

THE ROLE OF INTELLECTUALS AND JUDGES IN SUSTAINING POLITICAL SLAVERY IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

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Abstract

The role of intellectuals and judges in the politics of their nations cannot be over-emphasised. This study examines the role of these professionals in sustaining political slavery in Nigeria. It leans on Robert and Peter's Existentialist Conscious Consciencism (EXIC-CONSCIENCISM) model, which explains the need to be conscientiously conscious of the role to play in our professions, society, and all we do in order to ensure that what we do is for common good. Employing qualitative, systematic review and content analysis, the study relies on observation and secondary data to make an exposition of their role in sustaining political slavery. The descriptive analysis of data shows that intellectuals and judges play negative role in Nigeria's politics, electoral processes, electioneering and elections. As a result of corruption, ethnicity and religion, most of them compromise standards and professional ethics and put in unqualified and dubious persons in elective offices. The study concludes that the implication of playing the role manifests shortly afterwards as the same politicians turn around and chastise and enslave intellectuals and judges and the masses upon assuming offices, though excluding a few intellectuals and judges, who are their makers and allies. The study recommends strict observance of professional ethics at all times and considering the well-being of all rather than that of self and a few selfish individuals alone. Only those who are competent should be given places in public offices.

Keywords: Role, Intellectuals, Judges, Sustaining, Political slavery

Introduction

Nigerian intellectuals and judges are actually those who can salvage Nigeria and free the masses from age-long political slavery. Political slavery takes the forms of denial and abuse of human rights, imposition of unqualified and questionable rulers or leaders on the masses, ethno-religious politics, institutionalised corruption, embezzlement and misappropriation, misrepresentation, bad governance, impoverishment, incapacitation, perpetual underdevelopment and negative political culture. As Lashley (2018) rightly notes, apart from slavery in forms of forced labour, forced marriage, commercial sexual exploitation, human trafficking, displacement of persons and child trafficking and abuse, and infant soldiering, alienated employees also suffer enslavement. Some employees are enslaved, including those on low pay, delayed and denied salaries. It follows that government employees in Nigeria are enslaved, because most of them are on low salary scales, while others constantly suffer non-payment or delayed payment of salary. That is a manifestation of political slavery.

The answer to the question of how intellectuals and judges are the ones to salvage Nigeria from all these ills and install a new world order in the polity of the nation (i.e. installing a rebranded government) cannot be farfetched. They are those who decide the fate of persons vying for elective positions beyond the results from the polls. Details on this point shall be given later under the sub-heading on how intellectuals and judges sustain political slavery in Nigeria. Put summarily here, as intellectuals and judges fail to do the needful to put in right and qualified persons in elective offices, but collect bribe and put in dubious and unqualified persons, they sustain political slavery. This study is a clarion call to this ugly development, towards attaining change. It seeks to examine the notion of political slavery, which differs from the commonly discussed forms of neo-slavery in studies on slavery (in Africa).

It shall show that political slavery from the indigenous politicians is the worst form of neo-slavery. It is an institutional slavery, which has the masses as the *slaves* and the political elite and their a few allied elite as the masters. The cruelty suffered by slaves is meted out on the common masses and the

average citizens by these *slave masters*. Madu (2023) confirms that neo-slavery has grave socio-political and economic implications. To that end, it is imperative to carry out this study so as to rouse the consciousness of intellectuals and judges to their ill acts that hamper the attainment of freedom from political slavery and the deserving or envisaged newness in Nigerian politics, which the masses look up to.

Conceptual Clarification

Slavery, as Ottuh (2022) defines it, is forced acts against a person or a group, which denigrate them and deny them of their liberty and rights. In Ottuh's (2022) words, slavery 'refers to the subjugation of a person or persons, a culture or a community' (p. 42). Given this meaning of slavery, this study defines political slavery as the situation in which either a sovereign nation is enslaved directly or indirectly by another, or citizens are enslaved politically such that they have no say and cannot decide the fate of their public affairs and who to rule them, as imposition of corrupt and dubious rulers takes precedence. In Nigeria, where corruption is gradually becoming a norm, intellectuals and judges, who are in the position to decide the fate of Nigeria's democracy, simply concede to bribes offered to them and put the nation with its citizenry in the hands of unqualified and dubious politicians. That situation is political slavery, because the citizens are enslaved.

