

LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN NIGERIA'S FOURTH REPUBLIC: A CRITICAL INTROSPECTION

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ABSTRACT

Although Nigeria has witnessed six political transitions between 1999 and 2019, the outcomes have often returned acrimoniously. Nigeria's Fourth Republic has witnessed some of the most intriguing challenges in the country's political history. In spite of her enviable democratic credentials, compared to other states on the continent, Nigeria continues to grapple with two critical challenges – leadership and accountability – which have stunted its development and progress. Chinua Achebe's description of Nigeria's problem as squarely a failure of leadership illustrates the inherent rot that has inhibited the country's aspirations for greatness. And given the derelict nature of the leadership in all facet of Nigerian life, there is bound to be a deficit in effective accountability. This is best explained, for instance, in the recent vexed issue of false Assets Declaration by familiar political figures in the country. Apart from the fact that the leadership at all levels of government find it very difficult to declare their assets when requested to do so by law, they also mount a brick wall against those who seek to verify the documents via the Freedom of Information Act. The unwillingness to be accountable creates suspicion and increases mistrust among the citizenry towards the leadership. Thus, Nigerian leadership falls short of a good example expected of it. With reference to specific instances, this paper takes a critical introspection into the twins problems of leadership and accountability in Nigeria's Fourth Republic (1999-2019). It argues that for any meaningful reform to expressly manifest in the country, the leadership must first, lead by personal example, and secondly, commit itself on being accountable to the citizens at all time.

Keywords: Leadership, Nigeria, Fourth Republic, Accountability, Citizens

INTRODUCTION

The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. There is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian

problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to their responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of a true leadership.¹

The point of departure in this paper starts with the above quote taken from Chinua Achebe's classic, *The Trouble with Nigeria*. For a book published in 1983 – about 36 years ago – which sums up the form of decrepit leadership in Nigeria at the time and till this day across all strata of the nation, our attention is therefore drawn to a very serious yet monumental problem bedeviling the country. There is no doubt that a country which faces a leadership problem, particularly one that has remained in such state like Nigeria for close to six decades after independence cannot be serious about accountability towards the citizenry. This is best explained in the series of serious allegations of electoral malfeasance and brazen acts of corruption perpetuated by Nigeria's political leadership, rendering the mass of the people both hapless and helpless.

Since Nigeria's transition to democratic rule in 1999, the country has not fared better in virtually all areas of demand. The level of poverty has quadrupled in the last decade and half, making her the poverty capital of the world in recent times² with very little success recorded in the area of even development, while insecurity as a fallout of unemployment has been on a terrible increase.³ Given the number of internal crisis the country grapples with daily, Nigeria could be regarded as heading towards the precipice.⁴ In spite of these challenges, the country's situation is not totally hopeless when compared with how sister countries continue to contend with challenges such as aborted political transition, unabated civil strife among others. Nigeria's smooth democratic transitions and consolidation since 1999 must be commended even though this generally comes with a huge cost of human lives and distrust towards the democratic cum electoral process itself. This is often attributed to failure of leadership which contributes very little to the prospects of developing the country through sound and people-friendly policies and also failure to live by example at all times.

Nigeria's Fourth Republic has witnessed some of the most intriguing challenges in the country's political history. In spite of her enviable democratic credentials compared to other states on the continent, Nigeria continues to grapple with two critical challenges – leadership and accountability – which have stunted its development and progress. This is best explained, for instance, in the recent vexed issue of false Assets Declaration by familiar political figures in the

¹ Chinua Achebe, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishing, 1983, p. 1.

² Eniola Akinkuotu, With 87m Poor Citizens, Nigeria Overtakes India as World's Poverty Capital, *Punch*, 26 June, 2018.

³ Udoh Emmanuel Williams, Insecurity in Nigeria: Political, Religious and Cultural Implications, *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion*, Vol. 5, 2015, pp. 1-7.

⁴ John Campbell, *Nigeria: Dancing on the Brink*, Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2013.

country. Apart from the fact that the leadership at all levels of government find it very difficult to openly declare their assets when requested to do so by law, they also mount a brick wall against those who intend to pursue this legally. The unwillingness among the leadership to be accountable creates unnecessary mistrust among the citizenry. Thus, Nigerian leadership falls short of a good example expected of it. Citing specific instances, this paper takes a critical introspection into the twin problems of leadership and accountability in Nigeria between 2007 and 2019. It argues that for any meaningful reform to expressly manifest in the country, the leadership must first lead by personal example by willingly committing itself to being accountable to the citizens at all time.

TRANSITING INTO A DEMOCRATIC CONUNDRUM

Nigeria's return to democracy in 1999 after about 27 years of intermittent military rule was hailed by the international community as one of the positive signs of progress on the continent. Indeed, Nigeria was not only responding to what scholars have referred to as the Third Wave of Democratisation across the world. The June 12, 1993 crisis and the death of military head of state, General Sanni Abacha (1993-1998) among other internal challenges quickly transited the country into civil rule. It was the considered view by the Nigerian military establishment that having ruled with so many crises on its hands, it was expedient to give way for democratisation process. This explains the General Abdusalam Abubakar regime's (1998-1999) urgent call for national elections barely a year in power.

