

ANATOMY OF THE NIGERIAN ELITE: INTERROGATING A BLIND ELITE MODEL OF THE ELITE THEORY

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Abstract

The elite dimension to Nigeria's numerous socio-economic and socio-political problems have over the years, attracted immense scholarly attention. These socio-economic and socio-political challenges have however remained oncoming. The problem of this study derives essentially from a supposition that the persistent national challenges are attributable to elite blindness. The study considers as novel, the blind elite model of the elite theory. Thus, the general objective of the study was to conduct an anatomy of the Nigerian elite by interrogating the blind elite model of the elite theory. The specific objectives were to (i) examine if the thesis of elite blindness, particularly in the Nigerian context was plausible and (ii) recommend how elite blindness may be dealt with, in the specific Nigerian context and also in the general context. Findings of the study indeed indicate that the elite blindness thesis is highly plausible. However, it is also classifiable as phantom and self-inflicted blindness. Findings of the study further curiously indicate that the blind Nigerian elites continue to find their ways around their elite purposes under the guidance of their less privileged compatriots. The study posits in conclusion that the self-inflicted blindness of the Nigerian elite would become history, the day their less privileged guides finally elect to go blind as well.

Keywords: Nigerian Elite, Blind Elite, Elite Theory

Introduction:

The elite dimension to Nigeria's numerous socio-economic and socio-political problems have over the years, attracted immense scholarly attention (Ayandele, 1974; Achebe, 1983; Joseph, 1987; Osakwe, 2002; Omeje, 2007; Ojukwu and Shopeju, 2010; Amadi, 2011; Ebohon and Obakhedo, 2012; Edigheji, 2013; Ihonvbere, 2013). In consequence, one of Nigeria's foremost scholars, the late Professor Chinua Achebe, had in

Achebe (1983:30) postulated as follows: as a class, you and I and our friends who comprise the elite are incredibly blind. We refuse to see what we don't want to see. That is why we have not brought about the changes which our society must undergo or be written off (Achebe, 1983:30). Three decades after this contention, Kuka (2012) still refers to the Nigerian nation-state as a nation flying without black box and fundamentally blames the Nigerian elite for the socio-economic and socio-political challenges of the Nigerian nation. Furthermore, according to Ihonvbere (2013:2), can Nigeria say that the majority of her people are better off today than at independence? Has she made much progress since independence in 1960? Ihonvbere (2013:2) continues : it is possible to contend that there is very little structural distinction between Nigeria's yesterday and today. From the distortions in the economy and the fragility of the state to the largely unproductive disposition of the power elite and the marginalization of the political economy in the global political economy, not much has changed in Nigeria. There have been reforms, restructurings, minor adjustments here and there and political epochs but no revolution, effective reformation, or structural transformation. All these have been no more than motion in a barber's chair: a lot of motion but very little movement or progress. Countless opportunities to move forward, give the people hope, restructure and reposition the political economy and improve the living conditions of the people have been carelessly squandered without apologies by the governing elite (Ihonvbere, 2013:2).

The elites in the process, Edigheji (2013:2) contends , underestimated the impacts poor governance will have on their lives - they mistakenly thought that money is everything. Because they have access to medical treatments abroad, they thought that the poor health system in the country will not affect them. Because they could send their children to school overseas, the political elite neglect the Nigerian education system. That they could buy generators for electricity, public officials did not develop the power sector. And because the elites could afford to sink boreholes in their homes, they failed to build the required water facilities in the country. Furthermore, because the political, administrative and economic elites could hire private security guards, they failed to equip the police to become a force that can prevent and combat crime. And because the elite thought they were above the law, they destroyed the judicial system. And because they can afford SUVs, the elites refuse to develop Nigeria's public transport and the road and rail networks (Edigheji, 2013:2).

Furthermore, as Nigeria prepares for general elections in 2015, Campbell (2014) infact derisively suggests that politics in Nigeria might as well simply and squarely be regarded as elite politics. In other words, national politics in Nigeria, disregards the non-elite. In a direct

denunciation of the entire Nigerian political elite, Campbell (2014) opines that there is no obvious reason why a post-2015 government controlled by the now-opposition would behave very differently from its PDP (People's Democratic Party) predecessors. Hence, the Nigerian State continues to oscillate between democratic stagnancy and governance backwardness (Arowolo and Aluko, 2012:800). As a matter of fact, Arowolo and Aluko (2012:800), pointedly contend that Nigeria is oscillating between democratic stagnancy and governance backwardness, principally because of elite tendencies that are reflexive of pursuit of personal aggrandisement and promotion of egocentricism rather than altruistic policies that are nationalistic and 'peoplecentric' in nature.

