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A Critical Examination of Awolowo's Regime of Mental Magnitude as a Cure to Social Vices

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Abstract:

No state in the world is free from social ills. Every responsible government makes efforts at solving these problems. Social challenges such as: unemployment, robbery, terrorism, corruption, vandalism, illiteracy, violence, fraud, etc. have constrained the Nigeria's development in spite of her natural and human endowment. Corruption is the most problematic these and has haunted the potentials of the country. Despite governments (Past and present) governments to tackle this menace, such efforts have not paid off. Therefore, the paper seeks alternative to the cure of corruption in Nigeria in the moral and political philosophy of Obafemi Awolowo's Regime of Mental Magnitude. The paper noted that the political philosophy is capable of serving as panacea toward the problem and brings sanity to the nation.

Keywords: *Corruption, Leadership, Discipline, Mental Magnitude*

1. Introduction

Every successive government that has come to power in Nigeria laid claim to the fact that Nigerians have no business with poverty and underdevelopment. They hinge their argument on the fact that the country is well-blessed and endowed with human, natural and economic resources that are not found even in many of the developed countries of the world. And, according to Aderemi (2008: 261)

Nigeria is one of the world's most endowed nations, with abundant human and material resources.

There is practically every vital mineral deposit in the states of the federation; from crude oil to gold, cocoa to coal, uranium gypsum, palm oil to rubber, coffee to timber, cattle to fish, all in commercial quantities. However, Nigeria remains one of the developing but under-industrialized nations in the world.

The error in this thinking direction is that, people tend to assume that development is all about having resources in place. There is no contradiction in having resources and yet, the country remains poor. According to Omoboriwo (1982; 100), with corruption and without disciplined leaders and followers, there can be no meaningful development. Nigeria is ranked among the most blessed countries in the world, and equally, among the most corrupt countries. It should therefore not be a surprise that it is not developed, even to the dismay of the founding fathers of the country. It was Anyaoku (TELL, 2013) who said, disappointingly that;

There is no doubt that some of our dreams have been shattered- the dream that Nigeria would become a developed country that would be influential within Africa and in the rest of the world.

We were excited at the time of independence that the potential of Nigeria were such that, given 20 to 25 years, Nigeria would be one of the countries to be reckoned internationally. We are nowhere near what we thought at that time (of independence) that Nigeria would be at this time.

Anyaoku and other founding fathers of Nigeria probably had expected that, with the human and material resources super abundantly available in the country, if the resources had been organized and well-co-ordinated, the country would have been ranked among the developed one in the world.

Awolowo himself was aware of this challenge for development when he said in his interview with Makinde that why the country was lagging behind in term of development was leadership. According to him; "Yes, we have the money, but good or bad, competent or incompetent leadership makes the difference." (Awolowo as cited by Makinde; 2000, 242)

2. Corruption and Its Manifestations in Nigeria

Corruption as a concept has been flogged but cannot be over-flogged in literature. Corruption is often presented by some scholars as if it is a normal phenomenon. For instance, Aderemi Ajibewa (2008; 267), believes that; "Corruption has increased tremendously in the world... There is no continent, region, society and organization without some level of corruption." This is because it is a concept that has many sides. For Lipset & Lenz (2000; 112), corruption involves the breach of established rules for personal gain and profit; an effort to secure wealth or power through illegal means; private gain at public expense; or the misuse of public power for private benefits. Osoba (1998; 371), defines corruption as; "any anti-social behaviour conferring improper benefits contrary to legal and moral norms, and which undermines the authority's capacity to secure the welfare of all citizens." Corruption, according to the Encyclopedia Americana (2005) "is a general term for the misuse of a public position of trust for private gain." The tendency is always there to associate corruption with the state as these, and some other definitions have shown. Correct as they are, they seem to have neglected the fact that corruption is both a social and moral concept, not just social terminology. It is in this regard that corruption can simply be defined as the sum total of any act that falls below moral and social standard. Put differently, corruption is a perversion or degeneration in social and moral expectation. Awolowo's perception of corruption is quite similar to the views expressed above.