Given the fact that the different definitions of neo-slavery tally, this study leaves out the definitions and goes on to state that neo-slavery refers to institutional slavery that occurs these days in the contemporary society. It is also regarded as contemporary or modern slavery. That is, the enslavement of humans and nations, as it were in those days, has taken different dimensions now. As Okoli and Okpaleke (2014) agree, its nature, motive, cruelty and menace still remain the same or have even got worsened. However, its modes of operation have changed and advanced in line with trends of the modern and contemporary eras. The changes and continuities account for the modification of the concept of slavery to neo-slavery in contemporary time. The prefix 'neo' is now added to the root 'slavery' to denote advancement in the practice and the post-occurrence of what happened to slaves in the past.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Existentialist Conscious Consciencism (EXIC-CONSCIENCISM) model, proposed by Robert and Peter (2021). The proponents aver that EXIC-CONSCIENCISM 'aims at concretising existential realities of all kinds in the minds of all and sundry; rousing consciousness towards all existential creatures, beings (humans) and non-beings (non-humans) and phenomena; and our consciousness towards our own actions in totality' (p. 125). According to the proponents of EXIC-CONSCIENCISM, 'it is a kind of ideological pedagogy that prevails on everyone to be conscious of the totality of their existence, that of other individuals and non-humans, indigenous phenomena, and ideologies' (p. 126). By implication, it prevails on intellectuals and judges to do the needful that would get rid of dubious and unqualified politicians from Nigerian politics and thereby free the masses from political slavery.

In what justifies the choice of this theoretical framework, the theorists posit that indigenous ideologies, theories, measures and so on can be deployed to get individuals and groups conscientised on, and made perpetually conscious of doing all that is right, just and the for the common good of all (Robert & Peter, 2021). They argue that once imbibed and deployed appropriately, 'Existentialist Conscious Consciencism ideology and others are capable of resolving 'issues of leadership cum followership, gender, elitism, racism, discrimination, ethnicity, religious crisis, neo-colonialism, Westernisation, sour intergroup relations, international relations and diplomacy, justice and human rights abuse, insecurity, social vices, etc.' (Robert & Peter, 2021, p. 124).

It follows that EXIC-CONSCIENCISM is a model that conscientises intellectuals and judges and all and sundry in Nigerian and other parts of the world on realities and different critical matters of society and individual concerns. Thus, the model is adopted to be the theoretical framework of this study, because it makes intellectuals and judges to become conscious of the realities they neglect about politics, leadership, professionalism, public administration, and so on. That is, it rouses their consciousness to realities, actions, decisions and different matters of life. That is, they are *conscientised* by the adopted theory or model. Robert and Peter (2021) advise that conscientisation

should be done consciously by individuals and groups pursuing meaningful goals and 'common good' agenda. It is by doing so that the goals of conscientisation can be realised. Therefore, the model aptly suits this study.

Related Studies

A good number of studies on neo/slavery abound in the literature. The central points of several of them are summarily presented hereafter. Extant literatures are preoccupied with other forms of modern slavery, leaving out political slavery. This study considers it and argues that political neo/slavery is the highest and most complex phase or form of neo/slavery, which is often disregarded or not given scholarly attention, because of its political nature and actors. The commonly considered forms of neo-slavery are forced labour with its exploitation, internal and external human trafficking (NAPTIP, 2022; Benson-Idahosa et al., 2020; Dare, 2022; Nwaubani, 2017), organ and tissue trafficking (Faloyin, 2023; BBC, 2022), commercial exploitation of children for sex (Human Rights Watch, 2022; Reuters Staff, 2020), forced marriage (Global Slavery Index, 2023, ILO, 2019), and internal displacement of persons (International Organisation for Migration, 2021; Mbiyozo, 2018). The Global Slavery Index (2023) reports that out of 206,140,000 Nigerians, 1,611,000 (7.8%) are living in modern slavery. The vulnerability rate is 76 of 100%, government response to the scourge is 54 of 100% (Global Slavery Index, 2023). This shows unappreciable institutional response to neo-slavery in Nigeria. The non-response or poor response aggravates the issues at stake. The inaction of the government against the scourge is a clear indication of its deliberate enslavement, incapacitation and impoverishment of the masses, basically for political reasons and personal financial and material gains. Also, leaning on Marxist political economy, Okoli and Okpaleke (2014) make a qualitative exploration of human trafficking (HT) as a phase of neo-slavery. They argue that HT is a phase of neo-slavery by its nature, aim and modality. They suggest that strong legislations should be enacted and enforced.

