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IDEOLOGICAL DEBATE: CAPITALISM OR SOCIALISM IN NIGERIA?

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ABSTRACT: The text contitutes a reflection about the attitudes of different governments post-independence and of the principal legal texts related to an ideological debate in relation to the capitalistic or socialistic perspectives that emerge from political practice with emphasis on the 1979 Nigerian Constitution and the perfomance of military governments.

KEY WORDS: Ideology – Political System – Nigeria – Constitution.

INTRODUCTION

There is much confusion in Nigeria about the meaning and content of the term "ideology". This is not surprising since so much bad odour surrounds the word itself from the time it was first coined by the French philosopher Antonie Destutt de Tracy during the French Revolution. The original meaning of the word as used by De Tracy was "the science of ideas". It was in fact considered that time to be an intellectual study of the origins, evolution and nature of ideas to wich French intellectuals including De Tracy devoted a considerable part of their time. A look at the ordinary dictionary definition of ideology suggests that it is still basically what De Tracy and his fellow French philosophers had in mind, i.e. science of ideas.

However, from the nineteen century to date, ideology seems to have different meanings to different people. To some people any systematic set of moral and factual beliefs held by a group, class or members of a party is an ideology. Yet to others, ideology represents a false consciousness of a group or, as it is sometimes crudely put, it is a sort of false and delusory propaganda. Whatever is the perception of the term by people, the most important thing to be said here is that all of us have an ideology to the extent that we: (i) believe in certain things; (ii) value certain things – freedom, respect for law, personal

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property etc.; (iii) have prejudices which enable us to respond positively to those who share our values and brand others opposed to our ideas as "enemies"; (iv) are sensitive to and can be manipulated by ideas of others, be it for religious, racial or ethnic and class purposes.

In essence, no matter how people may pretend every country has an ideology as long as a particular belief system is common to the people of a country. It could be a mass belief system which is not even related to the organization of the society itself but which might indicate the existing relationship among the individuals. It could also be a doctrine such as religion which the individual uses to guide his life. On the other had, a mass belief system could go beyond this. It could relate directly to political and economic structures of a country; it could also be used to explain, justify and defend a preferred political order of the country. If there is such a belief system that prescribes some political order in a country then there is a political ideology for that country. After all, behind every ideology there is always a set of basic assumptions about the nature of and purposes of man and the society to which he belongs. As long as such basic assumptions are presented in form of a reasonable, coherent body of ideas suggesting practical means of how to change, reform or maintain a political order for a given society[1], the issue of ideology whether as a doctrine or mass belief system becomes important in any political discourse.

It is against this background that this paper examines the claim by the Nigerian military rulers that Nigeria does not need any ideology. The paper contends that there is in fact an ieology which all successive governments, military and civilian suscribe to. It is an ideology that defends and rationalizes the existing economic, social and political order. That ideology is capitalism. Admittedly, capitalism basically refers to an economic rather than a political system. But since the term has become enmeshed with a series of political ideas, our reference to it in this study is a reference to an ideology which sets the tone and direction of the legal order, and political activities in the country.

II CONTENDING ISSUES

For political ideology to remain relevant to any society, such ideology must be seen to address mundane issues like the quality of life, the distribution of

(1) FREDRICH, Carl. J. *Man and His Government. An Empirical Theory of Politics*. (New York, McGraw-Hill, 1963), p. 90.

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goods and services, equality of the people and liberty. The extent to which people react to or understand political ideology depends on the levels from which ideology is perceived. This, perhaps, indicates the position taken by people any time ideological issues are raised. There are two levels from which a discussion on ideology is generally viewed. They are philosophical and mass belief levels, and a discussion on what ideology is or is not gets influenced by the level from which one views it. The two levels exist in Nigeria.

(a) Ideology viewed from the philosophical level

If ideology is considered from philosophical level, then it must be seen to include three basic elements. First, it must contain a complex systematic set of normative statements which purports to set political and social values. Second, the normative statements must also be descriptive and analytical enough as to provide a guide for explaining and evaluating political and social events. Third, it usually prescribes and emphasises some desired political, economic and social conditions for the people[2]. When ideology is viewed from philosophical level, then the role of ideology in the society becomes intellectually stimulating. It offers an explanation and vision of human destiny; it provides a guide for action, give legitimacy to a set of social structures and invokes passion in support of a particular cause.