Corruption, seen in this angle, permeates every facet of life in Nigeria. The market men and women who use wrong scales or the filling stations that adjust the pumps or hoard fuel in anticipation of change in pump price are corrupt. The police and custom officers who take bribe are corrupt. Teachers and lecturers who will not go to classes as at when due without good reasons or who collect gifts or sleep with students just to pass them in exam are corrupt. Civil servants that resume work late and close early, and who will not do their work honestly and faithfully without gratification, are corrupt. Employers who will not pay their workers as at when due, and without good reasons are corrupt, just as employees that sabotage the efforts of their employers are corrupt. Governments that would not honour their electoral promises to the electorates without good reason are corrupt and public officers that use their positions, powers and public fund for their private interests are corrupt. In short, anyone who knows the right thing to do and is in a position to do it and has the power to do it but fails or refuses or both, to do it, is corrupt.

The pictures painted in the above paragraph reflect the situation of things in Nigeria and among Nigerians. Any country that is like this, to borrow the language of Omeregbe, (1998; 15) is sick and cannot make progress. It is with good reason that people focus on political and elite corruption in Nigeria. This is because the Nigerian picture painted above is within the purview of the government to rectify but has failed to do it or has not succeeded in doing it. Of course, there have been moves to rid Nigeria out of corruption; the Shagari Administration came up with Ethical Revolution but ended up in corruption and it was the major reasons given by the military that toppled the government (Anyanele; 2003, 194). Apart from this, the Buhari's regime had an anti-corruption posture; under it corrupt past leaders were jailed, (and some, unjustly). The government launched operation War Against Indiscipline (WAI), but because the government would not respect court orders and public opinion, people easily felt dissatisfied with it. No anti-corruption crusade can be fought with disregard to court orders. People must be given fair hearing no matter the level of the gravity of their offences. The Babangida's regime that succeeded Buhari's came up with Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) and Mass Mobilization for Social and Economic Reliance (MAMSER), with the mind of instilling discipline on Nigerian and to revive the ailing economy. Yet, the government is yet to give an account of the \$12 billion Gulf oil wind fall. The Abacha's regime introduced War Against Indiscipline and Corruption (WAIC) as if corruption is separate from indiscipline. It is on record that the government was the most corrupt so far in Nigeria. The government of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo launched the Independent Corrupt Practice and other related Commission (ICPC) and the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) to fight corruption. The commissions probably would have succeeded if not for the fact that they were targeted at political opponents, (Adeoye; 2013).

It can be asked that, in spite of these anti-corruption crusades, with several billions of naira spent on them, why is it that corruption level has not reduced? In 2012, when the fuel subsidy scam was opened, Tony Iredia lamented the unfortunate situation Nigeria found herself. In his own words; "It seems it is time for us to introspect and ask another question; is Nigeria a naturally corrupt nation that openly purports to hate what it inwardly likes doing?". Akin Omoboriowo's answer to the question raised is that those leaders that championed the crusades are not themselves disciplined, yet, they wanted the citizens to be disciplined. He writes:

From time to time, we hear people shouting aloud on top of their voices urging youths to impose discipline upon themselves and to be prepared to sacrifice for the good of the fatherland. But it must be realized that as long as those make these call swim in an ocean of ill-gotten affluence and criminal extravagance, their words are uttered in vain, and can only be treated with contempt. (Omoboriowo, 1982;

57)

It is because of the failure or because we believe that these anti-corruption crusades have not lived up to expectation that we seek solution in Awolowo's regime of mental magnitude. Let us look at this philosophy and appraise it. But before that, we need to say something in brief about the man called Awolowo.

