

INTEGRATION OF TRADITIONAL RULERS' ROLES IN NIGERIAN DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE: A STUDY OF LAYO OGUNLOLA'S NOVEL, *KO SORO*

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Abstract

The roles of traditional rulers cannot be underestimated when it comes to the political and social transformations of society in contemporary Nigerian democratic governance. This paper x-rays the roles, impact and types of duties that can be given to the traditional rulers in Nigerian democratic governance as it appears in the Yoruba novel titled '*Ko Soro*' by Layo Ogunlola based on the theory of Nativism. This study found out that the post of traditional rulers has diminished and needs to be given attention. This paper therefore recommends that traditional rulers should be integrated into the political democratic system of Nigeria as it was in 1963 constitution. It also suggests likely problems that could be encountered if traditional rulers are assigned roles in Nigerian political system and possible solutions to those challenges.

Keywords: Integration, traditional rulers, democratic governance

Introduction

The roles of traditional rulers in Nigerian democratic governance cannot be underestimated. By growth and sustainable development in Nigeria, it means a situation whereby a nation harnesses the resources at its disposal for growth and meaningful development. This development relates to economic growth, security, harmonious coexistence, intellectual growth in science and technology etc. What is paramount to Nigerian citizens in contemporary Nigerian system of governance is the growth and sustainable development of Nigeria and the integration of traditional rulers in the present Nigerian system of government. Adisa (2013:316) points out the roles of traditional title holders such as the local chiefs and traditional rulers in Nigerian system of government. He believes that traditional rulers cannot be separated

from political system. This implies that traditional rulers and chiefs are relevant in the development of a country like Nigeria. The Yorubas see traditional rulers as occupying a very important position in society. The Obas (traditional rulers) are perceived as next to God. Hence, the praised name '*Alase Ekeji Orisa*' meaning the second in command to god. This makes them reign supreme over their subjects. The Yorubas believe that traditional rulers have power over all things. They govern the people in the community. Law and order, freedom, good governance, peace and progress, development of locality, harmony, social-economic wellbeing etc., must prevail in the community they govern. Oladeni (1991:20) advises that in order to create positive change in the development of Nigeria as a country, it would be necessary for the Nigerian government to work in conjunction with traditional rulers to carry out projects that are beneficial to the generality of people.

Okeniyi (2013:414) while pointing out the roles of traditional rulers in the community or country, he posites that traditional rulers have power to take over the land, and also it is their duty to settle all disputes (e.g. land dispute, marital conflict and robbery) within the palace with fairness to all parties. Okeniyi observed that the absence of the roles of traditional rulers in governance in the Nigerian 1999 constitution is a setback to sustainable development of Nigeria. Likewise, Ogunlola (2014) observes this in his novel titled '*Ko Soro*' when he called for the integration of traditional rulers into Nigerian political system of government. This is what informed the need to select this novel. This paper seeks to scrutinize the roles to be ascribed traditional rulers in Nigerian democratic system in relation to the aim of the novel: '*Ko Soro*' written by Layo Ogunlola based on the theory of Nativism.

Theoretical Framework

This study is based on Williams and Laura (1994) and Wolfreys (1999) theory of Nativism. Their major concern was to find out the effects, disadvantages, menace, danger, bad effect, the injury, loss, damage faced by this immature or undeveloped countries as a result of British conquest. The proponents of this theory argue that despite the independence of developing countries, there are still traces of British indirect rule in the economic and political system of countries that

suffered the exploitation of the British colonists. Wolfreys (1999: 464) observes that this theory aims at finding all the cheating, oppression and the process of British conquest of countries during the era of colonization. Similarly, Eckford Prossor (2000:237) states that finding the changes that the British colonists brought to a particular society is the aim of this theory. According to the proponents of this theory, one of the countries that experienced British colonization or conquest is Nigeria before getting independence in 1960. It can be argued that after 59 years of Nigeria's independence, traces of colonization or exploitation of the British colonists still remains.

However, there is nothing wrong in a colonized country adopting aspects of political and cultural system of the British colonists. In order to succeed, it is also necessary that traditional and cultural values of the society are duly accommodated in the process. All these are being encompassed by Nativism theory. This is what informed the need to adopt this theory. This study therefore explored the bad effects or menace / disadvantages that democratic governance in Nigeria brought to the position of traditional rulers and the best way to effect change.

