

THE MACHIAVELLI TRAITS IN NIGERIA POLITY: A REALITY OR MYTH

1.0

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

The Nigerian society is noted to have been characterized by poor level of national development which is as a result of high level political corruption practiced by political leaders and other public officials who have run the affairs of Nigeria. Political corruption is seen as a phenomenon that has negatively affected the body politic of the Nigerian society. The hope of realizing the promises of peace, unity, order, justice and development remain uncertain as the elation of the Nigerian Independence had been buried. In fact the military eras of Gen. Ibrahim Babangida and Gen. Sanni Abacha were pointers to virus of political corruption which seems to be like destroying the future of Nigerians.

In Nigerian politics, these two set of leaders seems to have demonstrated the dynamics or principle of Machiavellianism in securing power. Machiavellianism is the practice of Niccolo Machiavelli's socio-political philosophy. According to Adegboyega (2015, p.2), the Machiavelli's (1999) book titled *The Prince* is the presentation of politics in an amoral sense. Machiavelli's opinion is that, in politics, any means employed can only be justified by the realization of the desired goal. His view implies that the essential thing in politics is to try to grab power by all means: fair or foul. Having grabbed power, it must be retained at all cost. Thus, to Machiavelli, and some other political philosophers, what is central to the idea of politics is the acquisition of power.

However, there is a difference between him and others in the mode by which the political power can be acquired. To most political philosophers, power must be acquired through the people's consent and with absolute moral consideration (Ogunmodede, 1986, p. 40 and Raphael, 1982, p. 55). To Machiavelli, political power can be acquired through any of the following; through war, through one's arms and skill, through the arms of others and fortune, through wickedness and nefarious means and through the favour of one's fellow citizens. In all of these means, Machiavelli does not give any consideration for morality. His view shows that, to be successful in politics, one should simply ignore morality and use amoral means. What is important is that one succeeds in the end. The success of the acquisition, retention and expansion of power to Machiavelli, is pertinent as it is the standard by which political struggles are judged.

It is interesting to note that before Machiavelli rulers and princes had always found the need to use immoral means like the art of cruelty, false hood, and killings to gain and retain political power and in so doing they had to suffer the problem of guilt and moral qualms. But with the introduction of the concept of Machiavellianism which emphasizes the relegation of ethics in politics, leaders and rulers now saw the adoption of immoral tactics as not only a rule but also a necessary tool in political mechanization. What was a simple matter of fact, with all weaknesses and inconsistencies pertaining, even in the evil, to accidental and contingent things has become after Machiavelli a matter of rights, with all the firmness and steadiness proper to necessary things (Prodanov, 2004).

In other words political leaders have come to accept Machiavellian approach as a necessary rule (condition sine qua non) rather than an option for attainment and preservation of political power. The counsel by Machiavelli to intending rulers in his book has been both misconstrued and misapplied by succeeding statesmen. There is no doubt that men like Napoleon, Mussolini, Hitler, Babangida and Abacha of Nigeria, Bush and Blair of the United States of America and Britain, have come to adopt some of the recommendations of Machiavelli. For instance Adolph Hitler was said to have made the following comments concerning the idea in *The Prince*. The reading of these unequalled pages, as he said, was like a cleansing of the mind. It had disencumbered him from plenty of false ideas and prejudices. It is only after the book was read that Hitler understood what politics truly is” (Eso, 2005).

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