

Nigeria's Image Crisis and Lessons from Obafemi Awolowo's Leadership and Education Ideologies

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Abstract

Nigeria's image crisis arose primarily from the rejection of those values that defined the communal identity in pre-colonial Nigeria. Such values as contentment, respect for constituted authority, humility, hard work, and selflessness which explained the ethics of social relations in pre-colonial society lost their relevance. By their actions, individuals began to question the sanctity of these values leading to the reconstruction of social practices which served as the basis for social relations in the pre-colonial societies. Individuals' craving for material possession soon replaced selfless service, and the effects inevitably are corrupt and fraudulent practices, an act that produced negative perception for the state. It was this negative perception that the state had been trying to change through the rebranding project. This project involved the use of jingles and rallies, mobilisations, articles in national and internal journals and other means of communication. There may be need to explore Awolowo's leadership ideologies on governance, for effective prosecution. These leadership ideologies rest on the theory of mental magnitude that espouses the principles of selfless service, accountability, transparency and humility in governance. When such ideologies are combined with relevant educational practice we can be sure of an improved image for the country.

Keywords: image crisis, image transformation, communal identity, theory of mental magnitude, corruption

1. Introduction

The various drives for *image transformation* or *re-branding* project in Nigeria, in recent time, spring from the different efforts by Nigerians to address the image crisis in the Nigerian state. The re-branding project involves the use of jingles, rallies, mobilisations and articles in national and international media.

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In spite of the efforts to transform the image of Nigeria for the international community, reports in Nigerian dailies indicate a rise in the rates of criminal activities. Incidents of criminality include the kidnapping of local and foreign nationals, assassination of journalists, local terrorism in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria, internet fraudsters, corruption, Boko Haram terrorist activities in Northern Nigeria among others. The effects of these criminal activities on Nigerian image necessitate the call for a change of attitudes among Nigerians, namely, *the re-branding project*. The paper defends the thesis that the success of the present drive for an image transformation project in Nigeria rests on the leaders' willingness to cultivate what Awolowo regarded as the regime of mental magnitude (taming the instinctual urges which encourage selfishness, corrupt and fraudulent practices, indiscipline, dishonesty and so on), and the citizens' readiness to be modest in their approach to life. In this regard, we intend to explore Obafemi Awolowo's theory of mental magnitude to push attitudinal change among Nigerians and see while Awolowo gives a tacit support for educated, disciplined leadership and enlightened citizenry as means to achieving social transformation in Nigeria.

2. Pre-Colonial Cultural Values in Nigeria

There are three fundamental issues at stake while dealing with the question of national identity crisis in Nigeria. First is the role of traditional values in the pre-colonial societies, second, the impact of foreign culture in the contemporary society, and third, the roles of individuals, leaders and the citizens alike, in the current national identity crisis in Nigeria. Indeed, these issues coalesce to provide the explanation that is needed for the current debate on national crisis. It is imperative to examine those traditional values that make the pre-colonial societies cohesive and dynamic. In the pre-colonial societies, different communities identify themselves with such values as contentment, respect for constituted authorities, humility, hard work, honesty and others. These different communities thrive economically, socially and politically because these values provided them with a desirable cohesive force. As Okoduwa (2008:17) has explicated, "in pre-colonial time, communities in Nigeria had methods of inculcating habits, norms and values into its members to reduce or eliminate vices."

It is the inculcation of these habits, norms and values by the elders that defined the ethos of the communities.

During this period, communities lay claim to their cultural identity, which include sharing the same language (though with varieties of dialects), dressing pattern, custom and gradually developing their norms. Indeed, there is the communal consciousness which permeates the entire community. There is what Midgley (1991: 68) calls 'a vision of a whole communal way of life' in which everybody could enjoy the common stocks of the community. There is no room for individualism, as personal interest outside the communal interest is considered alien. There is an identifiable cultural identity, *communal spirit*, shared by members of the different communities. Segers (1994:15) identifies three parameters for measuring this identifiable cultural identity. These are;

first, the formal cultural characteristics (traits) of a nation at a certain time in history; second, the way the people (or more accurately, the opinion leaders) of the nation select, interpret, and evaluate these characteristics (i.e., construct the cultural identity) of their country; and third, the way in which people (again, opinion leaders) from abroad conduct this same process of interpretation and evaluation (i.e., construct the cultural identity of a foreign nation).