Their assertion that HT is a phase of neo-slavery aligns with the unanimous stance held by Exodus-Cry (2012), UNODC (2012) and Pavlik (2018). The study done by Pavlik (2018) proves that corruption, state of peace, democracy, and terrorism, which are predictors of HT, correlate with HT. The implication is that corruption, insecurity, terrorism and undemocratic government are some major causes of neo-slavery. These factors are prevalent in contemporary Nigeria, where the government consistently fails to salvage the masses from these slavery situations. This paper argues that the government enslaves the Nigerian masses on one hand, while terrorists, bandits, thugs and other non-state actors enslave the same masses on the other hand. The miseries suffered by the Nigerian masses equate with those experienced by slaves in hands of their masters then and now alike.

Ottuh (2022) analyses Christianisation, commerce and civilisation, as colonial imperialist strategies used for enslaving Africa by eroding their indigenous systems and imposing theirs on the peoples of their colonies, such as the Nigerian peoples. He insinuates that the colonialists enslaved Nigeria and other colonised nations politically, economically, culturally, socially and historically (Ottuh, 2022). Cooper (1979) has shown and lamented the menace of the slavery Africa got into during the colonial era, which continues to linger till date and adversely affects African studies. In the same vein, Harris (2008) regrets that the slavery Europe had put Africa as well as other Black nations through continuously poses serious challenges to research on Black family. For Harris (2008), the slavery experiences continue to pose conceptual issues to Africans in particular and research on Black family in general.

Manning (1983) has looked at the social aspects as well as effects of the colonial enslavement of Africa. Fitzpatrick (2012) looks at the European enslavement of the Africans in terms of their names and naming practices. Obikili (2014) is of the view that the colonial enslavement of Africans caused the fragmentation of the traditional politics of African nations. For Obikili (2016), the enslavement of Africans by Europeans and their other allied Western nations impacted negatively on literacy in West Africa. The foregoing studies, among others, concentrate on external slavery and its grave implications for Africa and Africans across ages. They leave out internal slavery in the post-colonial era, particularly that from the elitist state agents to the citizens who are outside their circle. That form

of slavery left out by the above and other studies is what this present study engages with. That form is political slavery, man-tailored by politicians and sustained by intellectuals and judges, who alone have the professional powers and the critical skills to discontinue the practice of political slavery in contemporary time.

Thus, just as most of the politicians fail Nigeria and its citizenry so also most intellectuals and judges, particularly those of high calibers, fail Nigeria, its citizenry and their other fellow intellectuals and judges. They also fail their fellows, because their misdeeds are most often generalised to lecturers and lawyers in general terms. Unfortunately, those who are otherwise cannot be going round to dissociate themselves from the wrongs of their fellows. It becomes the case of one apple spoils the rest. Giving excuses, such as declaring fake results of votes under duress, do not justify the ill acts in any way, or clean the 'stain' brought upon other intellectuals and judges. Professor Iwe of Michael Okpara University and a few others, who stood their ground in the 2023 elections and bluntly refused to compromise standards, got accolades from far and near. They were not killed or disgraced publicly. They were only threatened by a few individuals on errands for dubious politicians. Imagine the case of the professor, who was stripped naked and beaten by angry electorates in Adamawa. If he had not feared threat, collected bribe and declared the loser, the angry mob would not have descended on him. Rather, they would have protected him from the allies of the desperate loser politicians, who offered him bribe and threatened him.

