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POLITICAL OFFICE AND THE (UN) MAKING OF NEW RICHES (NOUVEAU RICHE) IN THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT AREAS OF OYO STATE

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Abstract

The major challenges confronting political office holders in contemporary democratic regime in Nigeria at local government level is sustainability of status attained at post public office era because, the thought of the people is that while holding public office there must be drastic change in socio-economic status of the occupants because of huge financial rewards attached to the office. But after leaving office, the sustenance of that status becomes a major challenge to these leaders at grassroots level because of the belief that there is a curse that forbidding public office holders at council level to hold on their wealth after leaving office. It is within this context that this study investigates the relationship between political office and making of nouveau riche at local government level in Oyo State and the factors that impede sustainability of the wealth acquired after leaving office. Exploratory Survey design was employed, while data were generated through questionnaire. The sample size of 177 respondents was drawn among the ex-political functionaries and senior civil servants at local government level in Oyo State between 2007-2010. But only 130 questionnaires were retrieved, given a 73.5% response rate. The finding indicates a positive relationship between political office and making of nouveau riche at council level but there is a challenge in sustaining the wealth acquired after leaving office by these grassroots leaders. Based on the aforementioned, it is recommended that frantic efforts should be made in enlightening political office holders and the general public about the responsibility(s) of public office holders and their financial limitations to their constituency(s) so that the wealth acquired while in office can be well managed and sustained after leaving public office.

Keywords: Political Office, Nouveau Riche, Local Government, Oyo State

Introduction

In any society, there is need for proper coordination, regulation and provision of basic amenities to the people. These responsibilities are mainly reserved for the government duly elected by the people in a democratic setting (Webster, 1994).

In Nigeria, the existence of different tiers of government is to make governance close to the people, especially at grass root level who are seriously in need of government presence. That is why the Local Government has been regarded as a government involving the administration of public affairs in each locality by a body of representatives

of the local community directly elected or appointed to serve for a specific period of time. These representatives can be regarded as political office holders. Although, political office can be seen as an office occupied by a person or professional politician who gets involved in public policy and decision-making, it includes categories of the people who make decisions and hold position of authority in government or public corporations (Adegbolu, 2003).

At local government level, political office holders can be classified into the executive and the legislative arms. The executive arm is headed by the Chairman, assisted by his Vice who is jointly elected by the people from all the constituency/wards that make up the local government area. In Oyo State for instance, the Chairman is empowered by Oyo State Local Government Administrative Law of 2001 under section 24 (2) to appoint the supervisors, the secretary to the local government and other political aides that can assist in discharging his duties in office(Oyo State Local Government Law, 2001).

The legislative arm of the council is made up of all the councillors who were elected to represent each political ward that make up the local government area. The legislative arm is headed by the leader of the legislative council (speaker) and assisted by other principal officers elected by the council members. All these people are regarded as political officer holders at local level and they were all elected from different backgrounds and different principles with the aim of bringing development and good governance to the grass root level(Oyo State Local Government Law, 2001).

Across all levels of government, researches show that majority of politicians who hold public office in the society are the people who previously belong to a lower social class and economic stratum in the society. But with their migration to public office either by election or appointment within short period of time, their social status

definitely change because of the benefits attached to the office. The benefits also increase their chances of social mobility to the membership of upper class in the society. But the major challenges confronting these office holders are maintenance and sustenance of this status after leaving office. It is believed that thereafter majority of them become poorer than before they started their sojourn in office. Thus there is the need to conduct research to find out whether this belief holds or not. This study therefore attempted to investigate how political office is making nouveau riche at the local government level in Oyo State of Nigeria and the management and sustainability of acquired wealth after leaving office with emphasis on political office holder at the council level from 2007 - 2010.

The main aims of this study is to examine the relationship between holding public office and the (UN) making of nouveau riche at local government level in Oyo state. Also to establish the link between poor living conditions of political office holders after leaving public office and factors that impeding sustainability of a acquired wealth during post public office era.

*Political Office:*The effort to understand the root of how political office is the un (making) of the nouveau riche in Local Government level have concerned many scholars in the field of political economy for centuries. Mill (1995) probably represented the majority view among contemporary scholars when he propounded conspicuous consumption theory on how political office serves as a means of upgrading the standard of the people in the society. According to him “Political Office holders are found of public display of the discretionary economic power which classified them as a member of upper class in the society”. With new tax regime on luxury goods and services he argued that nouveau riche wealth diminished in their financial power after leaving office.

George (1987) argues that political office holders can be an elected or appointed to perform a specific duties in public administration but whoever in position of authority at any level of Government with the aim of impacting on the people through good governance can be recognized as a reliable leader who can continue to be relevant morally and financially after leaving public office.