While this appeared to be a sort of right step in certain quarters,⁵ it questioned the morality and legality of some of the actions taken by the military which would immediately and in the long run impact negatively on Nigeria's democratic practices. For instance, the regime in its desperate bid to relinquish power adopted a modified version of the 1979 constitution, one whose moral and philosophical principles and provisions apparently denies the citizenry probity of its leadership and whose contents contradict the very fundamental principle of equality of all citizens before the law.⁶ As Osoba and Usman observed, this constitution was based on fostering elite interests where "provisions [were made] for the formal and dubious accountability of one set of members of the bourgeois political class to another; with the Nigerian people at large reduced more or less to marginal observers of these actions."⁷ Given a number of laxities in the 1979 constitution, it was not a surprise, therefore, that the Second Republic for which the document was made kicked off on a very shaky note and incidentally collapsed only four years into its emergence.

⁵ *New African*, IC Magazines Limited, Issues 359-369, 1998, p. 10.

⁶ Olusegun Osoba and Yusufu Bala Usman, *Minority Report and Draft Constitution for the Federal Republic of Nigeria, 1976*, Zaria: Centre for Democratic Development Research and Training, 2019.

⁷ Osoba and Usman, *Minority Report*, p. 27.

Again, the Abdusalam regime, in trying to portray itself as a corrective one, hurriedly held national elections between December 1998 and February 1999 as part of its transition programme which unfortunately had no constitutional sanctioning as it appeared that the 1999 constitution was only promulgated into law in early May 1999, taking effect from May 29, 1999.⁸ This is the constitution that was forcefully hoisted on the citizenry in spite of its several technical failings and continues to be the apex of contradiction in the country till this day.

The above constitutes a number of challenges with respect to transition which by the way had occurred three times prior to 1999. Indeed, a constitution that was hurriedly modified and adopted less than a year without considering the inputs of popular sectors was likely to pose sooner than later very serious socio-political and economic challenges throughout the country.

THE PERILS OF A DEMOCRATIC TRANSITION

One of the first steps taken by Olusegun Obasanjo's administration (1999-2007), following the transition to civil rule, was to clean the Augean Stable. There was no doubt that Nigeria under the Abacha regime was already in serious confrontation with both internal and external forces in the aftermath of the forceful truncation of the interim arrangement headed by Chief Earnest Shonekan who had spent just 6 months in power. Abacha contended with Chief MKO Abiola's wife, Mrs Kudirat Abiola and broad coalition of forces within the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) which supported the actualisation of the June 12 election and favoured Abiola's mandate.⁹ There was also agitation and nationwide strike by the oil union, (NUPENG) led by its Secretary General, Frank Kokori over similar issues around June 12,¹⁰ while the oil rich Ogoni area in the Niger Delta region had become a hotbed of agitations and restiveness over environmental degradation of the land by major international oil company, Shell.¹¹ As Abacha became vicious and targeted the opposition some of whom were Alfred Rewane and Alhaja Suliat Adedeji, killed under very controversial circumstances,¹² the international community expressed deep concerns. The hanging of Ken Saro Wiwa in 1996 over the death of nine Ogoni chiefs generated global condemnation, leading to international sanctions and revocation of Nigeria's membership of the Commonwealth of Nations.¹³ Nigeria was not only declared a

⁸ Abdul Rauf Mustapha, *The Nigerian Transition: Third Time Lucky or More of the Same? Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 26, No. 80, 1999, p. 288.

⁹ Gilbert M. Khadiagala and Terrence Lyons (eds.), *African Foreign Policies: Power and Process*, Colorado: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001.

¹⁰ Frank Kokori, *Frank Kokori: The Struggle for June 12*, Ibadan: Safari Books Ltd, 2014.

¹¹ See Ogoni Bill of Rights presented to the Government and People of Nigeria by The Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), October, 1990.

¹² A Nation of Unresolved Murder Cases, *Thisday*, 8 November, 2015.

¹³ Steve Crawshaw, Karl Maier, Nick Cohen and Louise Jury, Sanctions Threat to Nigeria, *Independent (UK)*, 12 November, 1995.

pariah state but was summarily isolated by the international community. It was under these debilitating situations that Obasanjo had to embark on what was referred to as a shuttle diplomacy to salvage the already battered image of the country inherited from the military.

Scholars have argued that the president's incessant travels were justified, given the terrible state Nigeria had been plunged into. With sanctions still hanging over the country's head and huge debts accruing from deliberate pilfering of the treasury under past military regimes, it was expedient for the president to make these frequent trips. Indeed, several gains were made from these trips one of which was Nigeria's re-integration into world affairs while assuming leadership positions once again of regional, continental and international bodies such as the ECOWAS, AU, Commonwealth of Nations and the G-77. The country also hosted both the Commonwealth Heads of State and Government (CHOGM) and the All Africa Games in 2004 as evidence of its acceptability within the international community and confidence that it could begin to exert its powers in more positive ways.