How Intellectuals and Judges Sustain Political Slavery in Nigeria

All kinds of slavery having political attributes constitute political neo/slavery. This study contextualises slavery in all its references within politics. It considers all political ills, which chastise the masses in the same or like manners with what the slave master or actor does to the slave, to be acts of political neo/slavery. It argues that intellectuals in the academia and the judges wrongly decide the fate of Nigerian political and democratic future by subscribing to the ill-ways of politics and negative political culture. The idea of political slavery currently has no place in the literature on neo/slavery. This is because other studies on neo/slavery engage with colonial slavery and human trafficking, forced labour, commercial sexual exploitation, organ harvesting, child abuse, domestic servitude and forced marriage. This study moves away from the above noted concerns of neo/slavery and situates the concept and practice of slavery in the political setting.

It is because the masses are enslaved, incapacitated and impoverished that they have no say, their votes do not count but the rigged figures do, and their human rights are abused without being redressed. The judges deny the poor and the average citizens of the Nigerian society justice in order to amass wealth and gain position from the scrupulous and unqualified candidates for elective positions. This study argues that having got freed from the colonial government of restrictions and harsh policies on matters concerning the natives, the indigenous leaders took over the mantle of leadership and sustain only the negative legacies, leaving out the positive ones. Instead of manning the affairs of their nation and people well, they resort to sharp practice, bad governance, do-or-die politics, and enslaving the masses anyhow they like. They make life very difficult for the masses, impoverish them and deny them freedom and rights to political participation and electing or choosing their preferred leaders. If the Nigerian masses were not enslaved, but have their freedom and rights, what obtains in the Nigerian society in terms of politics, electioneering and voting would not be in place.

Either in error or in conscious realisation of the deserving place of the intellectuals in critical matters, such as the politics of their nation, the intellectuals are those put in-charge of the electoral processes in Nigeria. While recruiting adhoc staff for elections, intellectuals are the most engaged, with the highest positions being the exclusive preserve of theirs. The Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) is usually headed by a professor. Whatever the professor in-charge of this Commission decides stands unless the judges alter or disprove his decision. The pronouncements made by some other professors and PhD holders, who are returning, collation and resident officers and what have you, are also tentatively final until judges declare the pronouncements otherwise. The absolute autonomy of the INEC Chairman is what allows for the rigging of national election results. Just as Professors Jega and Mahmood soiled their hands and put the unqualified and questionable persons into power so also the judges, who would have corrected and changed the narrative, accepted

huge bribe and sustained the persons, who never won the conducted elections for the position(s) respectively.

Ideally or by the semantic impulse of the term intellectuals, the intellectuals are intelligent and learned persons involved in discourses about learned matters. They have the responsibility of righting wrongs and prevailing on the political class or elite to act rightly and do the needful in society. As unique persons and professionals in the society, Chomsky (1967) has lent credence to the foregoing in his essay 'The responsibility of intellectuals', as he considers them as having the unique overriding responsibility of initiating and pursuing the realisation of all that the non-intellectuals are incapable of doing for the overall well-being of society. It follows that intellectuals are (supposed to be) the persons at the forefront of anti-slavery movement and crusade. If all or a larger proportion of Nigerian intellectuals were up and doing, they would not sustain political slavery. This thinking reflects that of Nwala (2008) that if all linguists were up and doing, most of the problems bedeviling humans in the society would not have been in place. The extent to which Nigerian judges are corrupt these days makes one to wonder whether or not there are still incorruptible judges in the Nigerian courts.

The foregoing explanations undoubtedly make it clear why this study posits that when intellectuals and judges willingly subvert justice and thereby wrongfully put unqualified and questionable persons in power, they sustain political slavery in contemporary Nigeria. They sustain this phase of slavery because since they have the final say about who qualifies for the presidency and other major elective positions in the country, but fail to do so because of bribery and corruption. As such, they sustain the political slavery the masses are forced into by godfathers, desperate politicians vying for positions and chieftains of political parties. Since they abet the crimes cum misdeeds against the masses, intellectuals and judges undoubtedly sustain political slavery in contemporary Nigeria. The argument is that the Nigerian masses are perpetually enslaved by desperate and selfish politicians and their fellow elitist intellectuals and judges.

