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SEMANTIC INTERPRETATION OF THE QUR'ĀNIC CONCEPT OF POLITICS: ITS RELEVANCE TO NIGERIA SITUATION

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ABSTRACT

A lot of theories had been propounded by early and modern philosophers in order to have a suitable, stable and desirable political industry in Africa and the world at large. Such include Thomas Hobbes's concept of political representation or individualization and modern democracy, John Locke's theory of state of nature and social contract, Ibn Khaldun's theory of As-Sabiyyah (Solidarity) and yet the Realists, Liberals and Radicals were unable to supply a perfect model. Some scholars clamour that religion, gender discrimination and racial identity should be detached from the politics for its sustainability yet, their efforts have not yielded deserved results. The penetrating dynamism of the Qur'ān is tremendous and irresistible, the practicability of its teachings are for all the ages. Therefore the paper examines the dictates of the Qur'ān, whose universality is encompassing irrespective of race, gender and religion. Its concept of Politics, Election/Selection of a leader and Electorate could be a model to be adopted to the present nature of Nigeria politics as described by scholars and the adoption of this Qur'anic model might proffer permanent solution for stability, suitability and desirability of political industry in Africa and world at large. Keywords: Semantic Interpretation, the Qur'an, Political Concept, Nigeria Situation

INTRODUCTION

The world at large in their efforts to have sustainable democracy that is free of political or power corruption made use of theories of early and modern philosophers. Such theories included Thomas Hobbes's concept of political representation or individualization and modern democracy. Wherein he highlighted the concept of sovereign authority and recommended 'an absolute political authority'¹. John Locke, a renowned Western political theorist who was among the most influential European political philosophers of the modern period, has a theory on state of nature and social contract that is a proponent of 'natural right' and equality of men as part of the justification for the understanding of 'legitimate political government'. He condemned the notion that God made all men naturally subjected to a ruler or a monarch. Ibn Khaldun's theory of *As-Sabiyyah* (Solidarity) perceived man in his physical environment as a dependent being, an individual who cannot secure all needs without cooperation from someone else, that is a collective tendencies' of human in the states of nature and social organization². Realist known as 'the power politics perspective' has an approach in international relations, which helps to explain why states fight or threaten each other. Liberals and Radicals tried to adopt these models but were not absolved of fault³. Even many scholars of note described Nigeria politics

and other Africa countries are not exclusive. Makinde (2004) in his Political Scepticism: Nigeria and the Outside World quoted Levy Bruhl who wrote long time ago to describe African politics as a race that involves contradiction and absurdity. Through these, lawlessness, indiscipline, greed and corruption occupied the race. Therefore, African especially Nigerian politicians have a kind of thought that is not free from inner self-contradiction⁴. He states that

In 1914, two monsters were cloned into the Nigerian society by the colonial masters. These monsters, which we may call a monstrous couple – contradiction and absurdity – later gave birth to two sets of twins: The first set is made up of indiscipline and lawlessness while the second set consists of greed and corruption. The two sets love one another and agree to work together as in a relay race. As soon as indiscipline picked up the race, it passed the baton to lawlessness who then passed the baton to greed and finally, to corruption whose job was to perfect the race. So entrenched were these monsters that they have completely taken over Nigeria and governed her through their ministers: graft, embezzlement, bribery, lack of accountability, inflation of contracts, gangsterism, ritual killings and everything that is bad. I see Nigeria as a cloned nation that needs a cloned solution to a cloned problem.⁵

Some of Nigerian literary scholars such as Wole Soyinka advocate that politics and religion have no bearing than to serve as a bane to the development of democracy he said:

Any society which bases its code of reality, ethics, mores, racial or sexual interaction apportion of economic resources and other forms of social dealing on a "received" doctrine, one which is divinely transmitted to a select few either textually or interpretatively is a slave society.⁶

However, Nigerian Islamic scholars such as Shaykh Ādam al-Alōri also described Nigeria political system as an alien industry that has no fundamental principles that guides it by saying⁷

ساس يسوس سانس مسوس ## سياسة غربية ليس لها قاموس
Meaning:
To govern, administering, administer and people administered Western
(Alien) politics has no guiding reference.

