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**Governance and the Challenge of Accountable Leaders in Africa: Unmasking Developmental Character of Leadership Traits Amidst the Nigerian Management Problems**

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**Abstract**

Modern critical studies in postcolonial works have often attributed the failure of African leadership to the imperial structures of the global order—and to the pervasive impacts of these lingering colonial interests in frustrating the quest of the African leaders to provide good leadership for its people. A particular important trajectory of this preceding thought is that the source of African leadership challenges is attributed to the cultural paralysis and restraining political arrangement which this asphyxiating global order continually exercises on the growth and development of the African continent. On the other hand, there are critical discourses in this modern thought that directly or partly blamed the inability of the African people to govern themselves to the inferiority of the African DNA or some problematic racial deficiencies. While this school of thought has its root in pejorative and colonial studies of the African people—its lingering presence in modern discourses appeared to suggest that African people have no innate ability to lead themselves into economic prosperity and technological advancement in spite of their enormous natural and human resources. Departing from these different strands of modern critical discourse on leadership, the present paper engages the fundamental question of whether leaders are innately born with leadership abilities or whether they acquired these leadership qualities through training and discipline. Are African people inept and incompetent in leadership because they are pathologically doomed by the innate subversive workings of their DNA makeup—or is the failure of African leadership largely the failure to master strategic leadership qualities that are fundamental to good leadership? Siding with the developmental character of leadership qualities, the paper—using the exploratory method underscores the significance of development theories of leadership qualities in contemporary debates on leadership—and the need for African leaders, especially in Nigeria, to acquire these essential qualities for the progress of the African continent.

**Key words:** Leadership, Good governance, Development theory, Bad leadership, Imperialism

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## **Governance and the Challenge of Accountable Leaders in Africa: Unmasking Developmental Character of Leadership Traits Amidst the Nigerian Management Problems**

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### **Introduction**

Leadership is the foremost problem of contemporary Africa because everywhere one turns, we can see the effects of bad leadership in every sector of the African society (Acemoglu & Robinson, 2013). In his work, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, Chinua Achebe rightly observed that “the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership” (Achebe, 1983). He also observed, “[t]here is nothing basically wrong with the Nigerian character. There is nothing wrong with the Nigerian land, climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership.” Achebe (1983) significantly observed, “Nigeria can be changed today if she discovers leaders who have the will, ability and vision,” however, he added, “such people are rare in any time or place.” Unfortunately, this lack of visionary leaders has cost Nigeria and the African continent at large a lot in terms of unconsummated leadership promises, political backwardness and perpetual underdevelopments. It has also led, apparently, to the point of economic stagnation and the general fall in the standard of living. In fact, in contemporary times, bad leadership can be seen in the failed state of service delivery, dysfunctional health institutions, dilapidated educational facilities, general insecurity, and gross poverty in both rural and urban settlements.

In Africa, leadership problems affect the social, economic, cultural and political sectors, so that one can reason with just grounds that Africa’s main problems could be readily solved by changes of leadership in the continent. Historically, the African continent after the demise of the colonial regimes witnessed a new dispensation of dictatorship which further plunged the continent into the dark ages. Unfortunately, despite the good intentions of the Christian missions and its propagation of Western education, in the long run, it generally did not very well equip the African people in order to assume serious political leadership in terms of the democratic culture of the emerging modern world (Omenka, 2003). Thus, in the post-colonial world, instead of a movement out of the malaise of the colonial era, African continent witnessed the gross sabotage of its national and human resources by indigenous African leadership whose various trials and adventures in military rule further turned the nations of Africa into a place of pain, disease, desolation and general tragedy. It is this tragedy that has become the hallmark of the African continent and the familiar face that has become synonymous with the African continent as readily seen in the Western media.

If the tragedy of modern Africa is as a result of its leadership failure, particularly in the inability of its leaders to transit from traditional African society into a modern one, then it stands to reason to ask ourselves what factors contribute to this inability for many Africans to make the needed transition from traditional to modern or even postmodern society. Are Africans incapable of leadership? Or do they lack the inborn-leadership

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traits that are fundamental to effective leadership? Are we pathologically speaking inept to move the continent forward by way of competent leadership? Or are we mentally retarded or incapable to move the continent to development in the provision of effective modern health facilities, reduction of poverty and the general improvement of the standard of living? Why is the West developed and highly sophisticated while we continually wallow with the same stories of underdevelopment and failed state? Psychologically speaking, are some races inborn inherently with leadership traits and other naturally un-endowed with leadership characteristics? (Reed & Evans, 2008).

