

DECONSTRUCTING POLITICS IN AFRICA: THE RESURGENCE OF SERVICE PARADIGM

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ABSTRACT

The current practice of politics in Africa gravitates towards the ideal of the warfare paradigm. The conception of politics in most African states is based on the competitive nature of life. Life is a competition for scarce resources of which political power is one. Political offices are limited in number compared to many who vie for them. This competition eventually led to the idea of guerrilla warfare in African politics.

The demand for political power is more than the supply of the political offices the structure of the society permits. Therefore, there is this endless battle over who occupies the limited political power available in the political market. Also, some definitions of politics proposed by some political scientists further deepened the battles in the realm of politics, especially in Africa. This paper sets out as its main goal, the proposal of an alternative paradigm based on the possibility of eliminating the warfare conception of politics.

Keywords: Deconstruction; African Politics; Warfare Paradigm; Service Paradigm

INTRODUCTION

Deconstruction, as used in this paper, does not involve the engagement of Derrida's theory of literary deconstruction, but rather a critical attempt at analyzing politics as a social phenomenon. Therefore, we will not be considering the theories of deconstruction since the aim of this paper does not incorporate them. Deconstruction, as used in this paper, implies uncovering contradictions and unspoken assumptions and deciphering the conflicts in the usage of words. The word within the purview of our discourse now is politics. We, therefore, attempt to demystify politics in order to bring to the fore the spoken and the hidden assumptions surrounding its practice in many nations.

An attempt at defining politics is central to this discourse. This is because the definition guides us into the nature of the discipline and the practice of politics. There have been several definitions of politics as there have been several political scientists. It, then, becomes obvious that there is no unanimity among political scientists on what politics is. However, we cannot deny some central themes in the definitions of politics by the thousands of political scientists. One of such is the fact that politics is all about the people. Politics is only relevant amidst rational beings. Politics is a game of the people.

“Politics can be defined as simply the process through which a society makes its governing decisions” (Patterson, 2000). The society is a structured community of people. So politics is, therefore, the process through which people make their governing decisions. Thus, any form of politicking that removes the people or does not pay close attention to the effects of its policies and decisions on the people can be termed as a perverted form of politics that must be deconstructed so as to produce politics that is service oriented.

The delineation of several concepts in political science is incomplete without the concept of the people. Politics is, first and foremost, the people oriented human activity. The concept of the state, for instance, cannot be defined without reference to the people. The state is nothing but the highest form of human association. Therefore, it follows, necessarily, that the state should not be run without given priority to the people who are the basis of its existence.

This definition of politics is also helpful as defined by this scholar. “Politics is the process of making collective decisions in a community, society, or group through the application of influence and power” (Ethridge & Howard, 2004). It is a collective decision on who should govern the people and how they should be governed. The people are, therefore, expected to choose their own leaders and also participate effectively in the process of decision and policy-making and implementation. Influence and power are central concepts in politics, yet they are not supposed to be used to the detriment of the peoples’ wellbeing and wishes.

“Politics is a response to certain inherent human problems and, in particular, the problems of order and distribution of resources” (Faulks, Phillips and Thomson, 2003). Politics is a human tool for resolving inherent human problems. Politics is, therefore, a problem solver and not a problem generator/maker. Any society where politics always creates more disorderliness than orderliness must be a society built around the warfare paradigm of politics. This is a perverted conception of politics. The social contract theorists (we are not going to involve ourselves with the arguments and the counter-arguments on the subject of Social Contract Theorists) conceived the emergence of the state (government) as an attempt to create order in the society.

According to the last definition above, politics set out to bring order to the society and to effectively cater for the problems associated with the distribution of resources within the state. Therefore, any political system where the leaders only enrich themselves at the expense of the common good and the collective welfare of the citizens is a political system built on the warfare paradigm and it is injurious to any polity.

In most African post-colonial states, this seems to be our common experience. The leaders emerge as the riches in the society through embezzlement and lootings of the national treasuries, while many of the citizens are impoverished. Politics in such states do not solve problems but rather create more for the people and the society, as a whole.

More so, in many African post-colonial states, the political realm has always been the cause of most disorderliness and social unrest. Most African countries are characterized with political instability due to the fact that politics have not been conceived in the right perspective. So, in African politics, there is this perennial conception that politics is all about eliminating opponents, winning through any means, whether legitimate or illegitimate, moral or immoral, the survival of the fittest and the eliminations of the unfit, the means justifies the ends; politics is conceived as a dirty game that accommodates any immoral or illegal practice. There is this conception of politics as a game of deception where the politicians are to promise

what they will never do. The Machiavelli's advice to the prince to pretend to be good has been the hallmark of politics in most African post-colonial states.

