Beyond Governance: The Role of Dedicated Followership in Participatory Democracy

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Introduction

The subject of this paper was given to me by the organisers of this conference. I refused to rephrase it to my liking for two reasons: one is the debate about followership, and the consequent set up of the follower as a straw man, at the receiving end of the blame game about the ills of the Nigerian society, an issue I found scholarly attractive. To confess, I have had a longing to engage with it. Two, you cannot go beyond governance to address followership without reference to the former. Indeed, the content of the literature on followership encompasses the debate about governance, and leadership. So, I shall address, first the question of governance, and then stretch the thread to followership in ways that underline their relationship. In all, I shall relate to four variables, namely, governance, leadership, followership, and participatory democracy.

Governance

After the cold war between the East and the West, governance attained significance in the argot of agencies of global governance in ways that problematises the simplistic use of that word as the equivalent of government. Gerry Stoker (1998) captures this traditional sense as well as indicates the deviation, in other words, the point of departure from the usual usage. According to him:

Anglo-American political theory uses the term 'government' to refer to the formal institutions of the state and their monopoly of legitimate coercive power. Government is characterized by its ability to make decisions and its capacity to enforce them. In particular government is understood to refer to the formal and institutional processes which operate at the level of the nation state to maintain public order and facilitate collective action. Theoretical work on governance reflects the interest of the social science community in a shifting pattern in styles of governing. The traditional use of 'governance' and its dictionary entry define it as a synonym for government.

Following Rhodes and Rosenau, Stoker (1998, p. 17) notes that there is a redirection in the use and import of governance, signifying a change in the meaning of government to mean a new process of governing society along certain code of governance morality that are distinct from the traditional institutions of government. The point is that governance is no longer monolithic in terms of its meaning. Elsewhere, I have adverted to what I called the "other governance" which inheres in the politics of policy formulation by the international financial institutions (IFIs) meant for developing countries with implication for politics and economy (Akhaine, 2004, p. 6). Stoker (1998, p. 18) points up its variable, namely, "a commitment to efficient and accountable government". So what we have is supra governance, or more precisely, global governance described by Caroline Thomas (2001, p. 168) as:

The growing array of extra national, bilateral, regional and worldwide institutions and arrangement through which policy and politics are being developed above and between states. This creates frameworks that affect peoples and societies either directly or through shaping the activities of particular states.

In line with globalisation, Stoker (1998, p. 21) further argues that governance denotes the blurring of boundaries between the states and other agencies outside the state in terms responsibility for solving socio-economic problems of society, that is, the shifting of responsibilities into the province where the key actors are in the private, voluntary and the citizens' spheres.

In a research report titled Our Global Neighborhood issued in 1995, The Commission on Global Governance defines governance thus:

> Governance is the sum of the many ways individuals and institutions, public and private, manage their common affairs. It is a continuing process through which conflicting or diverse interests may be accommodated and cooperative action maybe taken. It includes formal institutions and regimes empowered to enforce compliance, as well as informal arrangements that people and institutions either have agreed to or perceive to be in their interest.'' It has four features: governance is not a set of rules or an activity, but a process; the process of governance is not based on control, but on coordination; it involves both public and private sectors; it is not a formal institution, but continuing interaction (Keeping, 2018, pp. 2-3).

Furthermore, governance embraces what is now called the new mangement that involves the deployment of panoply of tools that goes beyond direct provisions of service to contracting, franchising and deploying new forms of regulation aimed at achieving greater efficiency in the production of public services.

Notwithstanding the above insight into the dynamics of governance as a conceptual category, it is operationalised here as those processes that lead to the establishment of equilibrium in society, i. e, balancing of the interests of all the social forces in society in

the dispensation of public good. This is the responsibility of government within the ambit of the state. So, we are back to the point of departure where governance assumed multifaceted meaning. Government is an element of the state, the latter being the approximation of the 'general will' from a Rousseauan viewpoint. If the "general will" as a composite entity belongs to the people whose will make up the state, popular sovereignty, therefore, resides in the people. Modern government should be democratic in the sense of majority rule. This translates into the people, while elected representatives become the interim wielder of sovereignty. We now turn to followership.

Followership

Followership has been defined in different ways. Its connotation comes as complimentary opposites because when it is defined, because it is only intelligible in the context of leadership discourse. Various scholars have adverted to this point. Brian Crossman & Joanna Crossman (2011, pp. 482-483) have noted its use as "the opposite of leadership in a leadership/followership continuum...In other words, definitions of followership are also often constructed in terms of how the concept relates to leadership. Julian Stern (2021, p. 58) who lends his voice to the relations of roles between leadership and followership, notes that "followership seems to me to be leadership's forgotten companion, ignored, an embarrassment. Followership is the f-word that we hate to use." Tourish (cited in Stern, 2021, p. 60) sees "leadership and followership as co-constructed phenomena embedded in fluid social structures that we have barely begun to understand". For stern (2021, p. 61), in theorising, "A leadership theory without a complementary followership theory is like the sound of one hand clapping: it has no impact at all". Bayo Okunade (2008, p. 18) further foregrounds the relationship between leadership and followership in his inaugural lecture stressing that "…leadership must always identify and represent the aspirations of the people or the

collectivity it is leading…It is these attributes that determine leadership acceptability, ability to gain compliance of followership and legitimacy."