Because ideology contains numerous strata of thoughts and beliefs it is usually believed to be the exclusive business of philosophers, intellectuals and idealists. This group of people are the most articulate in any country. They readily have followers and easily motivate people to take a particular stand on issues. There may be, however, variations in their concepts or goals to be pursued. When this happens, then political discourse from the perspective of this group becomes an issue for polemics.

Nigeria is not short of such philosophers, intellectuals and idealists. Thus, philosophical assumption implicit in any discussion of ideology has the same scope and content as it has been described above. More significant, there is always in the Nigerian political scene the attempt by one group of ideologues to out-class the other and such attempt has sometimes taken combative form. Indecent language has also been employed to register an ideological point. This perhaps has driven "non-ideologues", conservative elements and the present

(2) MADDOX, Willian S. and STUART, Lilie A. *Beyond Liberal and Conservative:* Reassessing the Political Spectrum. Washington: Cato Institute, 1984.

military leadership to view ideology as a tool for deception, distortion or outright falsehood. Additionally, the explanation and suggestions offered by the ideologues to change the existing economic structures indicate a campaign for equity on behalf of the under-privileged and by extension anti-status quo. For this reason, the slightest reference to ideology or any attempt to give an alternative view on the socio-economic structure is hardly tolerated by the government and those who are pro-establishment. Indeed, the Nigerian military rulers and other right-wingers usually dismiss any idea that an ideological underpining as one of the antics of the revolutionary. Nigerians, they say, do not need any foreign ideology to run their country, thus suggesting that the present socio-economic structure is indigenous!

(b) Ideology as mass belief

If ideology from philosophical level is so narrowly defined by the authorities and so articulated combatively by the ideologues, the belief of the common people which in some cases prescribes how the society is to be organised and social life regulated is hardly recognised as an ideology. Generally, mass beliefs can be a simplified version of some complex philosophical views, ranging from religion to politics shared among the people. They are also related to each other in some coherent fashion. The organization of the society, for instance, may relate to religious beliefs and respect for hierarchy of authority; the distribution of wealth is linked with the concept of justice known to the people. In essence, the masses of ordinary citizens can and in fact have beliefs which are directly related to political and social values. They may, however, not be articulate in expressing them.

As expected, Nigerian rulers do not seem to believe that there is any thing like the "latent ideology of the common man"[3]. On the contrary what passes for the political belief of the people, is considered incoherent, vague, essentially varigated and communal in content. Furthermore, it is assumed that what constitutes the belief of the masses is not necessarily shared by many, given the ethnic and plural nature of the Nigerian society. Finally, since the masses are not as articulate and in fact incapable of expressing their political belief in theoretical language, the rulers are believed to be trusted to do things in the interest of the people. The people are thus satisfied with the efforts of government. They therefore do not need any new ideology and no one should force one on them.

(3) LANE. Robert E. *Political Ideology*. New York, Free Press, 1962, p. 16.

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The scenario above shows the disdain in which the word "ideology" is held in Nigeria by the ruling class, military or civilian. Nigerian rulers deliberately made ideology to be synonymous with socialism. They have refused to admit that capitalism which is the underlying socio-economic thinking of the rulers is itself an ideology. Let us now consider the steps taken by Nigerian rulers to conceal their ideological preference while rejecting outright the ideology that competes with their preferred one.

III. IDEOLOGY AND THE 1979 NIGERIAN CONSTITUTION

Political ideology is a set of moral rules which attempts to regulate the behavior of men in politics and its vision is not restricted to the mere fancy of the ideologues. Politicians and indeed every Nigerian government, colonial and post-colonial have always proclaimed one way or the other the principles on which the state is to be organised. They have always spelt out either in manifestoes or the constitution, the ideals and objectives on which social order rested. The colonial government, for instance, had a political ideology which was undeniably liberal and capitalist. All it did was to nurture it in Nigeria[4] after which the local capitalist system was incorporated into the mainstream of internacional capitalism.

It is true that Nigerian nationalist leaders disagreed with the colonial system of administration based on racial discrimination, repressive measures and divide and rule strategy. However, there is no evidence to date to show that they ever rejected the basic philosophy that informed the system of governance, namely, minimal state and capitalist road to development. Indeed, as Awa correctly noted, the bourgeois elements and the traditional elites who took over form the British in 1960 believed, like their British predecessors, so much in the efficacy of capitalism that, rather than change the system, they were busy competing with each other for the sectional control of the country's resources[5]. Little wonder then that colonial and post-colonial constitutions of Nigrian were all littered with direct and indirect references to the principles on which the state is organized, social order and capitalist way of life maintained.

