

RECKLESS STATEMENTS IN POLITICAL GOVERNANCE: ANALYSIS OF SELECTED STATEMENTS OF SOME NIGERIAN LEADERS

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Abstract

The main thrust of this paper is that in the course of governance and discharge of their duties, some Nigerian leaders have made statements or slips which could be regarded as reckless or outright vituperations. The psycho-social cum political effects of these statements on the citizenry and the political system at large are examined. And since this paper is an academic exercise in communication, models of communication and their applicability to the subject-matter is also undertaken. In the final analysis, the paper posits that it is not enough to determine the political personality of these leaders on the strength of one or two of these reckless statements.

Introduction

Leadership is a critical success factor in governance, whose actions, inactions, or non-actions can make or mar the system. Inter alia, a leader is required to motivate, inspire and channel the energies of the teeming populace into positive ends, initiate social interactions with the other members of the state, serve as the nation's mouthpiece, both nationally and internationally, maintain interpersonal relations, arbitrate disputes, and educate the generality of the populace on the nation's mission and vision statements towards ensuring the integrity, cohesion, stability and continuity of the nation. Central to these component functions of a leader is the communication skill. According to Harris (1979), words are double-edged sword - a tool to express ideas and could also convey meaning inadequately. Conversely, the International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences posits that "man's linguistic actions cannot be distinguished from the rest of his social interactions." It further queried whether the occurrence and reception of communicative signals be something more than just this social behaviour. In effect, words have deeper meaning that could convey the inner workings of a man's mind. The kernel of this paper, therefore, is to appraise some statements of selected Nigerian leaders and their psycho-social effects on the citizenry. Some of these statements were made during press interviews, television broadcasts, published works, personal views and comments on social issues during cocktail parties or other social functions, and which generates in their wake public concern and controversy in formal and informal fora. And since words are the raw materials of communication, it is imperative, at this juncture, to undertake a conceptual clarification of the term "communication".

Conceptual Clarification

What communication is: In the popularly understood sense of the term, "communication" can mean anything from the exchange of information between two friends in face-to-face conversation, to the transmission of live television broadcasts via communication satellites. In a formal sense, it can be viewed as the mechanism by which all human relations exist and develop all the means of the mind together with the means of conveying them through space and preserving them in time (Schram, 1972). Narrowing this formal approach, Daniel Katz and Robert C. Kahn (1978) defined communication, as; "the exchange of information and the transmission of the meaning." Adapting this definition, Koontz and Gore (1983), viewed communication as, "the transfer of information, from the- sender to the receiver with the information being understood by the receiver."

Basically, the communication process requires at least three elements - source, message and destination - known as the sender or the initiator, the source is the point at which messages originate. It can be in any form, audible, visual or tactile form, as any signal capable of meaningful interpretation. The destination or recipient, which again can be a person or a group of persons, is the final link in the communication chain, the intended target of the message. The basic linear model of communication is, therefore: source-message-destination (Stevens, 1992).

In a command or military setting, order flows top-down. Whenever the superior officer(s) command, the junior officers carry out without asking questions. In this case, the communication process is vertical, along the chain of command, from the superiors to subordinates down the ladder with a possible feedback up the ladder.

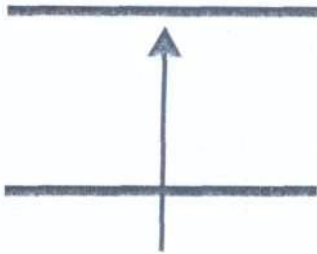


Fig. 1: Vertical communication flows (Source: Cherry, 1957)

In a democratic political setting, the leader's dictates and statements are not unquestionable. Although as an authority symbol, a leader's statements may not be rebuffed in his presence, but these speeches, statements, vituperations, or even slips become topical issues of social discussions by all and sundry. This communication flow is referred to as diagonal:

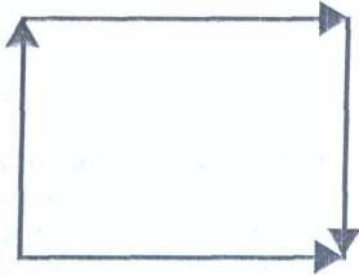


Fig. 2: Diagonal process flows (Source: Cherry, 1957)

Speeches and statements made by political leaders follow diagonal process flows. In their wake, these statements do generate highly emotive reactions from the populace particularly among the enlightened segment. Positive speeches and statements evoke emotions of love and support for the leader and his cause; inversely, negative speeches and statements provoke feelings of hatred and frustration. Borrowing from Dollard-Doob's frustration-aggression hypothesis (1949), feelings of frustration necessarily leads to aggression and violence. Ironically, however, one may be frustrated and harbour a feeling of aggression against a leader, but because the leader in issue is vested with an aura of authority, or capable of retaliating with a socially approved punishment, or in some other way rendered for all practical purposes invulnerable, these feelings of aggression are repressed. Repressed anger gives rise to a displacement of aggression, in which case, the individual directs his hostility towards someone or something not responsible for the original frustration, which may include non-payment of taxes, election boycott, vandalism, strikes and demonstrations and so on. It is against this backdrop, that the dialectical tensions and confrontations between political leaders and the followers in Nigeria can be understood and analyzed.

