

THE CONCEPT OF NATIONAL CAKE IN NIGERIAN POLITICAL SYSTEM: IMPLICATIONS FOR NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

George Christian Nche

Abstract

Nigeria is bedevilled with a lot of seemingly intractable problems. On the one hand, is the high rate of insecurity occasioned by the incidence of kidnapping for ransom, Boko Haram insurgency, armed robbery and other organized crimes, while on the other hand, are the sluggish economic development, astronomic rate of unemployment and the overwhelming rate of poverty and destitution. Yet at the centre stage, is the hydra-head monster which is corruption that has been ravaging the entire country for decades. Corruption is seen as the major as well as mother of the rest of other problems in the country. Yet, it is believed that this menace of corruption is encouraged by a particular understanding or notion among Nigerians. This is the notion of National Cake. Therefore, this Paper attempts to analyze the concept of National Cake in Nigerian Political System and how it affects the development of the nation. With the use of qualitative analytical method, it was found that the distorted notion of national cake is overwhelmingly common among Nigerians and has been a bane of national development. Hence, a Political Reorientation, Establishment of more Anti Graft Agencies, a Heavier Punishment for corruption, etc were recommended.

Key Words: National Cake, National Development, Corruption, Philosophy, Oil Wealth.

INTRODUCTION

Peoples' understanding, notion and mental disposition has always influenced and determined their decisions, resolutions, actions and results. The same understanding has always guided the people in making rules and regulations that make up their societal norms and value system. The same understanding has gone a long way in determining the serenity, orderliness, peace and prosperity of their society. By inference, therefore, if an understanding or notion is faulty in itself, peoples' decisions, actions and results would definitely reflect the source-the faulty notion. But if an understanding is faultless, the same goes for the decisions and actions of a people. Yet, if a peoples' understanding is retrogressive and anti-development; growth and development would be elusive in that society.

This is true of every society, including Nigeria. In Nigerian Political system, for instance, the series of national issues and events that occur in the country are believed to be largely influenced by a particular understanding. This understanding has to do with the designation of the Country's national wealth and income as "National Cake". The popularity of this concept of National cake among Nigerians is indeed overwhelmingly obvious. It is popular among students and the teeming unemployed graduates. It is also popular among casual workers, commercial drivers, business men/women and civil servants. However, it seems to be more common among Nigerian politicians. The distorted import of this concept of National cake in Nigeria, has been found to be the bane of national development. It has laid platforms for ethnic, political and even religious conflicts in the country. Arguably, it has also

directly or indirectly been the potent propeller of several issues of national concern, like derivation principle controversy, state creation controversy, political zoning controversy and incidence of militancy, corruption, kidnapping for ransom, Boko haram, armed robbery, oil theft etc., in the Country.

Therefore, having done a critical study of the functionality of this concept of national cake in Nigerian political system, this paper attempts to analyze it in relation to the national development of the country. Hence, the main objective of this paper is to critically analyze the notion or understanding Nigerians have about the wealth of the nation and how this has affected the development of the country.

Historical Background of the Concept of National Cake in Nigerian Political System

It is said that the phrase “National Cake” was coined in early 1960s, along with the reasons given for the justification of the country’s new political structure as a Republic, so that every citizen in every corner of the country should be able to partake of the National Cake, which is the commonwealth of Nigeria (Abraham and Sandan 2010). This commonwealth is no other, than the huge economic benefits that accrue from crude oil sales and exportations. Therefore, there can not be a separate collection of the history and development of the concept of national cake in Nigeria. This is due to the obvious fact that the history of this concept is inextricably tied to the history of oil boom and exploration in Nigeria. In other words, to trace the history of this concept is the same as tracing the history of oil boom in the country.

More interestingly however, the history of this concept, in extension, explains the history and development of corruption in the country. It explains the history of socio-political injustice, election malpractice, embezzlement and misappropriation of public fund. It explains the history of ethno-religious wars and civil conflicts, militancy, kidnapping for ransom and oil theft in Nigeria.

