

MACHIAVELLI'S *THE PRINCE* IN NIGERIA TODAY

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Abstract

*While the ideas espoused in *The Prince* have been interpreted in various ways by various scholars, it is generally believed that the ideas cannot be isolated from the political situation of Machiavelli's city-state, Florence, and Italy at the time of its writing. This article is an attempt to present a comparison between the political situation of Florence and Italy of Machiavelli's time and that of the present-day Nigeria. It argues that Nigeria's present political situation can be understood in the light of Italy's political situation during the time of Machiavelli. Though the Florence and Italy of Machiavelli's era is quite different in culture and civilization from contemporary Nigeria, findings from the article indicate that the two political situations are similar in terms of central features described in *The Prince* relating to human nature, lack of national cohesion, and the application of violence and cruelty in socio-political activities. The article will suggest that Nigeria can learn from Machiavelli's argument that what was needed in Florence was a strong ruler who could provide a unifying force that would allow the city-state to transit from political weakness to political stability. That said, it does not in any way imply that the views canvassed by Machiavelli in *The Prince* were the perfect solutions to the problems confronting Florence and Italy of his time, nor, that they are the solutions to the present problems confronting Nigeria. It only uses the political situation of Italy during the time of Machiavelli and his argument for a strong and united Italy as insight into the political problems of Nigeria and to make recommendations as to how these problems may be addressed.*

Keywords: Prince, Machiavelli, City-State, Nigeria, Politics, Law Makers.

Introduction

While *The Prince* means different things to different people, it is clear that the ideas contained therein are linked to the political situation of Machiavelli's city-state, Florence, and Italy back then. Considering what appears to be a similarity between the political situation of Florence and Italy of that time with the state of affairs in the present-day Nigeria, it is not out of place to say that Nigeria's political situation may be understood and dealt with in the light of Machiavelli's arguments in *The Prince*. In view of this, the objective of this article is to show

the similarity between the state of affairs in the Florence and Italy of Machiavelli's time and that of the present-day Nigeria.

Over the five centuries that Machiavelli's *The Prince* has existed, it has indeed courted much controversy and given rise to multiple interpretations. Berlin notes that "apart from a cloud of subsidiary views and glosses, there exists, even now, over a score of leading theories of how to interpret *The Prince*" (Berlin, 1992: 206). For the purpose of this article, I will mention six areas which, for me, are the major perspectives in the interpretations of the book. They are the interpretations in the perspectives of morality, satire, political science, nationalism, job-seeking, and conspiracy. It is not my intention to give an exhaustive account of these interpretations, but rather to provide some indication that the interpretation I settle on is not the only possible view.

In terms of morality, there are those who see *The Prince* in the light of conventional morality and those who see it as introducing a new kind of morality. Those who see *The Prince* from the perspective of conventional morality argue that it represents immorality. For them, the ideas in it are unacceptable because they run totally contrary to the conventional assumptions of morality. But for those against their view, Machiavelli's ideas in *The Prince* are not immoral but rather a kind of morality different from conventional morality. His morality, they insist, is expedient morality, that is, morality that is guided by necessity and exigencies of politics, which, for them, are independent of private and social life.

For scholars who interpret *The Prince* as a satire, their argument is that the book must have been written by Machiavelli as a satire because its line of advice contradicts in no small measure with everything else written by Machiavelli in his other works, as well as the things known about his moral, political and private life. Thus, they insist that it was a burlesque of despotism and tyranny intended to pull off the mask from the tyrannical rulers that were everywhere in Machiavelli's era. By implication, Machiavelli, they claim, used irony in identifying the worst political methods and tactics, with the hope that tyrants who follow his advice would get into strife in their kingdoms.

Those who see *The Prince* as a work of science base their argument on the 'reality' of the ideas posited in the book by Machiavelli, especially in the last chapter where he calls for the redemption of Italy from the barbarians who have desolated her. For something to be a work of science, they hold, it has to be based on provable facts and backed by empirical evidence. Therefore, they regard Machiavelli as the father of modern political science and *The Prince* as the first

major work of modern political science since it is the first treatise in modern era to address politics from the standpoint of realism rather than idealism. For them, in order to liberate Italy from the influence of foreign governments and put things in order, Machiavelli argues in *The Prince* that a strong and united indigenous government is necessary, even if it is an absolutist one.

The main argument of thinkers who see *The Prince* from the perspective of nationalism is that the book was written at a specific time and for specific circumstances of Italian history— when only power and cool ‘reason of state’ could save Italy from foreign domination. They argue that the key to the interpretation of the book is the impassioned appeal in the last chapter for national liberation through the new prince. Therefore, for them, Machiavelli was a passionate patriot who saw the need for uniting a chaotic collection of small and feeble Italian principalities into a strong and coherent whole. In other words, he was an Italian patriot speaking to his own generation, who cared most of all for the Italian unity and independence and acclaimed any form of rule that would ensure it.

