

A RENTIER STATE AND THE PREDATORY ELITE: THE DILEMMA OF NIGERIANS

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Abstract

The conspiracy between the hegemonic predatory elite and the rentier state among most less developed societies such as Nigeria has in recent times constituted a source of dilemma and concern to the oppressed citizens. The above scenario arises in the face of the endless rapacious expropriation of the wealth of these Nations by their elite among whom the Nigerian case has taken the front burner in various development discourse. In Nigeria the predatory elite is alleged to have colonized the state and the governing apparatuses for vested interests through their opportune access to the wealth of the land. As much as liberal scholars of modernization theory may wish to eulogize the sparsely identified decaying concrete Jungles of ill-conceived landmarks of development in the land of Nigeria, the evidence of poverty, decaying infrastructure, insecurity, mass unemployment and other vices that ravage the people in the midst of plenty exists among the citizens to buttress the contentions against the state which have culminated into its being called to question. This report is therefore part of the ever increasing efforts at an exposition of some of the horrendous conditions of life among the people. This study therefore sought to establish facts that Justified the vexing issues being orchestrated by the Nigerian state's descent to a puppet status in the hands of the predatory elite who; having entrapped it have continued to employ various mechanism of wealth expropriation to impoverish the people. Based on the paradigm of class analyses it was established that the convivial relationship between the predatory elite and the Nigerian state is sustained in consort with state bureaucrats, technocrats and political office holders through a mechanism that facilitates the exploitation of the masses in the interest of the elite. This process having persisted for ages in Nigeria and having elevated corruption to a state craft was synthesized in this study and established as unacceptable conditions of life to Nigerians that deserved lasting panacea. Accordingly, some recommendations were made the areas of ideological revolution by Nigerians based on a paradigm shift to egalitarianism as alternative development roadmaps for the general good of all Nigerians.

Keywords: *Rentier State, Predatory Elite, Poverty, Development, Good Governance.*



INTRODUCTION

The contemporary Nigerian state has been adjudged by critical analysts and the citizens of our society as a failed state in terms of the development of the nation. As a key player in the political and socio-economic determination of the dynamics that influence the trajectory of development in Nigeria, this state has continued to create avenues for it to be called to question. The ensuring scenario which has the potential of causing citizens to engage in social disobedience and other acts that constitute threats to the nation's sovereignty arises from the state's unbridled alliance with the dominant elite for the latter's interest. The relationship between the state and these elite has been adjudged as providing enabling environment for the elite's exploitation of the wealth of Nigerians. In view of this, a contradiction of this state's status as a neutral arbiter which superintends without bias; between all men as they relate in society is assumed to have occurred.

..... as a territorial society divided into the government and the (governed] subjects; the government being a body of persons within this state who apply the legal imperatives upon which the state rests and differently from "any person" within the territorial society, it is entitled to use coercion to see these imperatives are obeyed (Laski 1989).

This is the state of the people as it were which the Nigerian founding fathers envisaged while contending for power of self-rule with the British colonizers. Having been translated into a sovereign and independent state from 1960, this state as it exists today has lost its legitimacy among the citizens. This state as it exists and operates in contemporary Nigeria has continually skewed in its duties in favour of the dominant exploiter class whose elitist interests run ultra-varies to those of the masses. From the decaying infrastructure to the increasing insecurity, unemployment, poor health facilities as well as near total absence of welfare for citizens and rising income inequality, the endless list of what the state has failed to do in Nigeria have necessitated some critique. If the Nigerian state in its true and original form is "that regime or system of regulations and laws which form the basis for supreme authority that orders for all and receives orders from none", (Weber 1947) then Nigerians deserves to ask for a revisit of the meaning and duties of their state. This is a necessary agenda in view of this present status in which the Nigerian state has become a rentier state and an instrument for class domination. It is therefore seen as rentier state because of its alliance with the predatory elite who have subordinated it to their whims and caprice in defense of private property (Engels, 1977).