Prior to the crude oil era in Nigeria, the Country survived on different agricultural products like palm oil, groundnuts, cocoa, etc. with less resources-induced problems and conflicts. It was not until 1956 and beyond, that Nigeria started experiencing more pronounced resource related rift and rancor in the Country. Historically, in 15 January 1956, crude oil was discovered in commercial quantity by Shell Darcy (Later named Shell BP) in Oloibiri community, in Ogbia L.G.A of Bayelsa state, Nigeria. “By 1958, Shell BP had discovered oil in twelve areas in the Niger Delta of which Oloibiri, Afam and Bomu were the most promising” (www.en.wikipedia.org). Hence, from a few thousand barrels per day in the late 50s, and early 60s, production increased, accounting for 93% of Nigeria foreign exchange in 1975, 96% in 1980 and 98% by the 90s (Njoku. 2001). This brought Nigeria into the global scene. Today, Nigeria is a big player in the international oil and gas business (Enuka and Odife 2008:122). As at 2011, Nigeria was ranked 14th in the list of highest oil producing countries, but 4th biggest exporting country, exporting not less than 2.1 million barrels per day. (www.theriches.org). More interesting and significant, however, is the economic fortune and prosperity that came with this oil boom in the country. Aham (2008:26) has rightly observed that since the first oil exportation in 1958, Nigeria

has been ostensibly catapulted from a struggling independent nation to an economically dependent and buoyant country. Also, in a bid to practically relate the magnitude of the economic fortune that came with crude oil boom in the country, Enuka and Odife (2008) wrote thus;

With Oil wealth, Lagos, the nations' capital city was built to a befitting status comparable to many other nations' capitals. With oil wealth, the new capital city, Abuja was set up to enviable standard. Construction of several roads and stadia across the country owed to the availability of petrodollars. (p.123)

However, regrettably, this economic prosperity and fortune that accompanied oil boom, has inadvertently been the main cause of the problem in the country. It is the national wealth that is commonly referred to as National cake and main cause of the scramble among politicians and non-politicians, civilian and non-civilians in the country. It is the cause of several controversies and conflicts in several quarters of the country. It is the most valuable thing (the black gold) vigorously sought for, by both those in government and the governed. Hence, the much-said about the national cake in Nigeria.

The Philosophical Import of the Concept of National Cake in Nigerian Political System

The operational conceptualization of the term “philosophy or philosophical”, does not refer to the popular definition as the “love and pursuit of wisdom”. Nor does it refer to the critical analysis of fundamental assumptions and beliefs; or the discipline comprising Logic, Ethics, Aesthetics, Metaphysics and Epistemology. Rather, it is

contextually used as “an outlook, viewpoint or notion of a person or group of persons about something. It refers to an understanding of a people which has an influence on the people. Therefore, by inference, the philosophy of “national cake” is the same as the notion or understanding of “National Cake” in this paper.

Literally, the phrase “National Cake” means “a cake of a nation or a cake owned by a nation”. In Nigerian context, the phrase “national Cake” is synonymous with the “national wealth” of the country. It is said to have been designated as such, among other reasons, to drive home a point, which is that the “cake of the nation” (i.e. the wealth of the nation) is owned by all and not by a few. Hence, the philosophy of national cake in Nigeria has it that the wealth of the nation is generally owned by Nigerians and should be managed and dispensed in that notion. The idea was that every citizen of Nigeria, in every nook and cranny of the country, should be able to partake of the national Cake

Ruefully, however, this original antique philosophical import of the concept of national cake has been far misplaced and distorted in the country. For years now, this concept has been associated with corruption and bribery in the country. It has been viewed to be the propeller of gross embezzlement of public funds and other related problems in the country. This is because, the notion of a cake for all, has been distorted to mean a cake for a few opportunists. Little wonder, the overwhelming craves for power, which has eaten up politicians in Nigeria. Everyone wants to lead, even when there are a few genuine leaders in their midst. Of course, everyone wants to lead because, in Nigerian context, to lead is to avail oneself of the opportunity to have a share of the national cake. Hence the

electioneering processes in Nigeria, has been over the years inundated with political assassinations, godfatherism, political thuggery, kidnapping, money-sharing, sabotage, e.t.c.

The Country alongside her oil wealth is seen as a Country without owners. Hence, people keep amassing wealth for themselves at any given opportunity. According to Dapo (2012) who cited the *Economist* (a British Weekly) “Nigerian leaders are so greedy that they have subverted the entire machinery of the State to serve their needs. Every policy is a scam, every regulation a source of rent”. Many leaders have come and gone with so many cases of corruption and embezzlement, involving people who were never convicted by the Law. Impunity and Offender-Escapist culture has been the order of the day in the Country.

