

An Assessment of the Roles of Leadership and Followership in Nation Building: The Nigerian Experience

T. B. MCHAEI, CHIDI AMADI

Ignatius Ajuru University Of Education Port Harcourt, Nigeria

EZUWOBOMUDE EMMANUEL EWEKA

Federal University Otuoke, Bayelsa State, Nigeria

Abstract. This paper examined leadership and followership in nation building in Nigeria. In an ethno-centred and highly heterogeneous society life Nigeria, a well-articulated leadership and followership structure could have served for the good of all and promote the spirit of “live and let live”. But on the contrary, leadership and followership tussles have been the bane of unity and collective existence of the people. The study employed both primary and secondary sources of data collection such as oral interviews, archival materials, journals and articles, published text books etc. Since knowledge cut across disciplines, the study also adopted the interdisciplinary approach, using knowledge from related disciplines in the Humanities and Social Sciences to add to the available historical sources. The paper established that leadership and followership is the major challenge to nation building in Nigeria because it has over the years walked through the part of ethnicity and favouritism. Leadership and followership in Nigeria is without a clear vision and focus due to deliberate neglect of history, experiences of predecessors and consequences of visionless leadership and followership across the globe. The paper argued that the failure of leadership in Nigeria is as a result of the failure of followership. The followership is the watch dog of every society and as such must ensure the policing and accountability of leadership in the country. Ironically, the Nigerian followership are divided along ethnic lines with a biased approach to actions and inactions of leaders from their ethnic divides. It is against this background that the paper submits that nationhood can only be attained in Nigeria if leadership and followership is redefined with the consciousness of building a nation devoid of

ethnic and religious sentiments, favouritism, nepotism and dictatorial leadership. The paper concludes that Nigeria can only be respected as the giant of Africa if her leadership and followership are restructured with national integration, unity, sustainable peace and development as the watch words.

Keywords: Leadership, Followership, Nigeria, Nation Building, Development.

1. Introduction

Leadership and followership are intertwined and mutually interwoven activities in any given society and as such drives the developmental agenda of such society. The relationship between leadership and followership is to provide the basic necessities of life and responsible governance bearing in mind that to govern a people is a social contract between the leaders and followers. In Africa in general and Nigeria in particular, leadership has posed a grave danger to the development of independent states that emerged after long years of colonial rule. This has over the years imparted negatively on the attitude of the followers who believes that the failure of leadership is the reason for their attitude. In Nigeria, since 1960 when the country regained her independence, it has moved from one system of government to the other. First was the parliamentary system that was bequeathed on the country by the former colonial masters (Britain). This system failed within a period of 6 years leading to a military coup in 1966. The military coup of 1966 altered the democratic process and instituted a de facto leadership in the country. The Second Republic

which came on board on 1979 and ended in 1983, Nigeria adopted a presidential system of government which has been the system of government to date. This implies that between 1960 and 2019, Nigeria has experienced both civilian (Parliamentary and Presidential Systems) and Military Regimes yet her leaders have not been able to provide to her citizens basic necessities of life commensurate with her abundant resources (Thom-Otuya, 2012).

The Nigerian state as it is presently constituted and structured is an inherited state and alien in nature. It was a structure put in place by the colonial power to facilitate the process of economic exploitation, political domination and socio-cultural condemnation. The inherited system encouraged the leadership of the Nigeria state after independence to constitute a self-oriented leadership mentally with strong will power for self-aggrandizement. This according to Davidson (1975:243) encouraged the indolent ruling elite to be unduly reliant on state resources for private accumulation and so there was unbridled struggle to control the state and its machineries. Thus, thuggery, arson, election rigging and ethnic sentiments were regularly employed in storage force of political ascendancy and the control of the state from its First Republic (1960-1966) to the Fourth Republic (1999-Date) (Ajayi, 2012).

With such approach to governance the Nigerian leadership could not provide portable drinking water, quality schools, good roads, electricity, hospitals, housing scheme, credible electoral system, corrupt free societies amongst others. This has over the years influenced the character and attitude of the followers who worked assiduously with the leaders during the struggle for self-rule to feel betrayed and put up resistance movements and struggle against the newly emerged Nigerian leaders. The early struggle against the leadership of independent Nigerian state prompted the leaders to adopt the oppressive approach to resistance as inherited from the colonial masters to suppress, oppress and silence the voices of the followers. The oppressive rule has now made the once loyal and supportive followers to the course of nation building to be very poor and inactive to the attainment of the nation's goals. Corroborating the above, Thom-Otuya (2012:116) stressed that; "when a people are ravaged by people it will weaken their ability to rise up to their challenge of checkmating the excesses of their leaders. This docility will have a great negative impact on leadership – followership relations" (Thom-Otuya, 2012).