Taking in the same critical angles Babawale (2002) believed that political office can make individual wealthy which can be sustained even after leaving office if such leader possesses some qualities which includes adequate planning, contentment, accountability and non-neglect of associate and friends. He later describes political office as a position occupied by individuals who get involved directly in influencing public policy decision-making which include those in public positions in the society or in government either by election or appointment at various governmental levels and public institutions.

Adedeji (1997) advocates for adequate assessment of political officer holders in term of service delivery in the society because at the end of the tenure they will be bold enough to account for their stewardship while in office and this will improve the level of their relevance after office. This statement was also collaborated by Ologbenla (2002). In his contribution, Hahn (2003) sees political office as a political authority created by law in any form of government with main aim of making decision on how to provide essential service to the people in a democratic society. From this definition, one can easily agree that political office is a unit of governmental administration at any level in a country which was created through the act of parliament for the purpose of administering people so that citizen can benefit from dividend of good governance with a good policy and programme. But this can be

achieved effectively with leader listening to the needs of the people.

Adegbolu (2003) also argues that in order to make public office less attractive there is need for critical evaluation of the qualities and characters of those in position of authority because such evaluation will serve as a mean of examining how the citizens are being represented by their representative in government. Similarly, Oyeniyi (1988) explains that political office requires popular participation both in choice of decision makers and in the choice of decision-making process conducted by local bodies, while recognizing the supremacy of the government at any level to accept the responsibility for decision taking by political office holders while in office. He argues that those in positions of authority at Local Government Level should be a bonafide member of such community with the aim of impacting on the people at local level. He concludes that Local Government is a third tier of government in which popular participation in both decision-making processes must be conducted by local bodies effectively.

Ugwuka (2003) expresses his view that the issue regarding internal administration of any country is fundamental to determining the character of that given society. He concludes that there are some attitudes which contribute to the failure of political office holders in maintaining their relevance after their sojourn in power that is why people regard political office as unmaking people through migration from lower class to upper level in the society. He lists some of those attitudes that make them to cease to be relevant after office. These include extravagant lifestyle, over ambitions, change of environment while in office, excessive demand from constituency and lack of autonomy by the government at local level.

However, Webster (1994) provides a rather narrow explanation of how political office serves as machinery towards improvement

of the individual's status in the society and concluded that the upper ruling class has legitimized their rules with claims of honours and moral superiority through public office in the society. They make claims in defense of the ascribed superiority of wealth inherited through their opportunity in power which cannot be effectively managed during post political office era.

Nouveau Riche: Dyke (1999) describes nouveau riche as those upper member of contemporary club in the society who can only move to higher class through their participation in public management because their wealth were acquired within their activities in public office. He explains further that nouveau riche is explanation of "new rich or new money acquired while in power" because ordinarily contemporary political office holders initially belong to a lower class and economic stratum of the society but with their participation in governance the new money derived constitutes their wealth and allowed for upwards social mobility which at long run provided for conspicuous consumption of goods and services that signal their membership of upper class in modern regime.

Finally, Agbesinga (2014) argues from religious perspective that lack of accountability and selfishness prevented the blessing of Almighty God on the accumulated wealth of political office holders because leaders who do not fear God in their activities always fail to maintain and consolidate on their resources after leaving public office and this act may discourage citizens from getting involved in political process in the state there by making political office unmaking nouveau riche at council level. He posits further that aside the legitimate salaries and other allowances of political office holders, they also accumulates wealth through unconventional sources like bribe from government contractors, constituency projects fund returns, budget padding and over inflation of

the prices of services rendered to the government by service providers (Agbesinga, 2014).

Conspicuous Consumption Theory: This theory is of the view that spending habit of individuals on the acquiring of luxury goods and services through public display of economic power by nouveau riche in the society are the basis why public office is unmaking the occupant at local government level. The theory is originally proposed by Veblen (1963), who described the behavioural characteristics of the nouveau riche as those who emerged as a result of accumulation of capital wealth during the second industrial revolution (1860-1914). In that social and historical context, the term "conspicuous consumption" was narrowly applied to describe those of upper class who applied their great wealth as a means of publicly manifesting their social power and prestige, be it real or perceived.

Veblen (1963) believed that such a public display of discretionary economic power is a means either of attaining or maintaining a given status. Moreover individual consumption of goods and services in the society denotes the deliberate conspicuous consumption which intended to provoke the envy of other people, as a means of displaying the buyer's superior socio-economic status in the society. But in the 20th century, the significant improvement of the material standard of living in the society, and the consequent emergence of the middle class broadly applied the term "conspicuous consumption" to those who possessed the discretionary income that allowed them to practice the patterns of economic consumption of goods and services which were motivated by the desire for prestige and public display of social status rather than by practical utility of the goods and services proper.

The reasoning of this theory can be justifiably applied to a variety of social activities including the main reasons that

prevented public office holders to sustain and consolidate on their upper class status enjoyed when holding public office at the end of their tenure. The immediate implication of this theory to the study of how political office is unmaking of the nouveau riche at local level is by examining the general lifestyle and spending habit of political office holders in relations to their constituency at Local Government Level, the stakeholders and the legal framework that empowered the Government at the level to legislate on financial emoluments of political office holders at Local Government Level in Nigeria(Agbakoba, 2004).