By these parameters, members of the different communities in Nigeria at a time, in their history, defines their world view in relation to morality, religious life, economic system, and political institutions. Children, youth and elders alike abide by the dictates of the communal life.

Individuals begin to seize the opportunity provided by modernity and social change to reconstruct the values the societies nurse for years, an exercise that includes the young people, whose motive is to align with the changing mood of the time. In times of this rapid change, propensity for material life begins to manifest leading to corrupt tendencies. In Okoduwa's (2008) view, corruption comes to be regarded as a way of life; though for him this is inherited as part of colonial rule. This new way of life ushers in myriad problems; notable among them were poverty, political instability, hunger, illiteracy and so forth. Soon, wealth becomes a measure of relevance in the society and individuals' low moral precepts begin to manifest.

The birth and rise of foreign culture in Nigeria begin with the attempts to undermine the communal cultural values. It starts with a conscious change in the value system.

This change begins to reflect in the individuals' attempts to undermine the relevance of their languages, their dispositions to religious practices, and orientations towards traditional medicine and dressing habits. Makinde (2007: 19) contends that the change in value orientation is not peculiar to Nigeria. To him, it gets to a point that "any field of human knowledge described as 'African' is not seen as acceptable to Africans themselves unless it has official stamp of a recognised foreign language, thought, culture and value" (Makinde, 2007: 19). He thinks "it explains the essential difference between an African mind and Japanese, Chinese, or Indian mind, and the reason why, in spite of its well-known intellectuals, Africa as a whole has not developed like these three nations." We now have a situation where the African mind is glued to foreign values, and his thought is either American or European. Incidentally, this is accepted as a mark of civilisation, even when Americans and Europeans look down on him with scorn.

3. Nigeria's Image Crisis and the Transformation Project

The transformation or rebranding project is initiated by the country's former Minister of Information, Prof. Dora Akunyili, as an intervention to Nigeria's souring image. Akunyili contends that the re-branding project is motivated by the need to find out why some earlier intervention measures to transform Nigeria's image fail and some succeeded but are not sustained. Some of the past interventions include Ethical Revolution, Mass Mobilisation for Self-Reliance, Social Justice, and Economic Recovery (MAMSER), War Against Indiscipline (WAI), and most recently Heart of Africa. These different measures are meant to attack corrupt tendencies in Nigerians, to appeal to their conscience and to correct the negative perception of Nigeria as a corrupt and unreliable nation by the global community, a stigma that has led to a sceptic disposition by the international business community to Nigeria's suitability for business. Media outfit and intellectuals take steps to remove the stigma associated with this image crisis, and to present the positive outlook of Nigeria and Nigerians to the global community via articles, mobilisations, jingle and rally. The messages hinge on religious, social and cultural values, with some trying to extol the achievements of some intellectuals in Nigeria, a variant of transformation project. Reports in Nigerian media indicate that the rebranding project has not in any way stemmed the tide of corrupt and fraudulent practices.

In a letter written by Olusegun Obasanjo, former President of Nigeria to Jonathan, the current President, Obasanjo (2013) avers that;

[t]he serious and strong allegation of non-remitting of about \$7 billion from NNPC to Central Bank occurring from export of some 300,000 barrels per day, amounting to \$900 million a month, to be refined and with refined products of only \$400 million returned and Atlantic Oil loading about 130,000 barrels sold by Shell and managed on behalf of NPDC with no sales proceeds paid into NPDC account is incredible....This allegation will not fly away by non-action, cover-up, denial or bribing possible investigators.

