



SOCIOLOGY OF VILFREDO PARETO: NIGERIA IN CONTEXT

OLAYINKA AKANLE, JANET A. OGUNDAIRO, GBENGA S. ADEJARE
And
ADEFOLAKE ADEMUSON

*Department of Sociology,
University of Ibadan,
Ibadan, Nigeria*

yakanle@yahoo.com, o.akanle@ui.edu.ng, olayinkaakanle75@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

Theories remain cornerstones of understanding social realities and this is especially so in social and sociological theories. It is, as a matter of fact, impossible to sustainably professionally explain social realities and phenomena without affinity and allusions to sociological and social theories. It is against this background that this article examines and explains the Nigeria's leadership conundrum, existential comatose, social debacles, structural fixations and retrogressions as well as political and economic logjams within the theoretical prisms of Pareto Sociology to contribute strategically to the unanswered development questions of Nigeria. While this article is intrinsically theoretical, it is practical, polemic, pragmatic, discursive and engaging in manners that are relevant not only the academy, scholarship and literature but also to practice and leadership in Nigeria, Africa and globally.

Keywords: Vilfredo Pareto, Youth exclusion, Development sociology, Leadership and Governance, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

In this article, we examined the contribution of one of the foremost theorists in Sociology-Vilfredo Pareto – popularly known for his Elite Theory. In engaging Pareto's contributions, we espoused practical and adaptive patterns of reasoning. We preferred this contextual application approach to theory-based examination because one of the challenges facing many students, academics and scholars relative to theories is their foreign origins, abstract nature and triteness as well as monotonous ways of teaching and presenting them (Akanle and Olutayo, 2021, Olutayo and Akanle, 2013; Alatas, 2011; and Alatas, 2001). This is why even though *Sociological Theory* is always a compulsory course in most universities across the world, it is among the least enjoyed and the least appreciated. Against this background, we have decided to explore Pareto's contributions to sociological theories through practical Nigerian context to put *real textures, practical national cases and life* into the subject to make it more interesting and increase the practical value. This is important because one critical question most students of Sociological Theories all over the world ask is: of what use and relevance are these Sociological Theories, especially as most of the theories were developed abroad and are based on foreign examples from Europe and are somewhat uninteresting?

Historical accounts (audio, visual and written) of Nigeria's independence from colonial rule reveal that the country's independence was greeted with much glee and fanfare. The rein of leadership and power was handed over by the British colonial masters to Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and he became the country's first and only Prime Minister. The post-independence phase of the country however transcends this handing over. Nigeria has jostled between military dictatorship, democratic rules and interim governments. The military governments are usually referred to as uncomfortable, dictatorial, by many citizens and the return to democratic government especially in the fourth republic was believed, political watchers both nationally and internationally, to be a process that would result to good governance. This is because democracy is often projected as being anchored on values such as trust, accountability, confidence, transparency and credibility. These values potentially

ensure the fulfillment of the terms of the social contract between the governed and the governor, between the leaders and the followers, between government and the people. These promises include improved standard of living, provision of basic amenities, provision of employment opportunities for the growing number of graduates and other promises that come with the nascence of democracy. However, according to Idowu and Etinosa (2013), the return of Nigeria to democracy in the fourth republic has dashed the hopes of the masses. Politicians have failed to live up to the expectations of the people in delivering the promises made during campaigns. The rule of law has been grossly undermined. Many of the citizens are wallowing in abject poverty. They further noted that the state of the Nigerian economy and living conditions of the people is a paradox.

There have been events that have threatened the nation's security, cohesion and tranquility. These have often resulted into diverse social problems, including those that have threatened to break the geographical unity of the country. Leadership or governance has been identified as one of the major issues confronting the country. Does this mean that new government is preferable? It is important to note that the relevance of this analysis cannot be over-emphasized at this point in the country's political history when party politics revolve around campaigns of *saints and sinners*. Does this power-change signify a change of elite, power shift or a mere circulation of elites as postulated by Pareto? This and many more issues will be addressed in subsequent sections. To achieve the set objective, the paper is thus divided into sections.