Yoruba Traditional Political System before the Advent of Colonization

A political system is a system which the citizens of a particular society use to control and make decision between themselves in order to help its members to relate to one another, promote security, commerce, economy, health, development and general welfare (Olaosebikan, 2009). Virtually, there is no society without its own political system that is based on the governance of people where rulers are accountable to their people. Before the advent of British colonist, the Yorubas had formed the nucleus of governance. Yoruba political system in pre-colonial Nigeria is a political system by every standard. Within the Yoruba traditional political system, executive, legislative and judicial functions are derived from traditions long rooted, recognized and preserved by their people. Tyokase (1998:47) explains that colonialism and civilization has changed this Yoruba traditional political system. Before the coming of British colonists, the Yoruba traditional political system fulfilled the well-known functions of government, ranging from the family, which consist of man, wife/wives and children where the man is

the head of the monogamous or polygamous family. Adesina (2001:54) explains that:

“Within the Yorubas, the concept of family refers to different levels of social organization in different cultures. The word family does not limited to only man, his wife and children but, involved man conjugal family and some extended family lived together in their fore-father’s house.”

The most popular family type in Yoruba land is the extended family, which consist of two, three, four, five or more nuclear families. The most elderly person in such extended family is known as “Baale” (the chief head). The chief head and the other elders in the extended family direct the affairs of their unit or family. The combination of such extended family is known as the district (Adugbo). Baale, the chief head is the head. He has the overall authority and takes vital decisions, administer and protect the family. A Yoruba kingdom was made up of a headquarters (i.e. Olu-Ilu) and other local towns and villages. However, its political administration consisted central level and subordinating units. The central level was headed by traditional rulers; the king, known as Oba in Yoruba and assisted by a handful of chiefs as well as other political figures in the administration of the kingdom. The subordinate units headed by the chief head were responsible for the administration of the towns and villages in the kingdom. Like traditional rulers, the head chief (Baale) also had a group of chiefs that assisted him in his area of jurisdiction. However, every Baale was crowned by the king and was therefore responsible to him at the central level.

Before the advent of the British in Yoruba land, the seven offsprings of Okanbi (Oduduwa) and their generations were the kings. The seven offsprings of Oduduwa are Oranmiyan of Oyo, Alake of Egba land, owa of Obokun, Adimula of Ijesa, Orangun of Ile Ila, Oba of Benin, Alaketu of Ketu land and Onipopo of Popo land. Each of them was a royal highness and was responsible for the administration of towns and villages in every kingdom. Nowadays, the Yoruba kingdom has expanded and it must be noted that succession to the throne of some of

them, if not many kingdoms in Yoruba land is not hereditary. So, many baales ended up becoming kings (Fadipe, 1970, Johnson, 1921).

The Role of Traditional Rulers during the Colonial Era

Omolewu (2012:84) observes that British activity in Nigeria began before 1861. Between 1895 and 1906, the British had completely and effectively occupied the country. In 1914, Northern and southern Nigerian were amalgamated and the administration of the territory was vested in a governor known as Lord Lugard, a British representative. Thus, before the advent of British government, the kings (Obas) were in charge. The application and execution of laws were within their jurisdiction. They appointed all officials who were responsible to them. But when the British adopted various tactics to penetrate and eventually colonize Nigeria, the kings (Obas) lost their sovereignty to the British monarch. Their authorities ceased to impact the lives of their people, and their power of life and death over their subjects ended.

The first attempt to subject any part of Nigeria to British rule took place in 1851, when ships of the West African squadron bombarded Lagos and eventually annexed it in 1861. Lagos therefore became the first part of Nigeria to be formally integrated into the British colonial empire. The British presented themselves to the Nigerian rulers in a manner that weakened their resentment and suspicion about enslavement. They appeared as explorers and partners in trade as a result of the Yoruba inter-state war that was going on. The British colonists took the opportunity to supply ammunition, sophisticated war equipment and intoxicants to the rulers. In return, the traditional rulers gave the British lands and youths marking the beginning of slave trade in Nigeria.