The foregoing therefore necessitated a return to Achebe's hypothesis of a Nigerian blind elite. Achebe's thesis indeed, informs our notion of a blind elite model of the elite theory. Hence, the problem of this study fundamentally derives from the above Achebe supposition. According to Parry (2005:1) there are broadly two ways in which elites have interested political scientists. One is the education of the gender, social background, education, career paths and political orientations of those persons who attain the leading positions in a range of activities that have a major bearing on societies. This approach is as much concerned with illustrating and examining the patterns of opportunities in a society as with political action. It typically examines how far elites are socially or educationally representative or, more commonly, unrepresentative of the population at large. A second approach aims to establish to what extent the members of an elite act as an elite (Parry, 2005:1). The concerns of this study are in sync with the second approach. Hence, the problem of the study critically hinges on these research questions: how do the elite achieve their elite purposes when they are blind? Will the blindness of the elite not contradict its elite purposes? In other words, is the blind elite thesis not contradictory to the larger elite theory? Thus, the general objective of this study is to conduct an anatomy of the Nigerian elite by interrogating the blind elite model of the elite theory. The specific objectives are to (i) examine if the thesis of elite blindness, particularly in the Nigerian context is plausible and (ii) recommend how elite blindness may be dealt with, in the specific Nigerian context and in the general context. Invariably, the theoretical framework of the study is the elite theoretical framework. The study's methodology is the critical mode of research.

The Central Tenets of the Elite Theory

Higley (2010:161) highlights that elite theory's origins lie most clearly in the writings of Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923), and Robert Michels (1876-1936). It has however, also been

posited that perhaps, the classic expression of elite theory can be found in C. Wright Mills's *The Power Elite* (Henry, 2001:299). In any case, for our purposes in this study, we hereunder cite at length, the explication of Higley (2010:162/163) on the concept of the elite:

Elites derive from a fundamental and universal fact of social life, namely, the absence in any large collectivity of a robust common interest. While it is true that most large collectivities rest on a base of social and cultural understandings, these tend to be ambiguous and rough. The satisfactions some of their members seek are only partly compatible with the satisfactions sought by other members. Members constantly claim statuses and other valued goods for themselves, their kin, friends, and allies that other members do not accept as fully legitimate. Acceding to these claims is often more a matter of judging that it is dangerous or inexpedient to resist them than of recognizing that the persons and groups making the claims have some right to do so. In large collectivities common interest is fairly minimal and must always be supplemented by authoritative decisions that dissenters and opponents dare not or find it inexpedient to resist (Higley 2010:162).

Common interest is even more limited as regards the detailed features of any large collectivity's functioning. Its operations involve day-to-day decisions and, thus, allocations and re-allocations of tasks and statuses. Merely for a large collectivity to survive, intelligent and objective decisions that transcend individual interests must regularly be taken. But there can seldom be any firm consensus among a collectivity's members about the rightness of these decisions. This is partly because only a few are in positions that afford a relatively comprehensive view of the collective effort and its present location in time and space relative to its goals. Yet such a view is usually necessary for knowing if a particular decision is "right". Moreover, the need for constant decision-making deprives members of the time they would need to reach agreement about how their interests apply to current problems and needs. Even a relatively unimportant decision changes the lineup of influence for the next decision so that the details of a collectivity's structure and needs are always different today from what they were yesterday. This means that any incipient consensus among its members necessarily focuses on yesterdays' structure and needs (Higley 2010:162).

These aspects of collectivities give to elites their importance in political and social theory. Collectivities of any size and complexity require decisions by persons who happen to be strategically located in them. Because such collectivities are concentrations of power in the wider society, their top decision-makers have disproportionate societal power and influence, and they nearly always enjoy disproportionate privileges and protections. If we call these persons elites we can say that large and complex collectivities necessarily create elites. In this sense only are elites an inherent feature of

societies; all other reasons for the existence of elites are less persuasive and more debatable (Higley 2010:162/163).