While Obasanjo's image laundering diplomacy could be considered laudable, this was not often the case. It has become a norm for every Nigerian government to walk their way into the arms of the international community where demands are made by the latter without commensurate benefit to the country and its people. What this presupposes is that, the political leadership, in its bid to present itself in a positive light to its international allies and friends, often give away too much without weighing the consequences on the future development of the country. This practice, which according to Kaduna Chukwuemeka Nzeogwu, makes Nigeria "look big for nothing before international circles" have often rendered the country weak even when in her self-glorification is not considered the 'Giant of Africa' she presents herself. Three examples are germane to understand the point being made here.

One, the nation's leadership posture in the international community does not generally commensurate with the standard of living of the citizens. Nigeria suffers such moral depravity and an image crisis which adversely hinders opportunities in almost every areas of human endeavour. Ordinary citizens face some of the most dehumanizing forms of treatment and abuse of fundamental human rights at home and abroad which are not seriously challenged by the Nigerian leadership. On 14 February, 2006, the British Foreign Secretary, Jack Straw announced a temporary suspension (lifted in March 2006) on visa applications of 18-30 year old Nigerian first time travellers.¹⁴ Straw's announcement was made against the backdrop of the increasing number of Nigerians within the 18-30 age brackets, seeking to desperately leave the country. The measure, noted the Foreign Secretary, was aimed at "welcoming managed, legal, migration" and

¹⁴ UK Lifts Visa Ban, Announces Major Changes, *Thisday*, 16 March, 2006.

“to make it easier for legitimate Nigerian travellers to come to Britain.”¹⁵ Although the High Commission’s action was heavily criticised by Nigerians, it appeared very little was done by the Nigerian government to put an end to such obnoxious visa policy which unfortunately continues through other means till this day and among other foreign embassies in the country.

Two, considering the way Nigerians are being treated outside the country, Nigeria’s shuttle diplomacy could be regarded as a ruse and the accommodation it enjoys by the international community questionable. The atrocious reactions against Nigerians from a number of African states sum up the foregoing position. South Africa’s ill-treatment of Nigerians, for instance, should give room for sober reflection. Nigerians remain victims of xenophobic attacks while the government of South Africa continues to express covert support for this puerile act. In spite of this dehumanising treatment, Nigeria has not been able to come up with a coherent retributive policy to serve as deterrence to South Africa and others. Rather, the Nigerian leadership still prides itself as the Big Brother of Africa that should continue to expend much of its wealth on a camaraderie-styled foreign policy even when such relationship portends danger for the citizenry.

Three, in October 2005, Nigeria and its creditors, The Paris and London Clubs announced that a final agreement had been reached for Nigeria’s debt relief amounting to about \$18 billion and a total reduction of its debt stock by \$30 billion. Nigeria made its final payment on 21 April, 2006, clearing its name from the books. For a country considered poor in all ramifications and its people living below a dollar, Nigeria should have been considered for total debt relief. At the time, this payment was considered “an unprecedented operation” as it was the Paris Club’s “first ever buyback at a discount...that would cancel all of Nigeria’s debt...in exchange for a cash payment of roughly \$12 billion.”¹⁶ Interestingly, much of this humongous debt came as a result of compound interest accumulated in the last couple of decades despite the fact that Nigeria has consistently met its debt service obligations to several of her creditors. While this debt relief was widely celebrated within government circles, it did not take into consideration that such amount could have been better utilised by injecting it into developmental infrastructures that would generate wealth for the nation and most likely help to service these biting debts sooner. This decision was at best very poor and unwise when one considers the enormous and biting challenges the country contends with on daily basis. It also exposes the bootlicking position of the west and Britain in particular, which in 2001 had described Africa as a “scar on the conscience of the world” as a result of which it needed to do more work to reduce poverty on the continent.¹⁷ Why Britain appeared to have been the major beneficiary of this debt payment in

¹⁵ Jack Straw, *Africa: A New Agenda*, 1 March, 2006.

¹⁶ Lex Rieffel, *Nigeria’s Paris Club Debt Problem*, *Brookings*, 1 August, 2005.

¹⁷ Alan Hudson, *UK Aid to Africa: A Report for the UFJ Institute*, London: Overseas Development Institute, 20 January, 2006.

spite of its quest to ‘reduce poverty’ continues to baffle critics. According to a report, the amount Nigeria paid to her creditors “was larger than the donations the rich nations will be providing to poor countries in a period of ten years.”¹⁸ Incidentally, taking a look at UK funding aid in 2016, £13.4 billion was set aside in line with the 0.7 percent United Nations target to be met by developed countries on overseas development aid annually. Although the UK government signed up to this agreement since 1974, it was only able to achieve this target for the first time in 2013. Out of this amount, Africa received 51 percent, a figure that is still not matched with the debt Nigeria was made to pay to the Paris and London Clubs in one swoop.