A historico-materialist and dialectical view of the relationship between the Nigerian state and the citizens reveals a

contradiction of the liberal school's contention that this state is "a neutral arbiter (Weber 1947) in the affairs of men. Such a contradiction is evidenced when the material base of its origin and nature is revealed from British colonial experiences to the character of the crude-capitalist elite that dominates this state (Belov, 1986). The argument here is that since the Nigerian state is a child of circumstance mid-wived by the British capitalist from colonialism to contemporary disposition which remains in favour of the predatory elite in our society causes it to be called to question. The Nigerian state can therefore be rightly referred to as a tool in the hands of a specific few, who in this case are the few Nigerians with access to state powers and the means of socio-economic reproduction, distribution and allocation of resources. This is a colonial legacy bequeathed the Nigerian people under which a few opportune citizens dominate and use the state to pursue vested interests. Having become conditioned as rent collection machinery, the Nigeria state has reneged in its mediatory and arbitration duties between the citizens. Indeed, this state has become an agent for the collection of petro dollar rents in Nigeria with which it feeds the ever increasing appetite of the rapacious elite to the detriment of the masses. Having labored and suffered for decades under this state to the benefit of this exploiter elitist class, the Nigerian masses have come out variously to demand for a revisit of the nature and functions of their state. The increasing antagonism by Nigerians

towards their state as it exists has in recent times taken a turn for the worse with individuals and groups rising in various forms to express their feelings through such actions that include civil disorder or disobedience, repeated worker's labour unrest and strike as well as ethnic restiveness, acts of tenor and other forms of fifth columnist activities. This constitutes a source of concern that necessitates this paper presentation.

The Elite and the State

The elite are specific citizens who have access to the institutions of society with which they determine and control the affairs of that society. Mosca (1939) is of the view that in every society, which has attained the dawning of civilization; irrespective of their level of development; there is the evident existence of division of the citizens into two strata of the rulers and the ruled. Mosca's views which agree with those of Pareto (1848-1923) Ortega (1883- 1955) and Mitchels (1876-1936) is that every society (in particular, the crude capitalist ones) is ruled by a minority that possesses the qualities that facilitate their ascension to socio-economic and political power. It is this position they occupy that provides the commanding heights for them to control society's institutions such as the state.

The state on its part is seen as a creature of the basis and most decisive element of the superstructure of society. Igwe (2005) furthers here that such a state is a culmination of men's struggles in settled life and it is an embodiment of



the expression of the common interests of the dominant class within the system and the derivation ruling class within the government (Charlsworth ed (1967). In many African societies there is evident difficulty in the attempts at separating the elite and the state. It is always common to have the state existing at the best of the ruling elite thus leading to the existence of a state of the elite which operates to satisfy specific interests which most often remains farfetched from the interest of the masses. Thus we see states of societies in Africa existing under definite system of either a dictatorship or selective democracy subject to the specific interests of the dominant elite.

Conceptually, Lenin (1983:93-9) sees the renter state as that which does not engage in concrete activities of governance and provision of socio-economic facilities that give meaning to the life of the citizen. It is a state that depends on rents and royalties accruing from minerals extracted in the society by externally controlled sources such as multinational corporations (MNCs). The rentier state is in these instances in a weak position in its relationship with the owners of the means of production, with respect to the determination of the trajectory of policies governing activities of their benefactor foreign corporations. The dilemma of this state lies in its lack of political and economic command and control over the activities of the rent payers, thus disposing it to manipulations by such externally oriented tenants. The implications of

these situation in which the Nigerian state finds itself is that rent collection processes subjects it to the control of agents of the multinational corporation (MACs) for no other reason than profit maximization. Accruable rents to the state are often shortchanged, diverted or out rightly denied the state through various unwholesome practices by state officials in collusion with profiteers and the elite. Faced with this ordeal, the state becomes a lame state whose functions and responsibilities to the society are never effective. This being the order in Nigeria has extended to the most horrifying phase in which this weak spineless state is completely taken over and operated by agents, cronies and even the elite for purposes of unfettered rapacious expropriation of needed resources.

A THEORETICAL UNDERPINNING

The need for a theoretical base in understanding the state and the elite crisis in this paper is for the purpose of establishing the specific ideology guiding us. Fundamentally this paper takes on the theory of class analysis a guide based on a deliberate effort that had considered the efficacy of other contending views which can be applied by other interested analyst on the same subject.