To put this more simply, are leaders born or made? Is leadership the product of one's genetic endowment or the outcome of one's nurturing and education? Could one learn or get training on the rudiments of leadership or is leadership the sole right of men and women who nature has endowed with these traits? Personally, we do believe that the preceding questions are basic to any discussion on leadership, and with the obvious failure of leadership on the African continent, it is necessary to once again address this and many pertinent questions on leadership. Consequently, this paper describes the traditional African leadership assumptions which tilt toward a leadership that is inborn and hence it is culturally assumed in traditional African settings that leaders are born rather than made. Similarly, the paper describes the necessary universal qualities needed for leadership and argues that while leadership qualities could appear to be inborn in some persons the fact that these qualities could be cultivated shows that leaders are not merely born, but are largely made by the combined forces of cultural, environmental and communal conditionings. Consequently, the paper notes the implications of this thesis in the locus of the Nigerian leadership environment.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Despite many years of political independence, Nigeria's hope and aspiration still remained unfulfilled due to lack of proper leadership and accountable governance. Afegbua and Adejuwon (2012) rightly observe that African leaders have often been put inot their position with inadequate experience. Though most of them have strived on, dealing with their problems of development and nation building essentially not only unprepared but unaided, their efforts have been at best only a qualified success. Furthermore, Obasanjo (1993) in his speech contends that, it need to be realized that the morass of governance in Africa emerged primarily as a result of lack of checks and balances in Africa's system of governance. In effect, for some African leaders, their nation ended up being treated as their individual personal property. The problem of leadership traits and leadership challenge needs to be address for Africa the thrive as a continent full of resources both human and natural.

### **Current Critical Perspectives & Trajectories in Leadership Studies**

In his study, "Are Great Leaders Born, or Are they Made?" David A. Olson's answer to this inquiry was generally in the direction that leaders are made rather than born. Accordingly, Olson (2009) observed, "Great leaders are born, and *then* they are made" (p. 30). The emphatic italic of the "then" by Olson (2009), shows his perception that leaders are naturally born like everybody, but then leadership development process distinguishes leaders from others. In the same direction, against the association of leadership with innate genetic makeup, Avolio (1999) notes that "leadership skills *can* be developed and mastered" (p. 18). Avolio (1999) places his italics on the verb "can." In

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his work, “Are Leaders Born or Made?” Garic (2006) asked, “Does leadership DNA exist?” For Garic (2006), there is no leadership gene. In fact, Garic (2006) emphatically observed, “Leadership DNA is a myth” (p. 19). According to Garic (2006), leadership qualities are social skills that do not lie in the domain of our DNA and hence they can be learned or cultivated by continuous practice. Significantly, Garic (2006) argued that the society recognizes leadership as the product of learning experience, hence the organizational culture in military and academic institutions. For Garic (2006), “What makes... leaders effective is not a natural ability; it is their desire to lead people, combined with a set of learned skills that they apply as leaders” (p. 19). He further added, “Leadership is nothing more than a collection of skills, that when employed, produce results” (Garic, 2006, p. 19). In this same direction, CIO insight research on leadership (2003) notes that leadership skills are acquirable and hence leadership is not the product of innate genes. Even though they recognize that “leadership ability is a combination of personal traits and acquired skills,” it largely tilts towards the view that leadership skills in terms of “relationship building,” “communication skills,” and “inspiration” are skills which could be learned (CIO, 2003, p. 67). On the other hand, Yeung (2007) has largely described leadership in terms of inherited personality traits. To the question, are leaders born or made, Yeung (2007) answered,

As you can imagine, the answer lies somewhere between the two. The ‘born’ bit comes in the form of personality and motivation. There's strong research to say that a big chunk of personality is heritable. Traits such as extroversion and emotional stability (the tendency to stay calm and unfazed by external events) have genetic components. Some people are therefore naturally better leaders than others. Extroverts who enjoy social interaction tend to outpace their more inward-looking peers; emotionally stable managers usually cope better in crises than their nervier team mates. There are of course other personality dimensions - and measuring them can give a strong indicator of likely leadership success (p. 68)

