



# African Heritage Institution

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## THE IMPERATIVE OF NATIONAL CROSSROAD LEADERSHIP

**Being Lecture Delivered**

**By**

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**At**

**The Big Ideas Podium  
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## Introduction

The idea, explanation or definition of the term leadership is complex and controversial and indeed has been the focus of intense academic and public debate for over 2000 years.

However, one of the preferred definitions according to social science encyclopedia is that:-

“Leadership is the process of influencing people in a way that enhances their contribution to the achievement of group goals. It typically involves one person having a positive impact on the behaviour of many others”. Consequently, “the literature of leadership is concerned with the factors that enable the plans of an individual to be translated into the actions of collectivity.

It is further observed that the form of conceptualization leads to a recognition of a complex of emotional relationships which in turn define the various types of leadership.

Among them are:

1. **PATRIACHAL** leadership in which the person upon whom the members perceive themselves to be dependent is both loved and feared.
2. **TYRANNICAL** leadership, where the emotional relationship is dominated by fear, and
3. **IDEAL** or **CHARISMATIC**, leadership in which the interpersonal relationship is characterized by love and affection.

Hence, the above various forms of leadership point to one categorical conclusion that leadership is basically a function of personality and social system in dynamic interaction.

It is equally observed that in modern democratic regimes, the executive is no longer merely an arm of government but has become the organizing centre of the political system itself.

It is also important to note that in many emerging nations, democratic forms of government are precariously sustained by dramatic executive leaders who rule by mass appeal and the exercise of broad political powers.



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Therefore the ideological premise was that only effective leadership can furnish integrative direction and action as a cure for stalemated pluralism endemic in many societies including Nigeria.

Thus, the integrative function of leadership is fulfilled by two of the above political role types. One is the national hero syndrome, where the chief executive is seen as personification and representative of the “General Will” or higher interest of the nation.

De Gaulle, Mustafa Atartuck and some leaders of many emerging nations exemplify this type of political leadership.

As populist figures, they stand above politics and particular interests.

The second is the executive as political broker or artful synthesizer, as exemplified by Franklyn D. Roosevelt that is the expert manager of interests and builder of coalitions and consensus.

Nigeria, we must admit has witnessed the typical leadership of chief executive as personification and representative of the seemingly “general will” but later in reality turning into ethnic/regional champions to the disappointment of the general national expectations. We have therefore experienced in this country leaders holding power without responsibility, legitimacy or authority, but merely manipulated and teleguided by ethnic/Regional/Religious/sentiments.

Hence, Nigeria is a nation born in optimism in 1960 at independence but has in its 56years lived in a state of doubt and uncertainty. Within those years too, all kinds of analysis and conclusions have been assembled on critical issues responsible for what has become a Nigeria dilemma over its leadership, nation building and national development. This is because all the countries compared to Nigeria in 1960 such as Brazil, Malaysia, Indonesia, India, etc. have made astronomical progress, developed relatively stable political and economic systems.

However, one of Nigeria’s fault lines was for a long time attributed to leadership failures, others suggested defective political and economic structures and yet others spoke of the Nigerian national character or the “Nigerian factor”. Well, whatever or whichever, the reality is that in comparison to her other contemporaries, Nigeria was an abysmal disappointment in both



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expectations and achievements. This is obvious when one realizes the position of India, Brazil, Indonesia etc. within the present international political and economic system, in comparison to Nigeria. Actually Nigeria is a country of outrageous paradox in the sense that it is a nation constantly threatened not by the masses and those who have nothing to lose, but ironically by the incoherent national political elites who have everything to lose. Consequently, although Nigeria is assessed as uniquely powerful in its African and Global scope at the domestic level, the country is assessed as equally uniquely insecure and unstable. It is therefore imperative for us to recognize and accept, no matter how uncomfortable that the tensions and crises constantly present in Nigeria arise not from imaginary but real issues which the national leadership must address urgently.

**It is historic fact that leadership is everything in governance and management of human affairs.** Here also, history has furnished us with examples of specific qualities and attributes that contribute to effective leadership.

