



## Confucius Political Philosophy as a Panacea to Nigeria Political Crises

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**Abstract.** Democracy as practiced in Nigeria raises fundamental questions. It is besieged with series of problems ranging from corruption to morbid tenacity for power. Besides, political crises tug the nation in different direction and insecurity is on the increase. Electoral violence begets further sophistication across years. With a view to arresting this trend, this paper explores the basic rudiment of Confucius political Philosophy to generate a pedagogy of leadership for leaders.

### 1. Introduction

This paper explores the different dimensions of political crises in Nigeria and the attendant effects on socio-economic development. It enunciates an epistemology of leadership through the ethical and political teaching of Confucius. The essay is not a historical navigation of political crises but a Philosophical examination of why and the way out as demonstrated by Confucius.

### 2. Political and Political Development

Politics as used in their essay revolves around state management. It is the dynamics for managing the affairs of government in a state. According to S.I. Benn (1967:387), “Politics means conjecture about from political organizations actually work or about the causal connections between forms of institution and the types of politics likely to be pursued or between

economic structures and political power. “Hence, we can say that politics enshrines principles which treat the foundation of state and the principles of government” (Appadorai, 1979:3). The principles in reference ascertain who gets what, how and to which extents. As succinctly puts by Lasswell. It enunciates who gets what, how and when” (Lasswell, 1975:4).

Politics, when properly managed bring about political development. “Political development enhances the states capacity to mobilize and allocation resources, to process policy input, into implementable outputs. This assists in problem solving and adaptation to environmental changes and goal realization” (Brunnel, 1996:12). A politically developed state implies appreciable political and participation, proper mobilization of resources and qualitative advancement in the socio-historical and political life of the people (Oyenuga, 2014:166). A politically developed state allows democratic participation of man in governance and creates a latitude for self-realization. It is not oppressive, exploitative or alienating.

### 3. Idea of Political Crisis

In simple expression a crisis is any event that is, or is expected to lead to, an unstable and dangerous situation affecting an individual or group of people. Primarily, “crises are deemed to be negative changes in the security, economic,

political, societal or environmental affairs, especially when they occur suddenly.

Political crisis refer to a period or moment of instability causes by certain factors which a set of people consider unfavourable to their political growth.

#### **4. Dimension of Political Crisis in Nigeria**

Nigeria has been beguiled by series of political upheavals right from the independent era. The civic war (1967-1970) where the Igbo put up mercenary and logistic to secede reflect to a great extent, the enormity of political crisis in Nigeria. Besides, the agitation of the independent people of Biafra championed by Nnamdi Kanu still raise question on the unity of the nation. This is a prelude towards ethnic self determination.

Apart from the threat of session, electoral crisis is another major issue in the annal of politics in Nigeria. The reign of terror in the just concluded election in River State which culminated in the decollation of a police officer is a serious issue. In fact, electoral crisis in Nigeria are accompanied by the threat of force, use of force, assassination, etc.

Not all political crisis are inter-party. At times, it can be intra-party as seen in the on-going positional tussle between Makarfu and Sheriff who are both laying claim to the chairmanship of the People's Democratic Party. There are also crisis caused by the quest for power and position. This at times is caused by the tension between party supremacy and individual calculation on the dynamics of power. This is evident in the internal bickering in the All Progressive Congress over the emergence of Senator Bukola Saraki and the choice of Ekweremadu as Deputy Senate President.

Morbid tenacity for power is another contributory factor. This is anchored on the fact that whoever is in power determines the pattern of resources allocation. Thus, every ethnic group wants to be there and whenever any of them feel cheated; "they return to their primordial ethnic

shell and push their interest through any means" (Uroh, 1998:44).

Political crises can have religious undertone especially when dangerous sects hijacked and manipulate religious creed for survival. This is apparent in the Boko Haram's issue. Countless number of lives have been wasted by this dreaded sect.

