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### **BOOK REVIEW**

**Akani, E. C. (2019) *Machiavelli's Political Theory and Leadership in Nigeria*.  
Port Harcourt: Pearl Publishers International Ltd. 283 pp. Price: Not stated**

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This book deals with political philosophy and leadership. The author does this through the prism of the Florentine political philosopher, Niccolo Machiavelli. The latter's philosophy is largely articulated in *The Prince* and *The Discourses*. *The Prince* is a systematic discourse on power, its nature, and the mechanism of its acquisition and preservation. Dedicated to the Medici family in Florence, arises contextually from the bowels of Renaissance Europe where a decentred and tumultuous Italy was at the epicentre of papal dominance. *The Prince* made up of twenty-six succinct chapters, discusses the principalities and states of Europe, types of military formation, and the role of the prince in the armed enterprise. It further discusses the character and behaviour of the prince drawing generously from historical personages like Cesare Borgia, King Ferdinand, King Charles VIII, and King Louis the XII among others. In the words of Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, "Machiavelli is not concerned with how men do live merely in order to describe it; his intention is rather, on the basis of knowledge of how men do live, to teach princes how they ought to rule and even how they ought to live." *The Discourses* is more or less a re-reading of the history of Rome. As "moral-political teaching", its importance lies in its thesis on republics. To again quote Strauss and Cropsey, "... the *Discourses* state powerfully the case for republics while also instructing potential tyrants in how to destroy republican life. Yet there can hardly be any doubt that Machiavelli preferred republics to monarchies, tyrannical or non-tyrannical. He loathed oppression which is not in the service of the wellbeing of the people and hence of effective government, especially of impartial and unsqueamish punitive justice".

The above is the theoretical matrix of Akani's *Machiavelli's Political theory and Leadership in Nigeria*. It dissects the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida as a doctoral endeavour. This book wrapped up in 283 pages and organised in four chapters begins with an introduction that focuses on leadership and its essential character, namely, the power of personal example, selflessness, and the pursuit of the public good. Leadership is argued as the problem of Nigeria which has resulted in the "denationalisation" of nation-building. Chapter two articulates mainly conceptual and theoretical frameworks. The author engages with power and virtue. Power has two major elements, namely, authority and legitimacy. In its transcendence, political power is control over the thoughts and actions of men in a political community, and its constitutive elements are authority and legitimacy,

the former denoting the quality of being able to command compliance without force due to belief in the right of the wielder to do so, and the latter being the belief in a regime's rightness to make binding decisions. For the author and other realist thinkers like Hans Morgenthau, the essence of politics inheres in the acquisition of power which is why David Easton defines it as the "authoritative allocation of values". The Italian *Virtù* is the conceptual category the author is concerned about in this work, not the virtue of the moral hue. It covers ability, skill, energy, forcefulness, strength, ingenuity, civil spirit, and courage. For Machiavelli, it is the distinguishing leitmotif among princes. In the words of Quentin Skinner cited by the author, "it is the quality which enables a prince to withstand the blows of fortune" (p. 20). He typologises Machiavelli's points on the nature of *Virtù* and compares them with Babangida's political exertions demonstrable in his flexible disposition, generosity, the concentration of power, ruthless execution of friends and foes and passion in the study of historical figures like Hannibal and Alexander the Great. The author's thesis is underpinned by a Marxian political- economic framework that is dialectical-materialist in outlook. As Friedrich Engels notes "it is the science of the laws governing the production, exchange of material means of subsistence in the society".

Chapter three provides the context of the emergence of the seminal text, *The Prince*. The hallmark of the renaissance epoch was the intellectual movement, namely, scholasticism and humanism. The former placed emphasis on dialectics, rhetoric, and religious supremacy while the latter on the uniqueness of man to free men from the obscurantism and shackles of religious dogma. In the words of the author: "preconceived ideas about things, religion and man were challenged and new theories emerged. The idea of liberty, freedom, good governance, and individualism became main points of political discourses" (p. 45). The renaissance movement led to the emergence of nation-states consolidated in the Treaty of Westphalia in 1685. Before the consolidation of nation-states, Italy was disunited and broken into principalities, more or less territorial pawns of other European states such as France, Germany, and Spain on account of its resources. In the reading of Machiavelli, the unfortunate lie of the Italian state was engendered by the transcendence of the religious order, possessive individualism, and political decay. No wonder, his appeal to the Medici family for a demiurge who would lead Italy out of degradation and exploits of the Barbarians. *The Prince* emphasises the importance of the economy of violence or surgical actions for the benefit of the state and warned the prince against the acquisitive rapacity in property and the comfort of women of the subjects to preserve his domain. In Machiavelli's words: "We can say cruelty is used well (if it is permissible to talk in this way of what is evil) when it is employed once for all, and one's safety depends on it, and then it is not persisted in but as far as possible turned to the good of one's subjects. Cruelty badly used is that which, although infrequent to start with, as time goes on, rather than disappearing, grows in intensity. Those who use the first method can, with God and with men, somewhat enhance their position, as did Agathocles; the others cannot possibly stay in power". Babangida whose regime this work engages with perhaps misread *The Prince* and similarly his biographers, one of whom titled his work, *The Prince of the Niger*.