These include clear sense of purpose or mission and vision, charisma and the ability to motivate others in a way that favours compliance, dedication and devotion to the fulfillment of the vision and the mission. The late sage – Chinua Achebe – summarized Nigeria’s leadership problems in his book – **The Trouble with Nigeria**. Accordingly, he said “Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal examples which are the hallmarks of true leadership”. He further concluded that “in spite of all conventional opinion, Nigeria has been less fortunate in its leadership”, and placed the blame on the “seminal absence of intellectual rigour in the political thought of our founding fathers”.

Leadership and nation-building have consistently been Nigeria’s most constant priority agenda before and since independence. Unfortunately, in spite of all good intentions and spirited efforts of the nation’s leaders since 1960, these twin problems remain a national dilemma. Throughout Nigeria’s history, sub-national or ethnic nationalism has dominated and sabotaged all meaningful discussions and debates about national integration and nation-building.



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**In fact, no generation of leaders, military or civilian, has been able to create an atmosphere of credibility to ensure Nigeria's claim to a political future as one nation. None was able to evolve a unifying national ideology that was embraced either by fellow political elites or by the entire Nigerian populace across the country.**

Recently, some Nigerian political leaders have said that "Nigerian unity is not negotiable". This is an irony because these leaders have forgotten, or have failed to learn, the lessons of history, Nigerian unity is definitely negotiable and must be re-negotiated for it to stand or survive the test of time. The reality over the years remains that in spite of the best efforts of all our leaders past or present, Nigerian unity is not guaranteed. It is simply, at best, an aspiration and not yet an achievement. Hence, the statement that Nigerian unity is "not negotiable" is simply a historical fallacy.

Therefore, if we are to salvage the country, we must begin to face reality, stop the syndrome or self-deception and self-delusion about Nigerian historical exceptionalism. Today, if the truth must be told, our diversity has turned into disorder, and our democracy into an invitation to incremental anarchy.

**For Nigerian unity and nation-building or even national consciousness to succeed the leaders need to borrow a leaf from or emulate the experiences of countries that did not ignore the element of pluralism in their respective countries and societies. Nationalism, including ethnic nationalism, is not about to disappear in the world generally, and certainly not in Nigeria, no matter how much we want to wish it away. It is still a potent force and all its advocates feel they have a strong case and believe that history is on their side.**

Without mincing words, the disparity between claims to nationhood and the political realities in Nigeria are responsible for the political instability, past military coups, sporadic guerillawarfares, crises and violence including Boko Haram that have characterized Nigeria's history. **It is equally the same realities that compel the Nigerian political elites – military and civilian – once in power to quickly split along many lines, particularly, the lines of ethnic origin, religion and region. The result has been inter-elite rivalries, reciprocal suspicion, hostility**



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**of position and status conflict among Nigerian elites. Consequently throughout our history, the national elites have been engaged in deadly competitions and conflicts of hostile sub-cultures, resulting in various danger signals that often threaten the survival of the country.**

There is hardly any national issue over which our incoherent national political elites would accept consensus, except perhaps at the 2014 National Conference. Even that has a problem now as every issue is now subject to political maneuvers and intrigues, conspiracies and sabotage of one another or of one group against another. **Hence there exists in Nigeria, almost on a permanent basis, a heightened level of elite insecurity, with its inevitable national psychosis.**

Within the 56years of the country's existence, three systems of government, parliamentary, military and presidential systems have failed to solve Nigerian national leadership problem or guarantee the country's long-term existence as one nation. Instead Nigeria continues to be a country of a relatively acceptable past, a troubled present and an uncertain or doubtful future. Simply stated, ours is a country whose past is better than its present and the future is a guessing game at the national and international levels.

Certainly, the record of leadership in Nigeria military or civilian has not been impressive. Some leaders tried but others failed "ab initio" and had no capacity even to salvage either their own political future or the nation they swore to govern.

As Ali Mazuri and Michael Tidy stated:

"Military rule has not, on balance been more successful than civilian rule in curbing ethnicism in Africa.... To the extent that in most African countries, recruitment into the armed forces has been more ethnically specialized than participation on the civilian politics, the military situation has contained graver ethnic risks than the civilian political system".

It was once thought and some members of the military establishment believed it too, that military takeover of government several times in Nigeria was panacea to the country's endemic problem of political instability, economic underperformance and constant national crises.