The national wealth has been ceaselessly shared among a few, even on the platform of political parties. Many political parties in the country are known for money-sharing during meetings and rallies. The more money a Political Party shares, the more members it gets and the more corrupt and powerful it becomes on the political scene of the country. Many Nigerians, are in the Ruling Party not necessarily because of the competence and ingenuity of the Flag Bearers, but because; there lies their hope of partaking in sharing the national cake. Hence, it is pertinent to note that the ruling class seems not to be the only set of people obsessed with the ignoble philosophy of national cake; several other Nigerians are also guilty of the same mentality. This goes a long way to buttress the saying that “if the head of a fish gets spoilt, the body cannot evade the rot”. The popular Nollywood actress, Patience

Ozokwor (a.k.a Mama G) in her Music Album, titled “National Moi-Moi” (2010) sang, thus;

I will make my people happy
I will make everybody Jolly
I will share the national moi-moi; divide the national
cake.
I go chop (eat) my own, you
go chop your own, my government no chop alone.
I will share the national moi-moi
Divide the national cake.

Dramatically, she demonstrated this by sharing a ‘Ghana-Must-Go Bags’ supposedly filled with money, to crowd around her entourage. That is an apt demonstration of the Nigerian situation, where money is shared, at the expense of the human and infrastructural development of the country.

Implications for National Development

The following are the implications or effects of this distorted import of the Concept of National Cake on National Development in Nigeria.

Effect on National Politics

The National cake mentality is a big influence in Nigerian politics. It has largely contributed to giving Nigerian politics a negative peculiarity. A peculiarity in which, electoral rallies and campaigns are turned into battle fields, while elections are viewed as platforms for the most deadly and fearless. It is no more news to be told that in Nigeria, politics is seen as “a do or die affair”. Okafor (2011) has observed;

A “national cake” mentality is the major
affliction that continues to turn our politicians

into very curious creatures... This may well explain why we have politicians that murder each other in their bid to force their ways into positions of authority.

Consequently, extra-judicial killings, thuggery, dead threats, godfatherism, kidnapping, election malpractices and political assassinations have characterized politics in Country. Speaking on the nature of politics in Nigeria, particularly on the spate of political assassinations in the country, Edemodu cited in Nwokolo (2011:77) observed that political assassinations have become the norm in Nigerian politics while reporting that in 1995 alone fifty cases of politically induced assassinations were recorded in Lagos. Indeed, cases of political assassination abound in the country. Is it to talk of the unfortunate assassination of the former Minister of Justice and Attorney-General, Chief Bola Ige in Ibadan, Oyo State; the killing of Mr. S.A. Awoniyi, Secretary to the former Chief Justice of Nigeria, Justice Muhannadu Lawal Uwais in Federal Capital Territory, Abuja; (Igbafe and Offiong 2007:14) or the gruesome assassination of the local chairman of the Nigeria Bar Association, Barnabas Igwe and his Wife, in Onitsha, Anambra State. (Dawodu 2009)

Even when some of these Politicians eventually emerge as winners after probably rigging elections; they enter political offices “not with the aim to serve, but to partake in taking their share of the national cake” (Abraham and Sandan 2010) Also, this mental disposition has been behind the ethnic phenomena in Nigerian politics, in which political offices are allocated to persons based on tribal or ethnic origin. In other words, in Nigerian politics, people vie and eventually take over political

offices in tribal/ethnic turns. This was evidenced in the “zoning formula controversy” in which the North claimed to be entitled to the office of the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria till 2015. What would have been encouraging this idea of zoning if not the fact that people do not see political offices in Nigeria as a platform to render selfless service to the people, but as opportunity to have their own share of the National cake from the nation’s oil wealth? Hence, Abraham and Sandan (2010) wrote;

Take oil from Nigeria and you will get more accurate census figures, less agitation for state and local government creations, less attraction to power at the centre, less corruption and better development.

