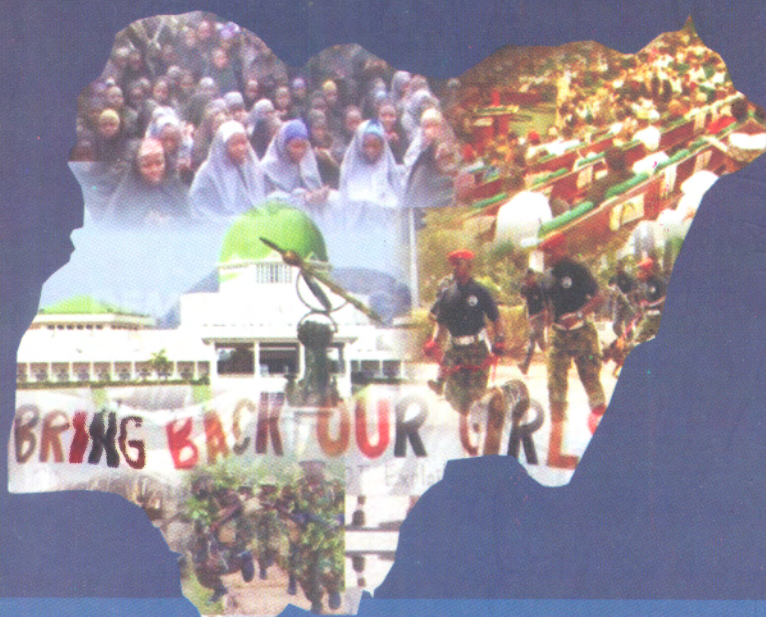


THE STATE IN CONTEMPORARY NIGERIA

Issues, Perspectives and Challenges



Essays in Honour of **Professor Ben O. Nwabueze**

Editors

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Contents

| | |
|---|------|
| Acknowledgements | viii |
| Foreword | ix |
| Introduction: The State in Perspective | 1 |
| – <i>J. Shola Omotola and Ikenna Mike Alumona</i> | |
| Section A: Theoretical Explorations | |
| 1. The State in Democratic Theory: Nigeria in Comparative Perspective | 17 |
| – <i>J. Shola Omotola</i> | |
| 2. The State: Concept and Applications | 42 |
| – <i>Aloysius-Michaels Okolie</i> | |
| Section B: Formulation and Implementation of Public Policies | |
| 3. The State and Implementation of National Youth Policy in Nigeria | 65 |
| – <i>Ernest Arinze Udalla</i> | |
| 4. The Implementation of the Universal Basic Education Policy in Nigeria, 2000-2013 | 81 |
| – <i>Elias Chukwuemeka Ngwu</i> | |
| 5. Challenges and Prospects of Educational Administration in Nigeria: A Focus on Education-for-All Policy | 96 |
| – <i>Nelson O. Akpotu and Patience O. Ogbodo</i> | |
| 6. The Enforcement of Zero Gas-flaring Policy in Nigeria | 117 |
| – <i>Ernest T. Aniche</i> | |
| 7. The Enforcement of Local Content Policy in Nigeria's Oil Industry | 144 |
| – <i>Stephen Nnaemeka Azom</i> | |
| 8. The Challenges of Combating Corruption in Nigeria | 166 |
| – <i>Moses Metumara Duruji and Dominic Ezinwa Azuh</i> | |
| 9. Judicial Corruption and Administration of Justice in Nigeria | 186 |
| – <i>Peter Chukwuma Obutte</i> | |

Section C: The National Question

10. The Management of the National Question in Nigeria: Insights from the 2014 National Conference 211
– *Peter O. Mbah*
11. The State and Identity Politics in Nigeria's Fourth Republic 238
– *C. Jaja Nwanegbo*
12. Ethno-religious Conflicts and Nigeria's National Security 253
– *Michael Ikechukwu Ugwueze*
13. Ethnic Militias in Post-Military Rule Nigeria 269
– *Moses Metumara Duruji*
14. Post-Civil War Reconciliation and the Challenge of National Unity in Nigeria 292
– *David U. Enweremadu*
15. Ben Nwabueze and the Igbo Struggle for Political Space and Emancipation in Nigeria 305
– *Chris Chigbo Ojukwu*
16. The State and Religion in Nigeria 321
– *James Okolie-Osemene*
17. The State and the Media in Nigeria 335
– *Adeniyi S. Basiru*