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Events proved many Nigerians wrong as our messianic brave military brass in power complicated and exacerbated Nigeria's challenges at every level imaginable.

**The performance of the military in power demonstrated the historic doctrine that human nature does not alter as between classes. And according to Will Durant "nothing is clearer in history than the adoption by successful rebels of the methods they were accustomed to condemn in the forces they deposed."**

Indeed the military regimes adopted similar cleavages of ethnicity, religion and region and directly inherited the same problems as the civilians they replaced.

And with the political civilian elites of today, the stark reality is dreadful and almost inescapable tragedy that looms in every sector of our live.

If Nigerians think a country can't remain underdeveloped for 200years, they should ask Haitians.

A perfect leader will compete with God and that is not what Nigerians want, what we need is a leader who can save Nigeria from its constant fluctuations between crises, violence and threats of national disintegration. **Quite often, our leaders, military or civilian play the "Ostrich" over what looks like a national tragedy foretold.**

Today, violence is taking over the country and it is imperative that the leaders prevent violence from killing Nigeria but instead they like Nero are "fiddling while Rome burns."

Is Nigeria a failed or a failing state? And is Nigeria becoming incrementally irrelevant within Africa and the international community in general?

One should be worried because the irony is that while the nation faces present and imminent danger, the leaders, individually and collectively are behaving as if they welcome the prospects of this incremental national catastrophe.

Today, one thing is clear and has always been clear, Nigeria needs credible and committed leadership for unity, nation-building and development to be achieved and sustained in the



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country. In fact, we need not just leadership in the ordinary sense of the word but **heroic leadership** because our national problems, now more than ever require the talents and inspirational articulateness of an extraordinary person or persons for the design and execution of sustainable solutions to our nations problems.

In the history of nations at crossroads like ours, France had Charles De Gaulle, Indonesia had Surkano, Yugoslavia had Tito, Egypt had Nasser and Turkey had Kernal Mustafa Ataturk, South Africa Mandela to name just a few. These were all self-confident, visionary leaders and without doubt, patriotic and genuine nationalists. As Richard Nixon said, “a leader is one who has the emotional, mental and physical strength to withstand the pressure and tensions, and then, at the critical moment, to make a choice and act decisively.

**In fact, the worst leaders in the world have been those who refused to make decisions on critical national issues of historic importance.**

## **RESTRUCTURE OR REFERENDUM**

**Generally, the leadership Nigeria needs now must recognize that any new system for the country must take cognizance of the present national reality that today no single group or bloc, no matter their pretenses to power, can again dominate the Nigerian political system. We need a system that commands the respect of our people and is seen as fair, just and equitable to all.**

Therefore, Nigerian politics needs restructuring and institutionalization as a way to contain its adverse effects on efforts towards nation-building, national integration and national development.

Consequently, **Nigeria needs a systems of shared power, bearing in mind that political decency flourishes best in societies in which stable, peaceful and just political institutions make it difficult for reckless and lawless political adventurers to thrive.**

AS YinkaOdumakin has warned “Events are moving too fast at such a speed that restructuring may become obsolete like perestroika and glasnost was in Soviet Union if we



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**tarry much longer than necessary on this point where most of the constituent units have nothing but frustration.”**

We must come to terms with the historic reality that, recognizes our country’s irrepressible pluralism and the necessity for voluntary integration. **Coercive integration – or integration by force or by intimidation – has failed all over the world including Africa. Events in Sudan, for example are indicative of the reality that no matter how long you hold people by force against their will; eventually the people’s yearning for freedom and voluntary association will triumph.**

A political system that makes it difficult for leaders to lead effectively and for followers to follow voluntarily is a recipe for progressive anarchy or national catastrophe. Our system of government must respect our respective cultural identities, interests and priorities.

We need a truly Federal System as the United States, India, and Canada, Switzerland or the present devolution process as in the United Kingdom. Federalism, in essence, is simply “**a contractual non-centralizing**” involving structural dispersion of power among many centers whose legitimate authority is constitutionally guaranteed. Hence, entrenched diffusion of power or division of power among levels of government remains the principal characteristic and argument for federal democracy. It becomes therefore clear that when one speaks of federalism, one means, in short, “**coordinate supremacy of the levels of government with regards to their respective functions**”. Certainly in this context, **the “golden rule” of Federalism** as stipulated by scholars and political analysts, has been constantly ignored or breached in Nigeria over the years. Nigeria has also ignored the important aspect of the equilibrium between the CENTRE and the REGIONS/FEDERATING UNITS.

