

POLITY DEBACLE
AND THE BURDEN OF
BEING IN AFRICA



EDITORS

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**POLITY DEBACLE AND
THE BURDEN OF BEING IN AFRICA**

Proceedings of the Third Biennial International
Conference of the Faculty of Arts, University of
Ibadan, Ibadan

Edited by

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UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN LIBRARY

Published by
Faculty of Arts, University of Ibadan, Ibadan,
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NIGERIA

ISBN: 978-978-961-448-6

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CHALLENGE OF GOVERNANCE IN NIGERIA: LESSONS FROM MUHAMMAD BELLO'S "PRINCIPLE OF LEADERSHIP"

Mubarak Ademola Noibi

ABSTRACT

Nigeria is confronted with the challenge of leadership which often led to polity debacle and frustration among the masses who are always at the receiving end of governance deficits. Previous studies on leadership have focused on the concept and theories of leadership, and governance in Nigeria with little attention to application of the principles of leadership of Muhammad Bello to governance in Nigeria. Hence, this paper examines the contribution of Muhammad Bello to governance and investigates the possibility of applying his principle on leadership to the body polity in Nigeria with a view of solving the leadership deficit confronting the Country. Data for the paper was sourced through content analysis of literature. The paper discovered that although Nigeria is a multi-religious state, Muhammad Bello's principles can still be applied to the Country given the principles of universality contained in it. The paper concluded by recommending that the leadership principles enumerated by Muhammad Bello should form part of school curriculum at all levels and be taught to prospective political office holders in the Country through the instrumentality of the Nigerian Institute of Democratic Studies.

Keywords: Sultan Muhammad Bello, Leadership principles of governance in Nigeria, Political office, Jihadist.

10.1 Introduction

In spite of the fact that Nigeria is blessed with numerous human and material resources, it is common knowledge that the

Country has over the years suffered from deprivation, poverty and deficit in social wages. The masses in the Country keep on hearing in the mass media and reading in the print media that the government has laudable plans for the Country and its citizens only for them to find out that the expected plans were not forth-coming. Compounding the situation is the attitude of their political representatives who after having promised them so much, end up disappointing them by increasing their burden and milking them to the marrow.

Unfortunately, a substantial part of the political actors in governance have been adherents of the Islamic Faith. Moreover, much has been said about some exemplary rulers in the Country. One of the exemplary rulers was Sultan Muhammad Bello who became the second *Amīrul-Muminīn* (Leader of the Faithful ones) of the Sultanate of Sokoto in the area now within Nigeria. Sultan Bello wrote: "*kitābu 'Usūl al-Siyāsah wa al-kayfiyyah al-Mukhlisah min 'Umūr al-Riyāsah*" (The Book of Political Principles and Sincere Manners in the Affairs of Governance) which is quite instructive on the maintenance of good leadership principle by political office holders. It is therefore, considered worthwhile examining the lessons contained in the book with a bid to it serving as instructions for political office holders, especially Muslims, in Nigerian.

The paper is divided into six sections: This section which introduces the paper while the second and third sections discuss about the concept and theories of leadership respectively. The fourth section explores governance in Nigeria while the fifth section examines Sultan Muhammad Bello and his leadership principles. Finally, the sixth section concludes the paper.

10.2 Concept of Leadership

Leadership is endemic in man. However, it has not been pinned down on a single definition. Hence, there are as many definitions of leadership as the number of scholars studying the phenomenon. Moreover, scholars and practitioners in the field of

leadership studies have not been able to articulate a coherent paradigm-shift approach that they can operate with¹. This notwithstanding, Barnard Bass views leadership as "an interaction between two or more members of a group which often involves structuring and restructuring of the situation, perception and expectations of the members"². Barnard Bass identifies many other definitions of leadership under a number of groupings. The groupings focus on group process, personality and its effect, and inducing compliance, exercise of influence, act or behaviour, form of persuasion, power relation, instruction of goal achievement, emerging effect of interaction, differential role, initiation of structure and combination of elements.

On leadership as focus of group process, Cooley (1902) is of the opinion that "the leader is always the nucleus of a tendency". This means that leaders are always influenced by the need of the followers who are themselves directed towards meeting their goals. Brown (1926) on his own, while contributing to the debate opined that leadership was equal to strength of personality-just as Bingham (1927) viewed leadership as a person commanding enormous desirable traits with respect to personality and character. A cross section of analysts assessed leadership from the viewpoint of the art of inducing compliance. Munson (1921) opined that leadership is the ability to handle men with least friction but with greater cooperation. Furthermore, Moore (1927) defined leadership as the ability to impress the will of the leader on the followers through obedience, respect, loyalty and cooperation³.