To be sure, the difficulty in defining the term employed from the dual perspective of a leader or a follower (Crossman & Crossman, 2011, p. 483) speaks to the connexion between leadership and followership.

However, there is a preponderance of mangement-inclined definitions of followership. John S. McCallum, a Professor of Finance, at the I. H. Asper School of Business, University of Manitoba, defines followership as "the ability to take direction well, to get in line behind a program, to be part of a team and to deliver on what is expected of you. It gets a bit of a bad rap! How well the followers follow is probably just as important to enterprise success as how well the leaders lead" (McCallum, 2013). In a mangement focused scholarship, Robert Kelley (1988) observed the absence of attention or focus on follower in management's obsession with better leaders. In his words:

> … Leaders matter greatly. But in searching so zealously for better leaders we
> tend to lose sight of the people these leaders will lead. Without his armies,
> after all, Napoleon was just a man with grandiose ambitions. Organizations
> stand or fall partly on the basis of how well their leaders lead, but partly also
> on the basis of how well their followers follow.

Kelley (1988) goes further to provide a typology of the qualities of what he has called effective followers. These include self-mangement, that is, they are able to manage themselves well; commitment to the organization, goal, and to principle; competency in terms of skill and disposition to further learning; and courage expressed in honest, and credible behaviour. Bjugstad et al. (cited in Crossman & Crossman 2011: 483) articulates

a leader-centred view of followership "defined as the ability to effectively follow the directives and support the efforts of a leader to maximize a structured organization.'

The Nigerian Context

While there is glut of literature on the phenomenon of followership in the management sciences, there is a lack in respect of followership in Nigeria, especially in the sphere of politics. Discourses on followership thrive in the public sphere in terms of rhetoric, propaganda and buck-passing by political leadership. One very old assumption about followership in Nigeria is the saying that the Nigerian people are very docile and that when beaten to the wall, instead of a fight back, they will jump the wall. Omorogieva Liberty Omoruyi (2022) argues that followership not leadership is the core problem of Nigeria in ways that underscore the charge of docility or apathy. He stresses the "'It doesn't matter' syndrome that causes matters to arise." He further argues that over time the masses compound the Nigerian condition due to their nonchalance attitude towards politics that ensures that the people neither scrutinise leadership aspirants nor vote for the right candidates. There is near-abdication of the business of governance to those in position of authority who employ it to aggrandise themselves. As he puts it:

> The majority of the citizens leave the business of governance to the few who are in various positions of authority or in government and this is one of the chief reasons politicians are not accountable to the people. Governance becomes a secret business and shady deals are made; loans are taken without citizens' consent (Omoruyi, 2022).

Omoruyi further notes that the negligence of the followers to participate in public affairs has only perpetrated enduring hardship. According to him, politics "affects almost all human endeavors and workings in society."

He expresses the belief that "if the people rise, things will change for the best because evil and illegitimate government prevails because the people choose to be ignorant or are kept in ignorance."

Two, Nigerians suffer from partial amnesia; we forget easily, therefore, we allow history to repeat itself. Wole Soyinka (1994, p. x) speaks to this reality in his justifications of his book, *Ibadan, The Penkelemes Years*:

> Underlying it all is also agonising, truly lamentable brief memory span that appears to bedevil my society. Well, perhaps, it is not so much a matter of mental retention as the seeming inability to extend meaningfully the *affective* span of memory.

Three, the population, especially the youth are lazy. Instead of seeking productive engagement they are vegetating in action and seeking easy way out of their hapless position. In relation to the third assumption President Mohammadu Buhari can be credited for voicing ex-cathedra at the Commonwealth Business Forum in far away London in April of 2018.
According to him:

> More than 60 per cent of the population is below 30, a lot of them haven't been to school and they are claiming that Nigeria is an oil producing country, therefore, they should sit and do nothing, and get housing, healthcare, education free" (Ogundipe, 2018).

Earlier in February 2016, in an interview with UK Telegraph, the President said some Nigerians in the UK, mostly youth, were disposed to criminality and should not be

granted asylum there. These charges underline the continuing relevance of the discourse on followership.