For the purpose of analytical rigour and clarity, we undertake a discussion of these selected statements considered reckless, as made by some Nigerian political leaders, viz:

- (i) If by Commission or Omission the East should Secede, the West will Follow - *Chief Obafemi Awolowo (Awolowo, 1981)*

This statement was credited to Chief Obafemi Awolowo, made in the heat of the conflict between the Eastern Nigeria and the government of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, which inevitably led to the civil war, July, 1966 - January, 1970. The underlying logic of this statement as explicated by Chief Obafemi Awolowo himself, was that Nigeria could be likened to a tripod stool, constituting mainly of Eastern, Western and Northern Nigeria. Invariably, the loss of any of the three legs translates into structural imbalance and the collapse of the superstructure. Innocuous as it were, this statement aggravated the agitation of the Ibos of the Eastern Region for Biafra Republic¹, believing that the Yoruba of the Western Region would follow suit. Thus, when the Western Region teamed up with the Northern Region towards quelling the secessionist moves of the Eastern Region, the Ibos felt that they had been stabbed at the back by the Yoruba cultural stock of the Western Region. In later days, this statement deepened inter-ethnic sentiments and hatred between the Yoruba of the South-Western Region and the Ibos of the South-Eastern Region of Nigeria, making it difficult, for the two Regions to cooperate on political and electoral matters.

- (ii) I Foresee the Jihad Sword Deeply Rooted Beyond the Niger -*Ahmadu Bello (Bello, 1961)*

This statement is attributed to Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, and the single most powerful politician in the First Republic of Nigeria. Coming from a religious bigot of the renowned caliphate, this statement elevated religion from the pedestal of private concern to an issue of public discord and hatred. People of other religious faith beyond the Niger, that is, the Southern part of Nigeria, construed this as a grand design by the Hausa-Fulani cultural stock of the Northern Nigeria to “islamise” the rest of the country. This statement has been a recurrent decimal in the conflict between the Christians and Muslims across the country.

- (iii) Divinely-crafted comparative advantage for the component Regions of Nigeria - *Maitama Stile (Sunday Times, 27 June, 1979)*

Prelude to the 1979 elections in Nigeria, Maitama Sule flodted a thesis where he show-cased the comparative advantage of the three Regions - East, West, and North - of Nigeria and the implication of this for national integration. In his formulation, Almighty God, in his infinite wisdom, has not only endowed Nigeria with complimentary economies but also ensured comparative advantage of the component units. For him, the East has comparative advantage in technology, commercial and entrepreneurial abilities; the West’s advantage is in the area of intellectual endowment and bureaucratic skills; while the North’s advantage is in military institution and political power. Against this backdrop, Maitama counselled that each region should specialize in its area of advantage to the mutual benefit of the Nigerian state. This thesis is self-serving as it tends to justify the’ oligarchical and hegemonic drives of the Northern Nigeria, which Maitama Sule belongs. Obviously, whatever comparative advantages are assigned to each and every region, they are still subsumed to political leadership. And in the maxim of Kwame Nkrumah: “give us the political kingdom and all else shall be added.”

Secondly, the comparative advantages he attributed to the various regions are evenly distributed across the country. Thirdly, this thesis has heightened the suspicions of the Eastern and Western Regions of Nigeria about the Northern hegemonic designs and the imperative to counter same. Indeed, the heightened tone and tenor of political and electoral competition between the Southern and Northern Nigeria can be gleaned from this perspective.

- (iv) How Many Nigerians have you seen Scavenging the Dustbin for Food? - *Umaru Dikko (Tribune, 23 April, 1982)*

This was a rhetorical question by Umaru Dikko, a party chieftain in the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) and also a Minister of Transport (1979-1983) in response to a question by a journalist that Nigerians were going through hard times engendered by massive corruption and economic mismanagement of the NPN government. Dikko’s index of poverty, which is the number of people scavenging the dustbin for food to eke out living, generated a lot of ill-feelings for the ruling party thus, compounding the crises of legitimacy and nation-building.