Those who interpret *The Prince* as a job-seeking treatise base their arguments on aspects within the treatise as well as circumstances surrounding its composition. The facts within the book, according to them, are its dedication to the reigning Medici prince, Lorenzo de’ Medici, and what seem like desperate arguments and pleading that Machiavelli employed in buttressing his statement in Chapter XX of the book that “princes, especially new princes, have found men who were suspect at the start of their rule more loyal and more useful than those who, at the start, were their trusted friends” (Bull, 1995: 68). The circumstances surrounding the composition of the book, they argue, are Machiavelli’s loss of his diplomatic job with the return of the Medici family to the throne of Florence in 1512, and dozens of job-seeking letters he wrote to his friends, Francesco Vetorri and Francesco Guicciardini, asking for their help in connecting him to the reigning Medici prince.

The argument of Mary Dietz who proposed the conspiracy theory is that Machiavelli’s *The Prince* is “a masterful act of political deception” aimed at undoing “Lorenzo de Medici by giving him advice that would jeopardize his power, hasten his overthrow, and allow for the resurgence of the Florentine republic” (Dietz, 1986: 777).’ For her, “*The Prince* is not simply about deception, but is itself an act of deception” and Machiavelli the “theorist of deceit is at the same time a practitioner of the very act” (Dietz, 1986: 781). By implication, *The*

Princeis a tract that in fact aims at restoring a republic, though in appearance it dedicates itself to maintaining a principedom.

As seen in the six interpretations summarized above, Machiavelli and *The Prince* mean various things to various people. While these interpretations have their respective merits, I think the appropriate interpretation through which Nigeria's political situation could be understood and explained is that of those who interpret *The Prince* from the angle of political science. This is because the book's realistic and practical approach to the issue of politics, its exaltation of the good of the state over personal sentiments, as well as its offering of theories that explain and predict political behaviour and events are enough to justify its interpretation as a work of political science. Moreover, this interpretation is most pertinent because whether knowingly or unknowingly many present-day Nigerian politicians and ordinary citizens manifest in their social and/or political practices many of the traits which Machiavelli observed in *The Prince*. In fact, there is a high degree of similarity between the state of affairs in the present-day Nigerian society and the state of affairs in Italy of the days of Machiavelli.

Comparative Analysis of the Two Political Situations

I begin this comparative section with this important question: What was the political situation of Florence and Italy in the time of Machiavelli? Adams captures the situation in Florence thus:

Florence was in constant ferment. The various wards and districts were in political conflict with one another; the rich and the poor were often at each other's throats; the various families gathered and broke up into factions; the guilds and trades were politically active; and because they were all crowded together in a tight little town behind walls, the Florentines were subject to gusty rumours and surges of passion that sent them raging through the streets to howl or hammer at the high towers and massive palazzo within which lay hidden their heroes or hated enemies of the moment (Adam, 1992: IX).

From the above description, it is clear that the time of Machiavelli was a worrisome one for people like him who wanted to see a city and nation in peace and unity, without internal and external distractions. Unfortunately, the whole of Italy was then in political turbulence. It was a very tumultuous era characterized by popes waging acquisitive wars against Italian city-states, as well as incessant battles for regional supremacy and control among France, Spain, the Holy

Roman Empire, and Switzerland. This resulted in frequent rising and falling of Italian people and cities from power, constant changing of political and military alliances, proliferation of mercenary armies, and rise and fall of many short-lived governments. The situation was so chaotic, that for Florence, that had no natural protection, a big army or strong military tradition, things were very difficult. It was in this confusing situation that Machiavelli wrote *The Prince*, wherein he sets out his views on how Florence and Italy could be salvaged from the chaotic and deplorable condition they were in.

Though Florence or Italy of Machiavelli's era is quite different in culture and civilization from contemporary Nigeria, a closer look, as I have noted earlier, reveals that there is some degree of resemblance between how things have been happening in the Nigerian society and what one can grasp from *The Prince* about Florence and Italy. To explore this position, let us look at these areas:

1. Human Nature
2. Lack of National Cohesion
3. Violence and Cruelty.

1. Human Nature: One of the recurrent themes in Machiavelli's treatise, *The Prince*, is his analysis of human nature. In order to formulate his advice for rulers, he mentions explicitly a number of natural traits in human beings which he came to know from his knowledge of history and his observation of events happening in his time in Italy, in general, and Florence, in particular. From his observations, Machiavelli concludes as follows about human beings:

Men are ready to change masters in the hope of bettering themselves. In this belief they take up arms against their master, but find themselves deceived when they discover by experience that instead things have got worse (Chapter III, Adams, 1992: 5).