In the case of Nigeria, the oppressive rule of both civilian and military regimes have made the followers

to be inactive in their quest for nationhood. Rather the followers have decided to take their destinies into their hands by devising all means humanly possible to survive not considering the consequences. This "Jungle Justice" approach to survival has created the "survival of the fittest mentality" in Nigeria. Ajayi (2012:191) further asserts that "the bitter experience of the years of military rule and civilian administration turned many Nigerians to docile followers based on the opportunistic philosophy of: "if you cannot beat them, join them". This has over the years been the defining factor in the relationship between leaders and followers in the management of Nigeria's socio-political development". With the above daunting issues the leadership and followership in Nigeria has been strained with high level of suspiciousness on both sides which has polarized the country along hostile leadership and oppressed and docile followership lines, making it difficult for the leaders and followers to work collectively towards achieving the goal of Nation building. It is against this background that this paper intends to examine the role of leadership and followership in Nation building in Nigeria.

2. Methodology

This paper adopted the use of primary and secondary sources of information to generate the required data for the study. It is true that only one source cannot provide the needed materials for this study hence the need for the researcher to adopt the multi-source approach in writing this paper. The approach became necessary because of the relationship between historical sources especially on the strength and weakness of each source which allowed the researcher to employ the strength of one source to balance the lacuna arising from the weakness of the other. The primary information derived from oral sources, newspapers, magazines, memos etc. were used to generate information for the study. On the other, secondary sources such as journals, books, intelligent reports, periodicals amongst others also provided the much need information.

Due to the changing nature of leadership and followership in the 21st century, and based on the fact that knowledge cut-a-cross disciplines, the paper also adopted the inter-disciplinary approach in writing this work. To this end, we have relied on works from the social sciences, humanities and sciences. Knowledge from these related disciplines helped to further strengthen our available historical materials. The data for this study was obtained through field work, library and archival research. The study adopted the historical, narrative descriptive and analytical

approach in the analysis and interpretation of data generated from primary and secondary sources. All the materials were subjected to thorough scrutiny and critical evaluation and analysis before conclusions were drawn.

3. Conceptual Clarification

3.1 Leadership

Leadership and followership are two concepts that have been defined and explained by scholars from different perspectives and backgrounds. According to Bryman (1992) Leadership is a process of social influence whereby a leader steers members of a group towards a goal. This implies that the leader is an influential member of the society and must as such guide the members towards attainment of societal goals.

Odo (2015) asserts that; “when people come together for a purpose, there would emerge a leader to organize them to achieve the desired task. Thus, leadership is one of the most important elements for order and progress in any human endeavor and society”. Leadership is paramount and central to the control and management of resources (Human and Material) in a given society. When a society is without a visionary leader, it may be heading towards doom. Corroborating the above, Fayemi (2009) cited in Odo (2015) opined that:

- Leadership is central to the control motivation and direction of every human society towards development, progress and meaningful achievement in all spheres of human existence.
- Leadership encompasses economic, political and socio-cultural spheres of every society and has the ability to either “make or mar” the society.
- Leadership is the ability to take an initiative, to motivate, to influence, to direct and control the thoughts, opinions and actions of the followers in any given society towards the achievement of purposeful end (Odo, 2015:3).

The implication of the above is that there is a strong relationship between leadership and followership in any given society. In an ideal situation, the emergence of a leader is the outcome of a decision taken by the followers on who should lead them. Such leaders who emerge from the selection process of the followers ought to be guided by the laws, rules and regulations of the society. Failure to lead the people (followers) towards the actualization of

societal goals attracts a penalty or total rejection as the law demands.

Furthermore, Tamenbaum cited in Thom-Otuya (2012) “defined leadership as interpersonal influence exercised in situation and directed through communication process, toward the attainment of goals”. To Utomi (2004), “Leadership is the art of mobilizing in a least cost manner to achieve a clear goal”. Newman (1997) on the other hand explained the concept leadership as the “special and unique ability to influence people to move towards goals that are beneficial and meet the group’s best interest”.

Oyedepo (2000) sees leadership as pure service to humanity. This implies that a leader is actually a servant, a selfless servant who is preoccupied with the tasks assigned to him and deliver as expected or positively as unexpected”. This means, he is a goal getter, an extra ordinary performer who is results-oriented and collectivist in diligently and committally seeking and finding solutions to concerns of mankind” (Folarin, 2013)

From the above definitions of leadership, one thing that is paramount is result or attainment of goals. The leader must be result-oriented in order to win the minds of the followers. This can be achieved through selfless service to humanity. For the purpose of this paper, we shall limit our definition to political leadership which is the bedrock of other aspects of leadership. Political leadership is the one that provides direction to a country, state or local government with the purpose of attaining set goals which in this paper referred to nation building. Political leadership is therefore, “challenging, particularly in a developing society such as Nigeria where there exists a lot of yearnings and demands for rapid socio-economic and political development (Odo, 2015:3).