Our present defective federal system needs to give way to true federalism, which will also enable the leaders to deliver social justice and guarantee citizens’ rights, safety and security across the country. It has become clear worldwide that leaders who are unable to ensure justice at all times and to all citizens regardless of their ethnicity, region, creed or state of ‘origin’ have no right to



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demand peaceful behavior amongst the citizenry. As I have often observed and remarked, **“Throughout history, those denied justice have had no interest in peace”**.

**Here we cannot avoid stating the obvious fact that operating a system with a strong, overarching centre and basically a unitary system in the guise of a federation – as we have had since 1967 – has been the root of the constant do – or die struggle by our sectional political leaders for the control of the central government.** This, according to Professor Elaigwu, has “turned the game of politics into the battle of politics” among the Nigerian elite.

**Indeed, in this context, Fiscal Federalism or Resource control is a problem that must be resolved before Nigeria and Nigerians would think of a peaceful or harmonious co-existence as one nation, united and indivisible.** The Founding Fathers of Nigeria has this effectively solved and settled. But the Military Coups, the Civil War and Military Regimes abandoned this important legacy of Nigeria’s Founding Fathers.

In fact, the federalism including fiscal federalism which they founded was principally a **CONTRACTUAL DECENTRALIZATION** that respected and recognized the **Autonomy, Legitimacy and Authority as well as the cultural identities of each Region.** But as a result of the Civil War and prolonged military rule, the political restructuring of Nigeria drastically changed with its **IMBALANCES, INCONGRUENCIES AND MANIFEST injustice at various levels.**

Virtually all well – meaning Nigerians know that the post-civil war and post military regimes political and economic structures must be revisited. And every regime since then has tinkered with it in the form of reforms, conferences, and debates including the 2014 National conference. And all have aimed at restoring Nigeria to its relative pre-civil war modicum of political stability, economic justice, peace, progress and national unity.

However many Nigerian leaders have lived in denial and falsehood for too long. It is now time to face reality .We therefore need a dynamic, pragmatic, courageous and purposeful leadership with integrity and genuine patriotism to move the nation forward.



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**It is clear that unless the leaders learn the lessons of history and act soon the call for Restructuring will be followed by a call for a National Referendum. Indeed, the REFERENDUM option is already here with us, and looms high at the national and international agenda to settle the Nigerian national questions and ensure stability and peaceful co-existence. And those who think they can stop it must take a second look at the present international system. All over the world, people are rejecting unity without justice and peace without justice. I know for example that majority of Igbos, prefer a united Nigeria but not the unity of “slaves” and “masters” and also want peace but not peace of the grave yard.**

Therefore, is Nigeria’s future in jeopardy? Definitely Yes, but the problems are not insurmountable. What is needed is political goodwill and decisive action that guarantees all the citizens right to all Nigerians regardless of ethnic origin, region or religion. As Fredrick Nietzsche, would have said Nigerian elites are obsessed with their vision of “eternal recurrence” in history and afraid of their shadows. And yet unlike other elites, a people who are conscious of their history do not repeat their past mistakes as Nigerian leaders often do.

Today, our collective interest lies in our decision to take our destiny in our hands.

We must reform, restructure or perish the idea of one Nigeria surviving the present impending critical challenges. This too can be averted by a dynamic leadership that can although too late change the course of Nigerian history by doing what is right and honorable IMPLEMENTING the 2014 NATIONAL CONFERENCE REPORT.

In conclusion, AS Thomas Jefferson said, “I am not an advocate for frequent changes in laws and constitutions but laws and institutions must go hand in hand with the progress of the human mind. As that becomes more developed, more enlightened and as new discoveries are made, new truths discovered and manners and opinions change, with the change of circumstances, institutions must advance able to keep pace with the times.”

**Thank you**



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...promoting evidence-based decision making