Section D: The Challenges of National Security

18. The State and Internal Security in Nigeria: A Study of Anambra State, 1999-2014 357
– *Ikenna Mike Alumona*
19. State Fragility and Human Insecurity in Nigeria 385
– *Onyekachi Ernest Nnabuihe*
20. The Crisis of Food Security in Contemporary Nigeria 410
– *Victor Chidubem Iwuoha*
21. The Management of Social Security in Nigeria, 1999-2012 437
– *Agaptus Nwozor*
22. Nigerian Prisons Service and Internal Security Management in Nigeria 462
– *John Tor Tsuwa and James O. Okoh*

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– *Peter O. Mbah*
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14. Post-Civil War Reconciliation and the Challenge of National Unity in Nigeria 292
– *David U. Enweremadu*
15. Ben Nwabueze and the Igbo Struggle for Political Space and Emancipation in Nigeria 305
– *Chris Chigbo Ojukwu*
16. The State and Religion in Nigeria 321
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– *Adeniyi S. Basiru*

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18. The State and Internal Security in Nigeria: A Study of Anambra State, 1999-2014 357
– *Ikenna Mike Alumona*
19. State Fragility and Human Insecurity in Nigeria 385
– *Onyekachi Ernest Nnabuihe*
20. The Crisis of Food Security in Contemporary Nigeria 410
– *Victor Chidubem Iwuoha*
21. The Management of Social Security in Nigeria, 1999-2012 437
– *Agaptus Nwozor*
22. Nigerian Prisons Service and Internal Security Management in Nigeria 462
– *John Tor Tsuwa and James O. Okoh*

| | |
|---|---------|
| 23. State Control of Cross-Border Traffic and Smuggling of Persons in Nigeria – <i>Willie Aziegbé Eselebor</i> | 484 |
| 24. The State and the Management of Religious Violence in Nigeria: The Case of Boko Haram – <i>Adeolu Durotoye</i> | 504 |
| 25. The Armed Forces and Security Management in Nigeria, 1999-2014 – <i>Idowu Johnson</i> | 528 |
| Section E: Nigeria and the Rest of the World | |
| 26. Nigeria and the Challenges of African Politics – <i>Francis Chigozie Chilaka</i> | 549 |
| 27. Nigeria and the Challenges of Global Politics – <i>Felix Chidozie Chidozie and Ilemobola Peter Olanrewaju</i> | 564 |
| Index | 577 |

Nigeria and the Challenges of Global Politics

Felix Chidozie Chidozie and
Ilemobola Peter Olanrewaju

27

INTRODUCTION

Presently, Nigeria is at a crossroads. The country is today faced with a myriad of problems at virtually all levels of social organisation (Olaitan, 1997:1). At the economic level, the global economic recession coupled with the falling prices of oil in the global market, necessitating the drastic drop in the country's foreign reserve has serious implications for the productive capacity of the economy. A political transition programme on the way, which is bound to consume a huge slice of national wealth and the collective energies of Nigerians make the picture grimmer for the country. If you add the disillusionment from a large mass of the already politically-fatigued populace, then the equation becomes complete. Indeed, these tensions at the economic, political and social levels qualify to earn Nigeria a legitimate description of a country striving and struggling to escape social quagmire.

In a way, the economic crisis, the political problems, and the social dislocations are seen only as part of the complex problems facing Nigeria in her journey to nationhood and should be viewed holistically. Incidentally, the state, as the epitome of the social, political and economic organisation of the society, recommends itself as an appropriate pedestal for such holistic view-point, such that the multifarious problems facing Nigeria can be legitimately confronted and analysed at the level of the Nigerian state (Olaitan, 1997: 4).