Indeed, the followership question has attracted the attention of many Nigerians and organisations. The Nigerian Guardian Newspaper in its editorial of May 7, 2018, while operationalising the relations of roles between leadership and followership notes that:

> Recent happenings have come to query the leadership quotient of this country. Smarting from a carry-over of inept leadership and deliberate planlessness, Nigeria seems to have gravitated into a helpless state of inertia… Thus to avert the cascading mediocrity that is so deleterious to leadership, there is need to build the capacity of Nigerians for leadership. It is not that this country does not have good forward-looking and result-oriented leaders, the problem is their absence from the political class… The problem of leadership does not rest with public office holders alone. The vast majority who see themselves as followers also have a role to play. To paraphrase an old maxim, the surest way for evil to thrive is for good people to do nothing…That Nigeria finds itself in the leadership quagmire is partly traceable to the followership that condones maladministration and lawlessness, and is also apathetic of the state of the nation.

Beyond the reflections of *The Guardian*, other Nigerians have also preoccupied themselves with the Nigerian condition while affirming the leadership problem; they have equally indicted the followership in the Nigerian governance quagmire. Rotimi Fawole (2019), jotted by the allegation of complicity of the leaders and the followers in the reproduction of the Nigerian problems, he argues that the followers must take equal share as the leaders in the problem that has bedeviled the country. According to him:

The dearth of leaders of quality is often and correctly said to be the problem with Nigeria. But if we will be honest, we will acknowledge that we have a considerable followership problem as well, perhaps underscoring another truism – that leaders emerge from the general populace and not from some utopian leadership factory. In other words, the people produce their leaders and leaders are perhaps a reflection of their followers.

In a prescriptive tone, he notes:

It almost seems unfair to demand more from people most of whom live in multidimensional poverty, but if the theses of leaders emerging from amongst the people and all of society thinking alike are true, then it must mean that if we want better leaders, we have to be better people.

Omagbitse Barrow (2017) who claims to have interacted with the leaders and the led, comes up with some propositions, namely:

1) leaders do not drop down from heaven, they emerge from the people; therefore 2) If the ordinary people do not understand the role they play in creating future leaders then they too must be blamed for the pervasive rot that our society faces; and 3) We should be concerned about the attitude and mindset of the 'led" or what others will describe as the "followers' even more than we are concerned about the leaders – since it is the led that create the leaders that we have.

Barrow goes further to encode his prescription as CODE where C stands for courage, O for oneness, D for discipline and E for empathy. The blame game could endure for forever. But are the followers to be blamed? I shall explain in what follows.

Participatory Democracy, Not Democracy

In the foregoing, there is dominant strain of blame but misapplied. To put the blame of the problems of Nigeria on the followers is to equate them with causality. The followers, in my opinion, are in a Rousseauan dilemma. The people have willed into existence the general will and still wish to retain their will once there is a mission creep on the part of the state. That was solved by the constitutional provision of recall in liberal democracy. This has been impossible in Nigeria because of the coup against the people. The state has become roguish without respect for the rule of law. The charges against the followers are the objective manifestations of the struggle against the strictures imposed by the rogue state. Need we remind ourselves that the dominant culture of every society is the culture of the ruling class? The regime type we have is not liberal democracy, even though it was the choice made by the Nigerian ruling elite in 1999. Liberal democracy is characterised by a cluster of freedoms that allows the masses to play the conventional role in politics, namely, vote, and be voted for. It is in this respect that participatory democracy, another marker of democracy, becomes relevant and simultaneously an aspiration.

Claude Ake (1992) charts the democratic course and underlines the liberal perversion. He goes further to examine its essential factors that must be factored into the democratic equation for democracy to take root in Africa which are the social context, or experience and the fulfilment of social needs of the people. Therefore, participatory democracy allows for political freedom that enables the people participate in the decision making process and ultimately meet their social need. To state differently, it allows citizens' space for the actualisation of their aspirations and wellbeing. It transcends the limitation of liberal democracy that inheres in the contradictory

dynamics of the capitalist system that underpins it, and "its repudiation of the essence of democracy which is popular power" (Ake, 1992, p. 2). Under participatory democracy, the Rousseauan 'general will' becomes active, and followership attains dialectical unity with leadership as it does the will of the people. To achieve this, followers must have to be nudged by the most advanced element in their fold to reclaim their sovereignty. As Ake (1992, p. 9) has warned, "Democracy cannot be got by bribing the people; it is not given through aid or whatever means; it is taken, and defended daily by struggle. Struggle-hard and unrelenting—is the very essence of its instantiation and sustainability."

Conclusion

The long and short of my arguments in this paper is that the followers are being wrongly blamed for the ills of the country; they are not to be blamed. Their docility and lethargy to reclaim their destiny in dramatic ways is a function of their repression by the ruling elite. But the unity of the subjective and objective factors will lead to the restoration of popular power and fulfilment of the social needs of society under a democracy that is truly participatory.

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