The above examples, among several others, point to the leadership challenge that continues to confront the country especially since the transition to democracy in 1999. It would have been thought that with Obasanjo’s high-level shuttle diplomacy, Nigeria would have attained a status befitting its stature as a regional and continental power that could favourably negotiate and navigate its own path and for its own advantage. Sadly, this has not achieved the desired goal two decades after civil rule as stricter visa rules, for instance, has been imposed on Nigerians¹⁹ while even less powerful African states continue to harbour ill-will towards genuine Nigerian travellers. Dramatically, while Nigeria appeared to have cleared its external debt few years ago, the situation today calls for serious concerns. The Debt Management Office revealed recently that Nigeria’s total debt as at 31 December, 2018 stood at a staggering \$79.437 billion, growing by 12.25 percent the same year.²⁰ Also of concern was the huge borrowing among states in the last three years which increased domestic debts from N1.69 trillion in June 2015 to N3.4 trillion in June 2018.²¹ Despite concerns raised by various local and international stakeholders, the Nigerian government allayed fears about the country’s debts profile, with the claim that it was within manageable limit, while considering its borrowing low compared to countries like Egypt, Ghana, South Africa and Angola. That Nigeria could borrow as much as \$79.437 billion within a space of 13 years after servicing its accrued debt to its foreign creditors, borrowing which has really not translated into any meaningful development for the country and have virtually very little positive impact on the citizenry illustrate a decrepit leadership whose interest continues to pursue voodoo economics and stand absolutely unaccountable.

LEADERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY: A GLIMMER OF HOPE?

¹⁸ Nigeria Payment of Foreign Debt: The Largest Transfer of Wealth in Modern Time, *Saharareporters*, 14 September, 2008.

¹⁹ China to Issue New Versions of Visa from June 1, *Punch*, 31 May, 2019; See also, Press Release: Indefinite Suspension of “Dropbox” Process for Renewals. United States Diplomatic Mission to Nigeria, Public Affairs Section, Abuja, 14 May, 2019.

²⁰ For more information on this, see Nigeria’s Total Public Debt Portfolio as at December 31, 2018. Accessed at <http://www.dmo.gov.ng/debt-profile/total-public-debts>

²¹ Concerns Over Nigeria’s Debt Profile, *Leadership*, 29 April, 2019.

The Obasanjo administration rounded off on a poor footing, although an appreciable number of gains were recorded. Understandably, a significant number of the administration's policies were aimed at returning Nigeria to a level of sanity, yet, several policy summersaults overshadow the gains recorded. The power sector was alleged to have gulped \$16 billion in eight years with little or no tangible results.²² Also, the perennial electoral challenge reared its ugly head once again in the 21 April, 2007 presidential election which was heavily criticised by national and international observers and rejected by the two major opposition candidates for being rigged in favour of the ruling party. Although the electoral umpire and ruling party pronounced the election free and fair, the winning candidate declared publicly that the election was indeed, faulty. It was this very poor electoral mishap that informed the choice of President Umar Musa Yar'adua (2007-2011) who attempted to reform the electoral process.²³

President Yar'adua appeared to be masses-friendly, given some of the resounding policies his administration came up with. Although, regarded as having "enough intellectual capacity", "sufficient personal integrity" and with a "broad mind[...] politically, religiously, socially" by his political backers,²⁴ Yar'adua soon turned out to be a 'disappointment' when it appeared his health challenges was slowing down the wheel of his administration.²⁵ For instance, in the heydays of the Obasanjo regime, oil prices had been controversially increased amidst widespread criticism among labour and the citizens at large. This was not acceptable for the new administration which felt the price hike was not justifiable. The aftermath of this was a serious hardship on the masses, hence the reversal to an appreciable price that was greeted with widespread acceptance.

Given his personal integrity, unassuming humility and strong emphasis on transparency, accountability and the rule of law, his policy of appeasement was able to achieve relative peace in the troubled Niger Delta through the Amnesty Programme, an enduring legacy till date. It is important to state that President Yar'adua remains by far the only Nigerian president,²⁶ to have shown a sort of exemplary leadership expected of a leader. Until his death, he proved that the leadership in Nigeria could be accountable even without the urge of political will. It was on record that as governor of Katsina state for eight years, he ran a prudent administration and he also made a public declaration of his assets, a very rare occurrence among public office holders

²² Nigerian Deals 'Wasted Billions', *BBC*, 14 March, 2008.

²³ Dan Agbese, The Uwais Report and the High Cost of Indifference (1), *Guardian*, 9 March, 2018.

²⁴ Osita Okechukwu, Obasanjo's Sermon of Deceit and Diet of Lies – CNPP, *Saharareporters*, 21 January, 2010.

²⁵ Criticism directed at Yar'adua by his political backers, some accounts observed, was not based on health grounds but because he had began to roll back some of the policies of his predecessors. See, for instance, Philip Nyam, Yar'adua Blames Obasanjo on Gas Plants, *Leadership*, 24 January, 2008.