For the avoidance of doubt, scholars have often described Nigeria as an artificial creation by the colonial masters. The purpose of which was for administrative convenience and imperial interests (Aluko, 2005:34). Thus, the

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state as bequeathed to Nigeria at independence has been an invasive and predatory force in the lives of its citizens, thus weakening, suffocating and destroying the traditional organisations and structures that had been, and can still be, most effective in achieving development in the society (Aluko, 2005: 33). These have created a high degree of distrust for the state, and by implication, continually conditioned her engagement at the international stage.

In strategic terms, this meant that Nigeria remained virtually a client state, through neo-colonial ties, incorporated into the capitalist economic order, while still wearing all the outward trappings of international sovereignty (Nkrumah, 1971). It is this situation that explains the development trajectories and its contributions to the crisis of development, resulting from the imposition of economic reforms on Nigeria by the international economic institutions as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the entrenchment of the peripheral role of the country in the global capitalist system (Udeala, 2009: 91).

Perhaps the most damaging implication of the above on state relations in Nigeria is the fact that the state today plays a diminished role as the sole decision maker and policy initiator within its territoriality. According to Obianyo (2009), the state in Nigeria has become a recipient of all kinds of policy initiatives instituted by global actors in the effort to reconstruct it to become more effective, more efficient and better equipped to face the challenges of economic, political and social development. She argued that these initiatives encapsulated in the ideology of market reforms conceived as state withdrawal from the economy

and down-sizing of state institutions have succeeded in making the state more remote and distanced from the populace. She concluded that the state in Nigeria has thus become a state in retreat, an abstraction removed from people and society, experienced not only as the 'invisible hand' directing the lives of the people but also as a meddling nuisance whose only interest is the pauperisation of its populace.

THEORETICAL ISSUES ON GLOBALISATION

The main theoretical accounts of world politics all see globalisation differently: some treat it as nothing more than a temporary phase in human history, and one which does not mean that we need to re-think how we understand world politics; others see it as but the latest manifestation of the growth of western capitalism and modernisation; and others see it as representing a fundamental transformation of world politics, one that requires new ways of understanding (Akhaine, 2000; Chidozie, 2003: 14).

Thus analysts of world politics have tended to collapse the understanding of world politics as it relates to globalisation into three theoretical perspectives: realism (power politics), liberalism (pluralism) and world system theory (structuralism or neo Marxism). It is important to note that none of these theories has all the answers when it comes to explaining world politics in an era of globalisation. In fact, each views globalisation differently. This is well articulated by Smith and Baylis (1997: 40). They argue that at first sight each seems to be particularly good at explaining some aspects of world politics as it relates to globalisation better than the others, and an obvious temptation would be to try and combine them into some overall account. They concluded that these three theories are not so much different views of the same world, but are instead three views of different worlds.

It is in this respect that Omoweh (2000) laments what he referred to as the absence of a theoretical framework in most of the discourse on globalisation in Africa. He identified two schools of thought as relevant to any discourse on globalisation from an African perspective – development school and dependency perspective. According to him, the thesis on globalisation by development theorists is that globalisation would enhance supra-territorial integration of goods, services and capital and that the gain of globalisation would trickle down to the countries of the Third World, particularly as the missing links of development like capital and technology would be placed more at their disposal. He contested the fact that little or no consideration was given to the historical experiences of Africa, its economy and polity by the development school.

Omoweh (2000) further argues that it was in response to this obvious gap in development literature and other unsettled issues that gave rise to the dependency

school on globalisation. According to him, the major contention of the dependency school is that globalisation is not really so new in the sense that since the rise of monopoly capitalism, international finance capital has not only overtaken other factors of production, but influenced its use and relocation in its quest to make monopoly profit. He submitted that globalisation completed and complemented the integration of Africa into the international division of labour, thus undermining the continent's development.

In other words, while the bourgeois scholars of globalisation represented by the development school of thought, and by extension, modernisation theorists, argued that the underdevelopment and dependency situation of the Third World was due largely to the internal contradictions of this group of countries arising from bad leadership, mismanagement of national resources and elevation of personal aggrandisement and primordial interests over and above national interest, the dependency school, on the other hand, submitted and insisted that, what propelled the development of the developed countries also facilitated, in the same measure, the underdevelopment of the underdeveloped countries. These, according to the latter group, are colonialism, slave trade and unequal exchange (Nkrumah, 1971; Ake, 1981; Offiong, 1981; Onimode, 2000; Omoweh, 2005; Chidozie, 2014).