- (v) "Shoot at Sight" - *Inspector General Sunday Adewusi (rtd.)*
(*Newswatch*, July 19, 1983)

This was the instruction handed over to the officers and men of the Nigerian police towards the 1983 general elections in Nigeria, in order to forestall trouble-makers from hijacking the elections. At the grammatical level, "shoot at sight" is a blunder. Does it mean shooting the people in the eyes thereby rendering them blind and inactive? Against the context of this instruction, he wanted his rank and file to "shoot on sight" undesirable elements bent on perpetrating violence during the elections. Dilating this statement, it portrayed the height of anti-democratic sentiment and served as a license for police to kill and maim indiscriminately. Invariably, this reckless statement ignited the orgy of violence and wanton destruction of lives and property, which attended the 1983 general elections in Nigeria leading in its wake to the sack of the Second Republic.

- (vi) Students have no Business Staging Demonstrations Against Hike in Fuel Price - *Brigadier David Mark (rtd.)* (*Concord*, 4 November, 1988)

Consequent upon the spate of demonstrations embarked upon by the Nigeria students in tertiary institutions of learning against the hike in price of fuel under the defunct administration of General I.B.B. Babangida (1985-1993), Brigadier David Mark (rtd.), the ex-governor of Niger state remarked that students had no business protesting the hike in price of fuel since they had no vehicular means of transport. For a military officer of a brigadier status and a governor to utter this reckless statement speaks volume for the mentality of the Nigerian ruling class. Petroleum products are a critical resource which affects all the sectors of the economy. Increase in the price of fuel, for instance, translates into multiplier effect on drugs, food and other consumables, fares and sundry goods and services.

- (vii) Annulment is Irrevocable - *General I.B.B Babangida (rtd.)* (*TELL*, July 2, 1993)

Having annulled the freest and fairest elections of 1993, popularly won by the Social Democratic Party (SDP) candidate, Chief M.K.O Abiola of the Yoruba ethnic cultural stock and an Islamic faithful, appeals to Babangida to revert the annulment of the election was described by General I.B.B Babangida and his cabal in the Armed Forces Ruling Council (AFRC) as irrevocable. This reckless statement amounted to playing god with the destiny of the Nigerians. Also, it shows that the judiciary and other institutional means of settling disputes can easily be brought under the jungle boot of the military junta. Invariably, this reckless statement set led to the regression of Nigerian fortune on the economic and political fronts. Similarly, it aggravated the crises of identity and integration in Nigeria.

- (viii) Southerners' Mad Rush For Education - *Wada Nas* (*TELL*, 18 August, 1997)

Credited to Wada Nas, the Minister of Education during the dictatorship of Abacha junta, this statement was made to express his disgust for the proliferation of outreach academic centres euphemistically referred to as "satellite campus". Indisputably, the advent of these outreach academic centres compromised academic standard, as the commercial motive was played up to the detriment of quality education. However, rather than seeing these outreach academic centres as symptomatic of the "Southerners' mad rush for education", a policy-maker, moreso of a Minister's status should have' seen this trend as a reflection of the yearnings of the teeming populace for western education and, in consequence, fashion out modalities for coping with it. This is the vacuum that investors in the education sector capitalized upon to establish private universities in the country. Literally, if we talk about the "Southerners' mad rush for education" then inversely, we can talk about the "Northerners sane non-rush for education". The latter scenario, no doubt, should gives policy-makers some cause for concern.

- (ix) “For Me to Stay in the National Assembly, and have Nothing to do for the People that Elected Me, I Prefer the Military to be There - *Senator Joseph Kennedy Waku (TELL, February 7, 2000)*”

This statement was credited to Senator Waku from Benue state in the interview he granted Tell Magazine on February 7, 2000. For a serving Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria to make, such a reckless statement, moreso given the fragility of the democratic experiment in Nigeria attests to the political immaturity of Nigerian leaders. There are more verile ways of achieving end objectives in a democracy such as bargaining, lobbying, public opinion, pressure group and so on than preferring “professional coupists to take over”.

- (x) “CAN my foot” - *President Olusegun Obasanjo (Punch, November 26, 2005)*

In response to a comment by the leader of Christians in Plateau State that President Obasanjo was always quick in pointing accusing finger when the Christians are at fault but always ready to look the other way when the Muslims were at fault, President Obasanjo described the septugenarian as a “compound fool”. Describing an elderly person and a religious leader in his own right as a “compound fool” left much to be desired. Further, President Obasanjo was quoted to have said, “CAN my foot”. CAN is the Umbrella organization for Christian Association of Nigeria. This was an unguarded statement in view of the population and spread of Christians coupled with the sensitivity of religion in Nigeria. Were President Obasanjo a Muslim, this statement could have set in pace chains of reactions that could engulf the whole country. Fortunately, he is a Christian faithful of Baptist faith.