One such constitution which stated the ideals was the 1979 Nigerian constitution because it contained for the first time a separate chapter on the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy. Why was such

(4) SCHATZ, I.S. *Nigerian Capitalism*. California, University of California, 1977.
(5) AWA, E. The Place of Ideology in Nigerian Politics. *African Review*, 4 (1974): 358-380.

an innovation expedient? Two reasons can be advanced for this. First, it was believed by the drafters of the constitution that a constitution should not simply be a code of justiciable rules and regulations. It must contain a set of principles and in fact should be made to operate within the context of recognisable ideals. Second, it was argued that governments and political leaders in Nigeria like other developing countries have always tended, to be pre-occupied with power and its material perquisites, paying scant attention in the process, to political ideals on how the country shoul be ruled to the advantage of all. The inclusion of a chapter on Fundamental Objectives in the 1979 constitution was therefore to serve an ideological purpose, i.e. providing a formula for action and a yardstick for assessing the political behaviour of the rulers and the ruled. On the need, for instance, to give the 1979 Nigerian constitution an ideological focus, the Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC) had this much to say:

> ideology arouses a certain mysticism and suspicion among us. Yet every new nation has special need of a nationally accepted ideology. For unless the goals and the fundamental attitudes and values that should inform the behaviour of its members and institutions are clearly stated and accepted, a new nation is likely to find itself rudderless, with no sense of purpose and direction. By defining the goals of society and prescribing the institutional forms and procedures for pursuing them, ideology seeks to direct and concert the efforts and actions of the people towards the achievement of these goals. In this way it seeks to unite the society into one nation bound together by common institutions and procedures and above all an acceptance of common social objectives and destiny[6].

Because of the complex and heterogenous nature of the Nigerian society where the "increasing gap between the rich and the poor" and "the growing cleavage between the social groups" combine to confuse the nation and bedevil Its "march to orderly progress" some of the members of the CDC were even ready to take a definite ideological position. The sub-committee of the CDC

(6) Report of the Constitution Drafting Committee, Lagos, Federal Ministry of Information, 1976, Vol. II. p. 35.

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for instance, suggested in its recommendation to the CDC that given the level of poverty in the country, the only ideology that is:

> most relevant to our society today and one that is accepted by most Nigerians is that of socialism operating within the framework of participatory democracy and ideals of Liberty, Equality and Justice. It is the only effective answer to the conditions of underdevelopment that exist in the country[7].

This was, however, as far as the recommendation could go, because the CDC rejected it after an extensive debate. True it was that there was unanimity among all the members of the CDC on the need for the country to have a political ideology to chart the direction of the state and government. More significant, there was also no disagreement among all the members on what should be the minimun social and political objectives of the state i.e. promotion of national unity and building a social order on Freedom, Equality and Justice. What seemed to divide them, however, was whether socialist ideology as recommended by the sub-committee was what Nigeria needed in its stride to economic greatness. Majority of the members of the CDC thought otherwise. Their view was that Nigeria did not need any new ideology to build its economy because the country already had an ideology, namely capitalism and "there are no compelling reasons for abandoning that ideology in favour of one conceived in a foreign political and social climate"[8]. By this, the CDC rejected outright the inclusion of a socialist ideology in the constitution. On the contrary, it recommended for entrenchment in the constitution an ideology that would make the State to:

> control and operate the major sectors of the economy while individual and group rights to operate the means of production distribution and exchange shall be protected by law[9].

(7) *Ibid.*, p. 36.
(8) Report of the Constitution Drafting Committee, Lagos, Federal Ministry of Information, 1976, Vo. I, p. xiii.
(9) *Ibid*, p. xiv.

What the CDC seemed to be saying is that capitalist ideology in Nigeria is autochthonous in origin or, at least, because it has existed since the annexation of Lagos colony in 1861, that it automatically qualified to be tagged a Nigerian phenomenon which did not need any replacement. The best that could be done is to operate the capitalist system in such a way that "there is no concentration of economic power in a few hands or group".

A Draft Constitution usually contains provisions that are merely recommendatory and the recommendations are then submitted to a higher authority for ratification. The Federal Military Government which wanted a new constitution for the country did not deviate from this pattern. It established a Constituent Assembly (CA) which was to consider the proposals of the CDC.