Intellectuals and Judges in Ethno-Religious Politics of Neo-Slavery

It is a well known fact that most Nigerian intellectuals and judges exhibit ethno-religious politics of neo-slavery. They consider ethnicity, religion and linguistic differences in carrying out professional tasks that need no such considerations. Some intellectuals write with and express bias against people who are outside the ethno-religious and linguistic groups. There are also many Nigerian judges who demonstrate their internalised or reserved ethno-religious sentiments in the course of exercising their judicial duties. Chimee and Ojiakor (2021) discuss the use of ethnicity by Nigerian elite to manipulate the masses for their selfish gains. Nigerian elite include intellectuals and judges, not politicians or political leaders alone. Chimee and Ojiakor (2021) are of the view that 'although ethnicity is a social phenomenon across the globe, the European made it a social construct that mark out different peoples in Africa' (p. 175). They note that the 'colonialists laid the foundation for ethnicity' through their indirect rule system (p. 175).

The implication is that the indigenous Nigerian elite had taken up and sustained the ethnicity mechanism introduced to them by the colonialists. Uwaifo (2016) rightly observes that Nigerian politicians create a class and ethnic society. Elitism is the class they create, with which they demarcate themselves and their allies from the masses. In what captures the grave implications of ethno-religious considerations, Eniemeh and Ibrahim (2021) state that ethno-religious nations usually have a poor quality of governance, insufficient provision of socio-political and economic goods and frequent socio-religious and political crisis hinged on the promotion of ethnic agenda by political leaders instead of promoting policies that drive the process of nation-building. With these in place, the masses are not only impoverished, alienated, brainwashed and incapacitated, but also enslaved.

Religion as a mechanism used by the elite to manipulate the Nigerian masses is explored by Abar (2019). According to Abar (2019), prior to the introduction of Islam and Christianity to the peoples of the today Nigeria, there was relative peace and smooth intergroup relations until the rise of Islamic radicalism that led to Jihad. This implies that intellectuals and judges in the then traditional societies of the today Nigeria never considered religious fraternity in handling matters brought before them for adjudication, redress or decisive solution. The points made by Abar (2019) are shared implicitly by

Ottuh (2022), who blames the colonialists for their superimposition of Christian religion, commerce and civilisation on Africa and thereby enslaved them perpetually with these systems and the likes. In essence, the point is that since Nigeria and other African nations remain under the superimpositions of the West till date and West still exerts some unlimited control over these nations, they are undoubtedly under slavery.

The sustained slavery in the post-colonial era is neo-slavery by the powerful nations of the world to the less powerful or developing nations. Thus, that from the developed or powerful nations to the less powerful or underdeveloped nations is external neo-slavery, while the different phases of slavery within any nation is internal neo-slavery. While the advanced nations pervert both external and internal neo-slavery, the less advanced ones only pervert internal slavery, while being in or suffering external neo-slavery concurrently, as slaves of the more powerful nations.

Isiaq et al. (2018) note that the 'elective position of the president is characterised by ethnicity' (p. 118). This explains why Nigerian intellectuals and judges usually have their respective preferred presidential candidate as well as other candidates for the different other elective positions. This is also why it is a common practice for some judges of a particular ethnic or religious group to often tend to give post-electoral judgement in favour of the candidates who are of the same ethnic and/or religious group with them. On 2nd October, 2023, when the Election Petition Tribunal in Lafia gave a ruling challenging the victory of Governor A.A. Sule, the Muslim judge of the three-man panel of judges ruled in favour of Sule on religious ground. The other two ruled in favour of Governor-Elect David Ombugado on the basis of the number of votes he had. The Muslim judge disagreed with the two others, who are not Muslims, and disregarded the substantial evidence before the court, as votes were recounted evidently.

Fagbohun (2013) observes that 'the importance of electoral systems lies in its role of regulating the quality of a democracy through a process leading to the award of seats in democratic assemblies to those seeking office[s]' (p. 3). This point pictures the corrupt systems through which corrupt political leaders are brought in and imposed on Nigerians. This is because Nigerian electoral systems are the reverse of the ideal ones Fagbohun (2013) talks about. The INEC is the ultimate body in-charge of electoral processes in Nigeria. Most of the intellectuals and the judges involved in these processes in Nigeria fail to play the ideal role they ought to play. Their failed responsibility is an indication of their sustenance of political slavery for the Nigerian masses. They fail to free the masses from the chains of oppression, injustice, bad governance, etc. to the otherwise.