Further, discussing leadership as the exercise of influence, Nash (1929) posits that it involves "influencing of change in the conduct of people". Also, according to Stogdill (1950), leadership is seen as a process of influencing the activities of an organized group in its efforts towards goal setting and goal achievement. In this case, leaders are seen as models. While emphasising the role of behaviour in leadership, Fiedler (1967) argues that leadership behaviour generally imply distinguishing acts that the leader engages in while

coordinating and giving direction to the work of his group members. Such behaviours may include praising, criticism, empathy and welfare towards group members⁴.

While giving further definition to leadership, the students of politics and social movements, industrial theorists and the military are of the opinion that leadership can be measured by persuasion. According to Neustadt (1960), who conducted a research on the presidents of the United States, leadership stems from the power to persuade. This stand is in line with the definition of Schenk (1928) who says that "leadership is the management of men by persuasion and inspiration rather than by implied or direct threat of coercion"⁵. However, political theorists, especially from Machiavelli to Max are of the opinion that power was the basis of political leadership⁶.

Moreover, leadership can also be defined and explained in terms of instruction for achieving goals. Davis (1942) points to the fact that leadership is a major dynamic force that motivates and coordinates groups in a bid to accomplishing their objectives. However, some other scholars view leadership as emerging from the effect of group interaction. For instance, Bogardus (1929) says that leadership ensues as a result of a social inter-stimulation wherein people start up an action meant to revive an old idea through a new zeal, goal or hopeful courage with division of labour amongst them. Hence, leadership ensues as a result of interaction⁷.

10.3 Theories of Leadership

The earliest of the theories of leadership is the Great Man's Theory. This is based on the belief that the leaders are exceptional people who are born with innate qualities and are destined to lead⁸. Early studies on leadership had laid emphasis on power and influence before an opinion shift to the great men theory. The first notable study on great man theory was popularised by Thomas Carlyle and Francis Galton when they stated that great men were born by with some innate qualities. This is the trait-based dimension has five well characteristics. The traits are intelligence, self-

confidence, determination, integrity and sociability⁹. Hence, great men are believed to be born great and not made¹⁰. Emerging from "great man" theory is the trait theory. It involves the identification of major features for successful leaders. Here, the belief was that the major features of leaders could be isolated and people with them could be selected, recruited and installed as leaders. Although this theory is still commonly utilised in the military, studies have showed that majority of the traits are not identified with all leaders¹¹.

The inconclusive nature of traits theory gave birth to the behavioural theory. This is because some traits: honesty, integrity, loyalty, diligence are difficult to measure. This challenge heralded the 1961 book of Douglas McGregor's titled: "*The Human Side of Enterprise*" which impacted on behavioural theories¹². Behaviour theory is a product of two research units: the Ohio and the Michigan studies¹³.

Closely following the Trait and Behaviour theories is Situational or Contingent theory. The theory emanated from the pitfalls noticed in Trait and Behaviour theories. Although behavioural theories may help develop specific attitudes, they generally pay little attention to guiding on the constituents of effective leadership. Studies have also shown that no specific leadership style can be applied under all circumstances. Hence situations dictate the leadership style to use¹⁴. In essence, situational or contingent theory posits that the effectiveness of a particular approach to leadership depends on situations.

The quantum of doubts about the reliability of existing leadership theories led to transformational leadership theory¹⁵. In a bid to restructuring issues concerning the promotion of change and development with regards to individuals, groups and organisations emanated transformational theory¹⁶. Transformational leadership has four phrases. First is trait theory of leadership in which successful leaders are believed to possess defined qualities and characters typical of good leaders such as Mandela, Thatcher,

Churchill and Ghandi to mention a few. Prospective leaders are expected to study and emulate the leaders whose personality traits differ from each other in varying degrees, although this task is almost impossible. Second is studying what good leaders do after that the context in which leaders exercise their tasks. The fourth face is linking the leader with the culture of the organisation he/she leads¹⁷.

The first person to put forward the concept of transformational leadership was James Mac Gregor Burns, who defined it a "... a relationship of mutual stimulation and elevation that coverts followers into leaders and may convert leaders into moral agents" He also says that it "occurs when one or more persons engage with others in such a way that leaders and followers raise one another to higher levels for motivation and morality...". Burns suggests that transformational leadership shapes, alters and give elevation to the goals, values and motives of followers achieving significant change in the process¹⁸. The Theory identifies leadership behaviour that instigates and assists the various crucial transformations in organisations.