Another dimension is when leadership is too autocratic as seen in the draconian rule of late General Sanni Abacha and the maverick manipulation that resulted in the cancellation of an election which was adjudged free and fair in June 1993.

The point is that political crises in Nigeria have diverse dimensions and causes. Some of the causes are: morbid tenacity for power, corruption, electoral malpractices, quest for ethnic self-determination, perceived alienation of ethnic group, manipulation of religion, etc.

#### **5. Political Problem and the Development of Nigeria**

The problem of Nigeria are too numerous to be expressed in a single sentence. They are multifaceted. Politically, Nigeria is being pummeled by diverse forces which violate the efficiency of the system and sap the economy to a worrisome extent.

It is not too outrageous to say that the problem of Nigeria is the problem of leadership. Leadership has a strong epistemological base that must be understood. When not properly understood and applied, the bridge between leaders and followers will certainly collapse generating crises and instability. Oremolola Ipinlaye addresses the problems of Nigeria from the angle of leadership:

*The foundation of Nigeria's political problem is anchored on leadership. Leadership is seen as a case of classical struggle between opposing political interests to control national machinery, exploit resources and further pure economic interest. Thus, the realm of power becomes a realm of complex interplay of forces, financial*

*inducement, Machiavellian manipulation, assassination, etc.* (Ipinlaye, 2015:74).

Ipinlaye really captures a key aspect of the Nigeria's predicament but his thinking will not go down well with those who trace the problem to an external source.

Remarkably, Water Rodney, Bade Onimode, Frantz Fanon, etc., trace the political and economic crises of Africa to the technical barrier imposed by slavery, colonialism and neo colonialism. To them, the contemporary problem Africa is facing can be best explained within the logical consequence of the phenomena of slavery and colonialism. This suggests that a clear analysis of Africa's political problem must embed the problems fostered by external relations. "Colonialism to start with thrust Africa into the world capitalist system dominated by metropolitan forces that operate under harsh individualism and by so doing created a new world economic order in which Africans were and are still ill-equipped to compete" (Sogolo, 1991:57).

Remarkably, it is argued that colonialism serves as the bedrock of modern political crisis in nation like Nigeria. In the word of Peter Ekeh, "Colonialism is to Africa what feudalism is to Europe. They form the historical background from which Africa and Europe advanced to modernity. As such, they have determined the peculiar characteristics of modernity in each of these areas" (1975:93).

A crucial area where the colonial legacy is prominently felt is in the combination of erstwhile autonomous territories of autonomous people. People with diverse cultural and socio-economic heritage were crammed together as nation. This was undertaken to spell out distinct sphere of influence for the colonial masters. As amplified by Oladipo

This was done in order to ensure that colonial control and dispossession could be achieved without undue rivalry among the colonizers and at minimum cost to them... they had brought together or entrenched ethnic divisions in order to be in a better position to ensure their continued

subjugation and dispossession, the colonizer, naturally settled for the second option (Oladipo, 1998:108).

The aforementioned colonial act could be simply identified as the starting point of ethnic rivalry in Nigeria. Though colonialism fast track the emergence of multi-national states in Africa, there was no commensurate process to ensure that these states evolve into a sustainable one. "Because the new states were primarily instrument of control and dispossession, could not generate the feelings of loyalty and support which could promote national cohesion in Africa. This is the origin of the alienation of the people from the states and the emergence of the phenomenon of ethnic self-definition" (Oladipo, 1998:109).

Besides, the colonial economy was structured in such a way that Africa was used as donor of raw materials to boost western economy. The African economy was organized to feed metropolitan industries, the indigenes were not free to determine the trajectory of development. The system was exploitative and oppressive. "The colonial state was oppressive, therefore, it could not establish collective goals, the pursuits which could bring about sense of nationality as a fundamental bold" (Oladipo, 1998:110).

