The Psychology of Power: A Nigerian Experiment

by

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Power is "the ability to satisfy one's wants through the control of preferences and/or opportunities" [Kuhn, 1963]

In writing this particular piece, I intend to delve into the issue of the power of psychology as it relates to the psychology of power. I have always been one to believe that you must claim in other to possess and once you possess, you must establish your position in the scheme of things, through personal conviction and resolve...that can only be sustained by an irrefutable air of palpability, requisite for the maintenance of that 'power' you now possess. But now the game has just begun. Why? Simple, your claim on power must remain forever productive, workable, adaptable, attractive and progressive that inevitably, it begins to shape decisively your 'domestic' and 'foreign' sphere of operation; and just what do you intend to accomplish by this? Shape your immediate and larger environment of course!

As a student of philosophy and psychology, I have always been fascinated by the affinity of westerners for political expediency over morality. Yes, the end as they say does justify the means. How exactly do you get what you want in the midst of so many competing and sometimes conflicting ideas, philosophies, principles, ideologies and interests. Simple, or is it! The intricacies and complexities of human behaviour and nature require more than anything else, the utmost in psychological and emotional aptitude/intelligence when dealing with foe and friend alike.

I have always been one to take the approach of figuring out who my friend or foe is so as to better lay out a plan of 'attack' or 'defence' as the case may be. Actually, I believe it is also prudent and advisable to have a 'neutral' strategy as part of one's modus operandi.

This then brings us to the issue of The Psychology of Power. What exactly is it and how does it manifest itself. Also, another rather logical question to ask would be how does it manifest itself in a particular setting? Be it politics, relationships or daily life. I intend to stick with how this phenomenon manifests itself in the 'political sphere'. Why? Because everything is politics and politics is everything!

The 'Nigerian laboratory' would seem to serve as a viable medium for such an 'experiment.' In doing this, I will stick primarily to the three main nationalities, Hausa-Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba that for all intents and purposes have dominated the Nigerian political landscape (albeit to varying degrees) for close to a hundred years!

For close to 36 of Nigeria's 40 years of independence, the Hausa-Fulani (through their leadership apparatus) have ruled Nigeria (note that I said ruled and not led). Why where
they able to do this? Simple. They incorporated another formidable Nigerian sectional interest (the middle-belt, comprising the Tiv and others) into their fold, as they, and not the Hausa-Fulani possessed (at least at the time) the skilled military personnel (mostly combatant) requisite for the control of their immediate and larger environment. Thus the theory of the ‘monolithic north’ was sold to the rest of the country (the south) and rehashed (rather successfully) along with the much-vaunted ‘indivisibility of Nigeria’, to the Yoruba towards a ‘successful’ prosecution of the bloody civil war. The truth is, the north (the Hausa-Fulani in particular) saw the defeat of Biafra as the defeat of the whole south. That, however was where they were wrong! That, without question has been the bane of the Hausa-Fulani political set-up till today.

The north mistook power gained through military conquest for real power. They also failed to take into cognizance the political wizardry of Chief Obafemi Awolowo in not getting the Yoruba dragged into a war they were not ready for...thereby positioning the Yoruba to be in a unique position politically once the war was over. Chief Awolowo knew from the onset that the decks were stacked against the south in the event of a military conflict. He had worked so hard and was continuing to work tirelessly to position the Yoruba through education, commerce, technology and industry, the true hallmarks of power...real power that is! He was therefore not going to let the inordinate and misguided ambition of a neophyte like Ojukwu, lead to the destruction of everything he had worked so hard to build. One could therefore say that the late Yoruba sage and tactician chose political expediency over ‘morality’ when it came to the survival of his people (since most Igbo claim till today he left them high and dry by not going along with the east at the time).

The north also underestimated the will and resilience of the Igbo people. It is amazing, even till today how quickly the Ndigbo recovered from a devastation of such magnitude, as was the Nigerian civil war. They (the Igbo) however had no choice. It was either grow from the ashes or die! And grow from the ashes they did! The recovery of the Igbo (no doubt due to their ingenuity and adaptive nature) was more than facilitated and enabled on the one hand by the infrastructure and institutions Chief Awolowo had built in the old western region (talk about an irony of all ironies), and on the other by the hospitable nature of the Yoruba towards their brethren from the east; as the north for the most part still harboured intense hostility towards them for the events leading up to and during the civil war. Politically however, the Igbo were in a state of flux and have been ever since.

With the end of the civil war, the stage was now set for the power play to begin. The north, either as a result of a lack of political sophistication or plain lack of foresight, rather than seize the opportunity presented by their ‘ascension to power’, instead bungled the opportunity. An opportunity that will never come their way again...at least not the way they had it for 36 years! Not only did they not influence their larger environment, their claim on power (the military and a moribund aristocracy) was unattractive, unworkable, utterly unproductive and so regressive that it was unable to influence its own immediate environment...hence the abject poverty in the north and the resultant relative backwardness in comparison to the south. To make matters worse, their descent into the abyss of religious bigotry might yet prove to be the final nail in the coffin regarding the political and economic future of the north.

On the other hand, while the northern power structure persisted with its defective plundercracy (in cahoots with quite a few individuals of questionable character and integrity in the south, the southwest in particular, of course), the sense of adventure that had always been part of the southern psyche, continued to manifest itself by way of greater accomplishments in the fields of education, the arts, sciences, business and industry. The reasoning (and quite a proven one at that) being as Francis Bacon, De
heresibus once said, ‘knowledge is power.’ This is why real power will never reside in the north! The capital of Nigeria can be moved to Gusau for all they want, it will never improve the lot of the average northerner in as much as the mentality of the leadership structure in the north remains the same.

As the example of the Jews has shown and continues to show, a good head is a function of a developed mind…and a developed mind will forever be a veritable source of innovation and creativity, the indisputable hallmarks of true and sustainable growth; it is he who values and encourages such a concept that inevitably is able to influence his immediate and larger environment. The Jews make up only 3% of the American population but control the entertainment industry, the law and medical professions, business (in particular banking) and industry…the list goes on. Mind you, the U.S. has never had a Jewish president! The stage, I believe is set for a politics of coalitions in the Nigerian political arena…coalitions that will be shaped by the pervading north-south dichotomy.

The bottom line...control and manage your resources (both human and natural) in addition to your immediate environment, and you will unquestionably influence the larger environment. Also, it is imperative that political expediency be your guiding principle when deciding who to align yourself with...remember, no one can go it alone! Hence, when you align yourself with a group, they must have something tangible, workable and complimentary to bring to the table. Shared (but workable) interests, principles and ideals are without question the recipe for true growth and development. This is The Psychology of Power!

“Everybody strives to become master over all space and to extend its force (its will to power:) and to thrust back all that resists its extension. But it continually encounters similar efforts on the part of other bodies and ends by coming to an arrangement (‘union’) with those of them that are sufficiently related to it: thus they then conspire together for power. And the process goes on”…. [Nietzsche]

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