The constitution that finally emerged from the CA and which was later approved by the Supreme Military Council scrupulously followed the pattern dictated by the class interest of its members. The 1979 Constitution, as it has been stated, created a separate chapter (Chapter II) which contained the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principle of State Policy. This chapter was divided into parts to reflect the numerous goals which must be attained by any government in Nigeria. They were (i) political objectives, such as national unity, faith, peace and progress (ii) social objectives like Freedom, Equality and Justice; (iii) educational objectives i.e. provision of adequate educational opportunities at all levels; (iv) foreign policy objectives like the promotion of African unity and total political, economic, social and cultural liberation of Africa were to be high on the agenda of the Nigerian government.

On the economic objetives which are germane to our discussion here, the constitution clearly confirmed and reaffirmed faith in the existing economic system, namely capitalism but nicknamed in Nigerian "mixed economy"[10]. Section 16 of the constitution directs the state to:

> (a) control the national economy in such manner as to secure the maximum welfare, freedom and happiness of every citizen on the basis of social justice and equality of status and opportunity;

(10) No government or political leaders in Nigeria have ever accepted that Nigeria operates a capitalist economic system. With the obnoxious aspects of capitalist system well known, it is not surprising that a less offensive word like 'mixed economy' has been coined by members of the CDC. For a discussion of the mixed economy perspective, see I. Eteng. Myths abd Fallacies in Nigerian Development. In: NNOLI O. (ed.) *Path to Nigerian Development*. Dakar, Codestria, 1981, pp. 48-75.

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> (b) without prejudice to its right to operate or participate in areas of the economy other than the major sectors of the economy, manage and operate the major sectors of the economy;
>
> (c) without prejudice to the right of any person to participate in areas of the economy within the major sector of the economy, protect the right of every citizen to engage in any economic activities outside the major sectors of the economy.

It is clear from the above that the constitution sanctioned the capitalist mode of development to the extent that (i) the public and private sectors of the economy were recognised and (ii) each sector has the right to participate in the areas designated as "major and outside major sectors of the economy". It is true that the state is expected to play a leading role in the major sector, it is not clear, however, what constitutes major sector except perhaps one construes if from:

> such economic activities as may from time to time be declared by a resolution of each House of the National Assembly to be managed and operated exclusively by the Government of the Federation[11].

The National Assembly did not at any time pass any resolution during its four years of existence, conferring exclusive right to the government to undertake an economic venture.

Furthermore, although government has always enjoyed a complete monopoly of operations in such areas as railways, electronic media, iron and steel, Ports, Mint and defence corporations, such monopoly nevertheless predated the 1979 constitution. What, therefore, the drafters of the constitution intended was that there should be sufficient freedom for the individuals to establish their own business, qua business, except those listed above. The drafters have thus sanctioned capitalism as an ideology for the country. One does not need to possess Lockean logic to know how much the 1979 Nigerian constitution has protected property right. It is also not necessary to be a disciple of Adam Smith to

(11) Sec. 16(4) of the 1979 Nigerian Constitution.

be able to recognise the extent to which the free enterprise system has been upheld by this constitution.

It is not surprising that the CDC and CA opted for a capitalist ideology since the background and social orientation of the members of the two bodies influenced the outcome of their deliberations. Majority of the members of the CDC, for instance, included a high percentage of right-wing academicians, some top legal luminaries and ministers in the First Republic[12]. Additionally, the CA consisted mostly of businessmen, contractors, former commissioners under General Gowon, politicians of the First Republic, retired top military and police personnel and members of the professions, such as lawyers and doctors[13]. Indeed, the membership of the two bodies was decidedly elitist and by accident or design majority of these elites either successfully contested elections into various legislative assemblies or were appointed ministers, commissioners or board chairmen between 1979 and 1983. An opportunity was thus provided for these people to implement when in power what they originally decided when they were "mere advisers" to the Murtala/Obasanjo military regime.

It has been suggested that there was a sort of consensus politics, at least in the ideological direction of the economic system in Nigeria during the Second Republic. The five registered political parties that operated between 1979 and 1983, for example, were said to have tacitly "endorsed the mixed economy ideology legalised by the constitution"[14]. It has also been claimed that socialism or any other left-wing ideology was not even an issue in the two general elections of 1979 and 1983. The true position, in our view, is that there was no such consensus between the conservative capitalist groups and the radical left on ideological orientation. If there was any acquiescence on the part of the radical left, it was because (i) the left was not cohesive and strong enough to challenge the conservatives, particularly through the democratic process and therefore was consigned to the sidelines of Nigerians politics during that time;[15] (ii) the military government was actually in favour of the type of constitution that had been approved and which it wanted to bequeath to its succesor-regime; and (iii) the federal and rigid nature of the constitution with its elaborate process of

(12) DUDLEY Billy . *An Introduction to Nigerian Government and Politics*. London, Mac. Millan Press, 1982, p. 160.