3. Who Is Awolowo?

Obafemi, Jeremiah Awolowo Oyeniyi was born in Ikenne in the Ijebu Remo in the present day Ogun state of Nigeria on March 6th, 1909. He schooled in Ikenne, Abeokuta and Ibadan in his early years. He lost his father at the age of eleven, but, Awolowo, a man of iron determination, never allowed that set back to becloud what the future had in stock for him. He went into business as produce buyer and seller. He combined that with transport business. He was later a teacher, then a newspaper reporter. Awolowo, in spite of all odds, had a Bachelor degree in Commerce and later studied Law at the famous Inner Temple, London. While in London, he co-

founded a socio-cultural group called EgbeOmoOduduwa in 1949, which later became a political party called Action Group in 1951. He was a great nationalist, and a member of the Nigerian Youth Movement. He became the first Premier of the old Western region in 1954 and remained there till 1959. He was the opposition leader between 1960 until his arrest, trial and detention in 1963. Released from prison by General Gowon who later made him both the Finance Minister and the Vice-Chairman of the Federal Executive Council. He resigned from the government in 1971 without blemish. He contested but lost the Presidential elections of 1979 and 1983. He was a great author and among his numerous books are ; The path to Nigeria Freedom, Awo; Autobiography of Chief ObafemiAwolowo, Philosophy for Independent Nigeria, Thoughts on Nigerian Constitution, The People's Republic, My Match Through Prison etc. As a politician, Awolowo has so many achievements. Apart from securing independence for Nigeria along with other nationalists, he was the first to introduce free education and free health services in Nigeria. He is also the first to increase workers' salary and to set up Television station in Africa. The Cocoa House and the Liberty Stadium in Ibadan, as well as the University of Ife are among his achievements, so also the now moribund Oodua Textile Industry. If Awolowo is a great achiever as a politician, Omoregbe, (1988) sees the greatest of his achievements coming from the area of Philosophy. This is one of the reasons we are looking at his regime of mental magnitude. His greatest failure however was his inability to become the Nigerian president despite all his effort, or, as some people have alleged, desperation. Surely, Awolowo is one of the greatest minds to have ever come from the continent of Africa. Little wonder then that Makinde (2002; 32), writes about Awolowo thus;

All chances were that through him, Nigeria would have been one of the richest countries in the world today. Awo, therefore, was a wasted president that never was, and may turn out to be the most important, and certainly, the most celebrated member of those Wole Soyinka described as a wasted generation.

4. The Regime of Mental Magnitude

After a careful study of the Nigerian situation, Awolowo came up with his moral and political philosophy of the Regime of Mental Magnitude. The philosophy shares much with the Platonic and the Cartesian conception of man as a composite of the body and the mind. Like these great philosophers, Awo, as he is fondly called, is a dualist. He wrote that man; "He is a dual nature; part animal, part God; part conscious, part subconscious; part body, part mind. He is definitely superior to all other living beings in the animal kingdom." (Awolowo, 1977; 214)

In Christian terminologies, man is both carnal and spiritual. The flesh lusts over what is worldly and man's sensual are manifested in negative thoughts and emotion. The mind is the seat of reason and positive thinking. A balanced man is the one that is controlled by the mind which is spiritual, or, in the Platonic term, the rational part of the soul. Anyone that allows reason to prevail over his emotion manifests good and godly acts. According to Makinde, (2000; 121)

Mental magnitude is a philosophical doctrine which derives from a theory of mind and body, with the assertion that the mental is superior to the physical element of a person, and should take control over the emotions, desires and actions of man.

A man becomes balanced therefore when he is able to train his mind so as to take good control of him and to subdue every manifestation of the flesh. According to Awolowo, (1966; 214)

If all the organs in man, together with the five senses and all the instincts are balanced and functioning normally and harmoniously as nature intends to, there will be no such things as negative emotions like those we just mentioned. Murder and all forms of crime will be non-existent. Man would live a full, happy, glorious and triumphant life.