The class theory is part of the Marxist political philosophy that sees the "class" as a socio-economic and political category in relation to its relationship to the means of production, distribution and exchange of material goods,

whether as the owner, controller or beneficiary or as the exploited. Based on an objective identification of the characteristics of subjects of analyses in this paper, it becomes historically *relevant for an appreciation of the consciousness* of the elite class in its position in the scheme of things (Igwe, 2005). Here the class theory becomes a handy guide for us to understand that beyond the classes primitive communalist mode of socio-economic reproduction under which socio-economic life was basically that of cooperation, communalist welfare devoid of any form of competition, antagonism and wealth accumulation for vested interests, classes have existed among men. The contradiction of the primitive communalist mode having occurred to pave way for the slave and other stages of feudalism and capitalism, division of society along the strata of the strong and the weak, the haves and have nots; have weighed in to ossify class characterization of men.

Notwithstanding these class divisions a few humane societies have managed to exist in recent times by striking some form of balance that causes each class to accommodate the other. Pursuant of a semblance of some form of egalitarian, some of such societies have had their states being strengthened to take on a relative role of the mediator between classes. Such mediation though not absolute and neutral beyond some form of dominant class interventions, has continued to reposition a few modern metropolitan states for a relatively

definite persuasive role of providing for all classes in the society. This level of development is unfortunately yet to be envisaged by the backward societies such as Nigeria, what with the ever increasing rapacious appetite of the prebendalist elite remaining ever voracious.

THE NIGERIAN DILEMMA

The Nigerian state remains a dilemma to the citizens in terms of its clear interpretation along either a core capitalist or socialist economy. This situation creates contentions among analyst in their efforts at a presentation of this state as a midway state despite the much bandied about mixed economy status which the ruling elite concocted to facilitate their double standard roles during the cold war era. The Nigerian state is therefore a dilemma to the people as it has deviated from its duties to them which is that of satisfying the interests of a specific set of citizens.

Ake (2007: 105) does not mince words when he argues that:

... the states in Africa are specific modalities of class domination. Being generic phenomenon in capitalist and socialist formations, the unique feature of the socio-economic formations in post colonials Africa is that their states, Igwe can properly talk of such existence at all, have very limited autonomy. The state in Africa is only a particular modality of class domination. In the social formations of Africa



that are supposedly capitalist, we find a rudimentary autonomization of class domination. In the African social formations that are purportedly socialist we find a limited possibility of class domination being mediated and autonomized effectively by commodity production and exchange. As far as the state and social forces are concerned, we can argue that much of postcolonial Africa remains essentially "enclave" capitalism marked by class domination.

Much contradiction does exist between the liberal schools' notions of the state and the reality of its roles in the affairs of men in Nigeria. This becomes clearer when we draw inferences between Cicero's (106-34Bc) allusion that the state belongs to the people because the people are an association of a good number of persons based on justice and partnership to source common good; and Akes (1996) contention that the state is organized in the midst of class conflict by the economically dominant class which therefore becomes also the politically most powerful class. In Nigeria, the neo-colonial state's contradiction of its liberalist's assumed neutrality in the affairs of men is made clearer because of its origin in the exploiter capitalist colonial state. As a product of European traders' capitalist exploits beyond their borders, the colonial state was imposed on the nationalities of the areas amalgamated in

1914 for the purpose of using it to superintend the expropriation processes among the colonized (Crawder 1968). The role of the colonial state being the subordination of all the nationalities through all forces necessary was actuated and strengthened most effectively through the principles of divide and rule (Okibe 2000). Imbued with its colonial master's attributes of class characterization for resources expropriation in the interest of a specific class at independence, the post-colonial Nigerian state has continued to sustain the same art of subterfuge among its people. Since the leopard cannot easily change its colour, we can argue that the post-colonial Nigerian state has since the 1960 flag independence jamboree; been stealthily entrapped into the intricate web of intrigues for resource appropriation ossified by the predatory elite within and outside the shores of Nigeria. By living up to its calling the state in Nigeria has grown into an octopusian rentier organism which is a development dilemma to the citizens under which those in control of state political structures depend on selective incentives such as patronage, clientalism (god fatherism) graft, gratifications, percentage cuts, kickbacks, contract inflation under over writing and write offs as well as other acts that facilitate prebendalism etc to keep his seat of power (Gaddes 1994).