Lastly, there is the *Transactional theory*. This is a situation in which leaders and followers enter into an exchange which begins with a process of negotiation with the view to establishing the object of negotiation and its conception: whether satisfactory or not. Here, reinforcement may either be materialistic or symbolic. It may also be implicit or explicit. Moreover, the reinforcement may be partial or whole, delayed or immediate and in term of resources or rewards¹⁹. The main features of transactional leadership are recognition of the desire of their followers when performing their duties. There is also the exchange of rewards and its promises for appropriate levels of performance. Furthermore, is continued response to the needs of followers so as to keep to their responsibilities²⁰. *In Transactional theory*, leaders motivate their followers by promising, persuading and rewarding them. Hence, the support of followers is solicited by transaction. In other words there is in an exchange of one thing for

the other. An example of the exchange is jobs in return for votes. This theory lays emphasis on honesty, consistency and responsible behaviour by the leader with a view to achieving his/her goals²¹.

10.4 Governance in Nigeria

It is common knowledge that Nigeria is faced with socio-economic and political challenges. The challenges are often put at the doorsteps of the nation's leaders. Eburn is of the opinion that "the country has not been able to enjoy the services of good, visionary and selfless leaders since the time of independence"²². Anyawku had explained that there was much unfulfilled expectation by Nigerians at the time of independence. It was the belief then that Nigeria would become developed within 20-25 years and become influential internationally²³. However, the hope of Nigerians became shattered when after several years the much desired development was not recorded. In the area of influence, the image of the Country had gone down the drain. This is evident in the suspension of the country from Common Wealth in 2005. Similarly, unimpressive human right records among other things led to the suspension of direct flight to Nigeria by the United States, the United Kingdom and some other developed countries of the world²⁴.

It has been observed that most leaders in Nigeria lack discipline, intellectual training and political experience. This is evident in their leading the country through different policies which often fail. Instead of the political leaders in the Country to look inwards, they tend to try another system or policy²⁵. This often leads to the belief that Nigeria is a country where nothing works. Moreover, the square peg is often selfishly placed in the right hole. To this end, Iwe says that:

Often political appointments are not based on evident competence and merit. The vested interests of the appointing

authorities account far more than other factors. The common practice is to buy your way up to the position of authority. Having reached the coveted position, the incumbent begins to regard his office as an inherited divine right. There can be no question of resignation from office²⁶.

One thing that characterised leadership in Nigeria is corruption. This phenomenon predates Nigeria's independence. For instance, the Colonial Government Report (CGR) of 1947 had reported the disparity in public morality between Britain and Africa, Nigeria inclusive. Moreover, there was official misuse of the country's resources²⁷. Many leaders scramble for political office because of the uncontrollable urge for primitive accumulation of wealth from the public treasury. Furthermore, many view politics and political power as a mean to the national cake which is instrumental to gaining the support of the people. This has led to a political class that often adds no real value to the lives of the citizens. In order to consolidate their empty period of rule, they give support to criminals and thugs in the community²⁸.

Ogbeidi has discussed how successive governments in the Country, civilian and military, have been fingered in corruption cases²⁹. The situation of corruption in the country has reached an alarming situation and has undermined the development of the Country. It is common knowledge that well meaning Nigerians and non-Nigerians including foreign nations have postulated that "corruption has inevitably become a major clog in the quest for sustainable growth and development"³⁰. Nigeria, like every other society followers expect their leaders to provide for them social infrastructure and welfare programmes. In places where such services are not provided, the leadership would be blamed and scored poorly by the subjects³¹. It is a known fact that the social services in Nigeria are generally poor. This poor state of social

facilities is no doubt a burden on the comfortable existence of the citizens.

The political corruption in the Country seems to be on-going phenomenon. Confirming this assertion is Vincent Azie's audit report on Federal government's establishments which showed that a sum of N23 billion was siphoned from the coffers of the government through embezzlement, payment for undone jobs, double debiting, over-invoicing and inflation of contract in some ministries³². Ribadu, the pioneering Chair of the Nigeria's Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) claims that the mismanaged resources in the Country was worth six times the resources committed to rebuilding Western Europe after the Second World War. This mismanagement of resources by the nation's leaders has engendered perpetual poverty of the underprivileged and led to challenges of underdevelopment and successful democracy³³.

This is corroborated by the evidence from the National Demographic Health Survey (NDHS) which shows that the Nigerian maternal and newborn mortality and morbidity is one of the highest in the world. It is estimated that about 545 maternal deaths occur in 100,000 live births. Also, 158 in 1,000 children who are less than 5 years old die yearly of diseases that could have been prevented³⁴.