In making the above lengthy extract, we have profoundly accepted that the elite factor is inseparable from the socio-economic and socio-political settings of nation-states. Hence, according to Arowolo and Aluko (2012:799), the elite theory is a philosophical explanation of the role of the leadership in governance as it affects public policy including all socio-economic and political matters. Elites accordingly, dominate the formal institutions of government and are a determining factor in governance and decision-making processes. Elites are the decision makers in the society whose power is not subject to control by any other body in the society (Arowolo and Aluko 2012:799). Citing Ikelegbe (1994), Arowolo and Aluko (2012:800) further highlights as follows: The elite theory postulates that public policy reflects the values and preferences of the elite rather than demands of the masses. The elite consist of those few individuals who wield powers and hold leading positions in the strategic aspects of society. The majority, the masses, only obey and are guided, controlled and governed by the few. Many of the elites do not hold formal or legal authoritative powers but are rather behind the scene, teleguiding and manipulating overt political and policy actions. It is on the basis of presumptions that the masses are contented and are incapable of challenging the authoritative position of the elite that the elites dominate public policy and its processes (Arowolo and Aluko, 2012:800).

The elite theory directs attention to the source of policy flow and whose interests public policies serve. The theory attempts a realistic explanation of the source of policy by predicating it on the elite rather than the masses. Elites are capable of setting the tone of society by coming out with policies of their choice. Hence, the level of stability and progress achieved in any society is a function elites' initiatives (Arowolo and Aluko, 2012:800). According to Osakwe (2002:182) the elites are considered to be the best or most important group a country can boast of because of their power, talent and wealth. The best of all the professions. Such people dominate the decision making process. Accordingly, the Nigerian elites make, interpret and implement laws that govern the society. They determine what is to be shared, who gets what, how and when. If decisions are taken at their back, they change it drastically, unless it suits their personal interests (Osakwe, 2002:182). Elites share common values that differentiate them from the mass, and prevailing public policies reflect elite values, which may be summed up simply as: preserve the status quo (Henry, 2001:298/299). In other words, elite purposes simply and invariably dovetail into the preservation of the status quo. Henry (2001:299) further adds that usually, elites have more money, more education and more status than the mass.

Over the yearstherefore, the spheres of elite activity (Parry, 2005:5) have expanded to reach finance, business, bureaucracy, the military, education and different other areas. Consequently, types of elite, in addition to the power or political elite includes, the military elite, business elite, economic elite, bureaucratic/administrative elite, educational elite, economic elite, social elite and even sports elite. In this study, the elite refers to the amalgam of all the elite types, inclusive of the political or power elite.

The Blind Elite Model of the Elite Theory: A Deconstruction

In this study, we underscore the contention of Achebe (1983:30) that Nigeria's elite refuses to see what they do not want to see. That is why they did not bring about the changes which the society must undergo or be written off. From very many indications, the required changes are yet to be brought about. Hence, three decades after the near-despair of Achebe (1983), another Nigerian scholar of undoubtful eminence, the cerebral Catholic Bishop of the Sokoto Diocese in Nigeria, Mathew Hassan Kuka, contends that the political class in Nigeria have turned Nigerian politics into a national bazaar (Kuka, 2012:1). As a matter of fact, it is only the blind elite that can turn national politics into a national bazaar - into a national bazaar of the blind. However, it is not likely that Nigeria's blind elite were born blind. It was for instance, the Nigerian elite that in 1960, led the nationalist struggle for the independence of Nigeria, from her British colonial masters. It was not some blindfolded elite that led this struggle. Hence, the nature of Nigeria's elite blindness attracts research attention. Let us for the purposes of this study call the nationalists that fought for Nigeria's independence from Britain, the fathers of the nation. Consequently, we highlight that Aminu (2002) cited in Osakwe (2011:2) have contended as follows: the so called fathers of the nation replaced the colonialists and in most cases behaved worse than the worst colonialists...The new political arrivals soon developed a wild culture of elitism, which soon divided the society into the arrived and the masses. The political elites or political heavyweights soon acquired expensive mentalities, lifestyles and tastes (Osakwe, 2011:2). In the process, they became blind. It was also at this time that oil was discovered in commercial quantity in the immensely resource rich new nation. Thus, it is obviously plausible to surmise that it was the resource richness of the Nigerian state that subsequently blindfolded the Nigerian elite (Umejei, 2013). But something deeper than such suspicion is further adduced in this study. Hence, we opine that in a way, the blindness of Nigeria's elite is self-inflicted. To that extent also, it is fully fictitious.