These acts having elevated corruption into a state craft debilitates development in Nigeria as it ossifies problems such as lack of essential infrastructure and social

services, which in turn compounds poverty which all causes citizen resentment and agitations for change. The predatory elite being a group though not cohesively held together exists as a cabal in the Nigerian context with a common interest which is access to state corridors of power, from where they operate and exploit Nigeria's resources. They include but are not limited to the past and present personalities occupying commanding height in the hierarchy of political and socio-economic conditioning of Nigeria. The Nigerian elite in this context include personalities that range from the immediate post-independence rulers to the military dictatorial rulers as well as the self-appointed democrats and those whose costumes change from regimented attires to flamboyant African traditional agbada, caftan, suits and their errand boy. The list continues to lengthen to include the pockets of bureaucrats, religious zealots, traditional rulers, ethnocentrists, captains of industries and all involved and are benefiting from the orchestration of exploitation and expropriation of the wealth of the land called Nigeria.

These are persons committed to perfecting the art of wealth expropriation for personal, family and class interests. They operate without formally coming together; as easily identifiable bodies, in a manner that causes easy crude -capitalist wealth and resources accumulation for vested interests. They are persons involved directly or indirectly in holding down or

conditioning the poor for the endless transfusion of their blood to sustain the lifeline of the dominant class through the apparatus of the state. These are acts that justify calling the Nigerian state a rent collecting agent. As much as there are ranges of states which can be defined in terms of the way they affect development among its citizens, the Nigerian state is a peculiar one. This is a state that facilitates and has even become involved in the extraction of large amount of otherwise investable surplus from the citizen's wealth and provided so little in the way of collective good (Evans 1987).

It seems reasonable to call the state that collaborates with the predatory elite to collect and misappropriate citizens' wealth a rentier state. This is so because it is a state that has its incumbents distributing resources to themselves, families, supporters and cronies without recourse to the demands of civility, due process and rule of law. This state is a rent collection agent because incumbents use their role and policymaking authorities to facilitate "rent" collection and royalties from multinational corporations engaged in resources extraction and transfer to the metropolis. This state is a rentier state because of its lack of legitimacy among the citizenry and sovereignty among decent committee of nations, occasioned by its vulnerability to a self-seeking elite who use it for wanton wealth accumulation. This state is so compromised in its relation with forces that control it leading some scholars to



hypothesize that "competition by the elite for entry to government for ruler ship is, in part, a competition for rent collection agency payoffs and settlement (Krueger 1974).

The rentier state in Nigeria being one of the weakest and dependent third world societies is not a neutral arbiter as western liberal scholarship such as Hegel may want us to believe. On the contrary, commentaries by neo-Marxist scholars hold that state policies of the rent collecting state are reflections of vested interests in society which in part causes a nostalgic recall of the efficacy of the opus magnum of Karl Marx. On the biases that likely characterize exploiter state policies (Colander 1984) The political office holders in rentier states have in most cases willingly or otherwise been held hostage by their political mentors, masters or god fathers, because of earlier arrangement that programmed and propelled such political office holders into power.

Przeworski et al (2000: 189) argue that;
Faced with the prospects of losing power, those (African rulers) who make political decisions (for the state) may engage in pillage rather than pursue development policies that would enhance the welfare of their constituencies so as to enhance their chances of surviving in power.

Goldman (2007) in a study of African state's misrule among their citizens

revealed that Nigeria was rated by Transparency International in year 2002 as second to last among nations characterized by official government acts of corruption, is an example of a rent collecting state that sustains corruption at the behest of a cabal. He furthered that between 1986 and 1999 when the military junta held sway in their reign of terror under the various juntas, the Nigerian people were held hostage by gun-toting military desperadoes whose primary objectives were that of feeding fat on the oil revenue flowing through the land. An illustration of the helplessness of the rentier state of Nigeria in the hands of predator elite was the case of late General Sani Abacha whose reign of terror between 1994 and 1998 opportuned him to amass wealth that made him, his family and cronies richer than some nations of Africa. This was a pathetic case that de-generated the status of the state in Nigeria beyond imaginations under the iron vice of Late General Abacha who collaborated with the predatory elite to elevate corruption, ineptitude, misrule, and other anti-people developmental practices to the highest level.

