

Obafemi Awolowo's Theory Of Mental Magnitude: An Overview

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Abstract

The philosophical views of Western thinkers be it classical, modern, or contemporary, have often received celebrated acceptance by African scholars and political leaders alike. There is arguably a high tempo of following the residual paths of Western Philosophers such as Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Machiavelli, Locke, and Hobbes amongst numerous others in the quest to formulate and implement sound political regimes and ideas as to how societies should be structured and governed. While there is absolutely nothing inherently wrong with appropriating philosophical ideas from non-African cultural backgrounds, what is problematic is the state of oblivion of African political philosophy in the academic sphere and Nigeria would not be spared in that matter. Therefore, this research seeks to analyze Awolowo's Theory of Mental Magnitude and its nexus to leadership, good governance and enlightened followership in Nigerian polity and also dissect the effects exerted due to the neglect of such political philosophies. The research further stresses that in the march to political and societal excellence, due consideration ought to be given to indigenous -be it African or Nigerian- thinkers and philosophers who have proffered thought-provoking ideas and carved a niche for what can be rightly referred to as the contemporary African political thought.

Keywords: Obafemi Awolowo, Theory of Mental Magnitude, Good leadership, Enlightened Followership, Good Governance.

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1. Introduction

The greatest challenge that hampers *third world countries'* development, including Nigeria, is nothing other than that of governance and subsequently that of followership. Notwithstanding this fact, Nigeria, as a nation, has a unique stance among other countries in the southern hemisphere, especially within the sub-Saharan Africa. Aboluwodi (2012, p. 59) asserts in regard with this matter that, despite possessing abundant human and material resources, Nigeria lags behind and falls among the poorest countries of the planet, best painted by institutional and structural decay amplified by a high level of poverty, ignorance, and superstitions. Nigeria ranks the 8th among oil-exporting countries but also falls among countries with the lowest Human Development Index and tagged as the “poverty capital of the planet” in 2018.

In this country where poverty seems to be the irreversible status-quo for the poor masses, where the ruling class utilizes the state machinery to enrich themselves at the expense of the common people they vowed to serve. Wealth is concentrated in the hands of the elite class, a tiny bourgeois class lavishing in wealth on the one hand, and the vast majority of the people languishing in misery and poverty on the other. Thus, leadership position has metamorphosed to un lieu of amassing wealth with self-centeredness at its heart.

It is in line with the above assertions that the sage Chief Obafemi Awolowo tries to proffer solutions to mitigate the decay of the Nigerian society, which is also applicable to African nation-states at large. Hence, the researchers seek to analyze Awolowo's Theory of Mental Magnitude and its nexus to leadership, good governance and enlightened followership in Nigerian polity on the one hand, and also it dissects the implications caused by lack of due consideration to indigenous political philosophy on the country.

2. Foundation of Awolowo's Political Philosophy

Chief Jeremiah Obafemi Awolowo (1909-1987), according to Felix (2002, p. 4) was an acknowledged nationalist and one of the statesmen who carried out the independence struggle to put an end to the colonial rule in Nigeria. Felix (2002) further expresses that Awolowo is best known for his remarkable integrity, ardent nationalism, principled, virile opposition, and his federalist nature. Moreover, elucidating Awolowo's socio-political philosophy without a genuine comprehension of the source, personalities, principles, and ideals that dominated and shaped his thoughts would be an endeavor of intellectual futility.

Accordingly, Awolowo in (Rev. Fr. Ogunmodede, 1986, p. 43), asserts: "I came in contact with other philosophers in what I would call my most fruitful [intellectual] periods in my life, around 1940-44... so I came in contact with Plato, Hegel, Marx and Gandhi". Hence Awolowo's thoughts were molded by the four thinkers on ideas ranging from how society should be organized, who should rule, and what the attributes of leaders are. Therefore, it is pertinent to note that it is under Plato's influence that Awolowo developed his Theory of Mental Magnitude, to the extent that he named one of his work as the "People's Republic" after Plato's "Republic" and Hegel to a lesser extent in the area of "Philosophy of Mind." However, Marx's and Gandhi's influence should not be undermined. As a socialist democrat, Awolowo was not a champion of radical social change but a vanguard to the community's social welfare upholding Gandhi's non-violence principles and the doctrine of decentralized federalism as that of India. In fact, the welfare of the society in general was the crux of Obafemi Awolowo's political philosophy.