Essentially, fictitious blindness, fictitious deafness, dumbness and other fictitious disabilities may not be as hard to explain as it may immediately appear. An anecdote hence, serves as analogy. Thus, as high

school students in Onitsha, South East of Nigeria in the late 1970s, this researcher knew about the case of a certain middle-aged man that occasionally sat in front of the school gate, placing at his front a cardboard on which he had some inscriptions, to the effect that he came from Akwapin Ghana as a deaf and dumb beggar. From the students' pocket monies, he usually received generously, each time that he came. About a kilometer away from our own school also, was located a famous girls' school whose population was as humongous as ours. The man that we now knew as Akwapin Ghana also begged at the gate of the girls' school on days he allotted to that school. Then on one fateful day, after classes, as the day-students of the two schools were trooping home in really large numbers, from their two different directions, nemesis caught up with Akwapin Ghana. Some students observed him discussing with some street vendors, after he was through with his dubious business for the day. And hell was let lose. Nobody was later able to confirm if Akwapin Ghana survived from the merciless combined-gender pummeling he got from the justifiably angry student mob. In relation to our interrogation of Achebe's blind elite thesis, the Akwapin Ghana episode proves that fictitious disabilities do bring their theatrical victims to a day of reckoning. On this score, Achebe (1983:30) further contends: we have no option really. If we do not move, we shall be moved. The masses whose name we take in vain are not amused; they do not enjoy their punishment and poverty. In essence, the day of reckoning may take long before it comes. In the Arab Spring for instance, it took quite sometime before it came. In Akwapin Ghana's case, it also took quite some time, before providence intervened in favour of the embattled students.

Fundamentally, phantom blindness relates positively with lack of vision in state affairs. Indeed, the abundance of visioning templates in the Nigerian state, in actual fact point towards the dearth of vision than a dossier of commendable output by the various generations of visionaries. Let us take a few examples. There was the Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) of the Olusegun Obasanjo-led Military Dispensation (1976-1979). Yet, pummeling poverty, occasioning hunger, still persists in the Nigerian economy (Ojo and Adebayo, 2012; Adeniran, 2013). There was also the Green Revolution Programme of the Shehu Shagari Civilian Era (1979-1983), yet the Nigerian nation remains a massive importer of food items (Ojo and Adebayo, 2012; Bisiriyu, 2012). During the Military Dispensation of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (1985-1993), there was the Better Life for Rural Women Programme, yet the bulk of the nation's 100 million destitute reside in the rural areas (Braithwaite, 2013; IFAD,2012). More recently, there has been the Vision 2010 of the Abacha Military Government (1993-1998), a National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) Programme of the Olusegun Obasanjo Civilian Administration (1999-2007), a 7-Point

Agenda of the Musa Yar'Adua Administration (2007-2010), the current Transformation Agenda of the present Goodluck Jonathan Leadership and the most celebrated of all the visions, with its visioning processes and embrace, cutting across the administrations of Obasanjo (1999-2007) up to the current Goodluck Jonathan Presidency - the Vision 20, 20:20 and its rhythmic hues, whose designs would make Nigeria's economy, one of the top 20 types on the face of the earth, by the paranormal year 2020. In fact, the endless list of visions of doubtful clarity, have only merited for the elite-visionaries, a scorecard of lack of vision which portrays them as blind elite. The unfortunate fact however remains that the elite refuse to see what they do not want to see. They refuse to see for instance, that everything considered, the Nigerian state is pathologically asleep (Fajonyomi, 2012). The critically misleading issue to the blind elite is that the apparently sleeping giant, refuses to snore.

Ihonvbere (2013:3-4) further posits: the power elite appears to have a pathological fixation on subverting the foundations of the state, collaborating with undemocratic forces to abridge democratic rights, and designing dubious and diabolical strategies to close political spaces, suffocate civil society, enthrone a culture of anti-intellectualism, and rusticate opportunities and possibilities for progress and development. Until recently, the culture and obsession of the power elite was on building a parallel or alternate state at the expense of the public good. In its failure, it has created private alternatives in the following areas: water - private boreholes as against public water systems; health services - private and foreign hospitals as against general or public hospitals; schools for children - expensive private schools in and outside the country at the expense of public schools; security - private bodyguards and security systems as against collective or community and public security; electricity - private generators as against public electricity supply; foreign travel - use of foreign as against national airlines / vacations abroad rather than local alternatives; banking stolen funds - stealing is bad enough, even then they patronize foreign banks and their counterparts do not even consider Nigerian banks for this purpose; houses as prisons - high walls, complex security gadgets, electrified fences, huge dogs, close circuit televisions, etc, more defended than local prisons (Ihonvbere, 2013:3-4)!