Classical Elite Theory and Pareto's Sociological Orientation

Classical Elite Theory (CET) is one of the profound theories on leadership, governance and the use of power. Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941), Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923) and Robert Michels (1876-1936) are believed to have produced a body of ideas that is today called 'classical elite theory' (Higley, nd). The theory assumes that the control of power or leadership position in a nation is between the two types of elites he called governing and non-governing elites. There is always a power tussle between these two types of elites. He explained that the societal rule is by a relatively small number of people, described as the *governing elites*. The few dominates the decision-making process and enforce their will on the masses. The non-governing elites gain the control of power from the governing elites when the latter fails in discharging its duties and power. The power game goes on and on in a circular manner. CET assumes that the society is made up of elites and masses with the former, though few, having their values and preferences reflected in public policies formulated and implemented within the established sovereign socio-geographical frameworks. They occupy strategic and advantageous positions in the society. Conversely, the latter forms the majority and take on the role of followers while struggling to claim their entitlement to the few crumbs that fall the table of the elites, of which they can be denied. Various mechanisms are used to keep them subdued, controlled and governed by the elite few.

Vilfredo Federico Damaso Pareto was born in Paris in 1848 to an Italian father and a French Mother. He grew up in middle – class environment because his father earned a reasonable amount of money as a hydrological engineer. This made them to live comfortably in the middle-class cadre. He had a quality education in both France and Italy, completed his degree in Engineering and graduated top of his class. He was a civil engineer in a state-owned Italian railway company before moving to a private industry. He was an economist as well as a sociologist.

Pareto contributed immensely to the elite theory. Elite theory basically accentuates the concentration of power in the hands of a small group of people or minority few known as the 'elite' in any given society (Bachrach, 2010). The elite theory is based on hierarchical positions in the society which also reflects in power distribution and relationship that affect social behaviour, relationship and interaction. The circulation of elites with same mindset will either produce a *developed*, *under-developed* or *stagnant* nation. This implicates the kind of societal problems (including the dimensions and momentum) that will be faced in such society. Pareto is widely known and celebrated in the sociology world for his theory on "circulation of the elites". In the theory, Pareto argued that there are two types of elites in the society: the governing and the non-governing elites. The control of power is between these two types of elites. The non-governing elites will wrestle power from governing elites when the former have failed in their leadership prowess. The latter step in and replace them. This process goes on and on. It is cyclical unlike the revolutionary, parallel one suggested by Karl Marx. The process is also more or less inevitable.

Pareto (1935) in his book "Mind and Society" argued in favour of leadership rule by a relatively small number, whom he described as the 'governing class'. The will of few minorities is supreme despite the much mouthed 'universal suffrage'. This minority few are called the 'Guardians' by Plato in his book 'Republic' (Schwarzmantel, 1987). He is regarded as the father of elitism. Other classical elitists include Gaetano Mosca and Robert Michels. These elitist scholars all agree on the concentration of power in the hands of a leading minority (Zuckerman, 1977) through which societal goals are achieved (Julius, 2012). Like other elitist scholar, Pareto believed that the society is divided on the elite-mass dichotomy. Despite its small population, the elites have the power and use it willingly while the larger population are always submissive despite the fact that they greatly out-number the elites (Odubajo, 2009). The ascension to and continuity in leadership is made possible by the ownership of valued and varied resources in society. Pareto (1935) argued that elites may possess exclusive qualities such as education, intelligence, shrewdness and union or organizational capacity that qualify them to ascend into political power. However, the grip of ruling elite on power in the society is not forever. The ruling elite is substituted by another dominant class in the society. Pareto (1935) argued that no association can function without a dominant class. This class is not guaranteed longevity and is unavoidably subject to decay, as a new dominant class tends to arise from the people. In his "circulation of elite" perspective, he believed that there is an absolute replacement of elite in the transfer of power from *old elite* to the *new elite*. On the other hand, another classical elitist scholar Michels (1949) has a different opinion. He argued that instead of absolute replacement, what happens is the constant amalgamation between old and new elites; both finding a middle ground to rule as a single unit.

