

BOOK REVIEW

A ROADMAP FOR UNDERSTANDING AFRICAN POLITICS: LEADERSHIP AND POLITICAL INTEGRATION IN NIGERIA

Victor Oguejiofor Okafor

*Reviewer: *Saheed Aderinto*

In this work of erudition, Okafor presents a discourse of leadership and political integration, two of the many controversial themes in post-independent African politics and society. Critics of Africa's development crisis identify the continent's problem as lack of leaders who have the acumen and charisma to pull their respective countries out of the quagmire of poverty, recession and political instability. The role of the followers in the achievement of the political agenda of the leaders is significant, but the credentials of leaders play a more important role in the quest towards political integration and nation building.

Drawing on a variety of sources, which include firsthand experience of Nigerian politics as a political reporter and editor for the Federal Radio Corporation of Nigeria, secondary and primary documentary sources and oral interviews, Okafor combines historical, philosophical and empirical approaches or methodologies in presenting an African-centered interpretation of leadership and political integration. Although the largest chunk of the data used for writing this book is drawn from Nigeria, Africa's most populous country, the author's arguments are applicable to the situation in most parts of the African continent. The issues raised in chapters three and five deal with the problems of political leadership and integration in the entire continent while the remaining chapters takes a critical look at the situation in Nigeria.

Very few scholars have achieved the Herculean task of domesticating academic knowledge. And it is not unusual for academics to say that their book is accessible to non academic readership even when it is obvious that the language and presentation of facts and ideas are complex and difficult to discern by non-specialists. As for this book, one is struck by the author's lucid presentation of academic ideas. His background as a journalist might

* *Aderinto is of the Department of History, University of Texas at Austin, USA.*

have helped him in this regard, but a fact that remains "indisputable" is that "a public access" academic work can only be written by a self-conscious desire or motivation to create knowledge for all and sundry. Okafor has proved beyond reasonable doubt that a scholarly work does not have to be overspecialized in order to move the frontier of knowledge forward, and create the ideas that could solve contemporary socio-political and economic problems. Philosophical terminologies as seen in chapters four and five are developed and discussed by pulling familiar data together and creating a digestible narrative. This approach removes theory from abstraction to practicality.

Okafor does an impressive job creating relevant theoretical and empirical discourse of political integration in Nigeria. He realizes the importance of colonial rule in the evolution of Nigeria's post-independent political culture in chapter two and thus presents important issues such as population census, constitutional evolution and the emergence of the so-called north/south dichotomy. Political instability from the First Republic up to 1983 is discussed thematically and chronologically. What is obvious is that Nigeria like other countries in most parts of Africa continuously adapt to historical circumstances in its quest towards nation building and national integration. Historical circumstances varied but political disintegration and poor leadership remain constant throughout the course of Nigerian history.

Okafor defines political integration as: "A process of developing a Maatic political culture and of inducing the commitment of the citizenry, particularly the political elite to accomplish two major objectives: (1) political stability and (2) a sense of cohesion in the nation-state" (page 121). Why do we need an African-centered epistemology of political integration? Okafor takes us to the root of post-independent African political crisis. He identifies the psychological effects of the infamous trans-Atlantic slave trade and colonialism. Africans were made to believe that Western political system is superior to theirs. "Colonial mentality" a state of mind and attitude, which gives undue preference to alien custom and political culture over African, according to the author, needs to be countered by a more superior African alternative. In other words, since Afrocentric epistemology is structured to rejuvenate Africa's cultural and political institutions: "It serve as a liberating mechanism for "re-centering" African political leadership."

The author does not rule out the importance of foreign political ideas in enhancing political integration and leadership. However, he wants any borrowed ideas to be Africanized and reshaped to reflect the African experience in order to ensure that they serve Africa's need and interest. The failure of political leadership and integration in colonial and postindependent Africa is explicable in terms of the fact that preexisting African-centered

system of political allegiance were flooded to give way for an exotic political system. Apparently, one does not expect a seed planted on a foreign soil to grow as desired.

Chapter five is the heart of this tome. Here, the author builds on the arguments he had earlier made in the previous chapters and outlines his ideas of basic components or constructs of African-centered political leadership: "Purposeful, benevolent, communicative, concordant, Maatic, populist and historically-conscious." He develops these seven constructs of African political leadership using six Nigerian leadership regimes between 1960 and 1983. Okafor believes that the Muritala Mohammed administration, 1975-76 is the most purposeful of the six regimes. He opines that this regime enjoyed the highest degree of allegiance from the people because Muhammed worked fervently to transform the country socially, politically and economically. So intense were his drastic measures that some critics felt massive and unending task of rebuilding Nigeria politics was impossible under military rule (page 165).

Okafor gives seven recommendations that could enhance African-centered political leadership. Out of these seven recommendations, the one that demands for the establishment of a National House of traditional leaders (House of OBOMELA - the word OBOMELA is derived from a combination of the words OBA, EMIR and ALAAFIN, which represents the names of traditional rulers of Benin, the Hausa Fulani and Oyo, a Yoruba town respectively) is the most elaborate. Okafor wants the House of OBOMELA to perform among other functions spiritual and secular responsibilities. This House will have traditional elites who enjoy cultural allegiance because their political ascendancy was naturally ordained as opposed to current leadership, which is based on elective representation. The House according to the author will also appoint important political leaders and confirm national honor on deserving Nigerians.

By suggesting the word "OBOMELA," Okafor is presumably inferring that the Benin, Oyo-Yoruba and Hausa Fulani political systems are more superior to those of other ethnic cleavages. Scholars are in the best position to disorientate Nigerians (especially journalists, politicians and policymakers) who for the purpose of verbal, political and symbolic conveniences and purposes persistently think and act as if Nigeria belongs to the Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba alone. The Ijaw, Tiv, Urhobo, Efik and Igbo to mention but a few are certainly not going to be interested in participating in a political arrangement whose name does not include their own ethnicity.

This work is a credible addition to the large and growing body of literature on political and intellectual history of Africa. It will surely stand the test of time.