(13) *Ibid*, p. 160.

(14) UWALA. U. "The Poverty of ideology in Nigerian Development". In: *Path to Nigerian Development*, p. 163.

(15) For an analysis of the ideological stand of the Nigerian political parties in the 1979 General elections, see R. Joseph. Political Parties and ideology in Nigeria. *Review of African Political Economy*, 13 :81, 1978.

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amendment made any attempt to canvass against the substantive political manifesto of the constitution a futile exercise.

The reasons stated above were sufficient to limit the ambition of any party, either radical or conservative, to change the ideology the military government had consciously extrenched in the constitution. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN) which succeeded the military government in 1979 was perhaps only responding to the political and social realities in the country, particularly the perceived preference of the military, when it drew up a manifesto that was congruent with both the spirit and letter of the constitution. The manifesto declared:

> The party will encourage, protect and promote private initiative, ownership and control in those areas of our economy where private control and ownership does not threaten or endanger the public interest. Such a judicious mixture of private and public ownership is necessary in order to mobilise all our resources at this stage of our history.....
> We do not consider it appropriate at this time to envisage programmes which go beyond the aspiration of our Federal Constitution by creating unrealistic expectations among our people[16].

Thus, the ruling party in the Second Republic was not prepared or constitutionally competent to deviate from the provisions of the 1979 constitution. As far as the party and indeed majority of Nigerian politicians were concerned, Chapter II of the Constitution has sufficiently stated the broad social, political, economic, educational, cultural and foreign policy goals to which any Nigerian government must direct all its energies.

It is true that section 6 (c) of the same constitution makes the provision in Chapter II non-justiciable. This means in essence that nobody has the constitutional right to seek court order compelling the government to adhere strictly to what the chapter directs. Such exclusionary clause, nevertheless, became necessary in order to discourage frivolous and vexations litigations by

(16) Quoted in *ibid*, p. 83.

citizens seeking to compel any Nigerian government to discharge the obligations imposed on it by Chapter II, even where circumstances dictate that the government should vary slightly or substancially its cause of action.

In any case, chapter II of the constitution has convincingly shown that there is an ideology for the Nigerian state. Its provisions contains normative statements and prescriptive formula which set political and social values. Additionally, the ideology it entrenches provides criteria for evaluating the beliefs, goals, standard of conduct and judgement of the rulers, individuals and groups in the state. It can also be said to provide legitimacy for the regime because like any other political ideology, it "captures and is captured by leaders who must meet its expectations, and in turn, justify their actions in its term"[17].

IV NIGERIAN MILITARY RULERS AND THE ISSUE OF IDEOLOGY

It is common knowledge that when the military intervene as they repeatedly do in the Third World countries, they present themselves as reformers. The restoration of political stability and the drive to economic development are among the items high on their agenda. The Nigeria military rulers are no excepetion to this. They have since their first intervenction in 1966 made conscious efforts to bring a divided people together. They have also had to tackle vigorously the economic problems created by the profligcy of the dismissed politicians. Thus, in 1966 when the military first appeared on the Nigerian political scene they were more than a group of people merely seeking power. They were, as proclaimed, a group which came "to bring an end to gansterism and to disorder and corruption and nepotism"[18]. (sic) All military rulers that have emerged in Nigeria from 1966 to date have more or less the same situation to deal with; they have always sung th same refrain.

But it is not sufficient for the military rulers to identify the problems besetting their country and adopt legal and administrative measures to deal with them. It seems important too that they employ symbols and articulate ideals which capture the imagination of the people. Nigerian military rulers have recognised this and have always communicated their national goals in a simplified language which presents them as "the embodiment of nationalism,

(17) CHRISTENSON, R.M. et al. *Ideologies and Modern Politics*. London, Thomas Nelson, 1979, p. 16.

(18) Quoted in MINERS, N. *The Nigerian Army*: 1956-1966. London: Methuen, 1971, p. 177.