²⁶ Atiku is said to have publicly declared his asset in 1999, shortly after being sworn in but did not do so, neither did he mention it in a public statement after he was returned as Vice President in 2003.

in Nigeria.²⁷ He replicated this gesture soon after he was declared president of the country in 2007 as a fulfilment of a promise made during his campaign.

It must be emphasised that the Nigeria Constitution does not make it duty-bound for public officers to publicly declare their assets. Critics have argued that the framers of the constitution had cleverly added this clause to shield the leadership from critical scrutiny by the citizens. This position may not be untrue, considering the heavy roadblocks often mounted by the Code of Conduct Bureau (CCB) when requests are made through the Freedom of Information to gain access to these asset declaration forms for proper scrutiny. This fear seemed to have been confirmed when the president himself was quoted to have claimed he was faced with the dilemma of whether or not to declare his assets publicly. According to Yar'adua, the CCB "counselled against the move on the grounds that *such action would put pressure on other categories of public officials to do same* even when the Constitution makes the exercise a confidential matter (emphasis mine)."²⁸ Sadly, the CCB's position at the material time sparks off ignorance of what true accountability represents. For an agency like the CCB which struggles so hard to get public officers to submit their assets declaration forms in due time as constitutionally required, giving strong support to the president's decision would have finally sealed the fate of assets declaration defaulters such that the sort of rigmarole that has characterised asset declaration among public officers in recent times would have been a thing of the past.

That 'the Constitution makes the exercise a confidential matter' as suggested by the CCB proves to be an escapist position against the backdrop of the president's view that publicly declaring one's asset was not tantamount to "breaking any law,"²⁹ but "borne out of his conviction that the war against corruption cannot have meaning until those at the helm begin to live by example."³⁰ Not satisfied with this act of goodwill, Yar'adua also vowed to work with the National Assembly to seek ways through which assets declaration could be "an effective weapon in the fight against corruption and abuse of office."³¹ The president's action was primarily expected to place a moral obligation on public office holders to exhibit traits of leadership and accountability but this proved a hard pill to swallow for the political class who have hitherto displayed traits of irresponsibility towards issues of accountability.

Unlike the 'fairly toothless' CCB's delusive claim, that the president's actions would "put pressure on other categories of public officials to do same", none at the material time incidentally

²⁷ Kaye Whiteman, Umaru Yar'adua Obituary, *The Guardian*, 6 May, 2010.

²⁸ Josephine Lohor, Yar'adua: I'm Worth N850m, *Thisday*, 29 June, 2007.

²⁹ Declaration of assets by public officials is mandatory but a public declaration is not voluntary and not a legal requirement. See Section 140; 142(2) and Paragraph 11, Part 1 of the Fifth Schedule of the Nigeria Constitution.

³⁰ Lohor, Yar'adua: I'm Worth N850m

³¹ Lohor, Yar'adua: I'm Worth N850m

followed suit except the Vice President, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan who, according to sources, was compelled to declare his assets public.³² But for the president's untimely death, significant progress could have been made on the vexed issue of public assets declaration among public officials. This progress was unfortunately rolled back not long thereafter, as successive presidents have only payed lip services to the critical issue. While Yar'adua's immediate successor in a live broadcast declared that he did not give a damn about it,³³ his own successor have continue to dilly-dally over this very germane issue even though this was made part of his campaign promise few years back.³⁴ Incidentally, while both supporters and critics had reminded the president of his "pledge to publicly declare his assets and labilities, encourage all his appointees to publicly declare their assets and liabilities as a pre-condition for an appointment," his spokesman, Garba Shehu claimed it was still early in the life of the administration to do so, having just settled down for government business. Bowing to immense public pressure, the president and his deputy were forced to make what later appeared to be a vague declaration which did not contain the full descriptions of their assets for proper verification.³⁵ In actual fact, a news report claimed that the declared assets did not contain adequate monetary values which made it quite impossible to know the exact worth of the two leaders.³⁶

This form of half-hearted, incomplete and 'duplicitous' disclosure fell short of any symbolic significance and it could clearly explain why by the time the same government was about to be sworn in for a second term in office, the zeal and zest to effect the necessary changes and this time around, correct this previous political failing did not even come up for discussion.³⁷ The same old process of constitutionally declaring one's asset to the CCB was simply carried out recently to the chagrin of the public who perceived such action as a dangerous setback in the fight against corruption.³⁸

Perhaps unaware that the presidency had failed to release a public document detailing the assets of the president and the vice president and would rather do so publicly once the CCB concluded

³² Another account claimed he was pressured by the president to declare his assets. See Olusegun Adeniyi, *Against the Run of Play: How an Incumbent President was defeated in Nigeria*, Lagos: Kachifo Limited, 2017.

³³ See Raheem Oluwafunminiyi, "'Stealing is Not Corruption': A Discourse on the Languages of Corruption in Nigeria," in Benson O. Igboin (ed.), *Corruption: A New Thinking in Reverse Order*, Oyo: Ajayi Crowder University Press, 2018.