Obasanjo goes further to argue that "as far as the issue of corruption, security and oil stealing is concerned, it is only apt to say that when the guard becomes the thief, nothing is safe." At a time, Olukiran (Nigerian Compass, November 28, 2009: 34) reports that "some Nigerian teenagers (about seven of them including girls) in London, strolled in and held everybody hostage (a la Niger Delta) demanded a \$3000.00 ransom before anyone could leave." These are Nigerians who leave their country to terrorise other nationals in a foreign land. Some of these reports are criminal in nature, no doubt, they provide the Transparency International the data to rate Nigeria in the corruption index. Thus, from its Corruption Index (2009) Transparency International rated Nigeria 130 out of 180 corrupt nations in the world. Thus, between 2004 and 2007, records show the two major anti-corruption agencies in Nigeria, Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and Independence Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) have prosecuted a number of cases. For instance, between 2004 and 2006 EFCC "recovered over \$5 billion (or N725billion) from financial criminals" (Enweremadu, 2010: 9), while ICPC recovered N212 billion in 2005 and N3.9 billion in 2006 (information from ICPC annual report, but cited in Enweremadu, 2010: 9). During the period, more than 350 people are convicted including the former Inspector General of Police, Tafa Balogun and ex-governor DSP Alamiyeseigha. A former governor and a top member of the ruling party in Nigeria, Bode George, is convicted of corrupt practice and sent to prison and later released for want of evidence. Many convictions have been made in the past and are still being made in the recent time, a fact that tends to strengthen the allegation made by Obasanjo and to show that the spate of corruption in Nigeria is still high.

One of the official moves by Nigerian government to transform its image or re-brand Nigeria is 23rd March, 2009 when it launches, in Abuja, the *Nigerian Project* with a slogan, Nigeria: *Good People, Great Nation*. According to Akunyili (2009), Nigeria's former Information Minister:

Nigeria cannot wait until it solves all her problems before it can stand to give serious thought to re-branding its battered image. This negative perception has had destructive effects on our people and stymied our growth and national progress.

Inherent in the speech, is an indication that Nigeria is suffering from (1) battered image (2) negative perception, and (3) stunted growth. The image crisis not only affects Nigeria's growth but also her progress. President Yar'Adua's (a former Nigerian President) wants Nigerians to 'resolve that we would no longer be held ransom by fraudsters that give Nigeria and all of us a bad name and image.' His remark on the image crisis is that, 'in most International Airport, special checkpoints are created where Nigerian travellers are subjected to rigorous and intensive security.' This negative perception clearly depicts the intensity of the international dimension of the crisis. The transformation or re-branding project is an attempt by the Nigerian government to carve a new image for Nigeria domestically and globally.

What then is rebranding and how does it relate to image transformation in Nigeria? Nworah (2006: 3) defines branding in relation to product and services as the "continuous and strategic process involved in the creating and managing of these associated elements, values and attributes." These elements, values or attributes attracted make the difference in each of the product or service. On the other hand, Nworah (2006:3) defines place (country) branding as a "process whereby a town, region, country (place) actively seeks to create a unique and competitive identity for itself, with the aim of positioning it internally and externally as a good destination for trade, tourism and investment." Nigeria's branding efforts seek to position the country internally and externally as a good destination for trade, tourism and so on. These efforts have failed to address the substance of the matter, namely, the involvement of discipline leadership in governance.

Nigeria is a spiral country looking for a new image; hence its branding is that of solving its battered image or identity. For now Nigeria has nothing to position to attract the business or international community and make it a destination for trade, tourism and investment.

While the Niger Delta crisis has subsided because of the success of the nation's amnesty programme, the Boko Haram crisis in the North has created a security challenge which is presently making it unsafe for investment and tourism. By re-branding, therefore, Nigerian government seeks to remove the blemish cast on Nigeria and Nigerians by the actions of her leaders and the citizens.