It is the nature of people to be fickle; to persuade of something is easy but to make them stand fast in that conviction is hard. Hence things must be arranged so that when they no longer believe they can be compelled to believe by force (Chapter VI. Adams, 1992: 17)

How men live is so different from how they should live that a ruler who does not do what is generally done, but persists in doing what ought to be done, will undermine his power rather than maintain it. If a ruler who wants always to act honourably is surrounded by

many unscrupulous men his downfall is inevitable (Chapter XV, Skinner and Price, 1988: 54).

A general rule about men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, liars and deceivers, fearful of danger and greedy for gain. While you serve their welfare, they are all yours, offering their blood, their belongings, their lives, and their children's lives, as we noted above – so long as the danger is remote. But when the danger is close at hand, they turn against you. Then any prince who has relied on their words and made no other preparations will come to grief. ... People are less concerned with offending a man who makes himself loved than one who makes himself feared: the reason is that love is a link of obligation which men, because they are rotten, will break any time they think doing so serves to their advantage; but fear involves dread of punishment, from which they can never escape (Chapter XVII, Adams, 1992: 46).

Men are so simple of mind, and so much dominated by their immediate needs, that a deceitful man will always find plenty who are ready to be deceived (Chapter XVIII, Adams, 1992: 48).

From the above statements, one can see that, for Machiavelli, human beings are naturally selfish, greedy, stubborn, hypocritical and unreliable. They are not to be trusted because they are dangerous, deceitful and profit-driven. He believes that all that men want and care for is nothing but their personal glory and wealth, and they are so desperate about it that they can lie, cheat or do all kinds of cruel things to get what they want. Most of Machiavelli's ideas in *The Prince* are his pieces of advice to the prince on how to acquire, maintain or preserve power in the midst of people who are naturally selfish and unreliable. Believing that the problems plaguing the city of Florence and the nation of Italy were caused by human beings out of their selfishness, greediness, hypocrisy and stubbornness, he insists that solution to the problems equally lies in a strong and capable prince who could use any necessary means to hold the nation together and make the nation self-sufficient. For him, the reason why everybody, including the religious leaders, is struggling for power, maneuvering for positions and fighting over spoils is because of human nature.

Looking at today's Nigeria, just like in Machiavelli's Florence, and Italy of his time, it is filled with individuals who exhibit the same attributes Machiavelli saw in the lives of people of his time. Nigeria today is made up of many greedy and

selfish people who do all kinds of cruel and violent things in order to acquire and maintain political power. Available empirical evidences show that in today's Nigeria the struggle for political power, maneuvering for political positions and fighting over spoils of office have led many to intimidation, kidnapping or killing of political opponents. Some have entered into sorcery and ritual practices of various kinds in order to secure political positions. While one may not agree with Machiavelli that his observations about human beings, which he stated in *The Prince*, are the full truth about human nature (considering that he acknowledged in Chapter XVIII that there were actually people abiding with honest principles, whom, as he said, were always overcome by trickery and cunning men), it is a true fact that many in Nigeria are exhibiting the same pattern of behaviour Machiavelli noticed in the people of his time. There are instances of selfishness, trickery and cunning being manifested by politicians in both high and low places in order to acquire or maintain political power

A typical example of this is the position of the ruling party, the All Progressives Congress (APC), on the issue of restructuring in Nigeria which has been on the front burner of National discourse since the middle of 2016. Restructuring, in the Nigerian context, means devolving more powers and responsibilities to the component states of the federation, which will make the states to be financially independent of the Federal Government and make the Federal Government to be only in charge of issues of national concern such as foreign policy, defence and economy. This is based on the argument that rejigging the current structure of the Nigerian federation would strengthen its unity and also stabilize its democracy. It is surprising to watchers of political events in Nigeria that the same leaders of APC who were at the forefront of the call for restructuring of the Nigerian federation when they were in opposition are, now that they are in power, reluctant to bring about the restructuring they formerly called for. Instead of taking the bull by the horn as they promised Nigerians in their campaign for votes in the 2015 elections, they now argue that those calling for restructuring are politicians who lost out in the 2015 elections.