Effect on National Security

Enraged by the gross embezzlement and misappropriation of the national wealth by a corrupt few, some youths have taken to crime as a way of protesting the level of unemployment, lack of access to quality healthcare system, education and overwhelming level of poverty which currently stands at 71.5%, according to the National Bureau of Statistics. (Subair 2012). The gap between the rich and the poor in the country has kept expanding as these few individuals, have continued to maintain access to the wealth of the nation. This, to a large extent, explains the rise in organized crimes that have been threatening the security of the nation. The incidence of militancy in the Niger Delta region, for instance, and the kidnapping for ransom that followed, were carried out by youths who felt oppressed and maltreated by the government who could not provide jobs for them, amidst the huge oil exploration in the region. Hence from the late 2005 when the incidence of militancy is said to have

started, to the middle of the year 2009, when the Amnesty Deal was signed by late President shehu Yaradua, the polity was hit-up by the Niger Delta Militants through the destruction of oil infrastructures and kidnapping of oil expatriates for ransom. The Amnesty Programme seems to have ended militancy in the Niger Delta, however, the incidence of kidnapping for ransom has continued in the Country. It has continued to thrive alongside the all-dreaded Boko Haram, armed robbery and other organized crimes, which have increased the level of insecurity in the country. A columnist wrote;

Perhaps one of the most serious problems confronting the country today is insecurity. Sporadic bombings of churches and public places by Boko Haram, kidnappings, armed robberies, ritual killing for money making and other purposes etc, have become the order of the day. The situation in the country is that even the future is uncertain. In short, life has become nasty, brutish and short (The Nation 2012: 19).

This is an apt description of the security situation in Nigeria. And it is generally held that these national security challenges are caused by the high level of unemployment and poverty in the country.

Effect on National Economy

It is true that the crude oil boom in the country brought and still brings a lot of economic fortune and prosperity to the Nation, it has at the same time, inadvertently brought doom which is evidenced in the magnitude of problem that beset the nation for years now. Right from 1956, when crude oil was discovered in commercial quantity, to date, the economy of the nation has pleasantly blossomed to the envy of several country's

across the globe. However, it is pertinent to note that the country's economy would have been far-better than the present state, if not for the several set-backs from corrupt set of leaders that have been running the affairs of the nation. Overwhelmed by the ignoble crave for personal shares of the national cake (national wealth), they have corruptly amassed wealth for themselves at the detriment of other Nigerian citizens. Without doubt, corruption takes a centre stage on the list of problems facing Nigeria. And this menace of corruption ravages the country because majority of her leaders view the wealth of the nation, as a "Cake" that should be vigorously shared and eaten. Even the followers/governed are guilty of this obscene mindset, as everyone passionately seeks for an opportunity to have one's own share of the national cake. No wonder Okafor (2011) argued thus;

Maybe Nigeria is in shambles because we have leaders and followers whose mind frame remains that of party-goers who are deeply concerned about the food and drinks to be consumed. Let us grab as much as possible and go home to belch.

Consequently, bribery, embezzlement, and misappropriation of public fund seem to have become a way of life in the country. Oni (2012) has succinctly observed, thus;

Once, it was tempting to see corruption as exclusive to the public sector. Today, it is as pervasive as it is engulfing sparing no institution of society. Not the sacred precincts of the religious institution or the hallowed chambers of the Judiciary or even the family institution are exempt. (P.21).

Also, Wole Soyinka has recently lamented that corruption has become so endemic in the country that it now serves as a unifying factor and a national Lexicon understood by everyone in the country (Orintunsin and Osagie 2012:11). Discipline, integrity and patriotism have sharply declined, as everyone is conscious of getting a share of the national cake at any given opportunity. At the receiving end, is the nation's economy that has been repeatedly depleted to a deplorable state by people whose duty was to build it. Reported cases of corruption and bribery abound in the country. Without delving into far historical records which are greatly enormous, the reported case of James Ibori (the ex-governor of Delta state) loot which runs into millions of US dollars (precisely \$250m) (www.africareview.com), the \$620,000 subsidy bribe scandal involving Farouk Lawan and Femi Otedola, and many others, are cases in point. (Oluwasegun and Anofi 2012:5). Also in a recent report by the Petroleum Revenue Special Task force under the chairmanship of Mallam Nuhu Ribadu (ex-EFCC Boss), an under estimated sum of ₦16 trillion has been lost in the last 10 years, to crude oil theft and other fraudulent acts in the Nation's oil industry. According to the report, the Nation has lost ₦ 785 billion (\$5 billion) signature bonuses, ₦ 455 and ₦ 475. 2 billion outstanding royalties to corrupt individuals and companies. (Ogidan and Okere 2012). With all these and many more, one would wonder what becomes of the Nation's economy.