This study, therefore examines the dictates of the Qur'an on the concept of politics, Election/Selection of a leader, electorate and the present nature of Nigerian politics as described by scholars and the application of the dictates of the Qur'an as a model and as solution proffered for the stability, suitability and desirability of political industry in Nigeria.

QUR'ĀNIC CONCEPT OF POLITICS

Islam provides guidance in all walks of life-individual and social, material and moral, economic and political, legal and cultural, national and international. The Qur'an enjoins man to enter the human community without any reservation and to follow God's guidance in all walks of life.

The Qur`ān does not consider politics as mere “dynamic social activity” but is concerned with the mode of power distribution as well as people’s social material relationship.⁸ Beyond that, the Qur`ān maintains right from the time of the progenitor of mankind – Adam (AS)⁹, considered politics as a responsibility emanating from God by which man was expected to manage human affairs and resources with a sense of responsibility since he would be accountable to them and God at the same time. This is exemplified by Allah’s creation of vicegerent. Allah says¹⁰

وإذ قال ربك للملائكة إني جاعل في الأرض خليفة قالوا أتجعل فيها من يفسد فيها ويسفك الدماء ونحن نسبح بحمدك ونقدس لك قال إني أعلم ما لا تعلمون.

Meaning: “Behold, thy Lord said to the angels: I will create a vicegerent on earth” they said: Wilt Thou place there in one who will make mischief therein and shed blood? Whilst we do celebrate Thy praises and Glorify Thy Holy (name) He said: I know that ye know not.¹¹

Politics according to the Qur`ān is a means by which the society could be put in such a perfect arrangement and organization that orderliness and social welfare will be maintained. The above verse explains a kind of campaign ground for the angels for the vacant position (*Khalifah*¹²) and freedom of expression of individual opinion on his qualification for the post. At the apex of such society is a leader who is referred to a *Khalifah* in the above verse. Moreover, his duty is both social and economic. He is therefore answerable to the electorate and God to Whom sovereignty actually and solely belongs. So while in the political arena, man is no less expected to seek the favour of God just as he regularly does among themselves in the community. In other words, through his obedience to God and dedication to service of humanity, he has been put succinctly by a team of Muslim scholars: “Man, in the Islamic scheme is eager to seek salvation but this salvation is sought through heeding God and establishment of correct relations with the whole of God’s creation”.¹³

Thus, man has been made to believe that politics or any other positive human endeavour is not a mere avenue to amass wealth or promote personal interests. Rather it should be seen as another act of worship that merits handsome reward in this world and everlasting felicity in the hereafter.

The sum total of the Qur`ānic attitude to politics could be summarized with the view of Ansārī that: “It is a means of service to humanity and a veritable way of seeking God’s pleasure on the Day of Resurrection”. Since this world is to the hereafter, what the farm is to farm produce, man, while engaging in politics or any other action, should not allow himself to be tempted by political vices, as that could cause strain in his relationship with His creator.¹⁴

CRITERIA FOR THE SELECTION/ELECTION OF LEADER AS IN THE QUR`AN

The Qur`ān expects a leader to see himself as a trustee to whom power has been delegated by Allah who could give it to, or withdraw it from, whom so ever He wishes as in the Qur`ān.¹⁵

قل اللهم مالك الملك تؤتي الملك ما تشاء وتنزع الملك ممن
تشاء
وتعز من تشاء وتذل من تشاء بيدك الخير إنك على كل شئ
قدير.

Meaning: Say (O Muhammed) ‘‘O Allah! Possessor of the kingdom, you give the kingdom to whom You will, and you take the kingdom from whom You will and You endue with honour whom You will. You humiliate whom You will. In Your hand is the good. Verily, You are Able to do all things.¹⁶

The implication of this link between a leader as a trustee and Allah is that all actions and in actions of a leader will be accounted for before people and Allah. If, through maneuvering and other tricks, he succeeds in pulling wool over the people’s eyes, whom he may have ferociously emasculated through misrule, he cannot escape Allah. Election of a leader as the Qur’an claims includes possession of functional knowledge which will enable him subordinate his desires and those of his family to the sacred duties of leadership. Piety is another quality, which is very essential for a leader to enable him, sees his duties from his cosmic status as vicegerent of Allah. The complex nature of leadership as the Qur’an states necessities that a leader must be physically fit and wise, just as he must also be upright so as to merit respect, obedience and loyalty of the people. Though the Qur’an permits that a leader may emerge through appointment, selection or election, it frowns at the use of blackmail, intimidation, wealth, influence and connection as well as other related means in order to emerge as a leader.