As enormous as the task of leadership in Nigeria, the political leaders have failed in the responsibility of leadership. In their quest for nationhood, they have deviated due to lack of vision, ethnic sentiment, and corruption. This has over the years created serious leadership and followership challenges as will be discussed in this paper.

3.2 Followership

Followership is the act of submitting to the direction provided by a leader in a subordinate manner in order to attain set goals. It is the action of a person or a group of persons who plays a subordinate role in a society or an organization. Ajayi (2012) defined

followership as a deliberate act of subordination exhibited by a person or group of persons to enhance the relationship between the leader and the follower. According to Thom-Otuya (2012), followership simply “connotes adherence to a leader”. However, he further stressed that followership is the virtue of supporting leaders and helping them to lead well. “This goes with the responsibility to actively participate in the achievement of a nation’s goal” (Thom-Otuya, 2012:117).

McCallum (2013) asserts that:

Followership is a straight-forward concept. It is the ability to take direction well, to get in line behind programme, to be part of a team and to deliver on what is expected of you. How well the follower follows is probably just as important as how well the leaders lead.

This implies that there is a synergy between the leaders and the followers in ensuring a society or an organization attain set goals. However, good followership is the product of good leadership. When the leader fails to give direction, the followers will be misled. This could amount to serious conflict and betrayal of trust on the part of followers. Followership according to McCallum (2013:2) “may take the backseat to leadership but it matters; it matters a lot; quite simply, where followership is a failure, not much gets done and/or what does get done is what was supposed to get done. Weak leadership and followership are two sides of the same coin and the consequences is always the same”.

The above is the situation of the Nigerian state which has over the years plunged the country into serious economic backwardness and political retrogression. In as much as followership is subordinate to leadership, there are no leaders without followers.

Corroborating the above, Ungar (2011) submitted that “followership is a people oriented behavior, and this behavior builds relationships between leaders and followers, providing an environment that promotes all organizational members to focus on a common goal. On his part, Werlin (2002) as cited in Thom-Otuya (2012) argued that good leadership and followership relationship must be built on motivation rather than absolute control and such will help to instil the desired values into the followers which will eventually develop the culture of trust and mutual relationship.

From the foregoing, followership which is an ally of leadership has to contribute immensely to the success of leadership in any given society. There must exist strong partnership between the leaders and followers

to attain the desired goal of any society. The followership makes the leadership through the process of selection or election. However, in the case of Nigeria, the followers seems not to understand the strength that is bestowed on them and as such, serves as mere appendages to the Nigerian project of nation building as shall be discussed in the preceding sections of this paper.

3.3 Nation Building

Nation building as a concept has been examined and analyzed by scholars from different backgrounds and disciplines. Its meaning differs from the scholar’s perspective and as such becomes a subject of academic discourse. To Ntalaja (1987) as cited in Erinosh (2012:195):

Nation building implies establishing a national identity to transcend ethnic, regional and other particularistic ties, promoting national integration through political participation, economic exchange and cultural interaction by all segments of the population and developing a national culture through education and cultural activities.

This implies that Nation Building is a collective responsibility that cut across all strata of society without cultural or political barrier. “The concept of nation building is an attempt to unite heterogeneous ethnic groups under a political unit” (Erinosh, 2012: 12). Nation building as a process involving the psycho-social reconstruction of individuals, is a process of infusing the people of the new independent territories who differ widely in language and shared identity” (Adekanye, 2011). In the same vein, Ekigwu (2012) asserts that nation building is an effort geared towards integrating the various groups in a country.

Erinosh (2012) further stressed that the issue of nation building is not new as leaders in the ages past always strived hard to ensure buoyancy, loyalty, peace and harmony. Thus, efforts were made towards setting up necessary machineries that would engender and sustain unity and sense of belonging among the various ethnic groups that constituted their states, kingdoms and empires”.

In Nigeria, over the years, efforts have been made towards sustaining unity and peace among the various ethnic groups that make up the country. However, nation building have not been achieved due to the inability of the leaders and followers to chart a genuine course towards attaining that goal. The country is bedeviled with numerous challenges such as ethnicity, religious intolerance, political

domination and marginalization, lack of national identity economic oppression, corruption among others which have further widen the gap between the leaders and followers making nation building a mirage. This paper therefore tends to address some of these challenges.

4. Leadership and Followership in Nigeria: A Historical Overview

Nigeria is one of the countries in Africa situated within the West African sub-region. The country is endowed with abundant mineral and human resources which ought to be the most developed country in Africa. On the contrary, the country is ranked among the poorest in the world as it was recently named the “headquarters of poverty” in the world. The failure of the Nigerian state is attributed to failure of leadership and followership.