From the above analysis, it is apparent that globalisation as a contemporary process that has created or is creating the "new world order" might be regarded in positive or negative terms. It can be viewed positively from a neo-classical or neo-liberal perspective as a triumph of political liberalism and of the unfettered play of market forces, which will strengthen the economic and socio-cultural basis of national societies. This is akin to Fukuyama's (1992) "end of history" thesis, where he claimed that the power of the economic market will result in liberal democracy replacing all other types of government. Though, he recognised that there are other types of political régimes that can challenge liberal democracy, he however contested that any of the alternatives such as communism, fascism, or Islam would not be able to deliver the economic goods in the way that liberal democracy could. In this sense, there is a direction to history pointing towards the expansion of the economic market throughout the world.

On the other hand, globalisation can be viewed negatively from the Marxist perspective. From this point of view, it is a new form of imperialism, heralding a new age of imperialism, in which national, regional, and global asymmetries, characterised by social injustice and unequal exchange, are much more pronounced and pernicious than before. According to Olukoshi (1994) cited in Ogbonnaya (2012:246), rather than fostering a sense of common interest in the global village, neo-liberal economic practices are bringing the world back to the Darwinian jungle of the survival of the fittest in which everything exists in a perpetual state of fierce competition in pursuit of self-interest. It is in this cruel

and zero-sum competition among the gladiators on the world stage that Nigeria's political and economic misfortunes become pronounced.

Indeed, the challenges posed by globalisation to the Nigerian political economy are enormous considering the devastating effect of decades of authoritarianism and their wasteful economic policies. Even though the country has exited from its pariah status resulting from the years of military misrule, the challenge is how to cope with the problem of statehood under globalisation; considering the present problems of pervasive poverty; unemployment and epidemics like HIV/AIDS and malaria scourge and above all, the challenges of consolidating democracy for good governance and sustainable development (Ogbonnaya, 2012:247). We now turn our attention to the origin of the Nigerian state; a theme that sheds more light on the fundamental problems that underpin the Nigerian state.

THE NIGERIAN STATE IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Nigeria was created in 1914 by the British colonial administration, but became an independent sovereign state on 1 October, 1960. As a dependent political entity, Nigeria turned 100 years old in 2014. However, as a sovereign, diplomatic and international legal subject, Nigeria started playing on the world scene in 1960 (Asobie, 2010:1) and by implication will be 55 years in the tenth month of (2014). To be sure, the persistent and pervasive challenges that bedevil the current Nigerian state are rooted in the nature and character of her nationhood. More so, when reference is made to the political economic trajectory of the origin of the Nigerian state, the challenges become more evident.

Prior to the advent of colonialism, the situation of the economy(ies) in the Nigerian region was one of the domination of the subsistence (peasant) agricultural mode of production in that the various political arrangements in terms of empires, kingdoms and caliphate were mainly dependent for survival on production within this mode which invariably generated tributes for the political institutions. The political arrangements of that time can therefore, not be adequately understood or explained without a proper situating of the contributions of the peasant agricultural mode of production towards the sustenance of the political arrangements (Olaitan, 1997:83).

However, with the establishment of British administration in Nigeria, Western economic forces profoundly changed both the structure of traditional Nigerian societies and the perspectives of the Nigerian people. The tempo and character of the changes created situations and attitudes that have predisposed many Nigerians to ethnic consciousness and sub-nationalist aspirations. The operation of these new economic forces, however, was governed to an important degree by the British colonial policies such as the establishment of internal

peace and security; development of a communications network and transportation grid; imposition of systematic and universal taxation; compulsory use of a standard coin currency; encouragement of the production of export crops; and extraterritorial enterprise (Coleman, 1958:63).