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national unity and cohesion, puritarism and modernization"[19]. Ideals communicated to show the qualities above represent the ideology of the military. Such an ideology can and in fact does perform the "symbolic functions of systematically reassuring the masses and inducing political quiescence."[20] This is, however, not peculiar to the military; politicians do the same thing. The point being made is that Nigeria military rulers like the politicians they replaced have always recognised the need to envolve an ideology which serves as a rallying focus and which can be used to manipulate and mobilize the populace for some political ends. Furthermore, Nigerian military rulers have strata of thoughts which have been distinctly articulated in their declarations of intent, decrees and even the 1979 constitution which, it has been said, was given to the country by the military. Therefore, the claim by the military that Nigeria does not need any ideology and that the military rulers are non-ideological is evidently not consistent with the reality of the social, economic and political orientation in the country and of the rulers. As the former President of Nigeria aptly noted, "no racial or linguistic or cultural group exists without an ideology."[21] Since Nigeria is a nation which comprises heterogenous linguistic and cultural groups, it is not out of place to say that there may even be many ideologies as there are groups in the country.

However, what seems cloudy, so the military rulers present it, is: which of the ideologies from the two well known ideological labels (capitalism and socialism) do the military rulers support and wish to impose on the people? On the surface, opinion may differ on this. In fact, there is a gale of controversy over what the military stand for ideologically since they have claimed ideological neutrality in many of their speeches. But a critical evaluation of both their speeches and actions does not support such neutrality. Some examples which follow support our view.

The late Nigerian Head of State, general Murtala Mohammed was the first military ruler in Nigeria to show the displeasure of the military to the suggestion by Nigerian scholars of left-wing persuasion that the military regime should adopt a specific ideology, notably socialism, for the country. In what could easily be interpreted to be a warning to the members of the CDC not to

(19) ODETOLA, T.O. *Military Politics in Nigeria*: Economic Development and Political Stability. New Jersey, Transactions Books, 1978, p. 39.

(20) *Ibid*, p. 40.

(21) AZIKIWE N.. *Ideology for Nigeria:* Capitalism, Socialism or Welfarism? Lagos: Macmillan, 1980, p. 1.

rock the boat as far as the socio-economic system in Nigeria was concerned, General Mohammed in his inaugural address to the Committee declared:

> Since the inception of this Administration, and particularly since the announcement of your appointment as member of the Constitutional Drafting Committee (sic) there has been a lively debate in the Press urging the introduction of one form of political ideology or another. Past eventshave, however, shown that we cannot build a future for this country on a rigid political ideology. Such an approach would be unrealistic. The evolution of a doctrinal concept is usually predicated upon the general acceptance by the people of a national political philosophy and consequently until all our people, or a large majority of them, have acknowledge a common ideological motivation, it woul be fruitless to proclaim any particular philosophy or ideology in our constitution.[22]

The address of the Head of State could mean that the military regime recognised the existence of varied political ideologies in Nigeria but that since Nigeria is a federation and no consensus has emerged on how best to achieve national unity, it would be inappropriate to impose a common ideology on the diverse people of Nigeria. But a more plausible reason for rejecting the call by the radicals for a new social order based on a socialist ideology was that the military government was not favourably disposed to accepting what the Head of State referred to in the speech as doctrinal concept. This was an indirect reference to socialism because the ideology has always been viewed by Nigerian leaders as a dogmatic creed. It is associated with revolution and therefore anti-thetical to the existing social order which favours the acumulation of property or wealth by a few at the expenses of the masses. The manner of its presentation by, and the combative language of, its proponents in Nigeria do not even help matters. In

(22) Report of the Constitution Drafting Committee, Lagos, Federal Ministry of Information, Vol. I, p. XLIII.

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essence, any thought of having a socialist ideology which makes the State to be the sole authority to plan, produce and distribute goods and services in Nigeria is enough to scare the ruling class, military or civilian.

It may be argued that the CDC members did not agree with the Head of State that no ideology be entrenched in the constitution. On the contrary, the CDC members believed that an ideology is not only necessary but also need to be enshrined in the constitution, so as to make it:

> appear less of a political slogan, investing it with the quality of a constitutional, albeit non-justiciable norm, and thereby making it easier for political leaders, and even judges, to establish and show the desired identification with it.[23]

This, however, may be regarded as the only noticeable disagreement between the military rulers and the CDC members on the issue. For, the ideology finally entrenched in the constitution showed a preference from the two labels. It was indeed remarkable in its equivocation of capitalism. One is therefore compelled to assume that the CDC and the CA did exactly what the military government wanted, i.e. preserving the status quo. This view is supported by the fact the Murtala/Obasanjo military regime had the opportunity to remove, for instance, the ideology of "mixed economy" entrenched in the 1979 constitution, replace it with something else or, better still, suggest that the choice of an economic system for the country be left to its democratically elected successor-government to decide. That the regime did not do any of these things before promulgating the constitution suggests that it was pleased with what the Founding Fathers of the 1979 Nigerian constitution have "imposed" on the people.