The author goes further to lay bare the nature of colonialism in Nigeria. His analysis shows that the colonial superstructure was nothing other than an exploitative for the

benefit of the colonising power. All the institutions of state and its bureaucratic mechanisms: taxation, education, transportation, and religion fed the accumulative goal of the colonising state. He seems to concur with the assertion of Walter Rodney that “the negative impact of colonialism in political terms was quite dramatic. Overnight, African Political states lost their power, independence and meaning—irrespective of whether they were big empires or small polities”.

The character of the post-colonial Nigerian state attracts the scrutiny of the author. The author re-echoing Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja’s viewpoint in his *Revolution and Counter-Revolution in Congo* qualifies the post-colonial state as a capitalist state, neo-colonial in substance and at the service of the accumulative goals of the metropolises. Re-echoing Hamza Alavi, it is an overdeveloped state, too complex for the ‘inheritance elite’. This view has been modified by Eme Ekekwe who sees the tension in the post-colonial state in the stunted nature of the mode of production yet to attain the maturity of capitalist relations of production and the super-imposed equipment of a modern state. The output of the post-colonial elite has bled the country of its resource to the rebound of international capital while simultaneously under-developing the country. The rapacity of the Babangida regime in its abuse of power, coup and misappropriation and outright looting of state resources are well evidenced. So is the handling of power relations which engendered coups and consequent bloodletting.

The author re-engages the theory of the state to underline the nature of the ruling class in Nigeria through both the liberal and radical perspectives. The former being that which plays the role of an impartial arbiter arising from the state of nature to mediate the civil society and ensuring the rule of law and good governance and social order in the state while the latter denotes the state as a class instrument for the oppression of another class. Despite the clear path provided by the text’s political economy theoretical frame, there is no fixation to the Marxian definition of the state as an instrument of class rule. Both Ekekwe and Phillip Corrigan provide a nuanced understanding of class. Ekekwe cited generously by the author avers that “to leave the matter thus would however be to harbour a simplistic and vulgarized conception of the state. It would be quite difficult if indeed possible at all for the state to be mere instrument of the ruling class since in fact that class is internally divided and subject to serious intra-class competition” (p. 156). Equally, Corrigan argues that “The state is an arena of contention and conflict within the ruling class just as much as it is the instrument of the class” (p. 157). Whatever your view on the state, the author contends that a neo-colonial state, without an industrial base, could hardly meet the basic needs of its people but vegetates in an uncertain future. The author speaks to the character of the Nigerian ruling class. The outputs of the Babangida regime underlined by the ethnicisation of politics. The manner in which M.K.O Abiola was denied ascent to the presidency and his business liquidated accentuated the ethnic determinism of the ruling class in Nigeria. As argued elsewhere, the ruling class in Nigeria is a default class whose complexion is mediated by ethnicity, prebendalism and naïve class interest. Babangida, the subject of analysis, once remarked, “Without Sani, I will not be alive today, without the North I would not have become officer in the Nigerian army and president of Nigeria”. Ikenna Nzimiro cited by the author deepens our understanding of the ethnic phenomenon when he pointed to tiny arrogant actors who regarded themselves as princes

in the corridor of power and looked down on others as the drawback of his regime. For a class to emerge in the Marxian conception of it, transformation in the development of productive forces, in other words, mode of production is necessary. This for me is the bane of development in Nigeria even when inclined towards the liberal paradigm.

In the final chapter of the book, the author makes some recommendations to the Nigerian political leadership: the need to respect public property, the rule of law, and the judiciary. Indeed, he calls for abidance to the democratic recommendations of the Florentine political philosopher which the Babangida regime observed in the breach. To quote Machiavelli, "it is not the wellbeing of individuals that makes cities great, but the wellbeing of the community and it is beyond question that it is only in republics that the common good is looked to properly in that all that promotes it is carried out."

This theoretical exercise assumes that both political philosophy and political theory occupy the same definitional roost and therefore the author assumes their interchangeability in usage. While we concede to him the liberty of usage he ought to have placed us on notice in a seminal academic endeavour such as this. Political philosophy concerns itself with apriori conception of man and nature, making sense of social relations, particularly the political implications of particular phenomena. However, political theory is more or less a formulation for a systematic understanding of political phenomena; it is somewhat eclectic and focused on power. However, by secularising the realm of the state, Machiavelli establishes the autonomy of politics as an amoral enterprise. The author's theorisation of the state deserves some accolade but fails to ground the ethnic variable which can no longer be dismissed as mere secondary contradiction but finds expression in the default class conception as well as in the state-nation category. Also, a Gramscian insight on the issue of hegemony would have been invaluable. An exercise in the sub-discipline of political theory is to be applauded. Truly, there are few works in this category these days in our clime and should be encouraged. It is strongly recommended for all social scientists and the country's political leadership. This book is well-written but a second edition in the near future can take care of the few editorial discontents.

#### **Biographical Note**

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