However, conspicuous consumptions approach to analyze the political office and UN (making) of nouveau riche has some weaknesses. According to Mill (1995), the public display of such discretionary economic power can be checked through the imposition of taxes upon luxury goods which can diminish societal expenditure on high status goods, by rendering them more expensive than non-positional goods. This considerably limits the comparative strength of the theory. But in spite of this limitations, the conspicuous consumption theory has the capacity of explaining the pattern and context of In, out and Down?: political office and the un(making) of the nouveau riche in Local Government Areas in Nigeria.

Materials and Methods

This section present all procedures employed in the study. Therefore the studyarea in Oyo state

Table 1: Senatorial Districts and Sample Selection

Senatorial District	Total	Selected Council
Oyo North	13	5
Oyo Central	11	4
Oyo South	9	4
Total	33	13

Source: Author & Information obtained from INEC (2015)

which has 33 local governments. The choice of Oyo State was as a result of being thestate with highest local government in South-West Nigeria. More the period covered was 2007-2010. The reason for the period chosen was selected because the public office holders are no more in power and their level of affluence can easily be ascertained. The sustainability of economics power / status in terms of wealth accumulation, social status, and political relevance can influence go a long way to measuring nouveau riche of political office holders at the local government level in Nigeria.

Research Design

The study is exploratory in nature

Population and Sample Size

The population for this study is all the Local Government in Nigeria. In view of this that the population cannot be covered, therefore, Oyo state was selected. Also, Oyo State was delineated according to its Senatorial District to give room for equal chance of being selected. In view of this, the study adopted the use of stratified and simple random sampling technique. In addition, 40% of Local Government in each Senatorial District was considered. Also, the questionnaire was distributed to three (3) categories of local council officers that are categorized as top political and public office holders which are: (i) executive arm (ii) legislative arm (iii) senior carrier officers.

However, 13 Local Governments represents 40% of the total Local Council (33) in Oyo State and more so, three (3) in each category of the 13 Local Governments chosen administered questionnaire.

Research Instrument

A well-structured questionnaire was used for obtaining information from the selected sample. The construction of the questionnaire was based on Likert Scale Rating (LSR).

Method of Data Analysis

This study adopted correlation methods of analysis. The data gathered from the

respondents were analyzed because it aimed at studying the degree of relationship between the variables, i.e. political office holding and nouveau riche.

Results and Discussion

*Analysis and Interpretation of Result:*This section centers on analysis and interpretation of data collected after administering the questionnaire. For the purpose of this study, 177 questionnaires were distributed and only 130 were retrieved. The questionnaire was grouped into two (2) parts. The first part (section A) covered personal data relating to the respondent while the second part covered the questions relating to the study.

Table 2: Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (PPMCC)

	Q1	Q2
Q1	1.000	0.898*
Q2	0.898*	1.000

* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

*Data Interpretation:*The information tabulated in Table 2 above indicates the relationship between political office and nouveau riche at the local government. The appropriate questions for this investigation centre on Q1 and Q2.

Q1 denotes the question requiring the respondent to answer that “Do you agree that political office has significant relationship with nouveau riche at the Local Government Level.” While Q2 implies the question that,“Do you agree that government politics toward political office is favorable to the ex-political functionaries.”

From the foregoing, the relationship that exists between political office and (UN) making of nouveau riche was investigated using correlation. The result

shows that there was a positive correlation between the two (2) variables, with $r = 0.898$, $n = 130$, $p < 0.01$. This implies that there is a strong positive relationship between political office and making of nouveau riche at the local council level in Nigeria. The result indicate that the prospect of political office in making nouveau riche at local government level is positive if there is no gap between the years of holding such offices in term of getting more elected or appointed to public office or having a financially strong base occupation after leaving office. But if there is gap in political relevance or non-strong base occupation and investment, public office can be seen as a means of unmaking nouveau riche at Local Government level in Nigeria.

Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between political office and (UN) making of nouveau riche at the local government level in Nigeria. From the study, it could be concluded that political office has positive relationship with making nouveau riche at local government level in Nigeria but sustainability of the resources acquired while in office during post public office era is a major challenges confronting the grassroots leaders. It is recommended that frantic efforts should be made in enlightening political office holders and the general public about the responsibility(s) of public office holders and their financial limitations to their constituency(s) so that the wealth acquired while in office can be well managed and sustained after leaving office.

The legislation should also be made by the National Assembly on financial autonomy of local government council in order to reduce financial burden placed on the public office holders by the state governors who unilaterally slashed the salary and allowances of public office holders at local government level in contrary to the amount recommended by Revenue Mobilization Allocations And Fiscal Commission (RAMFAC) as emolument of public office holders at grassroots level in Nigeria.

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