Really, the colonial situation negatively impinges on the development of Africa's politics and socio-economic life. However, the inability to transform a nation like Nigeria in spite of the avalanche of human and material resources should not be traced to colonialism. It is a problem of moral, ethnic rivalry, crass materialism, wrong leadership and unjustifiable tenacity for power.

Undue prioritization and monetization of politics is another problem that hinder political development in Nigeria. "One of the major problem in Nigeria's political process, is the prioritization of politics. Those in power deploy all available resources for the retention of power. The politics of control and retention is extended into the area of political administration and governance" (Onyekpe, 2004:64). How Onyekpe illuminated this

*... this, after the winning or capture of power, the wielders continue the politics involved in the*

*quest for power in the formulation and execution of policies and programmes. The value system is winner-takes-all. The elites of the ruling party, members of caucuses and big supporters are rewarded through patronage (p.64).*

Suffice to note that areas where the winner garner sufficient vote will maximally benefit from the allocation of social amenities and party financial will be abundantly rewarded. Thus, the winner and his or her supporter dictates who gets what, how, when and to what extent. Then, the political race becomes a do or die affair.

Poverty is equally instrumentalized to keep the people in servitude and get their vote. Amazingly, any amount can be expended by those in power to get what they need. A notable instance is the alleged usage of ₦10,000,000 to induce voters by a party in Ondo state during the last gubernatorial election. Indeed people who had been shattered by hunger and gradually dying from diverse ailment owing to financial incapability to patronize medical facilities, fall victim. They collected the money and voted. Where did the money come from, when the government couldn't pay salary for almost seven months?

The morbid tenacity for power has elicited diverse ugly incidence of assassination, corruption and manipulation. Politicians amass wealth with a view to securing status, maintain status and service their structures.

## 6. Confucius Political Philosophy

Confucius (Kong Dui) was born in 551BC in the Lu State of China. His teachings embodied in the analects focused on designing ethical models of family and public interaction and setting high educational standard. Kong Dui died in 478BC. During the sixth Century BC opposing Chinese states were at loggerheads and defied the authority of the Chou empire which had held supreme rule for many years. At this moment, traditional Chinese norms started waning and this reinforced Kong Qui moral stance and sparked him up to reinforce the societal value of compassion and tradition.

It must be noted that Confucius social Philosophy is predicated on the principle of ren or loving others while exercising self discipline. In his analysis 'ren' could be practically reinforced by the golden rule. This imperative posits that "what you do not wish for yourself, do not do to others (Lunyu, 12.2, 6.30). This is a facsimile of Immanuel kants categorical imperative. Kant notes thus: "There is therefore but one categorical imperative, namely this: Act only on that maxim whereby thou can at the same time will that it should become a universal law" (Kant, 1974:117). This means that there is a need to act in such a way that you will that your action be universal. If you are prepared that everyone performs your action, then it is morally worthy" (Fadahunsi, 2001:47).

Confucius political beliefs are rooted in self-discipline. A leader must exercise self-discipline and empathize with his followers. He must treat them with compassion. Leaders should motivate their subject to follow the law by teaching them value.

Politically, Confucius envisioned a society that returned to its root, virtue, point of historical advantage, etc. "People themselves should change. Change must be holistic, not just those that govern them" (Awojobi, 2016:83). The daily rituals which man should be involved in must be those that lead to happiness of themselves and the society. Every man has a responsibility to the society, not just themselves. Government must be tailored towards the well-being and sufficiency of the people. As amplified by James Parker:

*As for government, the three regularities are 'sufficiency of food, sufficiency of military equipment and the confidence of the people in their ruler. If one is to be forgone, the master insists that it is the military equipment of the two remaining, if another is to be forgone, the master states that food should be the next to go. The most important is the people's faith in their ruler. This is the foundation of the state (Jason, 2011:1).*

In a nutshell, the welfare of the people is the first indices of power. While a Machiavellian leader will consider his own interest first and foremost, a humane leader considers the people first.