³⁴ Farooq Kperogi, President Buhari, a Promise is a Promise, *Daily Trust*, 22 August, 2015.

³⁵ The opposition criticized the president's spokesman for declaring "a flimsy list released to shore up the diminished image of the presidency."

³⁶ Ayorinde Oluokun, Assets: What Buhari, Osinbajo Declared in 2015, the Controversies and Yar'adua's Example, *The News*, 30May, 2019.

³⁷ Queen Esther Iroanusi, Buharimeter: Nigerians Insist Buhari yet to Publicly Declare Assets, *Premium Times*, 28 May, 2018.

³⁸ Moses E. Ochonu, The Shattering of the Buhari Mythology, *African Arguments*, 4 August, 2016.

the process of verification which it never did throughout its four-year tenure in office, some public officers decided to go beyond the constitutional minimum in recent times by declaring publicly their assets. These include former Chairman of the National Human Rights Commission, Prof. Chidi Odinkalu,³⁹ Executive Secretary, Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative, Mr. Waziri Adio⁴⁰ and former Senator representing Kaduna Central Senatorial District, Senator Shehu Sani.⁴¹ Others are Dr. Joe Abah, Director General of the Bureau of Public Service Reforms and Dr. Kayode Fayemi, former governor of Ekiti State.

Shehu Sani's reasons for publicly declaring his assets in line with the moral example set by the president and his vice are quite interesting and very instructive for mentioning here. According to Sani, his decision was borne out of "conformity to the standard of transparent and exemplary leadership, and in submission to the public and popular demand for integrity test to all public office holders, in a new Nigeria on a filtration process for a politically cleaner and decent future."⁴² He stated further:

Public declaration of...assets is a moral challenge to all public office holders...[which] challenges all men of conscience and docks all men who lay claim to self-dignity and self-worth... hangs a chain of guilt on the neck of all public office holders. To refuse to publicly declare assets is to continue to carry the burden of a moral thorn of guilt in a nation whose generation of leaders for so long stands in the dock of ethical court.⁴³

In concluding his position, Sani proclaimed:

There are no saints and angels in politics, but the citizenry deserve to know the moral truth behind the facade of uprightness. A clean broom is needed to clean a dirty space. I chose to publicly declare and be pelted than to walk with the stain of suspicion and mistrust splashed on all public office holders by a generation of curious citizenry.⁴⁴

Being the first and only Nigerian Senator to have publicly declared his assets, especially against the background of derisive perception many express towards the legislature as a whole, one must

³⁹ Rights Chief Declares Assets, *PM News*, 21 February, 2012.

⁴⁰ Waziri Adio – NEITI's Executive Secretary – Declares Assets Publicly, *Omojuwa*, <http://www.omojuwa.com/2016/waziri-adio-neitis-executive-secretary-declares-assets-publicly-read-up-on-his-assets>, 13 April, 2016.

⁴¹ Festus Owete, Kaduna Senator, Shehu Sani, Declares Assets, says he is Worth N22 million, several Houses, Vehicles, *Saharareporters*, 4 September, 2015.

⁴² Owete, Kaduna Senator

⁴³ Owete, Kaduna Senator

⁴⁴ Owete, Kaduna Senator

commend Sani for the excellent position articulated above. For a man with a human rights background, giving a very sound position on public asset declaration remains unparalleled and as well stands even taller than those to whom he influenced to declare his assets publicly in the first place. It has been rightly observed that, as long as public office holders fail to exemplify true leadership and accountability, a 'chain of guilt' will, no doubt, continue to hang on their necks as revealed recently by a former Nigerian law officer.⁴⁵

FUTILITY OF ACCOUNTABILITY: THE SUB-NATIONAL AS CASE STUDY

Given the enormous powers wielded by the Federal Government, citizens often focus strict attention to events at the Centre without putting into consideration the activities at the sub-national levels. It may well illustrate why the leadership across the states have been less accountable. Indeed, much of the failures that has characterised the Nigerian state are offshoots of the crisis inherent within the sub-national. While the federal government could also be blamed for the poor showing at the sub-national, given the skewed federal structure that tilts power and resource ownership to the Centre, affecting the developmental pace of the latter, the sub-national often create the sort of tension and crisis that till date have proved very difficult to stem the tide.

For example, the emergence of Boko Haram before it turned out to be a terrorist organisation few years ago, have been traced remotely to the deliberate attempt by leadership at the sub-national to pauperise the mass of the people, thereby increasing the level of social inequality,⁴⁶ particularly in the northern part of the country. This twins problem of poverty and social injustice⁴⁷ was capitalised by Mohammed Yusuf, founder of the sect in 2002, who used his agency to attract poor Muslim families and to recruit unemployed young men into a jihadist complex. In spite of the public perception of this group as a dangerous militant organisation, local politicians, especially in Borno State looked the other way. There is no denying the fact that Yusuf and his henchmen were provided tacit support and needed cover by the state's political establishment against political opponents. Allegations against a former governor of the state over his initial support for the group remain rife till date.⁴⁸ The Boko Haram insurgency has led to the death of thousands of people and made millions more displaced since Yusuf was executed extra-

⁴⁵ Musikilu Mojeed and Abdulaziz Abdulaziz, How Decision to Prosecute Tinubu at Code of Conduct was taken – Ex-Minister Adoke, *Premium Times*, 5 June, 2019.