Prior to colonial rule, the various peoples that make up the entity known as Nigeria today were independent and sovereign with strong political institutions that produced responsible leadership and active followership. The colonial government in Nigeria instituted an oppressive rule through a political structure that undermined the pre-colonial structures and the educated elites. It was as a result of the oppressive rule that the educated elites spearheaded the struggle for independence. The moves were aimed at ensuring Nigerian (African) representations in the governance of the colonies and to address the political, economic and social policies that were not favourable to the people. It was in the spirit of self-determination by the educated elites who were denied equal opportunities with their European counterparts in the governance of the colonial state in Nigeria that prompted the move for total liberation of the Nigerian territory (Michael, 2017).

However, the leadership of the early years of agitation only succeeded in having elective positions through the Clifford Constitution of 1922. Corroborating the above, Laosebikan (2016) opined that the British colonial government after different constitutional experience which started with Clifford Constitution of 1922 which introduced elective principles to Nigeria, the country for the first time provided the platform for the emergence of the first political party; Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP) in 1923. Consequently, the first set of elected representatives (leaders) emerged. From there, Nigeria has evolved politically with the emergence of both civilian and military leaders but with a lot of challenges. With the Richards Constitution in 1946, Nigeria was divided into three

regions which provided diverse platforms for political participation and agitations for independence but with a deep rooted ethnic sentiment that have lingered to present.

According to Phillis & Patrick (1985) cited in Michael (2017), the modern independence movement of Nigeria started with the radical approach by Nnamdi Azikiwe and his group in 1944. The decisive factor in Nigeria nationalist struggle seems to have been the early emergence of regional rivalries and of parties expressing them. From 1951-1958, all political and ethnic interest were adjusted and a federal constitution was adopted in 1954. In 1957, the east and the west were granted internal self-government without the north. In 1958, the problem of central politics was thus resolved when the northern leaders entered a coalition federal government with NCNC in the east and in October, 1 1960 Nigeria became independent (Fage, 1962, Anene & Brown, 1966, Phillis and Patrick, 1985 in Michael, 2017).

During the pre-colonial and colonial eras, the followership was very active and thus compliments the role of the leaders. The followers especially during the colonial era and the struggle for regaining of independence supported the leaders to agitate for freedom believing that indigenous leadership is the answer to economic exploitation, political marginalization and socio-cultural condemnation. Again the followers also hoped that the indigenous leadership will address the issues of over taxation, poor infrastructure, racial discrimination, inequality, unequal economic and political opportunities, poor health care system and inadequate educational opportunities. It was in the quest to address the above issues, the leaders established mutual relationship with the followers during the colonial era. Such cordial relationship ignited strong passion amongst the leaders and followers towards building a nation of their dream. There was unity of purpose and desire to ensure that all the component units that make up the Nigerian state are adequately represented. All the ethnic groups downplayed their ethnic interest and pursued vigorously the national interest. It was in the spirit of mutual relationship, national interest and unity of purpose that both the leaders and followers fought and regained the independence of Nigeria from the British.

After independence, the Nigerian leaders inherited the colonial structures. According to Ogbonna, Ogundiwin and Uzuegbu-Wilson (2012) Nigeria was bequeathed a democratic state by the British in 1960 after long years of autocratic rule. Sooner than later Nigeria lost the democratic system it inherited at

independence. Phillis and Patrick (1985) as cited in Michael (2017) opined that “at independence, African (Nigeria inclusive) states for the most part retained political institutions patterned on those of their former colonial masters. Anglo-phone Africa which includes Nigeria was handed a parliamentary form of government, designed to encourage representative democracy and to monitor the actions of the executive through an assembly of popularly elected delegates to a national assembly. This implies that the post-colonial state of Nigeria inherited the political, economic and social structures of the Western powers without tangible changes (Michael, 2017).

The inherited political structures were very difficult to manage by Nigerian leaders who rather than ensuring lasting changes decided to build on the old foundation. This was because the colonial governments granted independence on the grounds that the political systems of the Western powers with their political and technical advice must be adopted by the post-colonial state. With such influences from the Western powers, the Nigerian state experienced wide spread political, economic and social challenges. In the first two decades of independence, Nigeria experienced widespread political instability. “The country was not free to decide a form of political ideology most suitable to its socio-economic and political development” (Enor, 2016).

The frequent interference from Western powers as to who becomes the leader and what ideology should be adopted created a lot of political instabilities. Most Nigerian leaders gradually skewed towards one party system to perfect their stay in office longer than the constitutional provision. This was done in connivance with the Western powers who wanted puppet as leaders to perfect their neo-colonialist tendencies. The abuse of constitutional provisions and constant political instabilities paved way for military interventions in the politics of Nigeria. The failure of the civilian government to project political ideologies that will address the problems of the nascent nation and the interventions by the military instituted autocratic rule in Nigeria.