Though Pareto believed in social change just like Karl Marx, his submission on social change contrasted that of Marx. Unlike Marx who argued for the role of the masses in the social change, Pareto was of the opinion that the masses are not necessarily instrumental in bringing about social change. He argued that elites act on the basis of enlightened self-interest, rules over the masses controlled by non-rational forces (Adams, 2005; Julius, 2014). Being dominated by non-rational forces, they are unlikely to be a revolutionary force (Julius, 2014). Whenever there is degeneration of an elite in power, there will be eventual replacement by a new set of elites who are from the non-governing class of elites or from the higher class of the masses. The process of replacement goes on and on with a set of elites replacing another set of elites. Pareto offered a cyclical, non-revolutionary theory of change. Significantly, this theory of change basically sidelines the plight of the masses in the social change. Just like the popular

saying “soldier go, soldier come, barrack remains the same”, elites go, elites come but the lots of the masses remain the same. The basic assumptions of Pareto’s elite’s theory include the following:

- The concentration of power in the hands of the few minorities.
- The presence of a single social class of elite in the analysis of political processes.
- A change in governance by supplanting the ruling elites by another elite group.
- The replacement of leadership is absolute.
- Power /social change is non-revolutionary.

As earlier mentioned, the aim of this paper is to apply Pareto’s theory of circulation of elites to the Nigerian context. The theory of circulation of elites has been explained. However, to apply the theory to the Nigeria’s political sphere, there is a need to have a cursory look into the post-independence history Nigeria.

Chronicle of Nigeria’s Democratic and Military Transitions since Independence

Nigeria became a politically independent nation on October 1, 1960, when the British colonial administrators formally relinquished their rein of power after much nationalistic struggles by the leaders who are often referred to as the country’s heroes, including Sir Tafawa Balewa, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Sir Nnamdi Azikwe and others. Power was handed over to Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa as he became the country’s first and only prime minister. The country also became a republic in 1963. The democratic nation’s administration was cut short by the military take-over on January 15, 1966, through a violent coup d’état led by Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu in company of some young army officers. This led to late Major General Aguiyi Ironsi becoming the first military head of state.

Barely six months after, on July 15, 1966, the Ironsi’s administration was truncated by another military coup d’état championed by Gen Yakubu Gowon. The new head of state enjoyed power till 1975 before he, too, was chased out of power through the process that brought him in, though bloodless this time around. This bloodless coup- d’état ushered in General Murtala Muhammad to power who was later assassinated in another coup d’état in 1976. His deputy, Gen Olusegun Obasanjo succeeded him as the military head of state. Gen Olusegun Obasanjo in the quest to fulfill the promise of returning the nation’s governance to democratic path, initiated the process of transition to democracy by drafting the 1979 constitution, replacing Westminster system of government with federal system of government, lifting the ban on political activities and conducting general elections. He handed over to Alhaji Shehu Shagari (presidential flag-bearer of National Party of Nigeria [NPN]), who won the election. NPN contested with other four political parties including Great Nigeria People’s Party (GNPP), Nigeria Advance Party (NAP), Nigerian People’s Party (NPP) and Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). In August 1983, Shagari re-emerged as the nation’s president in another round of general elections. The victory was landslide because the party also won the majority seats in the National Assembly. Barely five months after the re-emergence of Shagari, his administration was toppled on December 31, 1983, by a military take-over championed by Gen Muhammadu Buhari. The new Buhari’s government was also cut short by another coup d’état led by the then Chief of Army Staff, Major General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB) on August 27, 1985.