It follows from this then that when a man has mastery control over his emotion and allows right reason to prevail at all times, he has cultivated the philosophy of the regime of mental magnitude. In his exact words, (1966; 158);

The regime of mental magnitude is cultivated when we are sexually continent, abstemious of food, abstain totally from alcoholic beverages and tobacco, and completely vanquish emotions of greed and fear.

The reason for this position is simply that inordinate sex, much consumption of food indiscriminately; much in-take of alcoholic drinks and tobacco as well as negative emotions of fear and greed will corrupt not only the body but also the mind. Fasoro (2010; 100-101), put the essence and the whole idea of mental magnitude in the form of eradication of ; " (1) negative emotion of anger, hate, fear, envy or jealousy or greed (2) indulgence in the wrong type of food and drink and in ostentatious consumption; and (3) excessive or immoral craving for sex." And we may add to it, (4), the cultivation of the spirit of rational and positive thinking such as love, kindness, brotherhood, other-regardness, self-confidence and self-discipline.

For Awo, the process of cultivating the regime of mental magnitude should be in piece-meal and gradual. It must begin with the leaders that want to instill discipline on the masses. Those who aspire to be leaders or masters of others must first have mastery control of themselves. According to him;

Men of affairs and wisdom everywhere are unanimous in the view that only "Those who are masters of themselves become masters of others." Indeed, Aristotle has said it with the authority of one of the greatest and wisest men that ever lived; 'Let him that would move the world first move himself.' (Awolowo; 1966, 158)

The implication of this is that, it is not everybody that should aspire for the position of leadership, although, as a democrat, Awolowo would agree that everyone should have the right to aspire for the leadership position. Leadership is a serious position that should be

reserved for only those who prepare for it and not those who get it by chance. It is for only those who can pay the exorbitant price it requires and the sacrifices it demands. "Clearly," Dike Victor (2013) wrote, "not everybody has the leadership acumen to lead an organization, not to mention ruling a country." When and if the leaders must have cultivated the regime of mental magnitude, they can then lead others and invest this on the populace.

But how can the populace imbibe this hard philosophy? For Awolowo, it is through education. Awo's emphasis on education reminds us of the crucial role education plays in Plato's Republic. Like Plato, the goal of education for Awolowo is more than being literate. Literacy is good but is only a means to the final goal of education. According to him;

The cardinal aim of education is not, as is popularly but narrowly conceived, to teach a man to read and write, to acquire a profession to master a vocation, or to be versed in the liberal arts. All these are only means to the end of true education, which is to help a man to live a full, happy and triumphant life. In other words, any system of education which does not help a man to have a healthy and sound body, an alert brain, and balanced and discipline instructive urges, is both misconceived and dangerous. (1966; 268)

With right education therefore, every citizen will be well-disciplined and emotionally balanced and when this is achieved, together with 'Spiritual depth', the evils of the society will fade away and, in, "Some day in the distant future, we will all of us know the truth and, royally, enter into the regime of mental magnitude where love reigns supreme." (1966; 231)

5. An Appraisal of the Regime of Mental Magnitude

Fasoro, (2010; 101), wrote; "Here in our midst, is a god-sent prophet of hope and we must listen to him." Fasoro's comment is a satire. However, it is apt. Awolowo's regime of mental magnitude deserves some commendations. All social ills in Nigeria can be summed-up in corruption, and by this corruption, we mean degeneration, falling in standard. Maybe one of the reasons it has been difficult to fight corruption in Nigeria is that, we have focused so much on the elite or political corruption. Here, Awo focuses on corruption in general; that is, corruption at home, church and mosque, markets and company, school and university, down to private and public institutions, and among men and women, married and unmarried. Freedom from negative emotions and the cultivation of positive and fellow-men thinking, will go a long way at driving these evil forces away from the society.