THE MACHIAVELLIAN FOUNDATION OF WARFARE PARADIGM IN AFRICAN POLITICS

Machiavelli advises that "one must know how to color one's actions and to be a great liar and deceiver. Men are so simple, and so much creatures of circumstance, that the deceiver will always find someone ready to be deceived. A prince...need not necessarily have all the good qualities...but he should certainly appear to have them" (Machiavelli, 1956). This Machiavellian postulation is injurious to the people as the basis of all political interactions in the society.

Machiavelli posits further that "a prince...must have no other object or thought, nor acquire skill in anything, except war, its organization, and its discipline. The art of war is all that is expected of a ruler....The first way to lose your state is to neglect the art of war; the first way to win a state is to be skilled in the art of war" (Machiavelli, 1956).

War is the basis of all political interactions in the Machiavelli's political jungle. The leaders are not just at war with each other, they must also preserve themselves in power through the arts of war possibly with the citizens who may not be please with their reign of terror. Therefore, if the people oppose the leaders and attempt to remove them from power, the leaders who have mastered the art of war as a political virtue must stand against them.

However, it is worth of note that Machiavelli's advice bothers prominently on the prince's preservation of the state against external aggression than it does with his battle against his subjects. But this element of war has been broadened to accommodate political war in every sphere among and between leaders and the led. This has gradually become a warfare basis of political guerrilla interactions in the society. The prince has to do everything within his power to remain in power whether the people desire his leadership or not. The consent of the people is not relevant.

African politics, for instance, has been built around this Machiavellian notion of politics and political leadership. There is a need to deconstruct this warfare paradigm in African politics so as to revive the real definitions of politics as construed by ancient political philosophers.

He posits on his recommendation to the prince as thus: "he must never let his thought stray from military exercises, which he must pursue more vigorously in peace than in war. These exercises can be both physical and mental. A wise prince must observe these rules; he must never take things easy in times of peace, but rather use the latter assiduously, in order to be able to reap the profit in times of adversity" (Machiavelli, 1956).

This proposition for politics encourages all forms of evil practice within the confine of politics. Elections rigging, assassinations of political opponents, blackmailing, political propaganda, deceptions, fraud, deliberate instigation of social unrest and political instability and etc are hereby considered as the integral parts of politics. He further posits that "there are two ways of fighting: by law or by force. The first way is natural to men, and the second to beasts. But as the first way often proves inadequate one must needs have recourse to the second" (Machiavelli, 1956).

In other words, the prince should adopt the beast approach to leadership and governance. A beast refers to instinctive, irrational, and aggressive personality. It refers to something unpleasant; something wild or unruly or unrestrained. Political

leaders are to act as beasts. In other words, they are to act irrational, unruly, wild, unpleasant, and aggressive in order to retain their power. This is a dangerous theoretical basis for political activities.

This Machiavellian approach to politics has also influenced some scholars' definitions of politics. "Politics is the art of influencing, manipulating, and controlling others" (Wright, 1955). As innocent as this definition may look, the three components (influence, manipulation, and control) could be in the negative sense such that the experiential demonstration of them could be injurious to the people within the political community. The Machiavellian Prince seems to have mastered these arts of influencing, manipulating, and controlling the people for his own end. This definition portrays the people as a tool in the political market. He who profits more is he who is able to influence, manipulate, and control the people effectively to his own use.

"Politics is the struggle among actors pursuing conflicting desires on public issues" (Dyke, 1960). The struggle in this definition represents ideological struggles for what is the best way or how best can the society be organized such that the peoples' welfare are catered for. In African politics, this struggle among actors in political matters has been translated beyond ideological struggle to incorporate physical struggle as though the political realm is a battlefield.

According to the warfare paradigm in politics, the overriding objective of the political actors is the advancement of their own individual interests; an engagement of opponents and the citizens in consistent battle in which they (the politicians) must endeavor to consistently try to gulp as much as possible from the national treasury. The warfare paradigm does not accommodate failure in the process of vying for political offices or the initiation and implementation of policies. It is a win-win political mentality in which strife, corruption, deception, and violence are the central pillars. The politicians, within the confine of the warfare paradigm, pretend to be good and posit theoretically that politics are all about the people, but in reality they implement policies that are anti-life.