3. Theory of Mental Magnitude and its Nexus to Good Leadership and Good Governance

Obafemi Awolowo aggregates the causes of societal ailments in Africa, especially Nigeria, under selfishness and ignorance. Consequently, this brought political instability and social unrest in all most all the third world nations and, more specifically, Nigeria. Therefore, Awolowo sought to establish what he coined as the "the People's Republic," an egalitarian society based on justice

and equity, a realm where good governance constitutes the epitome of leadership. Hence, he remains faithful to his master Plato who in his *Republic* divided the human into three as the “head, chest and stomach”; the head driven by reason, the chest by spirit and the stomach home to appetites; and further divided the society into those three factions: as people who are driven by reason constitute the class of the philosopher-kings, who ought to govern the polis; the spirited individuals are the soldiers or auxiliaries who protect the integrity of the polis and the philosopher-kings; and lastly the group of people driven by appetite, the artisans or the class of producers who are people responsible for the production and distribution of goods and services in the contemporary time. However, according to Adegbsan (1988), Awolowo divides his *People’s Republic* into three classes: the educated class, which comprises the professionals; the enlightened class comprising the artisans and traders, and lastly, the ignorant masses.

Following Hegel on the “Philosophy of Mind” and Plato concerning that matter, Awolowo contends that human reasoning supersedes the physical element of an individual person. Based on this conviction, he extolls “reflective thinking” and places it at the apex of individual’s behavior and actions (Abulowodi, 2012, p. 60). Therefore, he divided the mind into two distinct parts: the “conscious” and “sub-conscious” minds. The conscious mind is sub-divided into the “objective” and “subjective” minds; the sub-conscious mind is also sub-divided into the “unconscious” and “superconscious minds.” Accordingly, Awolowo believes that the subjective mind is the realm of thinking and reasoning; while the objective mind, on the other hand, deals with faculties of seeing, smelling, tasting, and hearing. Therefore, for the objective mind to function, there is need for the existence of an object; while the subjective mind does not require or depend on any object. Above all, there is the subconscious mind which is independent of external factors and manifests the “Essence of God” (Awolowo, 1968, p. 212).

Accordingly, the Theory of Mental Magnitude contends that the “People’s Republic” ought to be governed by the educated class. Educated individuals ought to be prepared to carry the burden of leadership. As Awolowo emphasizes, leadership ought not to be acquired by chance, but rather leaders ought to have a developed mind and act base on reason and tame their instincts that drive them to crave for material things. Hence, mastery of control over one’s self is the pre-requisite for those who aspire to lead, as embedded in the ideals of the Theory of Mental Magnitude. Indeed, Aristotle once stated: “Let him that would move the world first move himself”.

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Above acquiring a developed mind through secular and religious education and self-discipline, Awolowo further argues that “love” is an essential ingredient in leadership. Here, he again refers to his master’s -Plato’s- theory of love. According to Plato, there are three types of love: “Agape, Philia, and Eros” (Lambert, (n.d.), p. 1). He places them hierarchically based on their level of importance. “Agape” is philosophical love, which is the highest, followed by “Philia,” which is love for society and at the bottom lies Eros or physical love. Consequently, “Agape” should flourish among leaders and “Philia” among all members of the society and including the leaders.

In line with this, “Eros” is based on the physical, it only appeases appetites. Hence Plato believes it is the lowest form of love. Above “Eros,” he places “Philia,” a higher and better kind of love. It connects to the soul, based on the spirited part of the soul, which connects individuals to each other in ways that are not tied to any material or non-material benefits. This type of love is found among family members and patriots, it promotes loyalty to the nation; nevertheless, it stands bellow “Agape.” “Agape” is placed at the apogee of the three types because it is philosophical, everlasting, and based on reason and rationality (Ibid. p.1). It is common among people who are not driven by appetites but rather by reason; in Awolowo’s terms people who have attained the regime of mental magnitude.