Babangida addressed himself as the military president and Commander-in-Chief. He ruled for eight years (from 1985 to 1993). He led a controversial administration filled with several failed promises to relinquish power to civilian government. In 1993, he went down under intense

pressure from both local and international bodies. The June 12, 1993, general election was the peak of the promise but was later cancelled due to some obvious as well as clouded circumstances. The June 12, 1993, presidential election was believed to have been won by Chief M.K.O. Abiola, the presidential flag-bearer of Social Democratic Party (SDP). Following the annulment, Gen Babangida reluctantly relinquished the administrative power to interim government led by Chief Ernest Shonekan. The interim government was truncated three months after inception on November 17, 1993, by a forceful take over by late Gen Sani Abacha. General Abacha started several programmes and activities in preparation to return the country to democratic rule. There was creation of more states and local governments, lifting of ban on political parties, formation of political parties etc. there were speculations that he wanted to make himself the democratic president in the new democratic Nigeria. He however died on June 8, 1998, without actualising his dream and seeing his plans unfold. His death brought in General Abdulsalami Abubakar (rtd), as the new head of State and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces on June 9, 1998. On July 20, 1998, he made it known that he had a 10-month transition programme to bring democracy back into the country. As part of the transition programme, he set up electoral body named Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The body conducted general elections that ushered in state governors, state and national lawmakers, local government chairmen and president. The presidential election was conducted on February 27, 1999. It was won by Chief Olusegun Obasanjo who represented the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the presidential election. However, the elections that brought him into power was allegedly marked by rigging and fraud and electoral malpractices.

The year 1999 marked a new era for Nigeria as the it ushered the country back to democratic rule and the beginning of the fourth republic. On May 29, 1999, General Abubakar fatefully handed over power to ex-military general Olusegun Obasanjo. He was guided by the new 1999 federal constitution of Nigeria which makes provision for separation of power, federalism and multiparty system. The administration recruited men and women from both military establishments and civilians, most of whom had served with various preceding regimes (Osha, 2011; Campbell, 2010). Notable bureaucrats and technocrats including Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala, Oby Ezekwesili, who are termed as professionals and also included in the political elite group (Adesola and Ako-Nai, 2010; Julius, 2014). This set of political elites wielded power which according to Oteh and Eze (2012) resulted into crises between elites and the masses, executive and legislature.

The 1999 constitution stipulates that a political term will be for four years and the maximum for a president is eight years which invariably means two terms. Obasanjo did two terms (1999-2003; 2003-2007) after the failure of third term agenda despite much struggles for it. The failed third term agenda of Obasanjo according to El-Rufai (2013) was greatly influenced by core economic team members comprising some of the bureaucrats and technocrats in the cabinet despite the fact that he was not pleased with relinquishing his hold on power. In 2007, general elections were conducted, and power was handed over to President Umaru Musa Yar'adua and Vice-president Goodluck Jonathan (Campbell, 2010). The choice president was a medically frail man from a Fulani elite family in Katsina State; the Katsina State governor and the younger brother to Obasanjo's deputy when he was a military head of state in 1976-1979. Jonathan was once the deputy governor of Bayelsa State. He became the governor when the then governor Diepreye Alamiesigba was entangled in a money laundering offense, arrested and jailed in London. Jonathan was also handpicked to be the vice president but became the acting president when his boss had to go abroad for medical help. He later became the

president in 2009 when Umaru Musa Yaradua passed away. Goodluck Jonathan re-contested as the president under and won.