The developing countries, especially Africa, seem to be a replica of the warfare paradigm in politics. Several countries within the African states witness what could be termed the tyranny of the minority. The elites have ceased state power and have used it to their own advantage alone.

THE COLONIAL FOUNDATION OF WARFARE PARADIGM IN AFRICAN POLITICS

The history of the African States is the history of colonialism. However, given that this paper does not major on the pros and cons of colonialism, our discourse here will be rather perfunctory. The African nationalists were in constant battle with the colonial masters in attempt at securing self-governance and thereby end all forms of exploitations of their economy. This prepared the African nationalists for the wrong perception of politics as nothing but a ceaseless battle for political power. This battle with the colonialists was later transferred to battles with indigenous political opponents resulting into many forms of violence and social anomie. That possibly explains the reason behind the present politics of violence in Africa.

The nationalists also grew to know politics, as practiced by the colonialists, as the tool for suppression, subjugation, and exploitation of the powerless. Ezeani (2008) quoted Claude Ake as saying that "the custodians of the post-colonial state had, rather than change it, merely inherited the exploitative policies and structures of their predecessors". Politics is thus seen as a warfare and unruly competition over state power that is eventually used to enrich the politicians and their accomplices.

Ekekwe (1986) posits that “throughout Africa, those elements of the African petit-bourgeoisie who had successful nationalist movement attempted, in the post-independence period, to use their new control over the state to direct financial resources and economic opportunities to themselves, in order to consolidate their economic and social position and become something of a dominant bourgeoisie”. Instead of serving the people, the post-colonial African leaders fleece the people while the people are enmeshed in poverty and lack. The African post-colonial states are synonymous with sinuous under-development and anomalous progress. This is due to the warfare conception of politics as against service paradigm or orientation that is necessary for any meaningful development in any polity. Politics is now a battle against the peoples’ welfare.

Ake (1996) illuminates it thus: “The character of the state in Africa rules out a politics of moderation and mandates a politics of lawlessness and extremism for the simple reason that the nature of state power makes the capture of state power irresistibly attractive. The winners in the competition win everything and the losers lose everything. Nothing can be worse than losing, nothing better than winning. Given this scenario, everyone seeks power by every means legal or otherwise, and those already in control of it try to keep it by every means. What emerges from this is a politics which does not know legitimacy or legality, only expediency. Thus those who get it first use it without restraint to put their opponents out of business, to expropriate them and even to deprive them of their liberty”.

THE DEFINITIONAL PROBLEMS OF POLITICS

One of the major problems we discovered with the several definitions of politics as both an art and a practice is the fact that the end of politics (political power) is hardly emphasized. Therefore, people who stumble on political power embrace it with no definite goal at hand.

Let us consider this definition, for instance. “Politics may be defined as all the activities that are directly or remotely associated with the acquisition of, consolidation, and the use of State Power” (Abonyi, 2005). The acquisition, consolidation, and the use of state power for what? Why should people struggle to acquire, consolidate, and use the power of the state? For what purpose is the power needed? For the good of the people in the state or for personal aggrandizement of the leaders who have been able to struggle through and now possesses the power of the State?

We, on the basis of critical analysis, found Max Weber definition also lacking in the process of delineating the purpose of political power. “Politics is the operation of the state and its institution. It means striving to share power or striving to influence the distribution of power among individuals and groups within a state” (Weber, 1947). The problem with this is the fact the reason for which the striving is done is not stated. So politicians engage in these ceaseless battles of sharing power in the state; political parties engage in this perennial striving forever over the state power of governance not wanting to share that with any other party. Mostly, in many developing countries, this striving has become political strife (bitter conflict and rivalry), resulting into violent social and political dissension. What this eventually does is to inhibit development. Therefore, it is not illogical to argue that the several definitions of politics have been the bane of development in many countries due to the wrong interpretation of the political enterprise by both the political scholars and the practicing politicians. This conclusion is relevant because politics is the central core of development in any nation. The distribution of wealth is done within the purview of political power. This is the central theme of political economy as a distinctive subject in political science.