Ihonvbere (2013:3-4) further queries: how can a country move forward when the elite, the leaders, the very custodians of state power, those that ought to set the example, give hope and inspiration, act as if they had lost faith in the present and future of their own nation? How can the nation have a future when the elite appear to be turning its back on the nation? Now they are buying houses in Brazil and Dubai and take pride in their foreign assets. Where they can help it, they die in foreign hospitals, and then we are told that they died with one white doctor by their bedsides!! What is more

painful is that these same elite presided over the squandering of trillions of naira, ran down Nigeria's basic institutions - Eleme petrochemicals, Nigeria Airways, Oku Iboku Paper Mill, Nigeria Shipping Lines, Nigeria Coal Corporation, all Government Catering Rest Houses, all Government Printing Presses, Ajaokuta Steel, Delta Steel, the various ports, Nicon Hilton Hotel, and so on. The list is endless (Ihonvbere, 2013:4-5). Indeed, the potency of elite blindness as analytical model for the physiognomy of Nigeria's elite becomes increasingly appealing. The thesis that Nigeria's elite refuses to see what they do not want to see and that is why they did not bring about the changes which the society must undergo or be written off (Achebe, 1983:30) becomes increasingly disconcerting.

Further Features of Elite Blindness in the Socio-Economic and Socio-Political Environment of Nigeria

The World Bank believes that 100 million Nigerians are destitute. In other words, this number of Nigerians lives on less than one dollar per day (Amaefule, 2013). The Nigerian elite spiritedly dispute this belief (see Usman, 2013). Hence, if the elite are in Nigeria and do not see what the World Bank sees, it is indicative of blindness. Truly, it does appear as if the elite do not see the reality of poverty in Nigeria. It is curious that from the grade of downtrodden Nigerians, the Nigerian elite still recruit and underpay the discontented drivers of their state of the art automobiles and the tired-looking old men that serve as gatemen at their opulent residences. From this class of Nigerians also, the Nigerian elite hire the phony security men that hover around their official and private offices. To complete the curious circle, the elite equally recruit from this class of unhappy Nigerians, the domestic servants that fatefully misguide the elite children when their elite fathers and mothers are away. In their blindness, the rampaging elite do not see the plight of these societal underdogs and the enormous inequality in the circumstances of the small fries and their blind elite masters.

In addition to the foregoing, Nigeria's elite are obviously widely travelled. However, it does appear as if outside the shores of their fatherland, they do not see the discipline of the lifestyles of such foreign lands that they frequently visit; when they travel outside their own country, they do not see positive developments in their host countries. Why is it for instance, that after five decades of independence, the Nigerian State with a population of over 170 million people (Okpi, 2013:1) can only generate 2,628.6 megawatts of electricity (Nnodim, 2013:1)? When the elite of Nigeria are in such other countries, they see uninterrupted power supply and on return home, they turn blind to the possibilities of uninterrupted power supply for Nigerian nationals. Yet, the fact remains that the supply of adequate and stable electricity to consumers is the back bone of socio-economic growth of any

nation and Nigeria is not an exception (Sule, 2010:163). Eboh (2013:1) discloses that the Federal Government of Nigeria, in a bid to curtail the epileptic power situation in the country had spent about N5 trillion (\$31.45 billion) from 1999 to April, 2013. But it has only been able to increase the country's electricity generating capacity by about 2,500 mega watts over the last 14 years; a far cry compared to its peers - South Africa and Brazil. Brazil recorded an investment of \$58 billion in its power sector between 1994 and 2008, while it currently produces about 100,000MW of electricity. South Africa on the other hand, currently produces about 40,000MW of electricity, with plans to invest additional \$37 billion over the next couple of years to triple current capacity (Eboh, 2013:1). From 1999 to date therefore, the relevant elite have refused to see that electricity supply to Nigerian citizens has remained nightmarish.