This verse of the Qur’an is the summary of a leader and its selection:¹⁷

يا أيها الذين آمنوا كونوا قوامين لله شهداء بالقسط ولا يجرمنكم
على أن لا تعدلوا اعدلوا هو أقرب للتقوى واتقوا الله شأن قوم
إن الله خبير بما تعملون.

Meaning: O ye who believe! Stand out firmly for God as witnesses to fair dealing, and let not the hatred of others to you make you swerve to wrong and depart from justice. Be just that is next to piety: and fear God, for God is well – acquainted with all that ye do.¹⁸

Prophet says in Hadith; *إِنَّ اللَّهَ تَعَالَى طَيِّبٌ وَلَا يَقْبَلُ إِلَّا طَيِّبًا* Meaning: ‘‘Allah is pure and accepts nothing but that which is pure’’.¹⁹

This is enough to discourage humankind from using dirty means to achieve his objective. Mutual trust between the ruler and the ruled if engendered; will insulate the society from what Sayyed Qutb describes as, ‘‘people’s usual propensity to see leadership and public offices as conduit pipe through which public fund could be siphoned.’’²⁰

Racial origin, family prestige and wealth should not be used to promote or hinder the chance of an individual to be chosen as a leader so long as he possesses the right qualities. This is to ensure that a wrong candidate is not entrusted with leadership

responsibilities. Prophet Muhammad, (Peace be upon him) has been quoted as having said:

Whoever entrusts a man to public office where, in his society, there is a better man than this trustee, he has betrayed the trust of God, His Messenger and the Muslims. (Bukhari vol. 2)

The submission of Hammudah 'Abdalati on this matter further brings out the role of the electorate in the process of entrusting leadership to right candidate. He said:

In a political sense, this means that the electorate cannot, morally speaking, be indifferent to public events and that they, whenever they cast ballots, vote after careful investigations and premeditated choice.²¹

The Qur'an does not regard the emergence of a leader as an end in itself; it is rather considered as a means to an end. Upon assumption of office, a leader is expected to be sensitive to the plight of the people just as he must be accessible and listening, especially whenever people have cause to complain about his offices. The similitude of a leader who shuts the door against people who want to complain is likened to a herdsman who, rather, than guarding his herd, holds the cow by the horns to help the thief to steal the milk. Are these not the cardinal elements of democracy? Democracy means openness and transparency of governance, people's participation in decision-making and above all, justice. Also, there is emphasis in democratic governance on human rights, freedom and human dignity. No meaningful democracy can function without honoring human rights and freedom of expression.

Allah says²²,

فَبِمَا رَحْمَةٍ مِّنَ اللَّهِ لِنْتَ لَهُمْ وَلَوْ كُنْتَ فَظًّا غَلِيظَ الْقَلْبِ
لَأَنْفَضُوا مِنْ حَوْلِكَ فَاعْفُ عَنْهُمْ وَاسْتَغْفِرْ لَهُمْ وَشَاوِرْهُمْ
فِي الْأَمْرِ فَإِذَا عَزَمْتَ فَتَوَكَّلْ عَلَى اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُحِبُّ
الْمُتَوَكِّلِينَ

Meaning: And by the Mercy of Allah, you dealt with them gently. And had you been severe and harsh hearted, they would have broken away from about you; so pass over (their faults), and ask (Allah's) forgiveness for them; and consult them in the affairs, Then when you have taken a decision, put your trust in Allah, certainly, Allah loves those who put their trust (in Him).²³

The above quoted verse of the Qur'an explains how a leader needs to be reminded that it was through the mercy of the Supreme Being he became victorious in the election or selection among other contestants. Therefore, he must deal with the electorate gently. He should not turn deaf ears to his community's plight, he needs to listen to the public opinion through advice except when envisages a jeopardy to his community, he can then be resolute to take decision that will benefit his subject.