“Reduced to its universal elements then, politics is a social process characterized by activity involving rivalry and co-operation in the exercise of power and culminating in the making of decisions for a group” (Bluhm, 1965). Indeed politics cannot be done without rivalry and competition, but there is also an element of co-operation so that the ruling party recognizes the role of the opposition party. But in many developing countries, the ruling party always sets out to eliminate the opposition party under the guise of being a political genius. But the problem with this definition above is the claim that decisions are made for a group. That explains the basis of the emergence of the tyranny of the minority (the elites) in African politics; which we believe is the same for most developing countries. The group becomes the political party, the elites group, the ethnic group, a segment of the society. Politics is not activity directed towards the welfare of a group, but rather for the collective or common good of the citizens. The state and its institutions do not exist to service the needs of a group in the society, but to serve the people whose existence within the state confirms the sense meaning on the state and its institutions.

The central argument in this section is that the several definitions of politics leave us on the verge of mere rivalry, competition, group-centered welfare as against collective welfare of the citizens, individuals striving for political power and influence without emphasis on the common good, egoistic leadership style, and an ultimate promotion of warfare paradigm.

THE REMINISCENCE OF THE GREEK POLITY

As a way of gradually moving toward the proposal of this paper, which is the resurgence of the service paradigm in our conception of politics in Africa, a little reminiscence of politics in the Greek city-states will serve as a corrective measure in our modern day notion of politics as warfare antics. However, this does not imply that the Greek politics was a perfect model for our contemporary politics.

The Greeks understood politics to be an activity that was meant to promote the common good of the citizens. Therefore, though due to the small size of the city-state, they encouraged active participation of the people in their politics. For them, to be a citizen did not merely imply the payment of taxes and the possession of the power to vote and to be voted for. It implied a direct and active co-operation in all the functions of civic and military life. It is to be actively involved in the affairs of the state. This was also evident in the political theories of Plato and Aristotle. An idiot in Greek is one who is not involved in the political affairs of the city-state.

This active involvement was never meant for the pursuit of personal goals. The striving for political power was to be able to contribute actively to the development of the city-state. The welfare of the citizens was the end to which the political power of the leaders was directed. Both the leaders and the led are subject to the law of the land. None was above the law.

Thus, one of the principal merits of this feature is that it enhanced the feeling of patriotism. The citizens were committed to the service of the state and individual interests were abandoned for the collective interest of the city-state. Public interest and the common good were the ends (purposes) for which political power was sought and directed.

THE SERVICE PARADIGM: AN APPEAL FOR RESPONSIBLE GOVERNANCE IN AFRICA

Aristotle, for instance, argues that “every state is a community of some kind, and every community is established with a view to some good; for mankind always act in order to obtain that which they think good. But, if all communities aim at some good, the state or political community, which the highest of all, and which embraces all the rest, aims at good in a greater degree than any other, and at the highest good” (Aristotle, 1962). Politics is practiced within the purview of the state for the

attainment of the highest good for the people. The state and those who wedge its supreme power must use it for the welfare of the people in the community in general. Politics for the ancient political thinkers is an art of service so that the people can realize their own projection and self-fulfillments within the political community. Happiness for Aristotle is the ultimate goal of any mortal man. The state and its leaders are to render services to the people that will foster the realization of this ultimate goal (happiness).

However, this writer recognizes the fact that some people within the state will be unhappy, irrespective of what the state provides; but the state must not deliberately engage in policies and decisions that will lead to the unhappiness of the people. In other words, if the state cannot promote happiness directly, it must not, either directly or indirectly, destroy the peoples' happiness.

This scholar's definition buttresses Aristotle postulation of politics as a means of achieving man's end, which is happiness. "Politics can be viewed as a process of conflict management. It is also a process through which individuals and groups organize and act collectively to achieve social goals- individual freedom, public health, quality education, national security, economic opportunity, clean air, and water" (Bibby & Brian, 2008). Politics should aid the resolution of conflicts in the society and not generate conflicts. The warfare paradigm produces conflict generating politics, while the service paradigm produces a political system that seeks the welfare of the people.

For the service paradigm, which could also be called the welfare paradigm, the politicians do not seek to take advantage of their position as the custodians of the peoples' economic and political power to impoverish the state and the citizens. They recognize the fact that sovereignty lies in the people without whom their ascendancy to the political thrones would have been impossible. They, therefore, initiate and implement policies that are people-orientated. For these politicians, the people are not mere objects to be used for personal achievements. The people have an objective existence as the real custodian of political power. They also recognize the fact they are the stewards of the people, the state and its institution, and therefore they are committed to servicing the needs of the people.