Echoing the mind of the ruling party, in his interview on *Channels Television* programme, *Sunrise*, on 29th June 2017, a prominent member of the ruling party, Governor Nasir El-Rufai of Kaduna State said that "politicians calling for restructuring were 'opportunists'" (*Vanguard Newspaper* of 30th June 2017, anchored by Madukwe under the heading *Politicians calling for Restructuring are Opportunists – El-Rufai*). This view is corroborated by another leading member of the ruling party, Governor Yahaya Bello of Kogi State who "called on Nigerians

to disregard calls for restructuring of the country, describing such calls as mere political deceit” (*Leadership Newspaper* of 6th July 2017, under the caption *Calls for Restructuring Mere Political Deceit – Kogi Gov.*).

2. Lack of National Cohesion: Another area in which the present Nigeria is comparable to Florence and Italy of Machiavelli’s time is the inability of the citizens to achieve national cohesion even after over 50 years of independence. Just as Florence and Italy of Machiavelli’s time were characterized by factional units and small states who were always at each other’s throat, Nigeria is characterized by ethnic nationalities that have always been in endless battles to outsmart each other politically and religiously. Inasmuch as Nigeria today is an independent nation, the way things have been happening since independence shows that the politicians and ordinary citizens believe more in their tribes and religions than in one Nigeria. The former National Anthem, used from the country’s independence in 1960, states thus:

1. Nigeria, we hail thee
Our own dear native land
Though tribe and tongue may differ
In brotherhood we stand
Nigerians all are proud to serve
Our sovereign Motherland
2. Our flag shall be a symbol
That truth and justice reign
In peace or battle honour’d
And this we count as gain
To hand on to our children
A banner without stain
3. O God of all creation
Grant this our one request
Help us to build a nation
Where no man is oppressed
And so with peace and plenty
Nigeria may be blessed

The second and current National Anthem, which replaced in 1978 the first one adopted at independence, reads as follows:

1. Arise, O compatriots
Nigeria's call obey
To serve our fatherland
With love and strength and faith
The labour of our heroes past
Shall never be in vain
To serve with heart and might
One nation bound in freedom
Peace and unity.

2. Oh God of creation
Direct our noble cause
Guide our leaders right
Help our youth the truth to know
In love and honesty to grow
And living just and true
Great lofty heights attain
To build a nation where peace
And justice shall reign.

Just like the National Anthem, the National Pledge which is recited by school children throughout Nigeria at the beginning and end of each school day goes like this:

I pledge to Nigeria, my country
To be faithful, loyal and honest
To serve Nigeria with all my strength
To defend her unity
And uphold her honour and glory
So help me God.

The aim of making the school children sing and recite respectively the National Anthem and Pledge is to get their words internalized into their lives so that when they grow up they will abide by their words and manifest them in their social, political and economic activities. But available evidences clearly portray the fact that many politicians that sing the national anthem at public functions do that only with their mouths and not from their hearts. In other words, they are just paying lip service to both the National Anthem and Pledge. This is hinged

on the fact that their political practices do not correspond with the wordings of the National Anthem and National Pledge. It is noticeable that from the country's independence in 1960 till date, the voting pattern of Nigerians most of the time portrayed tribal sentiments, showing everyone's desire to put into elective offices only people from his or her tribe or religion. This means that from independence to the present time, there is no sense of unity and oneness in Nigeria. This is part of the reason why *Boko Haram* and Moslem fanatics in Northern Nigerian are publicly and silently burning down churches and wiping out generations of Christians there, with what seems like tacit support of some of their state governments and religious leaders.

Up till now, there is no seriousness on the part of various states governments in the Northern part of Nigeria in arresting, prosecuting or jailing those sponsoring or taking part in the persistent religious crises occurring there. Reporting under the caption *CAN to Northern Govs: Halt the Killing Spree Now*, Igata wrote:

The Christian Association of Nigeria, CAN, yesterday tasked the Northern governors to stop further killing of Christians in the area. Rising from a joint meeting of the Southern Nigeria Christian Elders' Forum and the Christian Association of Nigeria, South-East zone, the Christian leaders condemned what they called "the inhuman treatment meted out on Christians in the Northern part of Nigeria. "How can Christians be treated like cows and goats in Northern part of Nigeria with impunity while we claim that Nigeria is a secular state, the group queried, warning that "this is a sign of total Islamization of Nigeria, which is dangerous to the corporate existence of the entity called Nigeria" (*Vanguard Newspaper* of 15th June 2016).