In respect to post-independent Nigeria and Africa at large, lack of visionary and citizen-oriented leadership, prevailing corruption, and institutionalization of informal practices in affairs of governance, teeming illiterate population, varying health challenges, in reference to resource curse theory or the paradox of plenty an existential problem of a high level of poverty amidst abundant natural resources, unemployment, and other political and socio-economic challenges, can be argued to have mitigated the level of development, encouraged unstable and highly volatile societies prone to civil unrest. Had there been a consideration of the propositions of Chief Awolowo, Nigeria is more likely to be better off, as these propositions are central to the challenges that are arguably definite of present-day Nigeria as many other states in post-independent Africa.

3.1. Attaining a Regime of Mental Magnitude and the Link Between Enlightened Followership and Accountability

Arguably the best forms of regimes as proffered by classical and modern thinkers and philosophers are perfect only but in theory. Taking into account the nature of the societies and era in which most of these regimes were extolled, societies were less sophisticated and were not as cosmopolitan as they are today. Consider both the Platonic and Aristotelian views of how societies are to be structured and governed, including the creation of small polities, direct form of rule, commonality, and even the notion of justice they are less likely to be operational, talk more of addressing the numerous challenges of poor governance in the developing world. This assumption does not in any font reject the achievement of the aforementioned philosophers in proffering how the best regimes that govern for common good of all should be structured. It rather attempts to point out how a society can attain a state of desirable governance, as argued by Chief Awolowo. His emphasis on the importance of education in the development of societies, as earlier stated, is central to attaining such a society. Ogoma (2014) elucidates the integral role education plays in Plato's Republic. Like Plato, the goal of education for Awolowo is more than being literate. Literacy is good but is only a means to the final goal of education.

Consequently, Awo (Awolowo, 1977, p. 268), argues the cardinal aim of education is not, as is popularly but narrowly conceived to teach a man to read and write, to acquire a profession to master a vocation, or to be versed in the liberal arts. All these are only a means to the end of true education, which is to help a man to live a full, happy and triumphant life. Thus, institutions of education are charged with aiding alert minds, healthy bodies; under these conditions, societies are likely gearing towards mental magnitude characterized by a desirable form of governance inhabited by educated citizens. He further claims that (Awolowo, 1977, p. 231), with the right education, therefore, every citizen will be well-disciplined and emotionally balanced and when this is achieved, together with "Spiritual depth," the evils of the society will fade away and in someday in the distant future, we will all of us know the truth and, royally, enter into the regime of mental magnitude where love reigns supreme. According to a publication (Vanguard Newspaper, 2016) dated December 17, 2016 claims according to UNESCO 65 million Nigerians, a (World Bank Group, 2010) statistics shows 49.4% and (Shiundu, 2018, p. 33) 35% of Sub-

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Saharan Africans are illiterate; without any formal or technical education and the Vanguard publication further claims the statistics are a cause to worry as the level of illiteracy has a rise in adverse effects both on individual and society levels. The inherent inhibitions on man and society at large are due to the absence of education and where education is oblivion, there is less likely to be productive citizens who would politically aware enough to hold officeholders and politicians accountable. The snowballing effects of the pervasive nature of illiteracy in Nigeria and its supposed correlation with poverty can be attributed as some of the mitigations to attaining a stable society, growth, development, and even advancements in the fields of science, technology, information technology and others. On the contrary, interrogations of more advanced states will likely reveal higher levels of literacy, which fosters political participation and accountability, education can thus be considered as an integral variable with possible direct effect on development.