The followers who were partners in the quest for good governance and nation-building during the colonial era and early years of independence later felt disappointed due to the failure of the leaders to provide the basic necessities of life. In addressing such challenges, the followers started agitating for a better state of affairs in Nigeria. In response, the leaders who have also inherited the instruments of coercion from the colonial powers used military

forces to suppress such agitators and eventually instituted oppressive leadership. The implication of such action by the leaders was a strained leadership and followership relations which culminated to a docile followership.

Corroborating the above argument, Thom-Otuya (2012) argued that “followership in Nigeria during the pre-colonial and colonial era was very active. However, after independence, the once active followership started resistance movements to address the failures of Nigerian leaders. These resistance cases were aimed at fighting against poor governance and ineptitude of Nigerian leaders. The Nigerian followership that were hitherto very active and participated actively in the achievement of the nation’s goals during the colonial era now became antagonist of the ruling class. Thom-Otuya further stressed that:

When a people are ravaged by poverty, it will weaken their ability to rise up to their challenge of checkmating the excesses of their leaders. This docility will have a great negative impact on leader-followership relationship. Leaders that are checkmated by their followers will limit their excesses and realign themselves to public opinion which will be for the good of all.

The heightened tension between the leadership and followership impacted negatively on nation building. The leaders succeeded in dividing the followers along ethnic lines and rather than struggle to actualize the dream of building a nation, the leaders and followers started projecting ethnic interest above national interest. Instead of promoting unity and national integration, the leaders maximized the opportunity of having a divided followership to destabilize the fragile nation hence, hate speeches were promoted, ethnic identities tolerated and corruption celebrated.

5. Strained Leadership and Followership: Implication to Nation Building in Nigeria

“Leadership and followership interaction is a cardinal element of citizenship vis-à-vis the social contract in a democratic setting. The citizens are entitled to rights and therefore obliged to the state” (Ogbonna et al, 2012:66). Ungar (2011) is of the view that “citizens should not expect good leadership without good followership”. The implication of the above on the Nigeria situation is that the leadership and followership must establish cordial relationship to attain the goal of nation building. On the contrary, leadership and followership in Nigeria has been strained and abused due to the oppressive tendencies of the leaders over the years.

Apart from making efforts to lead the inherited state, over the years, post-colonial Nigerian leaders and followers have been grappling with issues of nation building which revolves around the search for nationhood, development of national consciousness among individuals and groups to cultivate the sense of love, oneness, unity of purpose and commitment to the state.

According to Anthony (2004:10):

In Africa (Nigeria), nation building is a very big task. The countries that emerged at independence were not nations. They were rather nation states brought together by accident of history of colonialism. Because of the brutalities and exploitation of the colonial era, African states have not been able to establish single nations and ensuring love, patriotism, unity and loyalty to the new nation.

In the case of Nigeria, the accident of the amalgamation of 1914 brought different nations such as Igbo, Ijaw, Hausa States, Yoruba, Igala, Nupe, Benin amongst others together to form the Nigerian state. Since after independence, the various people of Nigeria have been grappling with the challenge of Nation building with little or no success due to strained leadership and followership divided along ethnic, religious and party lines. To buttress the above argument, Barkindo et al (1994) succinctly stressed that “the task of nation building since independence in Africa is still very backward as regime after regime have tried but failed. The failure of these regimes could be attributed to lack of national consciousness, negative colonial legacies, neo-colonialism, and ethnicity problem of ideology amongst others”.

To add to the above is the fact that Nigerian leaders lack experience of governing a complex society like hers and they also have the “sit tight” mentality which have over the years deepened the ethnic struggles over control of resources. Since the drive to actualizing nationhood is bestowed on the leadership, there was therefore the need for the leaders to create a conducive atmosphere for a friendly leadership and followership relationship. This means leadership is the driving force of a cordial relationship with the followers.

Thom-Otuya (2012:117) supporting the above argument opined that:

The relationship of leadership and followership is anchored on leadership because he is the driver of the relationship. It is incumbent on a leader to give direction and for the followers to comply.

In the case of Nigeria, since independence the country have been facing serious leadership crises

which have lingered to date with both military and civilian governments trading blames. The leadership crises has resulted to the inability of the leaders to foster unity and also integrate the various component units to a one and indivisible nation. They have also failed in their promises of building an egalitarian society and the provision of basic necessities of life. This has over the years made any ethnic group in power to see governance as an opportunity to loot and protect the interest of their ethnic groups. No wonder, appointments even to date are ethnic based making the ruling ethnic group and their allies to get what could be termed “juicy appointments”. The strained nature of leadership and followership in Nigeria is therefore posing a big challenge to nation building as leadership without followership cannot yield the desired result.