Thus colonial experience was a totalising one in terms of the attempt at submerging the extant ways of life of the colonised peoples (Fanon, 1965; Rodney, 1972). For colonialism, in reality, was not less than a subversion of existing scheme of things and the imposition of the will and ways of the colonising power particularly in the area of political organisation. Of course, a supplanting of the political arrangements existing before the advent of colonialism would necessarily invite re-configuration in other areas of social interaction like the economic and social organisation of life within this new political entity. It was therefore, not surprising that the new British colonial administration would attempt to re-organise economic life within Nigeria in a way to make the achievement of the basic aims of British colonisation possible (Olaitan, 1997:85). Ake (1981:36) summarises the British conspiracy in this way:

It has to be remembered that colonisation . . . was to a large extent the effect of the rivalry between European countries and the struggle to secure markets for manufactured goods as well as the supply of raw materials. This aim could not be accomplished without control of the economy, particularly the control of what to produce, how, when and in what quantities. It also meant control of the structure of demand in the colony as well as the growth of the economy . . .

Thus after the project of the Nigerian state had been put in place by British colonialism, the British then logically took the next step. They initiated the process of the subsequent modernisation of the new state and its incorporation into the world economy. This phenomenal action by the British government explains the crisis of the state in Nigeria, and by implication, Africa. Hence, it is safe to state that the Nigerian state, just like other colonial states, was conceived, nurtured and sustained in violence (Kukah, 1999:39). In effect, at independence on 1 October, 1960, Nigeria inherited a weak social political structure, a defective and unbalanced federation, an intensification of ethnic consciousness and rivalry, a subverted indigenous ethos of government and, above all an inexperienced leadership (Emmanuel, 2014:95).

Furthermore, most of the apparatuses of state (a civil service not primarily geared to development; a police force alienated from the interest of the ruling class and increasingly torn apart by regional sentiments; a judiciary wedded to the protection of the interest of the power élite) could not meet or support the aspirations of an emergent state. The parliamentary constitution did not contain adequate provisions for positive socio-economic transformation and national integration; it encouraged regionalism. All the major political parties, important

instruments for social and political mobilisation, were ethnically based (Emmanuel, 2014:95). The major element that inflamed and combusted these faulty political and social structures following the independence of the country was the quality of leaders who took over power from the British colonial government.

Achebe offers a brilliant insight into how the founding fathers of the Nigerian state initiated the false start in Nigeria's journey to nationhood. According to him:

In spite of conventional opinion, Nigeria has been less than fortunate in its leadership. A basic element of this misfortune is the seminal absence of intellectual rigour in the political thought of our founding fathers – a tendency to pious materialistic woolliness and self-centred pedestrianism . . . An absence of objectivity and intellectual rigour at the critical moment of a nation's formation is more than an academic matter. It inclines the fledgling state to disorderly growth and mental deficiency (Achebe, 1984:11-12).

The direct implications of this faulty start are the infamous testament of the Nigerian state from independence till the current fourth republic. The history of *militocracy*, civil war, unending transitions, violent ethnic conflicts, mismanagement of the economy, lack of public accountability, insensitivity of the political leadership to the yearnings and aspirations of the people, corruption and insecurity of lives and property, and recently domestic terrorism unleashed by the Boko Haram Islamic extremist have been the critical issues in the nation's life and public debate (Osaghae, 2002; Achebe, 2012; Emmanuel, 2014; Omotosho, 2014; Amuwo, 2015). Consequently, low capacity utilisation in the industries; inefficient and inadequate power supply; decay in the education and health sectors; galloping inflation; deteriorating value of the Naira against convertible currencies; unemployment and mass poverty characterised the Nigerian society and economy (Emmanuel, 2014:95). It is in these desperate political and social conditions that the Nigerian state is expected to compete in contemporary global politics.

THE NIGERIAN STATE IN CONTEMPORARY GLOBAL POLITICS

When the Nigerian state gained flag independence on 1 October, 1960, she inherited her basic position in the comity of nations direct from the colonial relationship. In strategic terms, this meant that Nigeria remained virtually a client state incorporated into the capitalist economic order. To be sure, the circumstances in which the country achieved independence did not suggest that she would have much leverage in world politics (Akinsanya, 2005:470).