To further advance the thesis that the blindness of the Nigerian elite is phantom blindness, he fails to see the dilapidated condition of health facilities in his home country. But when he is in other countries, he fully sees the wonders of modern medical infrastructure in such other lands, so that when he is sick, he is flown to such lands on medical grounds. As soon as he is fit and returns to his fatherland, he finds his phantom blindness back again. Today, argues Adamolekun (2013), Nigerians travel to India, Germany, England, Dubai, the US and many other countries to get medical care that was available in Nigeria 20 years ago. In a way, argues Edigheji (2013:2), the Nigerian elites have over the matter of being enamored by overseas medical treatment, become victims of their own creation - poor governance. In their shortsightedness, they forget that not all illnesses will give them sufficient notice to secure visas and flight tickets before they strike. Heart attacks do not give anyone the privilege to acquire visas and flight tickets before it hits you. The result is that some among the Nigerian elites have died unnecessary deaths. Save for the dysfunctional healthcare system, such people would have been attended to in local healthcare facilities and would have been saved. That the Nigerian elite do not realize this reflects their narrow mindedness. Their recourse to foreign hospitals also shows their lack of self-worth and awareness. There is no society where an elite with self-respect resorts to overseas medical care as the first port of call. Elites with a sense of the self will ensure that their national healthcare is able to cater for their needs (Edigheji, 2013:2). In contradistinction with South Africa, continues Edigheji (2013:2), this is one area that the new black elites in South Africa have done really well. As a result, no one among the South African political and economic elites go overseas for medical treatment. The well publicized President Mandela's treatments in South African hospitals attest to this fact. No ex-Nigerian leader will have opted to be treated at home! Some will argued that South Africa inherited its good healthcare

facilities from the apartheid era. The point though is that the ANC government since 1994 has not only expanded but also improved the healthcare facilities it inherited (Edigheji, 2013:2).

In general terms, the tastes of Nigeria's elite are suggestive of egregious blindness. Hence, from the food on his table, to his comic clothing, to his elitist wristwatch, fine footwears and even his underpants, all are imported from some other national economies. According to Fashola (2011:12), here is a country that imports everything, including footwear, bags and leather products of all types, clothing materials (sewn and unsewn); fruits, vegetables, poultry, canned beef and sardines; new and used cars, buses, trucks, trailers and motor cycles (used and unused). The list is virtually endless. Fashola (2011:12) continues: as we sit in this hall today, I dearsy there would be more of our clothes, shoes, bags, caps and wristwatches imported wholly or in part than were made in Nigeria. Even our public address system, computers, voter registration machines, radio and television - all the things that define our lives - are imported from abroad (Fashola, 2011:12). Obviously in relation to elite tastes, idiosyncracies and elite blindness in the Nigerian socio-political economy, Egbemode (2008), cited in Onuoha (2008:5), raises the following questions: What kind of country plants tomatoes and does not have plan for tinned tomatoes? What kind of nation has fisheries everywhere but imports sardine and geisha? What kind of country plants corn in all its regions and imports canned sweet corn? Which other country do you know where cows obstruct vehicular traffic in all its states' capital cities but still imports corned beef? Which nation has fertile land to plant all the food to feed its citizens, but leaves it to weeds? Welcome to Nigeria (Egbemode, 2008). Without necessarily mentioning Nigeria in express form, the country in question is that country whose elite are incredibly blind. It is that country where the elite refuse to see what they don't want to see (Achebe, 1983:30).

During Nigerian elections, the political elite recruit their thugs and other supportive miscreants from the class of less privileged citizens and continue to wine and dine with them. They refuse to see their class differences in this instance. After the elections, the political elite would dispense with the services of their erstwhile dubious political collaborators. Out in the cold, the thugs now decide to join or rejoin (as the case may be) some criminal gangs. The blind elite again, will not see their linkage with the occasioning upsurge in criminal activities. Discussing the malady of electoral violence in Nigeria, as perpetrated by the political thugs and their elite sponsors, Obakhedo (2011:102), citing HRW(2007) highlights: this violence is most often carried out by gangs whose members are openly recruited and paid by politicians and party leaders, to attack their sponsors' rivals, intimidate members of the public, rig elections, and protect their patrons

from similar attacks. The architects, sponsors, and perpetrators of this violence generally enjoy complete impunity because of both the powers of intimidation they wield and the tacit acceptance of their conduct by police and government officials at all levels (Obakhedo, 2011:102). The police in this instance, particularly refers to the police hierarchy - the security elite, while the reference to government officials remains an allusion to the well known notion of political elite. It is against this backdrop that Nigeria's governing elite have been widely implicated in acts of electoral violence, corruption and fraud so pervasive as to resemble criminal activity more than democratic governance (HRW, 2007; cited in Obakhedo, 2011:103). Abbass (2008), cited in Joseph (2013:330) further opines that election period in Nigeria is best described as warfare. This is warfare, induced principally by the blind tendencies of the elite. In fact, HRW (2007:18) asserts precisely that more often than not, political violence in Nigeria is paid for, used as a tool by prominent Nigerians to bolster their own political positions. Indeed, these prominent Nigerians, in their ostensible prominence can also pass for blind political elite.