The fallacy of appealing to the emotion of the people becomes apparent in the attempt to locate the cause of image crises in Nigeria. This fallacy is committed when we appeal to the sentiments of the masses rather than to reason. Instead of presenting facts and figures to support our claim we try to arouse the emotion of the people, in this case the people's attitudes are held for trial. In the Nigerian case, the peoples' attitudes are held as culprit in cases of fraudulent practices in Nigeria. Nevertheless, the issue at stake revolves around corrupt and fraudulent leaders who lack the political lustre to administer the state. Explanation to this issue is provided by Simpson (2006: 49) who holds that Nigeria is "faced with those who are not concerned with short-term capital value of the nation, but with how much wealth they can amass before they leave office." Perhaps, that is why as reported by the *Awake Correspondent* (2003: 9) "there is widespread lack of trust in the integrity of those to whom people look for leadership." Aside the political elites, there is also the notion that "business and religious leaders have likewise proved to be a shocking disappointment because of their corrupt and immoral actions" *Awake Correspondent* (2003: 9). So, if political elites, business and religious leaders are corrupt and unreliable who else can be trusted? The Nigerian socio-political climate remains so cloudy to the extent that the Nigerian democracy looks more of a class (elitist) government than government of the people.

According to Sumner, quoted in Trask (2004) "the test of 'good government' is whether it preserves a peaceful; and just social order, with a wide scope for liberty, security for property, and legal equality among the citizens." The different security challenges in Nigeria today attest to the state of Nigerian political and economic atmosphere. The test of good government in Nigeria, therefore, is best illustrated with the state of insecurity, human trafficking, kidnapping, drug peddling, local terrorism and others. It is no longer news that Nigerians engage in various social problems, but news that this practice has created an image crisis for the country. As a matter of fact, the Nigerian political elite exist in contradictory relations, in their attitudes to governance, to their people.

While the masses struggle to make ends meet, their political elite live in affluence with exotic cars, flamboyant houses, and titles from their traditional rulers. The result is a conflict of interests: while the affluent want to maintain their status, the poor masses want the economic resources to be distributed equitably.

4. Obafemi Awolowo's Theory of Mental Magnitude

In his remark about African development, Fafunwa (1967) identifies a symmetrical relationship between development and education. For him, the development of any nation rests on the number of her citizens who are educated. Today, in Africa, the level of poverty, hunger, disease, infant and maternal mortality and others is extremely high. In Nigeria, these problems have now become commonplace. The question we may ask ourselves is: What are the causes of these problems? Are they products of inadequate education or ineffective leadership or the two together? In the Nigerian case, how are they related to the Nigerian image crisis? We intend to answer these questions in order to locate the causes of the image crisis in Nigeria.

One individual who is concerned about the problem of leadership and good governance in Nigeria is Obafemi Awolowo. Indeed, one thing he has preached for years is re-enacted in a report by Awake Correspondent (1999) on the eroding values in our society. As a statesman, he has made it clear that every citizen in a state deserves a good quality of life; and this is achievable through education and effective leadership.

Awolowo equally shares the belief that for the human society to function properly it must have stable families, healthy workers, trustworthy government, honest police and law-abiding citizens. However, trustworthy government can only be instituted by leaders who can cultivate mental magnitude and spiritual depth. These are leaders who have risen above corruption and selfishness, and have gone beyond instinctive urges to defeat what Awolowo (1968) called the 'tyranny of the flesh'. So, Awolowo believes that government has the obligation to provide the conditions that will enable the individuals in the state to receive education, enjoy good health and be given employment. In other words, the argument is that government is under the obligation to provide social security for her citizens. Individuals resort to criminal activities when government slacks in her responsibilities to the citizens.

The theory of mental magnitude emphasises the primacy of *reason* in human affairs. It is a theory, which says that reason should exert control over the subconscious mind which in turn controls human instincts and emotions. The theory arises from the belief that man is made up of both mind and body, a physical being that possesses a body with organs, nerves, tissues and innumerable cells (Awolowo, 1968:212). The theory is all about individuals' ability to subvert human desires that crave selfish interest and crash materialism. Awolowo (1981: 18) defines the subconscious mind as "the projection of the GOD ESSENCE into man, and therefore, the same as that ESSENCE in kind and quality, only differs from it in degree." Only individuals with rational disposition to life can rise above this subconscious mind, since it requires a rational control of instincts and emotions in man.