The post-independence leaders of Nigeria are not conscious of the fact that their followers are determinant factor in their journey to nationhood (Michael, 2017:285). They have over the years failed to keep to the promises of infrastructural development, good living conditions, unity of purposes, national integration, abhorrence of religious sentiments and ethnicity, amongst others. The promise to fully promote national interest above ethnic interest has become a mirage. As the followers became increasingly disappointed with the leadership of the country, they mobilized to fight and liberate themselves. The leaders in turn, use repressive methods and the divide and rule policy to keep themselves in office. The same people who fought collectively to liberate the country from the shackles of colonialism are now fight among themselves. Again, the same approach adopted by the colonial government to subjugate and bring Nigerian leaders and followers under control is what the Nigerian leadership is using to suppress the masses and bring them to perpetual subordination.

It is pertinent to unequivocally state that as independence was granted to Nigeria, the followers had high expectations of what independence would bring to them personally as well as collectively. These expectations according to Sheldan (1985) cited in Michael (2017) related to basic human needs such as better living conditions, equal economic opportunities, unity, national integration and infrastructural development could not be achieved. The result as earlier stated was serious protest against poverty, high handedness, disunity, ethnicity, corruption, election rigging, political killings, and insecurity among others. Instead of using a peaceful approach through dialogue to talk to the minds of the vulnerable followers, the leaders employed the brutal

approach inherited from the colonial governments to suppress revolts, opposition and protest against bad governance.

To further suppress the people, Nigerian leaders created the privileged wealthy class with absolute power to control state resources at the expense of the poor masses; a system that have endured to date. These were the same leaders who fought against injustices of the colonial government now perpetuating the same atrocities they fought against. This is not surprising because most of those that emerged as leaders were very poor. In order to command respect and ensure the complete subjugation of the poor masses to prevent challenges, the leaders acquired wealth through corrupt means. The wealth was then used as a tool to intimidate and oppress the poor to a “yes sir level” and forced respect from them. They used the poor masses to protest against racial discrimination and to institute equality of all men. When that was achieved and the white regime overthrown, they made the poor masses to understand that “all men are equal, but some men are more equal than others” (Michael, 2017).

The thesis established is that the quest for wealth to the detriment of the state was due to the fact that none of the political leaders believed in the unity of purpose, ethnic integration and corporate existence of the Nigerian state. The implication of such maladministration is the fact that whosoever controls the centre, controls the resources of the entire country to the benefit of his or her ethnic group. The result of such approach to leadership was high level of corruption, inequality, favouritism, nepotism, ethnic sentiments and affiliations, disunity among others which are the reason for none attainment of nationhood.

The above scenario had ripple effect on leadership and followership relationship in Nigeria. In such circumstances where the masses sees the leaders as their greatest enemy, anarchy, instability, distrust, acrimony, lack of patriotism become the order of the day. The suspicious relationship between the leaders and followers especially those from opposing ethnic divides has deepened and widen the gap between the various ethnic groups. Furthermore, the marginalization method on the smaller ethnic groups by leaders from the major ethnic groups also oppose the quest for nation building as the marginalized groups and the oppressed masses clamour on daily basis for disintegration. From the foregoing, it is obvious that the failure of leadership have contributed to the failure of followership. The leaders

and the followers have failed in their responsibilities of nation building.

According to Thom-Otuya (2012:118) “followership needs to have a strong public opinion pool of the activities of her leaders or else leadership can unconsciously turn to be dictatorial. When followership establishes strong public opinion on issues of national interest, the leader will succumb to pressure where the followership decides to be docile as in the case of Nigeria, there is the tendency that the welfare of citizens and the overall development of the country will be compromised.

6. Challenges of Leadership and Followership in Nigeria

Looking at the nature of leadership and followership in Nigeria, there is no doubt saying that they have a lot of challenges. The challenges of leadership and followership have over the years had strong impact on nation building.

6.1 Challenges of Leadership

Weak Political Institutions: The Nigerian state is an inherited state. According to Phillis and Patrick (1985), “the political institutions the African states inherited from the colonial governments were very weak and lacked the potential to stimulate leadership and nation building”. The political and bureaucratic institutions were very weak and fragile, incapable of ensuring citizens compliances to state policies. This type of system is capable of breeding leaders that are not visionary but with the tendency to remain perpetually in office. These week political institutions and the lacuna created provided Nigerian leaders with no option than to be corrupt and at some point use state security apparatus to stifle revolts from the masses. Nigeria as it is presently constituted politically seems to have a stronger executive who controls the legislative and judicial arms of the government without regard to constitutional provisions.