Yeung (2007) largely emphasized the dominance of personality traits. However, he also gives place to the learning experience and opportunity. In his conclusion, Yeung (2007) observed, “Are leaders born or made? Perhaps it is more accurate to answer that leaders are born and then made” (p.68). Even though this concluding statement by Yeung (2007) appears similar to the one by Olson (2009), however, the emphasis by Yeung (2007) is not on the “then,” as in Olson (2009), but on the “born.” Consequently, for Yeung (2007), leadership training is largely the nursing or harnessing of leadership traits that are already there at birth. In this regard, Yeung (2007) primarily sees leadership qualities as the product of leadership genes. On the other hand, Ruvolo, Petersen and LeBoeuf (2004) have shown in their study, “Leaders are Made, Not Born: The Critical Role of a Developmental Framework to Facilitate an Organizational Culture of Development,” that deliberate development is important in the formation of organizational leadership. In the context of the United States Military academy, Ruvolo *et al* (2004) reiterate the thesis that leadership development is crucial to the success in an organization and there is the need to purposefully pursue a leadership development program rather just acknowledging superficially its importance. Concerning the need for this leadership development, they noted,

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The entire mindset and perspective of organizational leadership must be changed from the old paradigm of having one leader and a great many followers...to a new paradigm of seeing all members as leaders. This creates an organization characterized by leaders at all levels who are focused on the organization's vision and mission and who work together to promote individual and organizational success (Ruvolo *et al.*, 2004, p.18)

For Ruvolo *et al* (2004), everyone is a potential leader and thereby there is the need of the organization to develop and nurture the leadership abilities in each person within the organization. In the same direction, Paluch (2004) observes despite the misgivings on the idea that leaders are made rather than born, there is evidence that everyone could be a good leader in any selective area he or she chooses to exercise or develop his leadership abilities. Paluch (2004) observed, “[t]he many management consulting gurus and personality testing people claim that leaders are born” (p.34). In particular, he notes, “One management consultant I know says, ‘Maybe you can teach a pig to sing, but it is rarely worth the effort’” (Paluch, 2004, p. 34). Contrary to this perspective, Paluch (2004) observed, “[t]hat may be partly true, but there is still the possibility that everyone can lead at something. The trick is to find out what they can lead at that will profit the company and help them move in that direction” (p. 34). Similarly, Camecor (2006) has reiterated the place of education in the transition or transformation of ordinary people from being followers into leaders. Hence, Camecor (2006) argues primarily that leaders are basically the product of the molding influences of education and thus they are made rather than born. In addition, Horne (2008), in his work, “Nurture over Nature,” underscores the view that leadership qualities are the product of nurturing rather than the mere endowment of nature. In this regard, Horne (2008) concedes that “[m]ost leaders are born with certain qualities that enable them to lead,” however, “the exceptional ones take what they were born with and move their leadership and influence to the next level” (p. 28).

From these preceding works sampled, the general and dominating view is that leadership is largely the product of training, development and nurturing rather than the outcome of one's natural genetic endowments. In this understanding, leadership becomes an enterprise that could be engaged or participated by everyone particularly when he or she is given the right training or take the time to undergo the necessary nurturing processes which could help in honing his or her leadership abilities into perfection. Consequently, the myth of individual leaders who are genetically enhanced by nature to assume leadership position must be dispelled, and the right opportunities, developing processes and necessary nurturing program be encouraged in order to help people to aspire for leadership in different ramifications of the human society.

### **The Centrality of Royal Blood & Nobility in Traditional African Societies**

The traditional African leadership style is basically monarchy, where the king rules his domain with full force, and the subjects must obey his every whim and caprice (Njoku, 2006). Some of the African kings or chiefs in pre-modern Africa were humane and compassionate; however, most of them were known to encourage mysticism, cultic practices and prided themselves in the possession of supernatural powers which made their words and decrees authoritative and hence unquestionable. Significantly, the



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traditional African setting encourages largely the leadership in the Machiavellian order whereby most African kings or leaders are mostly feared rather than loved.

In this traditional setting, it is assumed that the royal family has the inborn leadership qualities necessary for leadership. In fact, the traditional idea of monarchy primarily believed that leaders are born rather than made, hence after the demise of a king, his firstborn or designated heir is enthroned as the next king without any criteria apart from a dominant emphasis on the membership of a person to royalty or nobility. This understanding that leadership is inherently within the royal blood assumes that leadership qualities are inborn within the royal blood, and hence leaders are born rather than made. There are instances whereby the community realizes that a particular heir is incompetent to lead; however, the kingmakers often manipulate the process in order to see that the desired person is on the throne. The general belief in monarchy in traditional African society relies upon the assumption that leadership qualities are inborn, that is, royal blood automatically gives one the needed qualities for leadership. However, in traditional African societies the heir apparent often undergoes informal leadership training in view of his future role as king, however, things are largely left to chance because it is believed that royalty and one's family pedigree provide the person with automatic leadership qualities which are necessary for good governance (Kpone-Tonwe, 2001). On the other hand, there are also times when ambitious generals take over or usurp the leadership of African kingdoms, but even when this occurs, there is the general belief that the nobility of such a person will automatically provide him with the necessary qualities for effective leadership.