Masland and Bartholet (2002) argued that within the period of this specific regime of General Sani Abacha, poverty became wide spread as revealed by a World Bank survey which showed that Abacha "managed to steal \$4 billion in less than five years as head of state. This wealth was amassed in collusion with his predatory elitist cronies through

fictitious contracts, taking huge bribes and creaming off directly from the national treasury using corrupt bureaucrats, central bank officials and foreign operators of the multinational oil corporations in Nigeria.

Beyond the military dictators that turned the Nigerian state into a rentier agent are the present day's political contractors roaming the land pretending to be consolidating on nonexistent democratic principles and dividends. Since 1999 when the "uniform wearing" and trigger happy" military elite decided to change garments by designing a constitution with so much lacuna, this rentier state has never been better. The Nigerian state under the present civilian (democratic) rule has continued to play its role of propagating state policies that facilitates the transformation of public utilities, corporations and other economically viable sectors into conduits for pillage, outright theft and other vices that negate the true virtues of democracy and good governance.

Olson (1993) posits here that "the axiom that leaders with orientation towards satisfying their momentary become more predatory and lose interested in issues of larger social welfare". This momentary interest in itself is predicated on the fact of age old fear, uncertainty and general socio-economic insecurity that pervades African and indeed developing societies. Faced with various forms of insecurity arising from an ever decreasing marketability of Nigerian economy to external investors and such

other issues as militancy, terrorism, and the risks associated with a mono cultural economic base, the political office holder sees the state structure as a means to an end. His pre-occupation with issues of his entry and exit from the seat of state power becomes defined as a momentary opportunity to secure a future for himself, family, cronies and benefactors. To this end, the state serves as access and channel to public revenue, which in Nigeria's case comes from the singular source of petro-dollar earnings and revenue which the elite uses the politician to superintend through the state structures and in that process siphon's wealth to the detriment of public good. Analytically it can be argued that prominent among the factors responsible for the entrapment of the Nigerian state into its rent collector status to the predatory elite is because the politicians are non-ideological, non-pragmatic and non-nationalistic in their service to motherland. The Nigerian rulers' (leader's) primacy has always been on self-perpetuation in power for the sole purpose of maximizing their material interests.

Conclusion

The main positron of this concluding part of this paper is fundamentally to state that the Nigerian state is not and has never been responsible to the citizens. It has never at any time stood as a power above all to create the synergy between contending interests in Nigeria by "taming domestic and international forces and harnessing them to national



economic interests "(Evans 2000). Irrespective of the intervening socio-economic and political forces that formed the foundation and growth of the Nigerian state, its continued subjugation under the control of the elite that does not mean well for the citizenry is unacceptable. There is therefore the need for the enthronement of a people oriented democratic processes through citizen based actions that can revolutionize the polity towards ushering in objective conditions that cause change for the better.

Among such actions include social actions of popular participation in electoral processes and elections through which the masses vote for credible candidates. Vote casting here should go beyond party politics (which has already been high jacked by the predatory elite) to the consideration of qualities of individual contestants. Votes cast must be made to count based on voters' insistence (through mass support) for on the spot counting and publication of election results. Also social actions such as mass protests, workers' strike, and civil society led peaceful but persistent demonstrations against misrule, state insensitivity to public good and the lot must be made a rallying point of the people. As much as the various institutions of the Nigerian state may have either gone moribund with respect to their duties or may have been subsumed under this ravaging predatory elite, the hope of the citizens for the better days still remains in the possibility of revitalizing and

mobilizing some institutions like the media, educational institutions, NGOs and others as channels of change.

To achieve such a mission, there is need to pursue equity, rule of law and justice (Roscoe 1995). The judiciary judicial decisions which have often been abused and ridiculed by the elite in Nigerian must rise up to the challenges if it must retain its dignity as the last hope of the common man and defender of democracy.

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