SOCIAL ORDER AND JUSTICE

Merki's (1967) definition of politics as "the quest for power, order and justice" can be helpful in portraying the ideal of the service (welfare) paradigm in politics. The quest for power is directed towards two things in the society, namely, fostering order and promoting justice. In other words, the politician's desire to wedge the state's power of governance is to be able to provide a viable social order and promote justice in the organization of the society. If political power is sought outside the provision of these two important issues (order and justice), then the warfare paradigm is in vogue.

For Ujomu (2004), social order is "the social systems and schemes of social relations that define the political, economic, and social roles, rights, and duties of people in a society. It is the sum of all the human arrangements, values, rules, norms, regulations, ideologies, and institutions that enhance the proper functioning of the various parts of the society or community".

We, therefore, posit that the service paradigm in politics in Africa (as it were in any nation on earth), is essential in providing a viable social order that will serve as the platform for the realization of the citizens' well being, self-actualization and self-fulfillments. If social order refers to a proper functioning of the various segments of the society, politics, being an important driver of social and economic progress and developments, must enhance the realization of a viable social order. If politics and

African politicians will embrace the service paradigm in politics, we can be sure of evolving a political system that facilitates the human project and goal of happiness as articulated by Aristotle.

The service paradigm in politics in Africa will also promote the ideal of social justice. Our description of social justice in this paper shall embrace the whole gamut of Rawls theory of justice. However, we shall not engage ourselves in an extensive description of his idea, but rather see how a proper understanding of politics can enhance the promotion of social justice.

John Rawls (1972) recommends two basic principles of social justice.

First principle:

Each person is to have equal rights to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.

Second principle:

Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefits of the least advantaged, consistent with the just saving principle, (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.

Rawls theory of justice does not negate the possibility of both inequalities of wealth and of political power in the society. But it rather emphasizes that the possibility of attaining wealth and political power should be opened to all, not just in theory, but also in practice. In other words, Rawls argues for equal opportunities to be granted to the people and not just equal distribution of wealth or position. This is because the structure of the world accommodates inequality of wealth and positions. For him therefore, people may not have equal wealth, but they should be given equal opportunity to create the wealth.

Thus, the service paradigm in politics provides an equal opportunity for all the citizens and not just the political elites who belong to another world of theirs. All citizens are to be placed in a position of a relative advantage through the provision of viable social order.

With the second principle, Rawls opposes the situation where the rich gets richer and the poor gets poorer. He opines that social and economic benefits should be arranged such that the less privileged do not get impoverished. The warfare conception of politics in Africa has widened the gap between the rich and the poor. While the rich (the politicians and their accomplices) get richer, the people, in whom political sovereignty should be located, get poorer.

But in service orientated politics, social and economic benefits are judiciously distributed so that the less advantaged are not made worst. The moral stand of Rawls is the avoidance of implementing policies that will further worsen the economic situation of the poor or less advantaged. His theory attempts to rehabilitate capitalism so as to make room for the economic improvements of the poor in the society. In the case of the African states, the poor are in the majority.

CONCLUSION

Politics is a people development activity that involves the control and the use of state power for the benefit of the citizens who are the primary bearers of political power. The primary goal of politics is the promotion of development and progress in the society and in the people. Development, in this sense, entails capital, resources and human development. Neither the politicians nor the people, on whose behalf they control state power of governance, are expected to be impoverished. Politics is a service (peoples' welfare) oriented activity and not warfare antics.

If Africa must emerge and prove itself as the real cradle of civilization, as it is claimed, and not a mere appendage to the comity of nations, politics should have to be about service and not a tool for the personal aggrandizements of the politicians and their accomplices. What will save African nations is the emergence of the service paradigm in our politics. Until we (both the political analysts and the politicians) begin to project the real essence of politics as service to the political community, we are bound to continue in this warfare paradigm till we take our final exit out of this world of spatiotemporal existence. There is no future for Africa without the emergence of the service paradigm in governance. And there can be no meaningful and sustainable development in any polity where the service dimension of politics is foreign and strange to the people.

It begins with us (the political analysts and the politicians) because we are the central figure in politics. The political analysts must begin to educate the public on the real essence of politics, while the politicians live the life of the real essence of politics. If not, the perennial perpetration of the warfare paradigm continues ad infinitum and thus the states and the masses suffer the loss forever.

We strongly believe that what Africa lacks is the understanding of the service dimension of politics. This can be enthroned with proper political education and an exemplary life of stewardship of the politicians. The journey should begin immediately so as to quickly evolve a political system that seeks primarily, social order and justice in the distribution of both social burdens and benefits. There is hope for Africa.

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