Recommendations

The following are recommended as way out of the current national dilemma besetting the country.

1. A total political re-orientation and attitudinal change of all Nigerians, starting from the leaders to the led. The Money Mentality of Nigerians should be overhauled, and those age long moral values be embraced to foster national development.
2. Establishment of more Anti-Graft Agencies to assist the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and the Independence Corruption Practices and other related Offences Commission (ICPC) in the fight against corruption in Nigeria. This is because of the obvious alarming rate of corruption in the country.
3. A Restructuring of the Judicial System as well as the Criminal Code System to make prosecutions of corrupt individuals less rigorous and efficient. In the same vein, a Separate Court should be put in place specifically for the prosecution of corruption cases in the country.
4. A Heavier Punishment, like a Life-imprisonment, for corrupt individuals should be adopted by the Nigerian Judicial System, to adequately and effectively fight corruption in the Country.
5. A thorough Discourse on the concept of National Cake as it relates to every Nigerian should be held across the country and broadcasted on the media. This should be aimed at correcting the misconception that surrounds this concept in Nigeria.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it is pertinent to note that out of the suggestions listed above, the most effective is the change of the mindset and mental disposition of Nigerians towards the nation. Unlike the understanding of many, which sees the nation and her wealth as a “no man’s property”, it

should be emphatically noted that the Nation-Nigeria belongs to every Nigerian including the generation of Nigerians to come. The Nation and her wealth should therefore be judiciously managed for the benefit of all Nigerians and the sake of posterity.

REFERENCES

- Abraham and Sandan (2010) National Cake Syndrome- The Concept of National Disloyalty (www.nigerianelitesforum.com) Assessed on 4th December 2012.
- Aham, U (2008) More Money More Problems. *Tell Magazine*, February 18,2012.
- Dawodu, C. M (2009) Political Assassination (www.thisdayonline.com) Assessed on 22nd November 2012.
- Depo, F (2012) The Growing Discontent with Public Corruption, *The Nation*, December 6,2012.
- Editorials (2012) State of the Nation: We Welcome Eminent Nigerians' Intervention, *The Nation*, November, 28,2012.
- Enuka, C and Odife, I (2008) Oil and Security in Nigeria: Matters Arising From the Boom of oil. *Nigerian Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences* (vol.2) Enugu: University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Highest Oil Producing Counties (www.the richest.org) Assessed on 22nd November 2012.
- Igbafe, A.A and Offiong, O.J(2007) Political Assassination in Nigeria: An Exploratory Study 1986-2005. *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations*, Vol. 1(1).
- Njoku, O (2001) *Economic History of Nigeria: 19th and 20th Centuries*, Enugu: magnet Publishers.
- Nwokolo, P (2011) Combating Political Assassination in Nigeria: The Role of the Mass Media. *International Journal of Research in Arts and Social Sciences* (vol.3). Abuja: Rabboni Nigeria Ltd.
- Ogidan, A and Okere, R (2012) Nigeria Lost #16 trillion to Scams in Oil, Gas Sector, says Report (www.nguardiannews.com) Assessed on 4th November 2012.

- Okafor, C. J (2011) Bingeing on Our National Cake (www.saharareporters.org) Assessed on 2nd December 2012.
- Oloibiri Oilfield (www.en.wikipedia.org) Assessed on 22nd November 2012.
- Oluwasegun, V and Anofi, D (2012) \$ 620, 000 Bribe: Reps' Panel Report Ready, The Nation, November 2, 2012.
- Oni, S (2012) Recovering the Nation's Soul, The Nation, December 11, 2012.
- Orintunsin, J and Osagie, E (2012) Corruption is Nigeria's Unifying Factor, The Nation, December 12, 2012.
- Subair, G (2012) Nigeria's Level Rises, Hits 71.5%: SOKOTO, Niger top List of Poorest States (www.nigeriantribune.com.ng) Assessed on 2nd December 2012.