Unfortunately, this understanding that one's royal background and wealth provides one with the inborn traits or qualities needed for leadership has generally continued to the modern African political dispensation as readily seen in the emphasis on nobility and royal pedigree as necessary prerequisites for African leaders in order to assume political offices. In this regard, there is no adequate scrutiny of the personal qualities of the individual to lead or assume leadership positions. It is a common knowledge that the relationship of one to an elite family, nobility and royal background are often the criteria for election or appointment into a particular public office. This is the reason why many a time a minister of finance or petroleum may not even be an expert in finances or petrol chemistry but may merely be just a privileged elite from a noble background who due to his noble background is expected to be a good leader.

Significantly, the pre-modern African traditional leadership style in terms of the monarchy is a trait that is not peculiar to Africa but has similar occurrence in the Western world. On the other hand, while the West has moved from this traditional understanding of leadership, unfortunately, the African continent is many steps behind in the understanding that leaders are born and thereby leadership qualities are only found in one's pedigree, royalty or nobility rather than in one's ability and merit.

### **Critical Mapping of Universal Qualities of Effective Leadership**

In looking at leadership, there are universally accepted qualities that are necessary for good governance. These qualities include integrity, communication, transparency, hard work, team work, vision, people-oriented, goal-setting ability, appreciative, charisma, and self-control (Gardner, 2000). In fact, the qualities of good leadership could be endless, however, the highlighted traits are assumed to be the dominant ones which are basic for good leadership to take place. The universal demand for these qualities in

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leaders invariably shows that these qualities can be cultivated and nurtured and they are not necessarily virtues or qualities that are inborn or inherited (Osaghae, 2010). While a person's upbringing or environment can accelerate or influence the fast maturity and developments of these leadership qualities, however, these qualities could be nursed, nurtured and developed by anyone because they are qualities that are indispensable and required in any law-abiding community. It is important to note that nature or God could endow an individual with these leadership traits, however, it is the individual that is responsible to nurse or develop these traits to fully-fledged leadership qualities. In this sense, these leadership qualities existed in each person to a certain degree or percentage that is necessary to exist in a law-abiding community (Clarke, 2009). In this particular understanding, each person that is a law-abiding individual must possess these traits in a minimal measure for him or her to function effectively in such a given society because these qualities in themselves are qualities that underpin human constitutions and laws, and ideally they are necessary elements which should be found in different degrees within each law-abiding person in the society. Consequently, the presence of these traits in minimal measure in each person indicates the potentiality of leadership that each law-abiding citizen carries with him or her. In fact, it is in the realm of such potentiality that these leadership qualities become a common heritage that could be individually enhanced or developed from its minimal status to fully-fledged leadership qualities.

Similarly, we can also add that no one is born honest or transparent or good, it is the environment with its religious, political and cultural influences that conditioned one into exercising or developing these qualities or virtues. In the long run, we are born virtue-less, however, we possess in each one of us an inherent potential to experience and practice the expected virtues within the community we live in. If this is right, it thence follows that each person can develop these qualities of leadership from the little moral fragments that are made available to him or her by his or her family, upbringing or community. In emphasizing the "tabula rasa" nature of the human person, we assumed that the human moral template is empty at birth, but it is naturally inbuilt with moral or amoral potentials to develop and evolve into a savage or a saint depending on the communal forces available to or shaping the individual. In fact, in each one of us at birth we have the potential or possibility to become men and women of virtues in relationship to the highlighted leadership virtues or not, depending on the combined and contributing influences of the environment which make personality and character possible in the molding hands of family or the entire society. In this understanding, the society, in the long run, invariably makes the moral imprint on the person whether in the direction of these leadership qualities or away from it.

On the other hand, in the Christian traditions, human depravity is an accepted fact and it is readily assumed that human persons are born morally corrupted and it is the society or the molding hands of God, Christ and the church which helps the imprinting of the right conducts on the individual. In either way, the community plays a very important role in the making of leaders because it helps in the development and nurturing of leaders. It is obvious to also say from this preceding consideration that failure in leadership is actually a failure of the community since the community exercises a lot of influence in developing, nursing and educating its leaders. In fact, a community that fails to produce good leaders shows that such community itself is morally sick because the leaders of a community are a true reflection of the virtues and values of the same society. In this perspective, the imposition of a pre-modern traditional leadership understanding

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within the modern African society is partly responsible for the African leadership problems and the continuous emphasis on this leadership template is traceable to the active adherence to this understanding of leadership in contemporary African communities. In fact, leaders emerge from the dominant moral forces within the community which they live in. It is no exaggeration to say that the leader of a particular people is a mirror of the values and beliefs of a given people. For example, Hitler was a true reflection of the racial confusions and intolerance of Germany in the first and second world wars.