10.5 Sultan Muhammad Bello and his Leadership Principles

Sultan Muhammad Bello was the first son of Shaykh Uthman bin Fodio, the great reformer and Jihadist in the Hausa/Fulani Empire. He was the second *Amir al-Mu'minin* of Sokoto Sultanate, a position he occupied for 20 years starting from 1195 AH before he passed on in 1253AH at the age of 58 years. Muhammad Bello was not only a prolific writer but was also the most learned of the children of Shaykh Uthman bin Fodio. He was reported to have authored over 120 books on different endeavours of human learning. Through his literary works, he contributed to the fields of medicine, law, administration, warfare and most

importantly politics. One of his works on politics is *kitāb 'Usūl al-Siyāsah wa al-kayfiyyah al-Mukhlisah min 'Umūr al-Riyāsah* (The book of Political Principles and Sincere Manners in the Affairs of Governance) where he discusses the fundamental principles of leadership³⁵.

In the book, Muhammad Bello started by explaining that leadership is one of the greatest trials of man owing to the burden of accountability to Allah on the Day of Judgement. A leader would have to render accounts for his words, actions and deeds in running the affairs of himself and for his people. He then said that whoever Allah does not exalt to the position of authority should be thankful to Him as that individual has been prevented from rendering a detailed account over his subjects. Moreover, such an individual has been prevented from the struggles of life which often lead to blame and punishment in the Hereafter. Muhammad Bello explained that the Prophet (S) has described the essence of leadership as beginning with blame, having it middle as regret and ending in punishment in the Hereafter. This is corroborated by a poetic stanza which states that: "If the shade of anonymity covers you, sleep under it all night long". This section addresses the individuals who inordinately jostle for political positions, sometimes at the expense of other peoples' lives. From this point of view, leadership should not be desired by people, rather people should be the ones to identify their potential leaders and persuade them to govern over them. This will give room for sanity in the polity and ensure not only the support of followers but also eliminate selfish interest and primitive accumulation of wealth³⁶.

Nevertheless, those who occupy position of leadership and play the game with the fear of accountability in the Hereafter would be rewarded handsomely by Allah in life and the Hereafter. An element that must be present in a good leader is justice. Justice is usually a difficult thing for leaders to do. As a result of that, even though a leader may be hampered from performing meritorious acts of worship, the like of which he may have practised before his

attainment of position of authority, he is rewarded same in multitudes if he upholds justice. This is in line with the sayings of the Prophet (S) that: "One day of justice by a leader is better than seventy years of acts of worship". Similarly, his deeds and each of his five canonical prayers (*As-Salawāt*) are rewarded in manifolds as the Prophet (S) is reported to have said that: "I swear to Allah in whose hand is the soul of Muhammad (S), Allah takes up to heaven the deeds of a just king and makes them equal to those of his subjects. Whenever he prays, it is equalled to seventy thousand prayers". The just leader is very close to Allah as he also says that: "the closest to Allah among people is a just leader..."³⁷.

Furthermore, on the Day of Judgement, a leader would be made to enjoy a privileged position for his justice as he will be made to be under the shade of Allah when there will be no other shade. This is evident in the speech of the Prophet that: "On the Day of Resurrection, There would be no shade but that of Allah. Seven (categories of) people shall enjoy the shade. These are: A leader who is just to his people...". On the contrary, an unjust leader is distanced from Allah as the Prophet (S) says that: "...the most distanced from Allah and the most hated is an oppressive leader"³⁸. Muhammad Bello categorises the guiding fundamental principles of a leader into seven. The following paragraphs discuss the fundamental principles.

The first fundamental principle guiding a leader in Islam is the fear of Allah in all his activities and following of the footsteps of Prophet Muhammad (S). In so doing, the leader would have to be mindful of the Hereafter at all times and be cautious of the limits set by Allah. The leader would also have to develop the quality of living a life of disinterestedness towards the material world and longing for leadership positions. These aforementioned attributes are necessary in a leader to prevent him from running into an endemic trap of the evil traditions of previous men of authority. Sultan Bello is quick at adding that craving for leadership positions may lead to temptation and oppression of the subjects³⁹.

The second fundamental principle guiding a leader is good personality traits. The good personality traits expected of a leader according to Sultan Bello are: patience, simplicity, bravery, forgiveness, avoidance of anger and transgression. Traits like forgiveness, simplicity and avoidance of anger will get his subject hooked to him as Allah tells Prophet Muhammad (S) in the Quran that: "It is part of the mercy of Allah that you deal gently with them, were you harsh-heated, they would have broken away from you..." (Q.3:159). Also, courage and bravery will uphold the leader at times of trials while generosity will afford him the opportunity of giving the subjects the financial assistance they deserve⁴⁰.