4. An Assessment of the Theory of Mental Magnitude

In light of Chief Obafemi Awolowo's political philosophy, it is pertinent to consider the plausible effects of his proposition on the overall quality of governance in contemporary Nigeria, specifically and Africa in general. In other words, the aforementioned variable affects both the government institutions, rulers and the ruled. In line with this, the Vanguard Newspaper dated December 17, 2016, claims, according to a UNESCO document, corruption to be one of the most prevailing socio-economic vices that hamper development. If seen from the perspective of Chief Awolowo, had present leaders and public office holders master themselves and put reasoning above desire and greed to amass material wealth, the likelihood of an improved or better governance is high. Ogoma argues that the difficulty in fighting corruption in Nigeria can be attributed to so much emphasis on the elite or political corruption (Ogoma, 2014, p. 162). Here, Awolowo focuses on corruption in general; that is, corruption at home, church and mosque, markets and company, school and university, down to private and public institutions, and among men and women, married and unmarried. Freedom from negative emotions and the cultivation of positive thinking will go a long way at driving these evil forces away from the society. The regime of mental magnitude, as proposed by Awolowo, satisfying the needs of man as the primary

function of the state, free education, healthcare, infrastructural development, a decentralized federalism amongst other ideals he stood for are far from actualization. The majority of citizens of post-independent Nigeria as many African countries are unable to meet necessary conditions that may usher in such a regime and taking into consideration efforts of both past and present governments, if any, has lacked visionary leadership or leaders who have mastered themselves. The more permanent political class in Nigeria have drained the country's resources, the pervasive level of corruption, disregard for the rule of law amongst other vices, the more development and growth are arrested; which has created conditions that are suitable for poverty, in the aided by high illiteracy among the citizenry. It is in this light that Ozden and Ousmane stress that access to free and quality education should be provided by the federal, state, and local governments (2020, p. 192). They further attest that this would help alleviate the level of hostility, suspicion and fear among the people of different ethnic and religious groups and other socio-cultural cleavages as a result of illiteracy and ignorance. It is believed that educated elites could be the cause of skirmishes in societies but would never be part of it on the battlefield, it is the people left uneducated that always persecute their [the elites'] wars. Therefore, with the educational aspect sorted out the elites would have no room to maneuver; in other words, education would most likely to create liberal, understanding, empathetic and sympathetic citizens (Ibid) p.192. Therefore, through quality education, the attainment of such regime seems more likely, on the quest of improved governance both by academicians and policymakers alike, it is crucial to harness resources effectively to alleviate the conditions of illiteracy from the vast majority.

5. Conclusion

The justification behind rationalizing man's welfare as the major concern of the state and adopting the propositions of the regime of mental magnitude as postulated by Chief Obafemi Awolowo as a likely solution to the political and socio-economic challenges that a vast majority have found themselves in today, is borne out of the contention that Nigeria like most African countries lack or neglect indigenous socio-economic and political philosophy upon which to build post-colonial Africa. These countries have overtime suffered from policy somersault and lack of continuity.

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Desirability of such a regime may be necessitated by its yearning for persons aspiring to be leaders as a necessary condition master themselves to enable them to masters others. Under such arrangements, discipline is a top to bottom approach beginning with the leader and then the citizens who should be educated and could assess certain welfare services. Today one may argue that as a result of pervasive corruption that has come to be institutionalized and shortage of visionary leadership, Nigeria and other resource-rich states in Africa are unable to provide essential goods and services to citizens and undertake developmental projects that would bring about growth and development.

In sum, this research contends, the attainment of the regime of mental magnitude may seem utopic it is of utmost importance that both academics and policy makers alike consider some of the propositions of thinkers of African descent, the likes Obafemi Awolowo, Barthelemy Boganda, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Julius Nyerere, Thomas Sankara, Nkuame Nkruma, Jomoh Kenyata, Sendar Senghor among many others, as they are likely to comprehend the various challenges of the society and proffer plausible solutions. While this is not an attempt to discredit the influence on non-African thinkers on society at large, rather it seeks to shed a light on the fact that the challenges of Africa/Nigeria are peculiar to Africans/Nigerians, and extolls the importance of African/Nigerian solution to African/Nigerian problems. Thus, it is pertinent that academics, policymakers, the political elites, and the society at large reconsider the African/Nigerian project and the aspirations and expectations that proceeded the early years of independence.

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