intentions devoid of Euro-American negatives, biases and illogicalities as hopefully sufficiently pointed out above. Arising from this, we could say that modernization represents a complex process of social and institutional change geared towards uplifting the citizens of a given political entity without polarizing modernity and traditionalism as such. As Offiong (1980:20) notes, “modernization involves a complex of changes in institutions or societies for the betterment of the citizens, without necessarily involving treating modernity and tradition as polar opposites.” Perhaps, a key point to emphasize here is that modernization or development should be for the good of people, in terms of bettering their lives, keeping them from want and providing them material comfort, freedom, dignity, and stability. Modernization is change for progress.

In Nigeria, political modernization has taken various forms and patterns. A new constitution (1979) was made which was reviewed and then suspended (1989 Constitution); switch over from parliamentary to presidential system of government; political reorganization of the country into thirty-six states; bold innovation of a tripartite federal system; vitalizing the third tier of government; creative use of traditional authorities in transition to modernity by reforming the feudal system through land use Decree of 1978; and the introduction of the now suspended two-party system (Ola and Tonwe, 2003:300).

There has also been creation of six geo-political zones in the country to facilitate representation; liberalization of the party system, resulting in the registration of thirty political parties in 2002; fifty in 2007; and sixty-three in 2011, re-introduction of the derivation principle for the sharing of national revenue and concomitant enhancement of its allocation to at least thirteen percent (13%), setting up of the Niger Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the Ministry of Niger Delta Affairs as well as the granting of amnesty and empowerment of Niger Deltan militants and youths in terms of providing them training/skill acquisition, psychological re-orientation/moral re-armament and economic/ financial welfare. There has further been introduction and implementation of social and economic reform policies and programmes such as the Structural Adjustment Programme, SAP (1985-93) and National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy, NEEDS (1999-2007); Seven-Point Agenda (2007-2010), Transformation Agenda (since 2011), initiation and implementation of political democratic transition programmes such as those under the regimes of Generals Murtala Mohammed/Olusegun Obasanjo (1975-79), Ibrahim Babangida (1985-93), Sani Abacha (1993-98), and Abdulsalami Abubakar (1998-99), et cetera.

Democratization processes in Nigeria have usually involved constitution-making by some selected individuals with dictated and shallow or restricted terms of reference, the setting up of political parties which are selectively given official recognition and

granted ridiculous modes of operation, setting up of an electoral body composed of government appointees, conducting of poorly organized, funded and secured elections, etc, etc. According to Bayo Adekanye, democratization or demilitarisation:

involves drawing up an elaborate timetable for a phased return to civilian rule, a procedure which features other processes as the making of a new constitution, summoning of a constituent assembly to debate and ratify the draft constitution, lifting of the ban on political party activities, and finally the holding of national election to determine successors to the military (Adekanye, 1979:216).

Democratization has usually been characterized by officialdom, expression of the preferences of the incumbent executive, godfatherism, poor political education and electoral fiasco.

Nigeria is a country that has all through experienced dictatorship – both before and after independence. The colonial period was a period of dictatorship by the British colonialists. The First Republic (1960-1966) was really too short to learn anything as there was no democratic foundation as we have mentioned earlier. The successive military regimes were virtually continuation of colonialism as they were characterized by autocracy. The only little exception where some (little) political education took place was under the General Ibrahim Babangida regime (1985-1993) when he set up the commission for Mass Mobilization for Self-Reliance, Social Justice and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) under Profesor Jerry Gana in 1988. The somewhat remarkable effort of Gana and his commission was lost when Babangida cancelled the June 12, 1993 Presidential Election (assumably) won by M.K.O. Abiola, a business magnate and South-Western Yoruba and hurriedly set up the Interim National Government (ING) headed by Ernest Shonekan, a business tycoon and Yoruba man of South-West Nigeria.