Events in Nigeria since independence indicate that it is not only in the Northern part of Nigeria that people are showing apathy to the corporate existence of Nigeria. All over the country, there is one problem or the other confronting the nation. Militant youths are blowing up oil pipelines in South-South of Nigeria, in spite of the plea from the President of Nigeria, Muhammadu Buhari, South-South leaders of thought, and other well-meaning Nigerians that they lay down their arms and dialogue with government in order to find lasting solution to their grievances. Writing on these recurrent blowing of oil pipelines in the *Daily Post* of 7th July 2016, under the heading, *Again, Niger Delta Avengers Blow Up Chevron Pipeline in Delta*, Opejobi stated:

The Niger Delta Avengers, NDA, said they blew up another oil installation belonging to Chevron Nigeria Limited in the creeks of Delta State on Wednesday night. This is coming barely 24 hours after the rampaging agitators reportedly attacked a pipeline belonging to Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation, NNPC, at Eleme leading to the Nigeria Liquefied National Gas, NLNG, in Rivers State. The resurgent militant group disclosed its latest attack on a statement by its spokesman, Mudoch Agbinibo.

In the South-East of Nigeria, the agitation for Biafra has resurfaced with high intensity, with the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) and Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) currently mobilizing all indigenes of South-East and South-South of Nigeria for another secession of Biafra from Nigeria. To prove their seriousness to their cause, they organized demonstrations in major cities of the South-East of Nigeria on Monday, May 30, 2016 to commemorate Biafra Day, i.e., the day the Biafra warlord, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu declared the independence of the aborted Republic of Biafra in 1967. In some places, the demonstration turned violent and bloody. Writing under the caption *7 Die as MASSOB Protests in Asaba, Vanguard Newspaper* of 30th May 2016 states thus:

No fewer than seven persons have been confirmed dead following protest by members of the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in Asaba on Monday. The Acting Police Public Relations Officer (PPRO) in Delta, SP Charles Muka, who confirmed this in a statement, added that the police recorded two casualties. It stated that the military arrested and brought eight members of MASSOB to the police who are now in custody in Asaba.

In another report of the demonstration, as it happened in Onitsha, anchored in the *This Day Newspaper* of 31st May 2016, under the heading *Dozens Killed, Several Injured as Biafra Day Rallies Turn Bloody*, the story goes in this way:

During yesterday's rally in Onitsha, Anambra State, a combined team and police clashed with members of IPOB during the celebration of Biafra Day in the commercial city. The clash, THISDAY checks revealed, left about 30 people dead and many injured. It was equally gathered that over 50 members of the Biafran

group were arrested by the military and taken to the 302 Cantonment of the Nigerian Army in Onitsha.

In response to the activities of Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) which culminated in a violent clash between the group and the Nigerian military at Umuahia, Abia State, in September 2017, the Nigerian Government secured a court ruling through which IPOB was formally proscribed and designated a terrorist organization. Reporting on it, Soniyi, Ogunmade and Ugwu of *This Day* Newspaper stated:

A Federal High Court sitting in Abuja has proscribed the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) in Nigeria, the South-East separatist group which has been agitating for the realization of the Republic of Biafra. The acting Chief Judge of the Federal High Court, Justice Abdul AdamuKafarati, granted the order proscribing IPOB following an application filed and moved Wednesday by the attorney General of the Federation (AGF) and Minister of Justice, AbubakarMalami (SAN). The judge granted all the prayers brought before him by the justice minister (*This Day* Newspaper of 21stSeptember 2017, under the heading *Court Formally Proscribes IPOB, Designates it Terrorist Organization*).

Though the proscription of IPOB and its designation as a terrorist group are seen by most observers of recent political events in Nigeria, including the United States (*Vanguard* Newspaper of 24th September 2017 under the caption, *IPOB is not a Terrorist Organization – US Govt.*), as uncalled for, many welcome the move because of the dangers posed to the unity of the Nigeria nation by the activities of IPOB, especially their activities in the six months before their proscription.

Just as there are presently insecurity situations in the Northern, Southern and Eastern parts of Nigeria, the Western part is not left out, as Oodua People's Congress (OPC), a Yoruba nationalist organization has for decades been a thorn in the flesh of both ordinary people in Lagos and other parts of Western Nigeria. Clashes between OPC and Security agents are now part of life in Western part of Nigeria, as residents in the region have become used to such clashes coming on regular basis. In one of their clashes, reported by Usman in the *Vanguard* of 28th August 2013, under the caption *5 arrested as OPC, Police clash in Lagos*, the story went thus:

Pandemonium broke out yesterday at Iju-Ishaga area of Lagos, following a clash between policemen and suspected members of the

Oodua People's Congress, OPC. Trouble, as gathered started after some policemen on stop-and-search flagged down the OPC vehicle which was moving towards Agege area for an event. An eye-witness who identified himself as Timothy, said: "The policeman fired teargas canisters which choked some of the OPC members. Other still managed to flee the scene in their vehicles."