But suppose the CDC and the CA had directly or implicitly recommended the adoption of socialism as the ideology of the State? Although there may be as many speculative answers as there are writers, we are, however, inclined to believe that such recommendation would have been rejected by the military government ostensibly because (i) it would have then been regarded as an unneccessary imposition of a particular ideology on the people, contrary to the warning clearly conveyed by the inaugural address of the Head of State; but more

(23) Report of the Constitution Drafting Committee, Lagos, Federal Ministry of Information, Vol. II, p. 36.

importantly (ii) the adoption of a socialist ideology for the State would have dashed the hopes and aspirations of the top military officers who wanted to retire into private business. For instance, the former Head of State, General Olusegun Obasanjo who had the distiction of returning power to the democratically elected government in 1979 retired from the army and is today the owner and director of the Obasanjo Farm, (formerly Temperance Farm) one of the largest Agro-businesses in Nigeria. Major-General Musa Yar'adua, General Obasanjo's second-in-command is now both a large-scale farmer and a shipping magnate, while a host of other retired military officers are also legitimately operating as businessmen and contractors to state and federal governments. A socialist ideology certainly cannot accommodate such activities.

The debate on whether the country should go socialist or remain in the capitalist fold had not abated and will not abate. However, the present military government headed by General Ibrahim Babangida seems to have charted an unmistakeable cause for the country. Unlike the Murtala/Obasanjo regime which shied away from stating clearly what the military would or would not tolerate, the Babangida regime could be said to be more forthright in exhibiting the ideological preference of his government than the Murtala/Obasanjo regime did.

Like other military governments that had ruled Nigeria, General Babangida's government firmly believes that military intervention in Nigerian politics should be for a limited period. For this reason, the government set up a Political Bureau charged with the responsibility of charting a new social order for the country. The Bureau proceeded with its work methodically. It called for memoranda from the general public; it held discussions and interviews with public institutions and dignitaries; collated and assessed opinions expressed in the media, and finally produced a Report which attempted to address Nigerian socio-economic and political problems.

There are several aspects of political life in Nigeria which the Report of the Bureau dealt with, but only the aspect on ideology is relevant to our discussion here. On the ideological direction which Nigeria should follow, the Bureau painstakingly considered the debates generated on both sides of the divide, i.e. debates between the supporters of capitalism and those on the side of socialism. Quite expectedly, the Bureau noted that there is need for the country to have a good leadership and a new ideology since, as it claimed, there is presently a correlation between poor leadership and the present social and economic underdevelopment in Nigeria. In order therefore to correct this, the Bureau advised in its Report that henceforth, "leadership should derive directly from the people in consonance with the ideology and philosophy of socialism." The Report also took a hard, long look at the capitalist road to development officially pursued by successive Nigerian governments from colonial era to date and

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concluded that capitalism as the dominant ideology in Nigeria is evil because it "tended to foster poverty, ignorance, disease and squalor among the masses."

In order to remove these problems created by capitalism, the Report of the Bureau advised that the country should discard the capitalist ideology and instead officially:

> adopt a socialist socio-economic system in which the State shall be committed to the nationalisation and socialisation of the commanding heights of the national economy.[24]

Characteristically and perhaps because the Bureau had been warned by the government against "lifting foreign constitution and political models",[25] the Babangida administration rejected the imposition of "a particular ideology on the nation," noting in an escapist fashion in its white Paper on the Bureau's Report that:

> Government believes that an ideology will eventually evolve with time and political maturity.[26]

Additionally the government claimed in the White Paper that it was satisfied with the goals set out in various Nigerian Development Plans and the "ideals of a greater and better Nigeria expounded by the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principle of State Policy in Chapter II of the 1979 constitution."

It seems from the above that socialist ideology is unacceptable to the military government of General Babangida. It is also clear that the provisions of chapter II of the 1979 constitution which we have stated elsewhere, represent an ideology for the State, agree substantially with the thinking of the military and therefore are considered by the government to be adequate and appropriate for the country.