- (xi) “I Will Rise Again” - *Inspector-general Tafa Balogun (rtd.) (Punch, March 28, 2006)*

This statement was made by the Inspector-General Tafa Balogun (rtd.) when a jail term of six months imprisonment was clamped on him for enriching himself to the tune of 17 billion dollars from police allocations and other sources of ill-gotten wealth. Having risen to the pinnacle of his career in the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) and crashed to the floor, the chief crime-prevention officer of the' country was expected to show remorse for his crime. Ironically, he was quoted to have said "I will rise again." This statement depicts the abysmal depth of moral decadence Nigerian has sunk into. Nothing justifies corruption as a way of life in Nigeria if an ex-convict could still hope to bounce back into public glare.

- (xii) Pocket Your Votes - *Governor Oyinlola Oyingunsoye (Tribune, 23 March, 2006)*

Reminded of his electioneering pledge to the people of Oshogbo, the capital of Osun State in respect of the establishment of state university, Governor Oyinlola Olagunsoye replied them that he did not need their votes in order to make a second term in office. This statement was made during the "Open Forum", a question-and-answer session between the Governor and the people of Osun State held in February 2006. This statement affirms the contempt the political rulers in Nigeria have for their subjects. Almost always this kind of scenario sets the stage for political violence and brigandage between the Governor that is bent on rigging elections and the mass of the people who felt shortchanged by the Governor.

- (xiii) We Rigged Lagos Polls - *Rafiu Tinubu (The Guardian, 7 February, 2006)*

Rafiu Tinubu was the Head of Civil Service in Lagos and a former chieftain of Alliance for Democracy in Lagos State, who later decamped to Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). He made a public declaration that the gubernatorial victory of AD, in Lagos State, his former party, was as a result of the blatant rigging of elections perpetrated by him and others. Such a statement shows that the concepts of free and fair elections and popular sovereignty are a farce in Nigeria. And by. implication it could lead to apathy or indifference by voters in future elections in the country.

- (xiv) We Rigged the Gubernatorial Election in Anambra State - *Chris Uba (Punch, 15 February, 2006)*

As a fallout of the cold relationship between Governor Chris Ngige and his erstwhile political godfather, Chris Uba made a public disclosure that the 2003, gubernatorial elections in Anambra state was rigged against the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) candidate, Peter Obi. Open admission of election rigging constitutes a serious crime against the state. Its psycho-social effects on competitors

for political power and the electorate cannot be over-emphasized.

(xv) “May be I was too Loyal. I would have done what I was Supposed to do, but I believe in Democracy. So, I didn’t Organize a Coup to Overthrow him (Obasanjo)” - *Lt. General Victor Main (rtd.) (TELL, 18 March, 2006)*

This statement was made by Lt. General Victor Main (rtd), who rose to the status of Chief of Army Staff (COAS) of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, at the general assembly of the Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) held in Kaduna in February 2006. Malu expressed unreserved regret for failing to sack the nascent democracy in Nigeria while he was in service, and the reason being the ideological difference between him and President Olusegun Obasanjo. A statement of this sort has dire security implications, it is capable of inciting the officers and men of the military to topple the legitimate government in the country if they harbour any disagreement with the latter. Reading between the lines, this statement also unveils Malu’s intent to sponsor military coup against the government if he is opportuned. Moreover, given the permeability of military institutional boundary between the retired military officers and the serving officers this statement is treasonable. Indeed, as a retired military officer, Malu is still under the authority of Section 262, of the Armed Force Decree of 1993 and Decree 105 of 2001 as amended, which requires any service officer in or out of service, to respect the office of the President and Commander-in-Chief.

Conclusion and Caveat

Having examined some selected statements of a number of Nigerian political leaders, it is instructive to point out that these statements do not constitute the whole gamut of reckless statements attributed to Nigerian leaders. They are only a tip of the iceberg. The question in issue now is: why are the Nigerian leaders quick to make reckless statements? A number of factors could be adduced. One reason is that the “colonial administrators were arbitrary in the use of words to their subjects. By making reckless statements occasionally, Nigerian leaders are only conforming to the political socialisation process gained during the colonial and military regimes. Secondly, the Nigerian military has tendency to regard the whole country as a barrack once it is in the helms of power. And in this conception, the “bloody civilians” are seen no better than the other ranks in the military. Thirdly, rigging of elections by politicians give them the impression that the electorate do not matter in the scheme of events.

One has to sound a note of caution, however, that one or two reckless statements made by a leader does not reflect his political personality. It is necessary to undertake content analysis of his speeches, published works, biographies and so on before one *con* make a definitive statement about his political personality.

Finally, while we have undertaken an appraisal of the reckless statements made by some Nigerian political leaders and their psycho-social cum political implications, it is equally necessary to undertake an analysis of their positive statements and philosophies in order to have a balanced scholarly research work. In fact, some of the Nigerian leaders are sages in their own rights.

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