Reporting on another clash in the *Vanguard* of 31st March 2014, under the heading, *One Killed, Station Torched in Lagos, Police, OPC Clash*, Usman stated:

Pandemonium broke out, weekend, in the densely populated Ajegunle area of Lagos State, after some members of Oodua People's Congress, OPC, engaged policemen in Tolu Police Division in a gun duel over the release of a suspect. A suspected member of OPC was shot dead in the process, a passer-by hit by a stray bullet, one policeman shot and several others sustained varying degrees of injuries in the incident which paralysed commercial activities in the area. A police van was also burnt by the OPC members and part of the station torched. Their attempt to burn down the station, however, was met with resistance from the policemen.

In a clash on Tuesday, 27th April 2016, involving the OPC and some hoodlums in Agejunle area of Lagos State, one person was killed, while several others were injured. Reporting on the incident, Igbonwelundu stated that "the incident which occurred around 10pm at Arumo Street, caused panic among residents as buildings were touched by the rampaging youths" (From *The Nation Newspaper* of 27th April 2016, under the heading *One Dies, Others Injured as OPC, Hoodlums Clash in Lagos*).

From the foregoing, it is understandable that in his national broadcast on 1st October 2017 in commemoration of Nigeria's 57th independence anniversary, the Nigerian President, MuhammaduBuhari, lamented the lack of cohesion among the ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. He said,

Recent calls on restructuring, quite proper in a legitimate debate, have let in highly irresponsible groups to call for dismemberment of the country. We cannot and we will not allow such advocacy.

As a young Army Officer, I took part from the beginning to the end in our tragic war costing about 2 million lives, resulting in fearful destruction and untold suffering. Those who are agitating for re-run

were not born in 1967 and have no idea of the horrendous consequences of the civil conflict we went through.

I am very disappointed that responsible leaders of these communities do not warn their hot-headed youths what the country went through. Those who were there should tell those who were not there the consequences of such folly (*Premium Times Newspaper of 1st October 2017 under the caption What Buhari told Nigerians at Independence*).

Also, few weeks after the Nigerian President's broadcast, the Vice President, Prof. Yemi Osibanjo echoed a similar sentiment on the lack of cohesion among the various tribes in the nation. Addressing a gathering of Nigerian pastors, he said,

We must also deal with tribalism, religion and other parochial tendencies. It is difficult to find national leaders today. Many Nigerians speak from a tribal perspective (*Daily Post Newspaper of 28th October 2017, anchored by Wale Odunsi under the heading Maina: Osinbajo Breaks Silence on Ex-Pension Boss*).

3. Violence and Cruelty: Machiavelli's narrative in *The Prince* brought to the fore the state of affairs in both Florence and Italy of his time. The city of Florence, just like other Italian city-states, was facing enormous challenges of how to sustain her statehood in the midst of incessant political conflict, violence and cruelty. It was a period of political turbulence, insecurity and chaos, violence and wickedness, characterized by struggles for acquisition of territories and influence. Likewise, Nigeria, a colonial creation, is today facing some challenges of political development coming from all fronts, which include the use of violence and cruelty to acquire political power and to express ethnic or religious grievances. Available evidences point to the fact that violence and cruelty are part of social cum political lifestyle of many Nigerians.

Right from the early years of the existence of the country as an independent state, there has always been the abuse of the power of incumbency by the ruling party, aimed at intimidating the opposition parties and their candidates, as well as their supporters. Notably, the first Federal election in Nigeria, as an independent country, held in 1964, was characterized by ugly incidents of political thuggery and violence, electoral malpractices and chaos, leading to boycott of the election by the opposition coalition, United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) in certain parts of the country. This made the ruling coalition, Nigerian National Alliance (NNA) to have a landslide victory. Resultantly, the entire process

suffered crisis of legitimacy and credibility, and everybody knew that a national crisis was imminent, as there were even talks of a possible military take-over. To avert such a development, the Prime Minister of the Federation, Sir AbubakarTafawaBalewa, agreed to form a Government of National Unity, and also to have fresh elections in the constituencies where no effective election had taken place due to the UPGA boycott.

As if what happened in the Federal election of 1964 was a child's play, in the Western Region elections held on 11th October 1965, there were higher incidents of widespread rigging, violence, intimidation and murder of opponents and destruction of their properties, perpetrated by both the NNA and the UPGA. The follow-up events culminated into a serious political crisis, which consequently, led to chaos and complete lawlessness all over the Western Region, resulting in massive destruction of lives and properties. It was reported that during the crisis, about 1000 people lost their lives and about 5,000 houses were burnt down. It was the problems associated with the Federal election of 1964 and the 1965 Western Region election that compelled the military to strike on the night of 14th - 15th January 1966 and terminate the Nigerian First Republic.