The cancellation of that election, however, does not prevent any objective observer from recognizing that the election was well organized by the Professor Henry Nwosuled National Electoral Commission (NEC) with remarkable inputs from the Centre for Democratic Studies (CDS) under Professor Omo Omoruyi. The election was free, fair, peaceful, transparent, innovative and record-breaking. Option A4 was the voting method adopted. Option A4 meant that voters simply queued behind their preferred candidates and counting was done immediately and result was announced on the spot. This exercise was conducted at the same given time across the entire country. It was simple, cheap, transparent and time-saving. If Babangida had been more sincere and willing to relinquish power and considered the crucial issues of nationhood and terms of co-existence among the ethnic nationalities as well as the related issues of true

federalism or fiscal federalism and over-centralisation of power and resources in the hands of the central government as part of his transition programme, the outcome will no doubt have been remarkably different.

It would be recalled that during that election, the politicians did not engage in the usual unwholesome acts of thuggery, kidnapping, assassinations, falsification of results, etc. Even the campaigns were relatively peaceful and decorous. It was obvious that the democratization processes were largely effective in spite of the few but critical omissions or limitations as mentioned above. The large-scale political sensitization by MAMSER towards creating a new political culture evidently made a great impact. There is therefore no doubt that an effective democratization process can contribute greatly to a successful transformation of Nigerian elite values into democracy sustaining values.

Nonetheless, the annulment of the election after an agonizing, eight-year long twisted transition programme caused so much pain, anger, tension, bitterness and crises that forced Babangida out of power and the country was brought to the brink of disintegration and total breakdown of law and order. Shonekan's interim government could also not survive as General Sani Abacha supplanted it in November, 1993 after only about three months in power. Abacha unleashed a crude dictatorship on Nigerians until his sudden death in June 1998. General Abdulsalami Abubakar, who succeeded him, and under whose regime M.K.O. Abiola died in jail, however, manageably conducted a quick political transition and handed over power to returnee President Olusegun Obasanjo for the Fourth Republic in May 1999. It would be recalled that Obasanjo then as an Army General and Head of State, handed over government to President Shehu Shagari (1979-1983), who ran a very corrupt, unserious, incompetent and rudderless administration until he was overthrown from power by Generals Mohammadu Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon, four months after a disastrous, flawed and violent election for a second four-year tenure in the Second Republic.

The Fourth Republic which began with President Obasanjo in 1999 has been experiencing many of the vices and indiscretions of the past such as corruption, arbitrariness, oppression, insensitivity, insecurity, breakdown of law and order, etc. Recall that late Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa was accused of corruption, nepotism and incompetence by the Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu-led military officers who toppled him to end the First Republic in January, 1966. So, only time will tell if this fourth republic will survive with the seeming continued manifestation of these anti-democratic tendencies by current political elites, just as it is worth investigating why this republic has lasted more than the previous ones. This republic has lasted over fourteen (14) years (i.e. May 1999 to May 2013).

However, Nigeria is yet to achieve a genuine, peaceful, orderly and stable democracy. So also has she been unable to achieve national integration and efficient bureaucracy to deliver public welfare services. Nonetheless, urbanization is rapid and chaotic, literacy, education, and mass media are slowly increasing, but mobile communication has increased exponentially. Finally, industrialization is sluggish, technological growth is in retreat, infrastructures have decayed and virtually non-existent, the economy is poor and undiversified and the people feel a sense of real hopelessness. So, whither Nigeria and its modernizing federal polity?

Conclusion

This paper has tried to draw attention, once again, to the problematic that political development is complex, difficult to evaluate, beyond objective factors and deliberately manipulable. Thus, it is not a situation of one society simply imitating another one. The developing countries can therefore not simply copy the West in order to develop. Modernization is change for progress. This does not however mean that the so-called new states cannot benefit from the experiences of the West and vice versa.

The paper also tried to highlight the various forms and patterns political modernization has taken in Nigeria. A typical case is that democratization processes in Nigeria has usually been characterized by officialdom, expression of the preferences of the incumbent executive, godfatherism, poor political education and electoral fiasco. We suggest that democratization and constitutional processes and designs should be properly and popularly carried out; that nation-building exercises should reflect collective aspirations; that political parties should be allowed to freely emerge and operate without official constraints of any kind; and that the electoral commission should truly enjoy independence in composition and operation in the country.

It is imperative that the people and their welfare should be the primary focus in any political modernization effort. Without this, it is very unlikely that the effort will succeed or be sustainable in Nigeria, or indeed elsewhere.

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