Lack of Policy Direction and Vision: Nigerian leaders lack policy direction and vision. Visionary leadership is a panacea to nation building and when leaders are not visionary, they will also lack policy direction. The trial and error approach adopted by Nigerian leaders makes them to lack ideologies and policies of survival and not of sustainable development are implemented. According to Newman (1997), vision is the key to understanding leadership. Nigerian leaders lack manifestos and ideologies and as such fail to deliver on their

campaign promises. Their sense of judgment on issues of national interest is so naïve to the extent they preach division rather than unity through their actions and inactions.

Use of Authoritarian Despotic and Coercive Force:

Nigerian leaders over the years have made so many promises to the masses but has fulfilled little to that effect. The poor masses have been promised better living conditions and political system that will protect the interest of all ethnic groups. On the contrary, leaders have failed to provide the needs of the people which have eventually resulted to some form of violence and refusal to comply with state laws. The poor masses have over the years expected the leaders to show selflessness and genuine love for the nation, to provide dedicated leadership, show high sense of patriotism and deep sense of commitment, show charisma and strong personality to be well informed on the conditions of the people". (Barkindo et al, 1994). The followers faced with such numerous problems without hope in the near future have refused to obey state rules and regulations believing that Nigeria is a jungle and in the jungle "survival of the fittest" is the watchword. In response to the masses protest for a better Nigeria, the leaders have subjected them to severe humiliation and ill treatment. The leaders like in the era of colonialism used police, military and other state security agencies to compel the people to obedience. The divide and rule policy of the colonial era has been reintroduced in a manner that has deepened ethnicity in Nigeria. The consistent call for change through agitations and wide protest and the use of force by the leaders have polarized the country along ethnic lines which is not healthy for heterogeneous society like Nigeria.

Ethnicity-Ethnic Division: Nigeria has over 250 ethnic groups with distinct culture, languages and historical origins. However, in 1914, the British government amalgamated the various ethnic groups that were hitherto independent and sovereign to one political entity called Nigeria. Thom-Otuya (2012:122) stressed that:

The amalgamation brought different perceptions, some saw it as a mistake while others saw it as necessity for the administrative convenience of the colonial government. Since then, Nigerians including her leaders pay more allegiance to their ethnic interest than to the country.

He further posited that even in time of elections, people vote according to their ethnic interest and when such leaders emerge, they also reciprocate same to their ethnic groups. The implication is that leaders who emerge through ethnic support cannot project national interest which is key to nation

building. Ethnic politics has over the years created disunity among leaders in Nigeria and the result is ethnic competitions on who should control the centre. Ethnicity has over the years posed a serious threat to nation building in Nigeria and the leaders must live above ethnic affiliations.

Lack of Integrity: Integrity is an important ingredient of leadership. It is the integrity of a leader that wins the trust and support of the followers. Nigeria is a country that parades corruption as a value system; this can be attributed to lack of integrity on the part of leadership (Thom-Otuya, 2012). Nigerians lack trust for her leaders and it has made the leaders to lose credibility both at home and abroad. The leaders in order to win support from the masses, turn to their ethnic groups for protection therefore creating ethnic sentiments among the followers.

Lack of Legitimacy: Since independence to date, legitimacy has been a major challenge to leadership in Nigeria. Legitimacy is the bedrock of democratic leadership and as such, leaders must get same from the followers. On the contrary, in Nigeria, most leaders find their way into power through the backdoors or dubious process. The military dictators imposes themselves on the people through *coup de tats* while the civilians imposes themselves on the people through election rigging. This according to Thom-Otuya (2012) and Ogbonna et al (2012) "only coarse the followership; they cannot criticize or dialogue with the leaders and as such, reduces the people's confidence on their leaders because their mandates and rights was stolen". The above leadership challenges have impacted negatively on the quest for nationhood by Nigerians.

On the other hand, followership in Nigeria also have numerous challenges ranging from; poverty, illiteracy, ethnicity, sycophancy, *laisse affaire* docile attitudes and lack of integrity. The high poverty level has made so many Nigerians to always compromise in their decision making. Poverty has its implications in politics and it infiltrates the political process (Ogbonna et al, 2012). Subscribing to the above, Thom-Otuya (2012) asserts that "poverty is one major factor that impairs the role of followership in Nigeria. He further asserts that:

In Nigeria, those who are rich are very rich and wealthy; the poor are really poor; the middle class wobbles between self-sufficiency and poverty. Followership that are poor are afraid to criticize or checkmate the excesses of their leaders because of fear of oppression from the leadership (Thom-Otuya, 2012:122).