Incidentally, other elections that have taken place in Nigeria after the 1964 and 1965 elections are characterized by violence and intimidation, and sometimes kidnapping or killing of political opponents, massive rigging, and other forms of electoral irregularities. These malpractices contributed partly to the overthrow of the Second Republic by the military on 31st December 1983. Even the 1998/1999 elections which ushered in the present democratic dispensation in Nigeria were characterized by wide-scale irregularities and violence. According to Ezeigbo, "soldiers were used to intimidate innocent voters", while observers witnessed "ballot stuffing and other pre-meditated political violence geared at perpetrating fraud to pave the way for the PDP candidates" (Ezeigbo, 2007: 297).

Analysing the 2003 and 2007 elections, Agubamah noted thus:

On the whole, the assessment of the 2003 elections reflected malpractice all over. In states like Rivers and Ogun, the votes cast were more than the voters registered....Like the 2003 elections, the 2007 witnessed various dimensions of malpractices. Accusing fingers in this regard pointed to the then President, OlusegunObasango. Accusations were rife that he was manipulating the electoral environment in favour of his party PDP (Agubamah, 2009: 471).

Similarly, the 2015 General Elections, considered the freest and fairest in Nigeria's election history, had pockets of violence and intimidation of political opponents in many areas of the country. According to Nigerian Human Rights Commission, 58 Nigerians were killed in the 2015 pre-election violence (*Premium Times* of 13th February 2015, anchored by Ibeh under the caption *58 Nigerians Killed in 2015 Pre-election Violence So Far – Rights Commission*).

Application of Machiavelli's Argument to Nigeria's Political Situation

It is likely that many will question the justification for my argument that the Nigerian society of the 21st century can be understood in the light of the events of sixteenth century Italian society and Machiavelli's response to the events as articulated in *The Prince*. For me, going by the similarities in the two political situations in terms of human nature, lack of national cohesion, violence and cruelty, as established in the comparison drawn above, it is plausible to use the political solution offered by Machiavelli as a recommendation on how Nigeria will get over its political problems. This is in view of the fact that Machiavelli's concern in *The Prince* is the evolution of a strong ruler that can unite Italy into a coherent whole capable of withstanding foreign incursions and distractions.

Just like the Italy of the Machiavellian era, Nigeria is facing some challenges of political development coming from all fronts, which include manifestation of greed and selfish interests, lack of national harmony and the use of violence and cruelty to acquire political power and also express ethnic or religious grievances. As Machiavelli saw the necessity for Florence and Italy of his time to transit from political weakness to political stability, there is no doubt that Nigeria needs some change of structure and mentality on the part of all the citizens. If Nigeria will grow to become a strong and great nation that can be a political and economic force in the comity of nations, in accordance with the aspirations of the founding fathers, there is need to apply the Machiavellian argument for a strong and indivisible nation.

While Machiavelli's argument for a strong ruler not in any way restrained by norms of conventional morality does not apply for present-day Nigeria, the fact remains that Nigeria still needs a strong democratic institutions to achieve greatness. At the moment, this desired greatness has not been realized notwithstanding that the nation has celebrated 57 years of attaining

independence. To achieve greatness for Nigeria, there must be true federalism. True federalism denotes a situation where the states will develop at their own pace and not depend on the centre for infrastructural development and payment of workers' salary. Presently, the way and manner in which the state governors in Nigeria run cap in hand to the Federal Government monthly for federal allocation is a mockery of federalism and caricature of democracy. The system in the country has greatly weakened the federal structure, making the state governments mere appendages of the Federal Government.

What is practiced now in the name of federalism is unitary in nature, and many opine that this is because the present constitution of Nigeria, which came into effect with the return of democracy in 1999, was drafted by the military, though after consultation with political and legal elites. The present system, they argue, is the direct result of the long years of military rule in Nigeria. This claim is based on the fact that in the First Republic (1960 - 1966) when Nigeria had regional governments, each region controlled the natural resources within its domain and developed without running to the centre for financial support. In those days, the regions were known for what they respectively produced. For instance, Northern Region produced groundnut and exported groundnut, Western Region was known for Cocoa production, and Eastern Region was known for Palm Oil production.