⁴⁶ See Abimbola Adesoji, The Boko Haram Uprising and Islamic Revivalism in Nigeria, *Africa Spectrum*, 2010, pp. 97-98.

⁴⁷ Aslam Khan and Lawan Cheri, An Examination of Poverty as the Foundation of Crisis in Northern Nigeria, *Insight on Africa*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2016, pp. 59-71.

⁴⁸ Christina Lamb, A Fight for the Soul of the World, *Sunday Times*, 20 March, 2016.

judicially by the police in 2009,⁴⁹ while those responsible either by omission or commission have not expressed a dint of remorse or were not prosecuted by the leadership to hold them accountable for dragging the country into a needless and devastating war for a decade.

For a while, many states across the federation have been faced with what some have regarded as the salary and pension conundrum amidst dwindling revenues and failure of the leadership at the sub-national to meet up with their statutory obligations, workers appear to have been at the receiving end. Given the parlous situation, many had expected state governors to carry out two important tasks, one, to be resourceful and two, to reduce wastage drastically – a common feature that oil government machinery exhibit. Sadly, the sub-national has continued to play to the gallery. Even under a very heavy debt profile, state governors continue to maintain a bevy of aides and needless political appointees who only lurk around the corridors of power contributing virtually nothing to the development of the state. Some take regular foreign trips in the guise of wooing foreign investors even though there is almost nothing to invest in states whose economy are absolutely redundant and heavily reliant on dwindling federal allocation.

In spite of the several huge bailouts given to the sub-national government by the Paris Club refund in recent times with the notion that this fund will be utilised to pay workers' salaries, offset pension arrears, revive moribund infrastructure among other statutory obligations, some state governors have allegedly been accused of diverting these funds for other unknown purposes even as reckless borrowing continues unabated, thereby plung many states into monumental debts. A comment notes that: "The breakdown of the debt portfolio of many states [has] remained a top secret thereby giving room for speculation on the actual figures."⁵⁰ We shall at this juncture revisit, albeit briefly, the issue of foreign trips embarked upon by state governors and political office holders under the pretence of wooing foreign investors, medical rest or marketing local contents to the international community.

In 2015, barely few months into office, the Niger state governor, Abubakar Sani Bello embarked on a visit to the United Kingdom to watch the match between English Premiership clubs, Chelsea and Arsenal. For a governor who assumed office barely a month before this London visit to be warning sports officials in the country to desist from using his name to organise any competition.⁵¹ He was also accused of not watching the state-owned football team, Niger

⁴⁹ Incidentally, nobody has been held accountable since 2009 for Yusuf's murder which soon became a rallying point for the ensuing violent campaigns carried out by the group. See *Spiraling Violence: Boko Haram Attacks and Security Force Abuses in Nigeria*, *Human Rights Watch*, 11 October, 2012.

⁵⁰ Bola Badmus and Kola Oy, *Unpaid Salaries: Hope Dims for Workers*, *Nigerian Tribune*, 3 September, 2017.

⁵¹ The governor claimed "I am not a billboard" when board members of the Nigerian Chess Federation and the state hockey team that won the National Super League paid him a visit and declared they [Chess Federation] requested to organise a national championship in his honour.

Tornadoes which had just gained promotion to the elite Nigeria Premier League to give encouragement to the team, his action came as a surprise to many. Bello had explained that the trip was made on the invitation of a popular Nigerian footballer who wanted the state to partner with him in the area of sports development and would therefore be “wrong to turn down a willing investor.”⁵² Realising the grave blunder, the Chief Press Secretary to the governor noted that the trip to London was part of a long itinerary “to meet with other international development partners.”⁵³ Residents, however, criticised the trip as insensitive, arguing that for a state facing immense financial challenges, sports development was least important.

In February, 2018, the Oyo State governor, Abiola Ajimobi and his team visited Denmark to seek possible ways of resolving the herders-farmers clash in Nigeria by studying the ranching methods in that country. Ajimobi also disclosed the possibility of bringing Danish farmers to the state “for ‘knowledge transfer’ that will enhance our local beef output in the local and international market.”⁵⁴ Whether this objective was later achieved, we cannot tell for certain, however, that a governor could deploy human and state resources to seek ‘knowledge transfer’ abroad when local experts who have full grasp and knowledge on ranching could be sourced across the federation speaks much about the sort of leadership in the state.