It is true that the Armed Forces Ruling Council of Nigeria, the highest governing body of the military government, has appointed another committee to

(24) Report of the Political Bureau, see *New Nigerian*, July 4, 1987.
(25) *Ibid.*
(26) *Ibid.*

review the 1979 Nigeria Constitution. However, the Babangida administration is also dictating the shape the review should take. It has, for instance, given some hints, if not a warning, to the Constitution Review Committee (CRC) on what it would or would not accept from the Committee. In his opening address to the members of the CRC, General Babangida clearly declared the support of his government for capitalist mode of development which the 1979 Constitution actually upholds but which, he agreed, needed a slight modification to meet new demands. For this reason, he called on the CRC to:

> review the national commitment to the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy in such a way that there is a pragmatic and useful balance between the public and private sectors of the economy.[27]

Thus, the CRC is expected to uphold the tenets of capitalism in Nigeria. Members of the CRC therefore are expected to purge themselves of any socialist tendency not because of its inappropriateness to the Nigerian environment but more specifically because the CRC had been warned that the government would not accept that Nigeria be turned into a socialist state. This is because, the government declared:

> It is our view that fundamental issues arise when a transitional corrective regime like ours exceeds its brief and goes beyond correction and imposes a particular ideological commitment which is so fundamental in nature that (sic) should be left to successive government.[28]

The statement quoted above should leave no one in doubt about the ideological orientation of the Babangida's regime. It has accordingly directed the CRC to follow the same path. Furthermore, the statement served *notice* to the Nigerian Socialist that the constitution which is undergoing review is not about to enthrone Marxism.

(27) The President's address to the CRC. See *New Nigerian*, September 12, 1987.
(28) *Ibid.*

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However, some noticeable contradictions in the position of the government on the relevance of ideology in the constitution become clearer as the argument progresses. In the first place, the Babangida administration does not want to entrench any ideology in the constitution. It wants the people to choose freely the type of ideology they want. Yet that same administration has warned the CRC to follow the ideological path dictated by chapter II. This chapter, it needs be said again, embodies the ideology of the Nigerian State; It was imposed by the Murtala/Obasanjo regime on the successor government of President Shehu Shagari. Since the present regime cherishes it so much that it wants it incorporated in the revised constitution, then the claim that the government does not want to impose an ideology on the people cannot be sustained. The government is actually reimposing an ideology which it inherited. Once that ideology is entrenched in the constitution the successor-government will certainly have little or no option than to uphold it.

Additionally, the claim that the Babangida administration has no ideological preference is false because some of its economic policies are too suggestive of its faith in capitalism. For example, the administration's obsession to privatise some public enterprises shoul be seen as its best approach of striking "a pragmatic and useful balance between the public and private sectors of the economy." The self-employment scheme of the government is also designed to "give full and maximum chance for the latent ability and genius of individual Nigerian to grow". These are familiar themes in *laissez-faire* economics and have been known to lace several speeches made by General Babangida in recent times. In the Lockean tradition, minimal government for the protection of life, liberty and estate has been expoused by General Babangida's government.

CONCLUSION

Contrary to the thinking in some quarters, the spectre of Nigeria politics has never been devoid of ideology. Quite markedly, Nigerian rulers whether military or civilian have always had preference for one ideology over the other. And from available evidence, that preference is capitalism as the bedrock of organising the society. The 1979 Nigerian constitution was drafted in such a way as to sustain it and the civilian government that succeeded the Murtala/Obasanjo military regime merely operated it.

The military government of General Babangida also intends to give the same capitalist ideology to its successor in 1992. The review of the 1979 constitution being contemplated is therefore expected to uphold it since a clear warning that the members of the CRC should distance themselves from socialism has been given by the President.

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Thus, it is no argument to say that Nigeria has no ideology. Every contry has. It may however, not be forcefully and clearly articulated. But the Babangida administration has most forcefully demonstrated its commitment to capitalism. Socialism meanwhile seems far fetched in Nigeria. This is stating the obvious because as the "foremost out-post of capitalism in Black Africa and the latest docile and complacement partner of international capitalism",[29] Nigeria, so the government believes, should support the capitalist ideology. This, perhaps, is the only way to sustain the capitalist mode of development.

RESUMO: O texto constitui-se numa reflexão sobre as atitudes dos diversos governos pós-independência e dos principais textos legais relativos ao debate ideológico em torno das perspectivas capitalistas ou socialistas que emergem da prática política com ênfase na Constituição da Nigéria de 1979 e do desempenho dos governos militares.

(29) *The Guardian*, (Nigeria) August 23, 1987.