Basically, Confucius political Philosophy is predicated on his belief that a ruler should learn self-discipline, should govern his subjects by his own examples and should sympathise and empathise with the people. The ruler must put into place a well designed social order that enhances harmonious relationship. Social harmony results in part from every individual knowing his or her place in the natural order and playing his or her part well (Marilyn, 2008:42). Thus, leadership is a form of proper administration to bring about good governance. In the Analects, Confucius notes “there is government, when the prince of prince and the minister is minister; when the father is father and the son is son” (Analects, XII, 11, trans legge).

Sequel to the above, particular duties arise from one’s particular situation in relation to others. Relationship is bonded as seen in father to son, friend to friend, husband to wife, etc. Specific duties are assigned to each of the components of the ladder of relationship.

### **7. Confucius Political Philosophy as Panacea to Political Crises in Nigeria**

Politics in Nigeria is bedeviled with series of unfavourable crises which tug the nation in different directions. However, a thorough study and application of Confucius notion of political leadership will go a long way to curb some of these problems. The principle of ‘ren’ in Confucius thought draws an interaction or inseparability between morality and politics. Unlike the legal positivist claims that morality is separable from law, politics and morality are inseparable. The idea of ‘ren’ suggests putting others first while exercising self-discipline. The welfare of the governed must be the first item in the scale of preference of the leader.

Leaders must lead with empathy lifestyle. Thus, crass materialism in the midst of a suffering masses is an aberration. A leader must live a life predicated on moral principles and rooted in virtue. He or she must motivate citizens to follow the law by teaching them values. This goes to show that a leader must not be involved in anything that can lead the followers astray.

For instance, if a leader ventures into the Machiavellian system of winning at all cost, he would lack the moral gut to correct the followers when they veer into the track of immorality.

Confucius advocated a system of change. Change must be holistic. It must involve the governor and the governed. It must not be a mere superimposition by a sovereign who like the Hobbes’ leviathan stand outside the circumference of query. In Confucian thought it is an aberration for leaders to be enjoying social amenities while the led live in dilapidated structures. There must be sufficiency of social amenities, food and security so that the people will have confidence in their leaders.

Another important issue is the choice of personnel to manage crucial posts in political administration. Everybody must be trained to know what he/she can do best and obtained maximum result. There must be no manipulative dislocation of human resources based on descriptive capacity as commonly done in Nigeria. One can easily get any juicy job in Nigeria by being connected with a person in power, even when such person lacks the mental power for acting in that capacity. This is one of the core points that underpin underdevelopment in Nigeria. Confucius puts up a moral pedagogy that elicits the best out of human.

This Philosophy also goes a long way to reduce ethnic unrest. Men live bonded life. Every relationship is seen in a bonded form unlike the Plato’s caste and hierarchy in his Republic.

It is sad to note that the political class in Nigeria is not willing to change their luxurious lifestyle in spite of the excruciating economic recession the nation is passing through. There is an urgent need to reduce the number of parliamentarians at the state and federal level. This will in turn reduce the cost of government. The idea of change as exemplified in the APC’s logo is not just the change of mind-set by the followers. The policy planners and political leaders must generate policy that shows empathy and sympathy with the people’s thought. A remarked by Obinto

The pain of the people must be the pain of the leaders. There is a need for radical orientation

and change of mindset by leaders to abandon crass materialism and put the people's plight first (Obinto, 2017:83).

This implies that government must be sensitive and sensitive to the people's plight. There must be practical demonstration of love as seen in father-son biological relationship. Nigeria need this to stem political crises, especially in the Niger Delta where the people complain of marginalization despite the huge deposit of crude oil in the region.

## 8. Conclusion

There is an urgent need for a Philosophy to wipe out crass materialism, morbid tenacity for power, egocentric policy, etc. One scholar whose idea is germane especially on the note of empathy, sympathy and bond is Confucius. His Philosophy must be ingrained into the scheme of strategic studies for leadership.

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