But barely six months after the military take-over, in May 1966, the new Head of State, Major General J. T. U. Aguiyi Ironsi abolished the regions by decree and replaced the Federal structure by unitary system of government. Even when his successor, General Yakubu Gowon, following the counter-coup of July 1966, restored the Federal system of government, it was not practiced the way it was done in the First Republic due to the usual nature of military government. Moreover, few months after assumption of office, Gowon issued a decree dividing Nigeria into twelve states. That act, which many saw as politically motivated, totally scattered the existing framework of the regions and changed the order of governance in the country. Today, the country has 36 states and a Federal Capital, Abuja, and all these states were created under military rule. As noted above, the 1999 constitution which the country is now operating on is a product of the Military, and it is not surprising that it has some areas which have impeded the growth of federalism. Efforts to restructure the Nigerian federation and have a new constitution are being sabotaged by those favoured by the current constitution, which made the composite states of the federation to heavily depend on the Federal Government for funds.

Again, the country needs some restructuring if it will move from economic weakness to economic stability. The restructuring has to start with changing the present constitution which made mining of all minerals and exploration of all oil and gas resources in all Nigerian lands and territorial waters an exclusive preserve of the Federal Government. The present constitution should be changed or amended to give states right to exploit and explore the mineral deposits within their respective territories. If this is done, it will create the opportunity to tap into many of the untapped solid mineral resources wasting in various states of Nigeria because successive Nigerian governments jettisoned their exploration because of oil boom.

Knowing that funds for sustaining government expenditure will no longer come from outside of the state as it used to be, every state will do everything possible to develop alternative means of revenue other than oil, such as agriculture, taxation, commercial activities, etc. This will certainly promote healthy rivalry among the constituent units of the Nigerian federation and bring about rapid development of agricultural potentials of various segments of the country as it was in the First Republic when the country operated by regions. Presently the price of crude oil in the international market is on the decline, thereby reducing drastically the income of the country and the capacity of the Federal government to provide essential infrastructural facilities to the citizenry. As things stand now, the states depend on the Federal Government's monthly allocation for funds to perform government functions and pay salary of workers. Reporting on this dependence on the centre for funds, *The Nation* Newspaper of 12th June 2016, under the caption, *FG to Give Fresh Bailout to States*, stated as follows:

A fresh financial support facility is on the way for the states from the Federal Government to cushion the effect of the current economic crisis, although with stringent conditions. The scheme is designed to provide relief to the states, many of which are finding it difficult to pay their workers' salaries. The Federal government recently gave the states a bailout to enable them clear the arrear of salaries owed their workers.

As at October 2017, the Federal Government has given states bailout funds several times to enable them meet their obligations, especially payment of workers' salaries, but there is no hope in sight that things will improve for the states, unless the states have other avenues of generating enough funds to meet their obligations. Reporting on the view of the Nigerian President concerning

this when he received a delegation of the Nigeria Governors' Forum, Adetayo wrote:

President MuhammaduBuhari on Tuesday lamented that despite the various interventions by the Federal Government, there were still complaints and agitations by workers over unpaid salaries and allowances by state governments. He wondered how the unpaid workers had been managing to meet their needs. ...The President told the governors that the plight of workers in the states needed urgent attention as many could hardly survive. "How can anyone go to bed and sleep soundly when workers have not been paid their salaries for months" (*Punch Newspaper of 18th October 2017, under the caption State Governors Demand Fresh Bailout FromBuhari*).

This is where the need for a strong nation, where the principles of true federalism are firmly in place, comes to mind. When the states are given the responsibility of tapping their mineral resources, it will increase their economic viability. When the states are economically strong and viable, they will impact on their people, and when they impact on their people, many of the challenges confronting the nation, such as unemployment, prostitution and crime, restiveness and militancy will be reduced to the barest minimum. By then, the public will begin to enjoy real dividends of democracy.

Conclusion

In view of the instances highlighted above, I would reiterate my argument that the political situation of the present-day Nigeria can be understood in the light of the political situation of the Florence and Italy of Machiavelli's time and also be addressed in line with Machiavelli's argument in *The Prince* for a strong and united nation. Inasmuch as Italy of Machiavelli's era is quite different in culture and civilization from contemporary Nigeria, there are still bases for comparison between the political events of both societies. This is the reason why I think that the interpretation through which one can understand and explain the state of affairs in Nigerian politics is that which holds that Machiavelli's *The Prince* is a realistic reflection of the state of affairs in Florence and Italy of his time. Therefore, his ideas are his own way of trying to solve the political problems of his city-state and nation.

However, it does not in any way imply that the views canvassed by Machiavelli in *The Prince* are the perfect solutions to the problems confronting Florence and Italy of his time neither are they the solutions to the present problems

confronting Nigeria in her quest for political development. It only means that the views could help in providing insight into the political problems of Nigeria, and as well serve as a recommendation on how these problems can be addressed.

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