Also, Fagbohun (2013) observes that 'incompetent political leadership of supposedly elected leaders who stand behind our individual tragedies and the serious afflictions that have led to the degeneration of our once buoyant and vibrant nation' (p. 3). The noted incompetent leaders are products of dubious intellectuals and judges, who had failed to disqualify the unqualified candidates accordingly. Besides, the fairness of democratic dispensation is measured by 'how well relevant public interests are represented and how much control voters have over their government' (Fagbohun, 2013, p. 3). Fairness does not obtain in Nigeria. Nigerian voters have no control over the government. Public interest means nothing to Nigerian politicians and their allied intellectuals and judges, who receive bribe and impose the supposed losers on Nigeria and Nigerians. The study by Jacob and Saad (2011) looks at ethnic conflict in Nigeria in relation to constitutional law, and the dilemma of decision-making. The study makes an analysis of how Nigerian governments make decisions based on religious considerations. Jacob and Saad (2011) are of the view that political, Muslim and Christian leaders often create as well as fuel ethnic conflicts that would ordinarily have no religious and political undertones.

Yagboyaju (2017) discusses political corruption, religion and culture in Nigeria, arguing that even though development theorists often neglect the place of religion and culture in development, religion and culture functionally correlate to pursue the attainment of development. Employing interpretive and descriptive methodological techniques, the study shows in its analysis that corruption is a serious challenge to the realisation of development and impacts negatively on religion and culture. It concludes that corruption remains the vice used by the elite to cause ethnic and religious ills facing

Nigeria, which leaves untold effects on the nation in all sectors. The foregoing points are apt. Corruption hampers efficiency, professionalism and rightness and causes poverty and underdevelopment. Osoba (1996) describes corruption any ‘anti-social behaviour conferring improper benefits contrary to legal and moral norms, and which undermined the authority’s capacity to secure the welfare of all citizens’ (p. 311). This definition points out that corruption is a bad, immoral, illegal and counter-productive act.

As Jang (2012) points out, corruption in Nigeria spans all political dispensations, civilian and military administrations. Ikubaje (2006) has noted that ‘corruption has become so prevalent in Nigeria that almost all governance crises, economic woes and development predicaments are attributed to the problem’ (p. 1). Ekeh (1980) has argued that colonialism in Nigeria was built on corruption. Similarly, Omotola (2005) observes that ‘the colonial era marked the beginning of official corruption in Nigeria and the idea of a privatised state began to manifest. Odenkule (1994) has observed that during the Babangida administration, corruption became not only intensified but institutionalised, such that the outcome of government policies often became erratic and apparently well-intentioned measures and programmes aimed at dealing with socio-economic and political problems seemed increasingly inept and sometimes futile.

As Odo (2012) and Besong (2017) rightly point out, corruption has poses serious challenges to economic development, undermines democracy and good governance by subverting electoral process and governmental procedures, and reduces the legitimacy of government, accountability and representation in policy-making. In the judiciary sphere, where judges situate, the rule of law gets suspended, the masses lose confidence in the judiciary for justice, and the institutional capacity of government gets eroded (Odo, 2012). It causes the negligence of institutional safeguards, embezzlement of resources, mediocrity and poor performance. It also ‘undermines economic development by generating considerable distortions and inefficiency’ (Odo, 2012, p. 16).

Conclusion

This study engages with the notion of political slavery, which currently has no place or is given no attention in the literature on neo/slavery. It describes the place of intellectuals and judges in (re)shaping Nigerian polity and public affairs. It regrets that these two sets of professionals fail in their responsibilities, like politicians. They alone have the opportunity or ultimate power of putting the right and qualified persons in elective offices. Regrettably, those of them in-charge of electoral processes and bodies accept bribe from dubious politicians and compromise standards, after which they put these wrong persons in elective offices, who in turn chastise and enslave them (intellectuals and judges) and all other civil servants under them. The paper calls on intellectuals and judges to resist bribe and threats and always do what is right by putting the right persons in elective offices for the change and the betterment of Nigeria. It is by doing so that they free the masses from the age-long political slavery the politicians have entrapped them into.

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