THE PRESENT NATURE OF POLITICS IN NIGERIA

Nigeria became an independent state in 1960, got autonomy from her colonial master Britain to exercise her rights and duties as a free nation. The first elections ever held

in Nigeria then brought about the first republic with Sir Tafawa Balewa as Prime Minister. There was Military intervention in 1966/67 that left the nation in the hands of the military down to 1979 when Nigeria had a second republic with election of President Shehu Usman Shagari. He completed the term and was re-elected for another four-year term. Few months after his re-election, the military took over again till 1999 when the nation ushered in another republic with the election of the former military Head of State – Retired General Mathew Aremu Olusegun Obasanjo as President in May 1999. He completed his first term, got re-elected in May 2003 till 2007. He attempted the third term but failed, the baton eventually passed to Late Musa Yar'adua and now President Goodluck Jonathan.

According to Makinde, "Nigeria is such a nation full of contradiction that it may have presented itself to the outside world as a big theatre of contradictions and absurdities."²⁴

Going by his submission, we discovered that Nigeria witnesses abundant contradictory situations and suppositions.

- i) Nigeria is an oil rich country, but it is a country where there is perennial shortage of petroleum products and price hike
- ii) Nigeria as a country that supplies electricity to its neighbouring countries but suffers from an unending epileptic – several government regimes promise on its stability but yet to overcome the problem.
- iii) Due to its oil wealth and its swollen foreign reserve, it just seems to be on paper. Nigeria is a country that 5 or 10 percent of its citizens are stinking rich, while more than 65 percent are wallowing in abject poverty.
- iv) It is a country where its leaders, even including some religious leaders preach morality in the morning and break it at noon. As Ayantayo J.K. expatiates the religious coloration of elections in Nigeria "It is one of the campaign tactics involving wooing of electorates to vote for candidates who are practicing the same religion with them." As if both aspirant and electorates are religious.²⁵
- v) Nigeria, a country, which badly craves for economic, political, creativity, scientific and technological developments and yet treats her teachers/academics, who are indispensable to these goals as beggars in intellectual clothing.
- vi) It is a country where the judiciary exhibits traits of injustice and lawlessness where people see white and call it black and a nation where an individual will not respect the court's rule.
- vii) To mention but few, a country where people pray for order but at the same time create atmosphere for turmoil or where they pray for peace and prepare for war.²⁶

INDISCIPLINE AND LAWLESSNESS

Nigeria has been described as a nation that anything goes.

An indiscipline and lawless society is definitely and unstable society where anything can happen. It is a society without order, without principles and without decorum. There is no enforcement of laws because those who are to enforce these laws are themselves lawless.²⁷

A true picture of indiscipline and lawlessness in Nigeria has also been captioned by Idris Mahmoud Daura in the *Nigeria Tribune* with title: "Governors and the fear of freedom". He opened the story as thus: "Most of the governors of Nigeria's 36 state are real of the shockers as far as their relationship with Olusegun Obasanjo"²⁸

During the Second Republic, the governors quickly supported the mission of the President. Even some individuals believe that they had been penciled down for destruction, especially when they found that President is also interested again for the third term bid. The vogue of the day is voting incumbent President again for forthcoming election as if there is no rule of zoning. But things fell apart for the President on this bid. Whoever speaks the truth among political office holders or a public figure in the country might face the wrath of the day.

The lawlessness and indiscipline is found in all sectors of Nigeria society namely: political parties, educational institutions, public institutions, even judiciary. procedure of impeachment in Nigeria political arena is enough to depict the highest indiscipline and lawlessness of our decision makers.

Mr. John Major, former Prime Minister of Great Britain refers to an-oblique reference to judicial lawlessness and wickedness as "judicial murder".²⁹

Because of lawlessness, there is always a disagreement between the executive and legislative arms of government, with each arm interpreting the laws in its own way. As if the laws are ambiguous or incomprehensive.

Greed and Corruption

Corruption means different things to different people. In ordinary parlance, "Corruption means any dishonest or illegal act, an immoral behavior, any conduct that smacks cheating, indecency and a violation of normative value of the society."³⁰

Corruption also means the use of public office, power or position for private benefits.³¹ Corruption manifests itself in various forms such as outright misappropriation of public resources for purely private or dishonest use, nepotism or disregard for accountability.