Only recently, the Osun State governor, Gboyega Oyetola was forced to cancel an earlier approved 10-day foreign trip to the United Arab Emirates for 68 council chairmen. The trip, according to the government, was meant to expose the office holders to capacity building and to gain more administrative skills to administer the affairs of the respective local governments across the state. Embarrassed by the national outcry which greeted the purported trip, a statement by the Chief Press Secretary claimed that while it was desirable for public officers to be exposed to capacity building, the poor financial situation of the state makes the trip null and void. In spite its ignoble illegality, the governor, nonetheless, promised to make the trip a “priority at the appropriate time when the financial situation of the state permits.”⁵⁵

From the above, it is very clear that these trips were not only unnecessarily frivolous, but illustrate the needless foreign jamboree that the leadership at all levels in the country often prioritise with little or nothing to gain from them. Trips as these do not always demand the presence of the governor and could at best be delegated to the lowest rung of competence within the directorate levels. First, it reduces the huge amount of money that would be wasted,

⁵² Wale Odunsi, Condemnations Trail Niger Governor’s Trip to Watch Chelsea vs Arsenal Match, *Daily Post*, 22 September, 2015.

⁵³ Odunsi, Condemnations Trail Niger Governor’s Trip

⁵⁴ Herders-Farmers Clash: Ajimobi Seeks ‘Solution’ in Denmark, Visits Dairy Farm, *Punch*, 23 February, 2018.

⁵⁵ Alfred Olufemi, Oyetola Cancels Dubai Trip for Council Chairpersons Approved by Aregbesola, *Premium Times*, 10 June, 2019.

considering the number of associates accompanying the governor on such trip, second, it allows the governor to face strictly other home pressing problems affecting the state, and third, by delegating others for such an assignment, it exposes the directorate to efficiency, broadens their horizons and gives them the necessary confidence to work and invite accruing benefits on behalf of the state. Most importantly is the fact that many of the solutions often believed to be available abroad could readily be found within the country. In actual fact, Ondo state, for instance, has the highest number of cannabis planters in the country⁵⁶ and what the governor could have possibly done was to harness these home-grown talents and if possible, use their inherent potentials to develop a locally produced medicinal cannabis industry based on international standards.⁵⁷

Sadly, several governors' desperation for foreign investors or partners as it is called within government circles, by personally visiting them abroad makes nonsense of the sort of personal example required of true leadership as espoused by Achebe. It is the sort of leadership which often espouses bourgeois thinking, extricating the immense values or accruing benefits that could be gained from looking inwards. It is simply a mentality that puts the cart before the horse and addresses virtually nothing other than adding further problem to an already complicated process.

CONCLUSION

Our paper provides vivid and characteristic examples of a number of leadership and accountability deficit in virtually all facets of everyday life in Nigeria. We do not assume that this crack is fixated on the political sphere alone; rather, our argument and examples is representative of other sectors where intense human interactions occur such as the religious, social and even extended/nuclear family structures. Accountability characteristically gives way for primordial sentiments which instantly discard punishments for clemency.⁵⁸ In this case, individuals or groups who ordinarily should account for their stewardship, especially since this is based on trust and oath, usually emerge unscathed in spite of the overwhelming criminal offence committed against the state and citizenry. It explains why religious leaders, for instance, are shielded surprisingly by the 'flock' who ordinarily should hold the leadership accountable. This is a typical assumption of being more catholic than the pope and analogous to God in such a way

⁵⁶ Doyin Adebusuyi and Bola Ojuola, Why Marijuana Farms Thrive in Ondo, Ekiti, *Daily Trust*, 27 November, 2015.

⁵⁷ The governor, Rotimi Akeredolu visited Thailand in May, 2019, to understand the cannabis extract industry.

⁵⁸ John Hatchard, *Combating Corruption: Legal Approaches to Supporting Good Governance and Integrity in Africa*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2014, p. 84

that religious leaders cannot be wrong, the flock have given inadvertently a blank check for absolute impunity within the religious institutions in the country.⁵⁹

It is clear that a nation which fails to hold its leadership accountable does not have the moral obligation to expect accountability in leadership. Both concepts complement each other without which a society cannot assume efficient functionality. The position here is derived from actions by the last political dispensation which promised overwhelming systemic and institutional changes. Four years down the line, the citizenry is still expectant of these changes even though it appears the leadership of the day has moved on to the next level, leaving behind a docile population too complacent to hold its leadership accountable for its promises.

In the final analysis, what this paper has actually done is to question the perennial leadership conundrum which continues to roll back the country's progress. Leadership is understood to be held in trust and in the event, this is breached, consequences must follow strictly. Accountability, on the other hand, stems from a culture of openness and transparency and from the notion that all actions are to be carried out for the purpose of societal development. Once this primary building block is questioned, accountability becomes the guiding light. This is to serve as deterrence to others who may wish to tow similar path. Thus, for a similar reason, especially, the failure to achieve Brexit, British Prime Ministers have honourably resigned in the last five years. This is not only about quality leadership but the manifestation of accountability.

⁵⁹ Chima Agazue, *The Role of a Culture of Superstition in the Proliferation of Religio-Commercial Pastors in Nigeria*, Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2013, pp. 169-172. See also Angela Okpe, Christian Youths Plead for Reverend King, *Vanguard*, 12 March, 2016.