The poverty level has created a fearful mentality among the followers. This has made the followers to rather resort to compromise as a means of survival. Rather than criticize the leaders, they adopt the slogan “if you cannot beat them, you join them”. The implication is that rather than having followers that will stand to challenge the leaders, we have followers that are sycophants; always ready to sing praises to the leaders who kept them in that miserable condition.

Furthermore, economic poverty begat religious poverty in Nigeria with the mentality of “It is well with us “it is God’s will” “There is God” among others. Nigerians are none unthinking political beings and they have left everything to fate. Both Christians and Muslims now believe that “Power comes from God and he gives to whosoever he wishes or deems fit”. This mentality of the followers has made them not to ask the leaders to account for their actions while in office with the erroneous belief that they will account to God. There is therefore a strong coalition and conspiracy by the political and religious leaders in Nigeria to exploit the poor masses through false campaign, promises and religious dogmas. The few followers that make effort to protest are tagged enemies of the ethnic group in power. Instead of the exploited masses to collectively protest against the leaders, they become instruments in their hands. The leaders now pay them to protest against themselves in what is tagged “anti-protest and pro-protest groups”. The polarized youth groups through these protest fight among themselves while the leaders loot the economy dry.

Next is the problem of ethnicity. Most Nigerian followers pledge loyalty to their ethnic groups than to the country. This ethnic loyalty makes the followers to protect corrupt leaders from their ethnic divides. Even when the policies of the leaders are against national interest, the followers support them. People in Nigeria vote based on ethnic affiliation or alignment. In tandem with the above, Thom-Otuya (2012) opined that: “In Nigeria, when a corrupt leader is prosecuted, his ethnic men and women come to his defense, when they want to vote, they vote according to the ethnic ties and after voting, the leaders empower those from their ethnic divides to the detriment of the other ethnic groups”. This attitude of the followers impacts negatively on nation building. The leaders have succeeded in dividing the followers along ethnic lines for easier manipulation and exploitation.

7. The Way Forward

Nation building is a collective responsibility and as such, all stakeholders in the Nigeria project must deliberately make efforts towards attaining nationhood. The following suggestions are put forward:

- The inherited political, social and economic structures of the colonial administration should be dismantled. Over the years, the Nigerian leaders have built on the old foundation put in place by Britain. With such in place, Western powers will continue to have strong economic, political and socio-cultural influences over the Nigerian state therefore dictating the style of leadership that affects nation building.
- Both leadership and followership should be geared towards promoting unity and national integration in the country. The divide and rule approach of leaders in disorganizing the effort of followers in their quest for nationhood should be discouraged. Leadership and followership relationship should be harmonious and complimentary so that the challenges of nation building can be surmounted.
- A mutual and complimentary effort towards good leadership and followership must be channeled to the satisfaction of all. This implies that leadership and followership must be without personal interest, ethnic sentiment, divide and rule policies and favouritism (Solomon and Egba, 2014).
- Leaders should stop the use of state security apparatus in suppressing genuine agitations and protest from the masses. The continuous use of such force to bring the masses under control will continue to widen the gap between the leaders and followers which will impact negatively on nation building.
- The docile nature of the followers should be discouraged. It is true that the oppressive rule of leaders is the reason for the docility. However, for the sake of the future generation, the followers must rise to their responsibilities by holding the leaders accountable for their actions and participate actively in political processes in the country especially during elections. This will help them to choose leaders that will promote the quest for nation building.
- The motto of Nigeria “Unity and Faith, Peace and Progress” should be promoted. Over the years, this important national symbol has been undermined by both the leaders the followers. The leaders have compromised the unity of the country,

making the followers to lose faith in the country. This has again strained the relationship between the leaders and followers resulting to serious political instability, distrust and anarchy. With such as state of affairs, peace has eroded the country thereby impeding the progress and development.

8. Conclusion

The nature of leadership and followership in Nigeria is a major challenge to nation building. Leaders and followers are important stakeholders in the drive towards nationhood. Therefore, it requires a collective responsibility on the part of the leaders and followers to overcome their challenges and build a nation that will protect the interest of all ethnic groups, religion and people.

With the present attitude to leadership and followership characterized by ethnic sentiments, greed, corruption, nepotism, insecurity, distrust, marginalization, brutality, oppression, disregard for the rule of law, inequality, hatred, hate speeches, political instability and exploitation of the minority, nation building will continue to be a mirage. "Nigeria is seriously torn apart by ever increasing polarity - groups, lack of ideology and ethnic agitations" (Ogbonna et al, 2012).

The paper has therefore established that leadership and followership is vital to nation building and such must work collectively for the interest of all groups and interest. The paper has revealed that the inactive nature of followership is the reason for ineffective leadership in the country. The paper has demonstrated how strained leadership and followership can impact negatively on nation building in Nigeria.

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