The reasons bear mentioning: first colonisation had caused profound

distortions in the political, economic and social structures of the state; second, the 'founding fathers', in many cases, could hardly agree on a common strategy in resolving internal and international problems; third, the country's economic position was vulnerable and subject to the vagaries of international economic conditionality; fourth, not much attempt was made before independence to analyse the reality of Nigeria's international position or to set out in concrete terms the foreign policy options for the post-independence period (Akinsanya, 2005: 470).

Thus given these prevailing political and social conditions, it is not surprising that the Nigerian state, and by implication many African states, have been the subject of diverse, disparaging and negative descriptions and characterisations. It has been described as authoritarian, repressive, exploitative and predatory; weak, frail, verging on collapse, in a state of flux, in disarray, unstable and in profound decay; neo-patrimonial, corrupt, poorly bureaucratised and institutionalised, informalised not emancipated from society and immersed in particularistic or ascriptive grounds; non-autonomous and in formation; wicked, hostile and coercive but irrelevant; overdeveloped and appropriate for clientelist, prebendal and primordial purposes, and unproductive and poorly managed (*cf* Ikelegbe, 2010:124).

Without doubt, some of these characterisations are deeply rooted in the political economy of post-independent Nigerian state. To begin with, two notable features of Nigeria's economy have constrained the country's ability to participate effectively in the globalisation process and benefit significantly from it – they are the inhibiting feature of mono-cultural economy and primary commodity exports, and weak manufacturing base (Obadan, 2002:16). Indeed, Nigeria is one of the many African countries that depend heavily on primary commodities for the bulk of their export receipts and domestic revenue, and this has often caused serious problems for economic management.

In addition, the one-commodity structure in Nigeria, reflecting the dominance of oil, has made the economy to be very vulnerable to short-term booms and busts (Onuoha, 2009:41), causing Akinsanya (2005:471) to assert that "no commodity plays a more vital role in the political economy of less-developed countries than oil". With the characteristic "Dutch Disease" effect of the oil sector, the non oil sector of the economy has suffered irreparable damage (Obadan, 2002:18). As a consequence, the non-oil sector of the economy became characterised by wanton neglect, weak productive base, poor technological base, slow productivity and low level of uncompetitiveness. Indeed, structural imbalances in the economy became magnified.

Today, the oil sector accounts for over 97 percent of Nigeria's foreign exchange earnings – Nigeria, being one of the largest oil producers in the world – the main operators in the sector being foreigners (Ikelegbe, 2010:132; Nwoke,

2014). The unprecedented growth in the economy, engendered by expansion in the production of crude oil has had little or no positive effect on the lives of the citizens. According to Amuwo (2015) a major element of structural violence has been the failure of the ruling party to wean the economy off its suffocating over-reliance on oil earnings and rents. Ekpo (2015:43) cited in Amuwo, (2015:21) paints the picture more clearly, thus:

It remains paradoxical that robust growth in the economy results in rising poverty. GDP growth in 2014 was 7.4 per cent in 2014 up from 6.2 per cent in 2013. It had averaged 6.8 per cent between 2005 and 2013 and a little above 5 per cent between 2005 and 2008-9. While growth matters for poverty reduction, it is growth associated with deliberate distribution that will have a greater impact on poverty. If there is no distribution then the impact of growth on poverty remains negligible (Amuwo, 2015:21-22).

A growing consensus in scholarly literature on globalisation is that economic globalisation as presently structured is too impersonal and market-oriented to address the social plight of Nigerians, given the fact that economic globalisation is premised on the wrong notion that the distancing of government from the economic sector and free play of market forces in a liberalised economy generate development (Anugwom, 2006; Onuoha, 2009; Udeala, 2009; Nwoke, 2014; Amuwo, 2015). In fact, Anugwom (2006:37) avers that in Africa generally, social indicators have not kept pace with economic indicators. He argued that in spite of reported marginal improvement in economic performance in Nigeria, the socio-political realities confronting the average citizens seem insurmountable.