Hitler did not produce Germany, but Germany produced Hitler because they provided him with ethnic and racial sentiments that placed him in a leadership position. In the same way, Idi Amin's atrocities in Uganda bear a remarkable resemblance to the moral and political confusions of the pre-Idi Amin Uganda that gave rise to his leadership. In the long run, the tale of corrupted African leaders is a direct reflection of the corruption that is evident in the larger African society that gave birth to these corrupt leaders. In fact, there are no corrupt leaders without a corrupt majority of the community as accomplices. One may say that this analysis is simplistic or naïve, however, history is replete with incidences that good leadership in the long run emerges because of the good values of a community and bad leaders emerge because of a decline in the values and virtues of the community. It is obvious that when a community is warmongering in character, there invariably arises a warlord to lead them, and when a community desires a diplomat, providence also has a way of making this leadership preference to take place. Consequently, communal values play a fundamental role in the shaping of leaders, whether good leaders or bad ones. In that sense, the universal qualities of leadership assume that leadership is primarily the product of community and upbringing, rather than the working out of inborn traits or characteristics.

### **Critical Implications for the Nigerian Society**

From the preceding observations, it is obvious that leaders are primarily made rather than born and this understanding comes with its many implications for the Nigerian leadership problems. First, the observations that leaders are made rather than born provides the necessary blueprint to embark on the formal training of African leaders. This point presupposes the need to educate both current and emerging African and Nigerian leaders in particular on the culture of democracy, rule of law and human rights stipulations which are necessary ingredients for effective leadership within the present modern dispensation. In this sense, there is need to establish and improve the existing administrative and managerial institutions which will help to nurse and nurture the needed qualities that are essential for good leadership.

Secondly, there is the need of re-education and the need to create awareness which will assist in the replacement of prior and pre-modern understandings that leadership is primarily based on one's pedigree or nobility and not on the exercise of leadership qualities by the Nigerian leaders. This re-education could take the form of conferences, workshops, and seminars in rural and urban areas and in homes, schools and public places on the need to elect leaders based on exemplary leadership qualities which are evident in the life of the aspirants of public offices. Thirdly, students both in the universities, secondary schools and even the primary schools should be introduced into the subject of leadership and the essential qualities of a good leader. The curricula of Nigerian schools should be reviewed and new courses or subjects in this specification



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included. It is ironic that in spite of the realization that while leadership is the foremost Nigerian problem yet our curricula in primary and second schools or even universities do not place leadership as a core course or compulsory subject for all students. Lastly, the government should have a ministry for leadership development which should monitor leadership matters. This leadership ministry should offer the Nigerian people carefully laid down plans on leadership matters such as the present leadership potentials, problems and possibilities for the entire country. This ministry should also develop ways of nursing or encouraging leadership qualities, forestall brain-drain and provide leadership guidance for the nation. It should also show the leadership availability and problems within the different geo-political zones and encourage the harnessing of the leadership potentials of each of these local zones in order to chart and map projectionary paths of effective leadership in the future. This sector should be encouraged to have statistics, information and blueprints for effective transition and continuity in Nigerian leadership. It should also encourage leadership values and qualities that aimed at moving the country forward, and it should present the Nigerian people with adequate data that will assist them in their evaluation of the efficiency of the people in public offices.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Africa and Nigeria are in dire need of good leaders. The paper argues that leaders are made rather than born. In this understanding, the paper draws the implications of this view in the light of the contemporary Nigerian leadership problems. It encourages the need to develop effective leaders for the country by a change of the mindset of the Nigerian people which places more attention on nobility and royalty in the choice of people in public offices rather than merits and established leadership traits. Consequently, the African people and the Nigerian context in particular must consciously encourage the development of selfless leaders who are patriotic and reliable to run public offices. It is these kinds of leaders that are now needed in order to move Nigeria from the present economic and political stagnation into the joy of prosperity and abundance. In this sense, the first sentences of the national anthem are appropriate, which partly read, “Arise O Compatriot Nigeria’s call obey to serve our father’s land with love strength and faith...” We cannot rise and have a place in the community of nations without heeding this call to offer ourselves in selfless service to our fatherland.

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