The theory is borne out of Awolowo's observation that most leaders lack the basic ingredient of leadership, namely, *self-discipline* and *rationality*. Indeed, Awolowo shares this notion with Plato who has earlier observed that the interests and desires of the politicians are sometimes in conflict with the interests of the people. Plato sees the link between the politicians' selfish desires and their instincts, hence his call for reason to control those instincts and emotions that bring about corrupt and selfish tendencies. Awolowo's regime of mental magnitude represents this notion. This regime is attained through special education which the state provides for the leaders.

Awolowo demonstrates the relative significance of leadership in governance when he serves as the Premier of Western region in Nigeria. His leadership ideology is derived from the belief that leaders who are "placed in a position of leadership must be prepared to grasp the nettle...set a worthy example and a marat on pace in probity, unselfishness, and self-sacrifice..." For him, "Africa has produced more self-seeking leaders than public spirited ones." In this regard, "only men who are masters of themselves become easily masters of others." Awolowo sets an example of good leadership while serving as the Premier of Western Nigeria. The following go to his credit;

- a. provision of free and mandatory primary education for all in Western Region
- b. established the WNTV, the first television station in Africa in 1959
- c. provision of free health services till the age of 18

- d. integrated rural development
- e. full employment
- f. built the liberty stadium in Ibadan. (Oduşote, 2013).

Awolowo, like Platos emphasises education and effective leadership as factors for human and national development. He advocates free and compulsory education, perhaps in response to the problem of illiteracy and ignorance which characterise the Nigerian society, hence constituted an impediment to sustainable democratic culture in the country. This problem often manifests in two basic areas. These are in the areas of illiterate electorate who aid rigging and incompetent leaders who aid corruption in the state. Awolowo (1981) believes that education is required to create educated electorate within the state. Awolowo follows Plato as he has earlier argued that a leader that engages in corrupt and fraudulent practices do so because he lacks true education. For Awolowo, he is like a person who gets stuck in the cave. Once he is educated, that is, his mind, brain and body are developed; he breaks the bonds of ignorance.

Awolowo's temperament is shared by Nyerere (2006) on the purpose of education, hence his belief that education should focus on the liberation of man from the restraint and limitations of ignorance and dependency. Such education, as Nyerere (2006) wants it to be done, should also enable individuals to think for themselves because, for him, man's consciousness is developed in the process of thinking. In a related argument, Fisher (2005: 7-8) wants us to see that "the quality of life depends on the quality of our thinking." This time, Fisher (2005: 7-8) believes that "a successful society will be a thinking society in which the capacities of lifelong learning of its citizens are most fully realized." In this regard, critical thinking becomes a quality in education which individuals need to cultivate.

Actually, leadership is about service supported by a vision. According to Robbins and Judge, (2007: 402) leadership is the "ability to influence a group toward the achievement of a vision or a set of goals." In its political application, leadership suggests the ability to influence a people towards the achievement of their desired goals. It seems to illustrate a leader's ability to match his objectives with the situation in his environment. This is best illustrated by Fielder's contingency theory which says that leader's effectiveness comes from a good match between the leader's objectives and the degree to which the situation is favourable for the leader to perform his functions.

It appears Awolowo's notion of good governance is clearly supported by the reductionism theory which reduces governance to "efficiency and rationality in allocating resources, curbing corruption which inhibits development and investment, guarantee of civil and human rights and accountability of the people" (Ologbenla: 2007:99). The greatest asset in Awolowo's leadership model is the consideration he gives to the being of the leader, a situation which sees leadership from the standpoint of the person who holds office as opposed to what he does. For Awolowo, "leadership springs from within; it's about who I am as much as what I do." (Stiglitz, 2008:6). The leadership conception is about the belief that a leader's values and principles, as well as his/her thoughts inform, influence, and guide his/her actions, attitudes, behaviours, and decisions (Stiglitz, 2008). Thus Awolowo's leadership model like Stiglitz is holistic; it is a model which aims at the development of the whole person- the being. The notion of ethical leadership is adequately captured in Awolowo's theory of mental magnitude where he draws a line between leaders who crave wealth and materialism, and those who choose to serve their people. The former are ruled by instincts and emotions while the latter are controlled by reason. For Awolowo leaders who choose to serve are those ruled by reason and not emotions, and by emotions Awolowo means negative emotions such as fear, anger, anxiety, envy, selfishness and the like. It is difficult to preach accountability and transparency when the leaders refuse to live by these values, and that is the case with Nigerian leaders.