However, at the beginning, it was very difficult for the British to penetrate the traditional rulers' territories because the nature of the existing political system in Yoruba land at the time did not favour the British. Whereas the British found the nature of the political system in the North, at the time favourable thus making it easy for Lord Lugard to penetrate the caliphate. Indirect rule was successful in the caliphate owing to the centralized nature of the government and partly due to the fact that Lugard had intimate knowledge of the emirate society. The

same system of indirect rule was also introduced and practiced in Yoruba land, by Mr Edwin when he resorted to using traditional rulers in his government thereby extended the Alaafin's power in South-west Nigeria. As a result, all the Yoruba rulers came under him making indirect rule in Yoruba land successful.

Some measure of responsibility was therefore conferred on recognized traditional rulers, and under the new arrangement of the British, the native authorities established the native councils. The introduction of the native authorities with legislative power to run the activities of government such as collection of taxes, budgeting of expenditure, enforcement of laws and culture was designed to actualize the desires of Britain. In 1901, governor Macgregor took over the position from McCollum and also resorted to using traditional rulers in his government. He gave the rulers power to run the activities of his government. Traditional rulers hence exercised the right to impose taxes on people. Anyone who refused to pay was punished. Some traditional rulers like Oba Alaafin of Oyo were reported to have misused the power given to them. The attitude of such traditional rulers during the colonial era turned them into messengers of the British, and consequently lost their respect before the people. Also, those who were educated among the youths were seen as the opposition to the imposition of indirect rule. What is important is that the British did value the existence and roles of the traditional rulers in their government. They believed that without the traditional rulers, they might not succeed. In order to ensure smooth administration, the British resorted to using traditional rulers in their government. Without their support, it would be very difficult for the British colonist to implement policies, especially in areas that touch upon the traditional customs of a community. They recognized traditional rulers as the Centre of economic resources as a result they decided that it would be cheap and pragmatic to rule the natives through their own leaders. Therefore, it is worth mentioning that traditional rulers were key political instruments of the local British authority during the colonial era.

Military Regime and Position of Traditional rulers after the Independence

Nigeria emerged out of the web of colonial rule and gained

independence on October 1, 1960. Nigeria inherited the parliamentary system of government from Britain in which the head of government is the prime minister who holds the real power. The head of state may be an elected president. The Littleton constitution which was reviewed in 1957 and 1958, provided for a parliamentary system of government a bicameral legislative framework at the Federal level which were: House of Senate and House of Representatives. As for the regional levels, it provided for House of Assembly and House of chiefs. The parliamentary system designed under 1960 constitution recognized the British monarch as the head of state with the power to appoint a resident agent, the governor general to exercise executive powers on her behalf while a prime minister elected by the Federal parliament acted as the head of the federal executive council. This constitution took ground until 1963, when Nigeria became a republic under a parliamentary government. Despite the fact that the 1963 constitution was reviewed, a bicameral legislative framework was provided. What this implies is that the traditional rulers had significant roles in the Nigerian first republic. This constitution was strictly followed until January 8, 1966 when the military took over power. The military supplanted the first republic with military dictatorship, which was to last for about 13 years, from January 1966 to October first, 1979. This was the period when the military leadership of Obasanjo handed over power to an elected president, Alhaji Usman Shehu Shagari. The 1979 constitution was followed during this regime until when the life span of the constitution was abruptly terminated on 31st December, 1983 when the civilian administration of President Shehu Shagari and vice president Alex Ekwunme was toppled and replaced by the military dictatorship of General Muhammed Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon. This had made them not to recognize the traditional rulers in their administration because they are military dictatorship and also they didn't see the traditional rulers as an agent of development. This regime seeded three other extra-constitutional regimes- the General Ibrahim Babangida military dictatorship (1985-1993), Mr. Ernest Shonekan interim civilian-led regime, General Sanni Abacha military dictatorship (1993-1998) and General Abdulsalami Abubakar military administration which successfully ushered in the 3rd republic on the 27th of May, 1999 with the introduction of the 1999 constitution. Yet, traditional rulers were not given any role in the revised 1999

constitution as a result, the current Nigerian system of government does not recognize traditional rulers nor integrate them into the political system.

Nigerian Democratic governance and Sustainable Development

The word government means a group of people who are given power to rule, while the process of controlling a country is known as system of government. The current system of government practiced in Nigeria is democracy. This is the platform through which the citizens elect those who will represent them. Rosen (1985) says that national development is a kind of gradual and advanced improvement or growth through progressive changes in the socio-political life of the nation in terms of political system, internal cohesion, economic, well-being and also it is the responsibilities of the government to promote democracy and social justice as it is through these that individual rights will be enjoyed fully and everyone will be able to realize his potentials. When we are talking of development, provision of social welfare services, social amenities, peace and protection of lives and properties are necessary. Rosen maintain that a developed country is the one which ensures peace, protects lives and properties and provides basic necessities of life for the individual citizens living within the society.