Anugwom (2006) contends that in Nigeria with its mono-economy and inadequate capacity, economic globalisation exposes marginal groups and vulnerable citizens to extreme privation. He argued that in spite of the perceived benefits of globalisation, Nigeria can hardly reap these since weak economic capacity severely limits its participation. He submitted that Nigeria's adherence to market economy under globalisation since the 1990s has not improved the incidence of poverty and ever-widening social inequality. In short, Fomunyoh, (2001: 43) cited in Amuwo (2015:6) posited that in conceptual terms, liberalisation is not a deep process: "it allows citizens to enjoy greater rights and freedoms only insofar as this is compatible with preserving existing power structures and the privileges of their immediate beneficiaries".

A critical look at the state of the Nigerian economy today will show that the economic sovereignty of the country has been mortgaged by the combined efforts of the domestic and foreign bourgeois defined as the "new élite" (Ogbonnaya, 2012:255). This new form of imperialism, represented most aptly by the IMF, the World Bank, multinational and transnational corporations, the World Trade Organization and other mainstream western capitalist alliances and organisations which today, form the composite arrowheads of globalisation,

connive with the “local compradors” to savagely plunder the commonwealth of Nigeria. Hence, corruption has become so perverse and ubiquitous “that some pertinent observers have suggested that what we presently witness in Nigeria is not democratic governance but criminality garbed in official respectability” (Amuwo, 2015:10). In short, Amuwo (2015) probes into the depth of fiscal recklessness and financial profligacy in Nigeria in this manner:

According to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) data, external reserves dropped by about 7 per cent from \$44.8 billion in November 2013 to \$41.4 billion in February 2014, at a period oil prices were spiralling upwards. In the same vein, the Excess Crude Account declined within a year from \$11.5 billion to a paltry \$2.5 billion. The Petroleum Product Pricing and Regulatory Agency (PPPRA) issued over ₦331 billion kerosene subsidy certificates to the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC) in 2012 alone. The PPPRA, NNPC and 72 firms reportedly stole ₦1 trillion subsidy money. In January 2014 alone, Federal Government overspent by ₦105.47 billion. Between 2004 and 2012, successive governments spent a whopping ₦4.17 trillion as against ₦1.8 trillion approved by the National Assembly as Service Wide Votes (SWV) component of the budgets. Over ₦1 trillion was allegedly spent on publicity and publication of various government programmes. In the 2014 budget estimates, two federal ministries proposed to spend ₦305 million on typewriters and Public Relations (Amuwo, 2015:23-24).

It is clear from the above arguments and illustrations that the current structure of the Nigerian political economy (inherited from independence and perpetuated by the forces and factors of globalisation - understood as new forms of imperialism) cleverly short change and undermine the country’s chances in contemporary global politics. It is this “push and pull” factor and the consequent capture of the state that has sustained the political economic crisis and made the revamping of the state impossible (Onuoha, 2009). As a result, contemporary globalisation must be approached cautiously with a focus on social provisioning and the periodic intervention of government to ensure necessary adjustments and the resolution of social disequilibrium.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This chapter has argued that the Nigerian state is in serious crisis – political, economic and social – portraying an uncertain future for the country. It has demonstrated that the domestic challenges inherent in the country have narrowed the state-society space and resulted in “the tragedy of low expectations” on the part of the Nigerian people. The chapter posited that the tragedy of the performance of the Nigerian state in the global context is rooted in her false start and her forceful integration into the international division of labour resulting in structural distortions in the country’s political economy. Thus the chapter

concludes “that, one thing on which there is consensus across the board, within and outside the country, is that Nigeria is one of the most badly and poorly governed nation-state on the globe – even though, paradoxically, she is also one of the most and best endowed” (Amuwo, 2015:4).

Therefore, the chapter recommends among others, that the most critical political struggle in the country should be centred on bringing the state back into the public sphere and space where it really belongs – to be a public agency that gives happiness and welfare to Nigerians (Amuwo, 2015). As the Nigerian state begins to perform its critical roles, citizens and communities will gradually begin to ascribe due recognition to the state and this will eventually dovetail into strong state-society relations. As a natural consequence, the tempo created by this wider space for political and social relations will result in redefinition of the role of the Nigerian state in the new global economy.

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