The solution to the current image crisis in Nigeria lies with the acceptance of Awolowo ideologies on leadership and governance, and a change in school curriculum to reflect critical thinking education. Awolowo believes that good leadership is a necessary condition for administrative competence. It is his belief that those who aspire to lead must be properly educated to be able to understand the value of governance. To him, true education involves the development of the mind, body and brain. The individuals whose mind, brain and body are developed are those who have cultivated the regime of mental magnitude. Individuals with this mind-set can control their appetite, emotion and desire, because their thought and actions are now being guided by *reason*. In the Nigerian case, the political elites are only interested in crass materialism and splendour of offices, while the officials revel in rhetoric. Yet, the Nigerian Federal government whose officials move about with great splendour want the masses to re-new the country's battered image.

Nevertheless, the citizens, too, need to be enlightened enough to know that engaging in criminal activities such as human trafficking, drug peddling, hooliganism, prostitution, kidnapping and others can harm the image of their country. This is where the role of education becomes imperative. This type of education, again, must involve the training of the mind, body and brain (critical thinking education). The leaders as well as the citizens need this type of education to be able to evolve a culture of honesty and transparency.

5. Nigeria's Image Transformation and Critical Thinking Education

The introduction of critical thinking into the curricula of primary and secondary schools is fundamental to thinking capability of Nigerian children. The Nigeria education system as currently constituted does not make provision for creative and critical thinking education in the primary and secondary education levels. The only methods of assessments of these children which eventually lead to certification are continuous assessments and one-short examination at the end of their programmes. Sometimes students are held responsible through failure for not mirroring the mind of their teachers. Thus, students who reproduce what their teachers teach them in class will be rewarded with higher scores. Nigerian education system is therefore shallow and devoid of rigour that could make children reflect on their actions. Children exposed to critical thinking would reflect critically on woolly ideas and think straight. In this paper the argument is that the type of education that is required to meet these challenges should be able to incorporate in its content critical thinking education. By critical thinking, we mean ability to evaluate ideas. A critical thinking education is that which develops learners, children and adult alike, to be able to apply their reasoning to life situation. Understanding such global challenges as terrorism, religious crises, corruption, moral decadence and several others need to be approached through education that places emphasis on critical thinking. It may not be true to argue that only the illiterate people engage in destructive activities. There are indications that, in Nigeria, individuals who engage in vandalism, hooliganism and other forms of anti-social behaviour are 'educated'. Perhaps there is need to suggest that this is the right time to start teaching critical thinking in our various schools especially in the primary and secondary schools.

There should be a shift in learning paradigm from the traditional system of teaching that encourages mere consumption of information to creation and use of ideas.

Invariably, this requires that teachers should encourage learners' active participation in the class rather than the present passive culture encouraged by the teacher's teaching method. It must be made clear that Awolowo is an advocate of critical thinking education, since for him only those who imbibe the critical thinking culture can raise questions concerning government policies.

6. Conclusion

The effectiveness of the re-branding project in Nigeria rests on leadership rather than rhetoric. Nigerian leaders need to change their value orientation, and understand the essence of governance. They must be able to understand that the central concern of government is how to meet the needs of the people. For the masses, re-branding project begins with the provision of social amenities such as electricity, good schools, drinkable water, good roads, health facilities, and employment opportunities, a sign of what Awolowo would regard as good governance. Though there are quite a number of challenges which may hinder the application of Awolowo's theory of mental magnitude to governance, it is clear that Nigerians need attitudinal change if the nation intends to develop. It is the belief that Awolowo's ideals of politics and education should serve as a model for Nigeria's re-branding project. It must start with leaders who have overcome instinctual urges and are controlled by *reason*.

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