However, when development is mentioned in Nigeria, it can be argued that Nigerian citizens are yet to experience the much desired dividends of democracy from the Nigerian government. In order to deepen Nigerian democracy, Nigeria must be a nation where sustainable development, provision of social amenities or good standard of living is of topmost concern to the government. It is the government's responsibility to provide basic necessities of life, protect the fundamental human right and any other services that improve the standard of living of the citizens. Thus, it is arguable that the Nigerian government has failed in almost all the responsibilities aforementioned. This means that the present Nigerian system of government needs serious attention. This paper therefore seeks to proffer solutions to challenges of sustainable development of Nigerian democracy. That is, the eroded roles of traditional rulers in Nigeria constitution is one aspect of the problems facing democratic governance in Nigeria

The Plot construction of *Ko Soro*

Central to this novel "*Ko Soro*" is the theme of fighting against the exploitation of workers by employers called modern slavery. The government, which represents the employer, is the oppressor/exploiter while labour congress/workers' congress serves as the oppressed or suffered the exploitation of the government. Despite that workers were not organized/unite, they enjoyed the support of the people in the society and police. Yet, the government refused to listen to them. They stood their ground that they did not owe their workers any arrears. The workers did not waver in their resolve to fight for their right. They took government to court, negotiated to settle amicably, staged protests and even embarked on strike to no avail. Workers appealed for the intervention of traditional rulers in the dispute. The traditional rulers obliged and summon a meeting between representative of workers and government. Four representatives each were sent to the senate house for the meeting with hope that the senate house would respect the crown.

Unfortunately, the traditional rulers were disgraced. The senate's response was unusually hash, and from that time on, the traditional rulers kept silent over the issue. Later, the workers convened a rally at the house of senate to create awareness amongst the populace about their plight. They took four senators hostage, forcing the government to seek the intervention of the traditional rulers for the release of the senators held hostage. The traditional rulers agreed to intervene in the matter and invited the three groups: the workers, the senate and the government representatives to a meeting where all the issues were finally resolved amicably. The government granted all the workers' demands, while the workers vowed to release the four senators held hostage. Finally, it was shown that the abused, disgraced and rejected counsel of the traditional rulers eventually served as the key instrument in the resolution of the problem.

The novel consists of fifteen chapters. The intense commotion between the workers' congress and the government began from chapter three and continued until the problem was finally resolved through the intervention of the traditional rulers in chapters 14-15. What is paramount to the writer is to draw attention to some of the important roles traditional rulers could play, which could bring about good

governance in Nigeria. The writer depicts traditional rulers as leaders that are very close to the people, and as a result could serve as intermediaries between government and the masses.

Nativism theory and “*Ko Soro*”

As discussed earlier, traditional theory of modern-day slavery shows that the colonized countries had inherited much from the British colonial government. Democracy as a political system of government is one thing that Nigeria inherited from the British colonists. If the setting of the novel: *Ko Soro* is critically examined, it would be seen that the novel reflects Nigerian society where the system of government is based on the platform through which the citizens elect those who will represent them. This system of government is the type of government practiced in Ayedogbon’s country. In the same vein, the society of Ayedogbon like Nigerian society is full of deceitfulness, cheating, self-centredness, slavery or exploitation, disrespectfulness and inhumanity to fellow human being

Just like the Nigerian society, there is no particular role assigned to the traditional rulers in the political system of government practiced in Ayedogbon. They are remembered only during the time of conflict or when politicians need their assistance during elections. Sometimes ago, the senate president David Mark sought the help of traditional rulers to find solution to the problem of insecurity that was caused or masterminded by the Boko Haram sect in the Northern part of Nigeria (The Punch, Monday, 25 August, 2014). Likewise, President Goodluck Jonathan also invited the traditional rulers in the Northern part of Nigeria to a meeting where he solicited for their help towards finding solution to the Boko Haram insurgency (Premium Times Online September 19, 2014). Hence, many incidents have happened in Nigeria that took the intervention of traditional rulers to be resolved. It is therefore suggested that traditional rulers should be given constitutional role in Nigerian democratic governance.