The third fundamental principle guiding leadership in the opinion of Muhammad Bello is the appropriate attitude of the leader towards scholars. The leader has to show interest and listen to the pieces of advice rendered to them by rightly guided scholars. The question that will arise is how to identify rightly guided scholars. To him, rightly guided scholars are never interested in personal gains from leaders. Conversely, the leader must ignore evil scholars who are often identified by their playing to the gallery for financial gains. Paying attention to evil scholars might misguide the leader or at least lead to negative suspicion by the followers as a poem reads "Ask about a person not, but about his companion, for every companion follows the footsteps of his companion"⁴¹.

The fourth fundamental principle discusses about the constitution and supervision of the aids of a leader. Muhammad Bello is of the view that the leader must select the best of his citizens as his aids and constantly supervise them while insisting that justice and avoidance of oppression should be their watch word⁴². Sultan Bello referred to 'Umar bin Khattāb, the second successor of the Prophet (S) when he wrote a letter to Abu Musa al-Ash'arī wherein he stated that:

The best among the governors is the one with whom his subjects are pleased and the worst is

him with whom his subjects are not happy. I warn you against oppression for your workers will copy you. Your similitude is like that of an animal in a green field. If fed very well and puts up weight. The weight will become the reason for its death for it is slaughtered and eaten for its fat⁴³.

Sultan Bello then says that: "workers are after satisfying their selfish desires and so the leader must guard against their excessive demands"⁴⁴.

The fifth fundamental principle has to do with the duty of the leader with respect to educating and encouraging the followers to be just and nice to each other at all times. He is also under the obligation to prohibit aggression and evil behaviour among them. The importance of the role of the leader in this regard is underscored by the fact that the behaviour of the leader is always determined by the behaviour of his subjects. If the followership is good there is every tendency that Allah would put His mercy and compassion into the heart of the leaders and he will become just to them. However, if the followership is the kind that engages in vices, the leader will be harsh on them and Allah would subject them to the will of the leader. This is supported by the *āyah* of the Qur'ān wherein Allah states that: "Thus do We make the wrongdoers turn to each other because of what you earn" (Q.6:129). Similarly, the Prophet (S) is reported to have said that: "You would be given leaders in accordance to your behaviours"⁴⁵.

The sixth fundamental principle of leadership in the opinion of Muhammad Bello is the maintenance of the welfare of the people. In actualising that, the leader should facilitate the creation of jobs and embark on human capital development with special attention on the critical sectors of their social and economic lives. Professionals should be engaged throughout the length and breath

of the state. Similarly, the leader is to embark on an all inclusive infrastructural development so that social amenities would be evenly enjoyed in the state⁴⁶. Sultan Bello quoted Umar bin Khattāb as saying that:

...if a small lamb were to get lost on the brink of River Euphrates, Umar (the leader) would be held responsible for it on the Day of Resurrection. There is no esteem for the governor who neglects the affair of the Muslims⁴⁷.

The last of the fundamental principles of leadership of Muhammad Bello deals with compassion towards the subjects. He maintains that a leader should treat his subjects with kindness. As a result, a leader should not place unnecessary responsibilities on his subjects. Also, the leader should be sensitive when allotting appointments to people so that important personalities would not feel ridiculed by him. Moreover, he should be tolerant on issues that are not forbidden even when he dislikes those issues⁴⁸.

10.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, leadership has to do with God consciousness and a number of personality traits that can be acquired under a well tailored system of belief. The leadership principles of Sultan Muhammad Bello are golden rules for a successful leader. Nigeria is faced with the challenge of good leadership. The challenge of leadership has incidentally undermined development and given the masses much burden in Nigeria. This challenge has incidentally taken place in the same country that nourished Muhammad Bello as a scholar and leader. Nigerians, especially the leaders with special reference to Muslims would need to learn the leadership principles

of the great scholar and leader. The paper, therefore, recommends as follows:

- i) The leadership principles of Muhammad Bello should form part of the school curriculum at all levels in Nigeria.
- ii) The National Democratic Institute should adopt the leadership principles of Muhammad Bello as part of its training package for prospective political office holders, especially the Muslims.
- iii) Religious leaders should emphasise Muhammad Bello's leadership principles in their preaching.

It is hoped that if the above recommendations are adhered to, the leadership space in the country would begin to change for the better and Nigerian would attain to the hope of its founding fathers.

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