Justice Mustapha Akanbi stated in his paper the types of corruption as following.³²

- i) Political Corruption more pronounced during elections.
- ii) Economic/Financial Monetary Corruption
- iii) Moral Corruption often identified with educational Institution
- iv) Bureaucratic Corruption in the Public service and Educational Institution
- v) Judicial Corruption

Political Corruption in Nigeria could be summed up as following:

Election: There is a body in Nigeria formed to conduct election called Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). This is a dependent as a slave who takes order from his master who constituted its membership. It is said, "He who plays the piper dictates the tune". Even if elections do not hold in a particular constituency, INEC must announce results according to the dictates of whom in power. Ridiculously, there were cases where the votes cast outnumbered the figure in the voter's register.

Use of Power: is another political corruption in Nigeria, gross abuse of power in all

ramifications and levels become yogue among our rulers who are power intoxicants. Although, Nigeria rulers both former and present took a bold step to wipe out corruption from Nigerian society such as General Murtala's Corruption Practice Decree No. 38, War Against Indiscipline of Buhari/Idiagbon regime, National Committee on Corruption and other Economic Crimes (NCCEC) by Babangida Administration, ICPC AND EFCC and so on. But due to greed which led to craze for wealth, ill-gotten gain escalated. Nigerian became more and more materialistic so much so that is rarely possible to convince the average Nigerian youth that he could achieve greatness and positions of responsibility without necessarily being corrupt.

A WAY OUT

Some people have traced the perennial political problems in Nigeria to: The carefree manner in which the British took over administered and abandoned the government and people of Nigeria.³³

Various theories and suggestions were made in the past to correct political maladies in Nigeria, which has not reached the nation to its expected desire. The paper is now referring to the Qur'anic step on Politics of love such as;

Ensuring People's Welfare: It is the responsibility of the ruler to ensure that those under him have access to their basic needs such as food, shelter, health services and access to quality education.

Maintaining Justice and Fair Play: The Qur'an does not at all compromise when it comes to justice and fair play. Justice should not be concerned to Judiciary alone, Law enforcement agents all citizens of Nigeria must not allow to strain relationship and ill feelings to make us deviate from the cause of uprightness and transparent honesty.

Upholding the Rule of Law: The Qur'an requires those in authority to uphold the rule of law without fear of favour.

Guaranteeing Human Rights: It is the responsibility of the leader to ensure that the rights of those under him are not trampled upon.³⁴ following the example laid by the Prophet's (PBUH) ³⁴ successor- Umar bn Khattab. When someone reacted to one of his speech publicly and people attempted to silence the interruptor, he remarked: "let him speak, He is free to give his opinion. If people do not give their opinions hey dare Useless, and if we (rulers) do not listen to them; we dare useless."³⁵

Sensitivity to Complaints: It is not enough for the ruler to allow his people to speak out but should also take deliberate steps to make their life as pleasant as possible. Our policy in Nigeria has been characterized by turbulence, intolerance and instability justice due to lack of response to public complaints.³⁶ It is discovered that a high level of crime and a high level of poverty is the low level of commitment to Political System in Nigeria. Thuggery, Financial Inducement or Vote Buying, Blatant Rigging at the Polls and at collating centres are electoral mishap in Nigeria which when complained about were usually swept underground.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1) As at now in Nigeria, politics is the exclusive of the rich, the self employed and the non-employed. The inclusion of interested educated people into

politics will improve the quality of debates and critical appraisals of public opinions.

- 2) Corruption is a man-made. It is not a natural condition; it is possible to reduce its prominence if we abide by steps stated above by the Quran. We honour our political office holders with different chieftaincy and religious titles even though, we know their fallacies in political arena. If we ignore wealth and caution them of their activities, it will reduce the corruption.

If flamboyance and ostentation could be given a way out of Nigeria society at large and political office holder, stability, peace and tranquility will exist among our politicians and political parties.

Fair election, tolerance of position, popular consultation, accountability of the fulfillment of government to the public, avoid religious colouration to deceive people and existence of multiparty system will improve our politics in Nigeria. Previous party's promise should be used for party and individual campaign rather than instigation irrational killing and political violence for mere succession.

- 3) Lastly, it is worthy to conclude with the comment of one of the foremost Qur'an commentators – Sayyid Qutb;

There can be no reform on this earth, there can be no rest for this generation of mankind and there can be no tranquility for man, no upliftment, no blessing, no purity and no harmony with the procedure of the world and the nature of life except by returning to Allah – al-Qur'an.³⁷

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