How the Nigerian Blind Elite Achieve their Elite Goals

Usually in the socio-cultural setting of the Nigerian State, the blind denizens invariably have as escorts, some members of their families who inescapably perform the duty of guiding the blind relations around their various destinations. The blind may be street beggars and these relatives in their lowly status, dutifully share in the existential tribulations of their beggar relations. Similarly and perhaps in curious conformity with cultural nuances, the blind Nigerian elites continue to find their ways around their elite purposes, under the guidance of their less privileged compatriots. We have referred to some of them above - their discontented chauffeurs, their disgruntled gatemen, their despairing security men and their malevolent domestic servants are all fateful accomplices in the accomplishment of the elite purposes of the Nigerian blind elite. Additional to this list is the burgeoning army of mendicants whom the elite gleefully give few bags of rice and yards of local textiles, to commemorate religious festivals. In appreciation of the largesse of the elite, the recipients of the handouts allow the elite to take more of their children as domestic servants. Of course, the list of these accomplices includes the poverty stricken thugs, deployed by the political elite in the rigging of elections for public offices. Hence, the blindness of the Nigerian elite has not contradicted its elite purposes, which after all fundamentally borders on the sustenance of the current situation. In effect, the blindness of the Nigerian elite as espoused in the blind elite thesis has not contradicted the tenets of the elite theory

Incidentally, the cure for elite blindness in Nigeria is in the hands of the non-elite. We agree with Ofuebe (2001:65) that in all societies there are shared ideas about how people ought to behave, as these ideas form the morality and customs of the people. The phantom blindness of the elite can neither represent such morality nor customs of the Nigerian people, as the inactions consequent to the shadowy blindness of the Nigerian elite remain debilitating to the entire Nigerian society. Non-violent resistance of the downtrodden elite-guides, is recommended as cure for elite blindness in all societies, inclusive of the Nigerian society. According to Ofuebe (2001:64) most of us have used non-violent resistance in our own inter-personal conflicts. It simply entails refusal to obey an order that goes against our conscience or violate our integrity. Specifically in the Nigerian context, the poverty stricken political thugs deployed by the political elite in the rigging of elections, must take the lead in providing the panacea for elite blindness in the polity, by refusing to serve as political thugs as means of livelihood.

Conclusion:

Findings of this study indeed indicate that the elite blindness thesis is highly plausible. However, it is also classifiable as phantom blindness. For instance, when the blind Nigerian elite get to some preferred foreign destinations, they simply discard their blindfolding appurtenances, so they can invest in choice real estates, engage in mouth-watering personal financial deals, and keep proceeds of corruption in their private portfolios abroad. They wear their garb of blindness again, once they are back to their fatherland. Edigheji (2013:3) however advises as follows: even if the economic and political elites “don’t give a damn” about the Nigerian people, they should give a damn about themselves by expanding and improving the country’s social and physical infrastructure. They should fix the health sector, education system, roads, the railways, and the aviation sector; and ensure that the security forces are well staffed and equipped. Instead of spending money on condolences’ adverts and spending billions on overseas’ medical care yearly, the economic and political elites should invest the necessary resources on Nigeria’s national health sector. Instead of having elaborate burial ceremonies, the elites should immortalize their loved ones who passed away by making investments in the education sector, including through scholarships, sponsorship of research, establishing chairs, and so on. These they should do for self-preservation or what is generally known as enlightened self-interest (Edigheji, 2013:3). If they do these things and establish inclusive political and economic institutions it will be a demonstration of purposeful and visionary leaderships. Unless they do this, the political and economic leaders will be consumed by the rot they have created in the country (Edigheji, 2013:3). Hence, we surmise that the

phantom blindness of the Nigerian elite would become history, the day their less privileged guides finally decide to go blind as well. According to Achebe (1983:30), the owners of the nation are the masses because they have the number; and when they move they will not look back, knowing that God loves them or He would not have made so many of them.

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