Another area where credit must be given to Awolowo's political theory is in education. Right education, or what Appadorai (1974; 140), calls 'democratic education', is needed for any nation that is in dire need of progress and development. Education that makes the citizens to be docile, to receive and believe anything because somebody has said it, to entertain fear, (even the fear of the unknown), to know what to do but fails or still needs someone to tell him or motivate or bribe him, is a wrong type of education. True education should make a man to be rational, critical, moral, and, above all, emotionally balanced. It is then that the citizens can contribute meaningfully to the development of the state. Awo's model of education can produce these citizens.

The issue of spiritual depth can be taken as having been subsumed in the entire business of mental magnitude. A well-disciplined, moral, rational cannot but be a lover of his country and fellow citizens.

However, it is the cultivation of the mental magnitude that can pose a challenge. No doubt, "Awoism" is a hard philosophy. Only few Nigerians can meet Awo's standard for leadership. But then, Awolowo himself did not leave us in the dark as to the practice of his philosophy, he puts it into practice. When he was sentenced in to jail in 1963 (even when it was widely believed that the judgment was unjust), he remained calm and balanced. While in prison, the news of the death of his son was brought to him the very hour he was to prepare a defense for some of his disciples that were to appear before the court the next day. Awolowo wrote the defense without allowing his present situation then to becloud him, (See Awolowo's My Match Through Prison for the story) He returned from prison in Calabar in 1971 and was made not only the Finance Minister, but also the Vice-Chairman of the Federal Executive Council by the then military head of state, General Yakubu Gowon. He helped to prosecute the Civil War without borrowing, a rare and great feat. As corrupt as the government of Gowon was, (ten out of his twelve governors were indicted over corruption charges) Awolowo was not indicted. When Gowon reneged on his promise to return the country to a democracy, Awolowo, in order to protect his integrity, voluntarily resigned his appointment. The first Television station in Africa which was his product was cited in Ibadan, not Ikenne, his home town. The same is the Liberty Stadium in Ibadan. The present-day University of Ife, the Cocoa House in Ibadan and the Oodua Textile, etc., were built outside Ikenne.

The point being made is that, the philosophy might be difficult, but then, it is not impracticable. It was Napoleon who said that the difficulty may be overcome immediately but impossible takes a little time longer. We must know that nothing good comes easy.

6. Conclusion

Every developed country today in the world had at one time or the other made sacrifice, especially, their leaders. Nigeria is in dire need of those leaders that can make the required sacrifice for nation building. She is in need of such disciplined, responsible and good leaders that are products of the regime of mental magnitude. Anti-corruption crusades in Nigeria will continue to fail so long as the targets are those who are opposed to the government as in the cases of the ICPC and the EFCC under Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. Those who enjoin Nigerians to patronize locally made goods, if they want to be taken serious, must use the same. Nigeria and Nigerians have alternatives; either we imbibe the hard philosophy or remain satisfied with our present situations. However, as Makinde (2000, 170) noted;

The rejection of Awolowo's political ideals constitutes a tragic paradox. The same doctrine which in Nigeria is rejected by default is the one that is badly needed to keep the nation on the

move. Nigeria witnessed four military coups between 1966 and 1978 for the very reasons of indiscipline, greed, corruption, nepotism, lack of direction, and all the negative emotions which Awolowo's mental magnitude was designed to curb.

Most people in Nigeria long for progress and development but they are not ready to pay for the price it requires. We need to know that nothing good comes by chance, and there is no gain without pain. The development we desire may not come until both the leaders and the led are prepared for it. Lastly, the words of Omoboriowo (1982; 73), are useful for the final conclusion of this paper when he said;

Ghana prevented Nkrumah and Nkrumahism from becoming a reality and the people are now lamenting it. They are now in search for an Nkrumah that they did not value when he was with them. In the same vein I want to predict that if by any act of omission or commission, Nigeria should prevent Awo and Awoism from becoming a reality in our quest for Nigerian leadership, we would enter into a generation of oblivion and decadence devoid of orientation and direction. Then the country would be set adrift. We would then embark on a long search for Awo and Awoism. God forbid!

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