The colonialists perfected their exploitation through the use of traditional rulers. The British treated them with caution and respect. Similarly, when Nigeria gained independence, traditional rulers during the period were co-opted to perform roles where there were traditional

rulers' houses of council distinct from regional legislative council. It is a fact that today's democratic governance does not integrate traditional rulers into the constitution of Nigeria. And this is one of the important challenges of sustainable development in this country. If we look at the roles of traditional rulers the novel: *Ko Soro*, and Nigerian society as it was mentioned above, it could be seen that it is very important for the Nigerian constitution to assign roles to the traditional rulers. This is due to the fact that their roles cannot be underestimated in the society.

Even, the military in particular recognized their roles and made use of them for their own gain. For example, during former president, General Sanni Abacha's regime, he called the traditional rulers to bear witness in court for the failed planned coup in which his government claimed to be existed through the recorded video that he allowed them to watch. In the same vein, General Sanni Abacha also called for their help when he aimed at transforming his government into a civilian president via a self-succession bid. Apart from these, despite the fact that the traditional rulers are free of any role now, their monthly salary and other allowances are not affected. This shows that they do not work for the money they earn. It is observed that failure to assign them particular role has made them to be inferior and atrocious. If this is true, it would be better to integrate them into democratic governance. According to the aim of this theory adopted in this study, which says that all what is poorly inherited from the British colonists can be corrected. It is therefore suggested that the traditional rulers should be a legislative body and advisers to the state governor. Similarly, the system should adopt the use of traditional rulers and local chiefs merely supervising the administration instead of being chairman of their locality. The first class traditional rulers should stand as chairman. The second class traditional rulers should stand as supervising councillor while third class should stand as city councilor. Some people from the citizen or masses in the state or locality should be selected as their representatives.

Also, the state representatives would be of help to the traditional rulers who are the law makers and advisers to the governor, while local representatives would be of help to local chiefs under the rulers who are the law makers and advisers to the traditional rulers. If all these are done, their salary would not be wasted and government workers would

also be reduced. The government would not spend much on its workers while traditional rulers would have their roles to play in democratic governance. There is no harm in the inheritance of democracy that is based on the platform of British, the amendment is necessary in order to be in conformity to the Nigerian society. Then, it can be said that Nigeria is no more under the British colonists. There is no doubt that traditional rulers are the closest to their people. They know the problems of their people and how to solve them. If the traditional rulers are co-opted to perform roles mentioned above, criminalization, embezzlement, political tugs and kidnapping would be reduced. Even, aspiring for political post would be reduced. This would make Nigerian citizen especially the youths to be hardworking instead of desperately aspiring to hold an important position in the politics. If the traditional rulers are incorporated at the state and local level in this modern day government and administration, they would not want to tarnish the image of their family. They would try and protect their names and good reputation, try to be dynamic and open to change. This will facilitate good governance in as much as the title is for life and the fear of poverty which is the agent of embezzlement would be reduced. Also, abandoned projects would be minimized if not eradicated. There will be no traditional rulers or local chief that would not want his community which he is governed to be developed. They would be desperately ready to fill the vacuum left by politicians. This means that the development of their communities would be of paramount to them and would not be taken with levity hands unlike that of the Nigerian politicians.

However, it is possible for traditional political system and their cultural imperative to entrench unwarranted party squabbles, political distractions, corruption, nepotism, and authoritarianism etc., all these could only be practiced by few people in the society if compared to this present day government. Thus, the antidote against these atrocities is the amendment of Nigerian constitution.

Conclusion

One continuous thread that has run through this study is the issue of inability of the present day democratic governance to integrate the role(s) of traditional rulers in Nigerian democratic governance.

Ogunsola observed this in his book titled *Ko Soro* when he called for the allotment of roles to the traditional rulers in the political system of Nigeria. Apart from this, this paper points out that one of the disadvantages or demerit or bad effect of the British conquest in the democratic governance in Nigeria is that it did not integrate the roles of traditional rulers thereby calls for their integration. Similarly, it suggests the types of roles to be assigned and their advantages or importance in democratic governance. It also suggests likely problems to encounter and the solutions if the traditional rulers are assigned roles. It is very sure that if the government and important personalities look deeply into all these suggestions and are integrated in the Nigerian constitution, the political system of democratic governance in Nigeria would be developed and sustained.

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