Since the country's return to democracy in 1999 till 2015, PDP had been the party in control at the federal level and in sizeable number of states and local governments in the country. Notable opposition parties include CPC, ANPP, APGA, ACN etc. In 2013, three main opposition parties; CPC, ACN and APGA joined forces together and formed a strong coalition party called All Progressive Congress (APC) against the then ruling party PDP. A considerable number of party members including notable ones such as Rabi'u Kwankwaso (governor of Kano State), Rotimi Amaechi (governor of Rivers State), Atiku Abubakar, Speaker of the house, Aminu Tambuwal left PDP for the new coalition party. Primary election was conducted and Muhammadu Buhari, a one – time military head of state, three-time presidential candidate (2003, 2007 and 2011) emerged as the presidential candidate for APC. PDP did not have any primary and Goodluck Jonathan was flagged again as the party's presidential candidate. The political atmosphere preceding the 2015 general election was very tense and filled with jibes, verbal assaults, abuses and innuendos thrown from one political party to others. A lot of money was thrown out in an effort to win elections. However, for the first time in Nigeria's political history from the first to the fourth republic, the incumbent was thrown off their seat by an opposition party. That was a significant change.

Actors in the Nigerian Political Drama: Compositions of the Nigerian Political Elites

Contributing to the elite theory, Pareto argued that whether developed or underdeveloped, simple or complex, power is concentrated in the hands of the minority called elites. Relating this to the Nigerian experience, it is an unarguable fact that the minority holds the reins of governance. The few ones occupied the key, advantageous and enviable positions. He further argued that though there is change in governance, it is all about circulation of elites. Looking critically at the Nigerian experience, since independence till now, this assertion tends to hold sway. Leaders in the country have directly or indirectly emerged from the same source – group of elites. Ex-military head of state, Obasanjo, came back to power as a civilian president for eight years in the fourth republic. Ex-military head of state Muhammadu Buhari is presently the civilian president. Musa Yaradua, who ruled from 2007 to 2009, was a younger brother to a one-time deputy head of state during Obasanjo regime. Politicians and military administrators alike of each political / military regime have led the populace to believe that they are out to bring relief to the sufferings experienced by the people brought on them by preceding administrations. The independence fighters professed to be fighting for freedom from colonialists' over-bearing, cheating ruler ship. There is the popular psychological maneuvering that taking over of government through military take-over or democratic election is the end to suffering. The handing over of government to Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was termed as a relief from long military oppression. Obasanjo was seen as the then 'Nigerian Messiah'. *Change mantra* was introduced by the coalition of three political parties that formed an alliance against the popular ruling party that ushered in a considerable numbers of political office holders who divorced the old party in the face of dire tribulation. The elites with protruding chests and raised shoulders with confident smiles made bold statements of relieving the burden imposed by old leaders. The masses are of the sincere belief that this new batch of elites will not swallow their promises in the face of shinning and tempting naira. They swear to be better in their leadership than the previous administrations. The drama is all about circulation of political elites, staged by people with the same ideological beliefs of swindling and robbing the masses of the common inheritance through sweet words.

Prior to the 2015 general elections, Campbell (2014) argued that Nigerian politics might as well as be named elite politics. This implies that the major players are the elites while the non-elites are just speculators. The elites are the artists while the non-elites are audiences. Campbell (2014) reflected his total loss of hope in the Nigeria political elites by arguing that the governance of the then opposition party now winning party; APC will act, govern or represent in opposite of what was obtainable during the then ruling party; PDP. This can be linked to the fact that some considerable members of the then ruling party have shifted base to the current ruling party and are given viable positions. Also, majority of the political offices and appointments are still in control of former political office holders and appointees. They are elites with identical ideologies. A situation certain political analysts refer to as the recycling of the political gladiators (Adesola&Ako-Nai, 2010). This cross-carpeting of members of one political party to the other defied the absolute replacement assertion of Pareto. What is obtainable in Nigeria is tantamount to what Michels (1949) explained as the recurrent coming together of both old and new elites come, reaching a compromise on how to rule as one. What is obtainable in Nigeria sometimes is the change of political party to get back to power through a new one.

Pareto also argued that the elites derive their political power through force or coercion. This is reflected in both democratic and military era in Nigeria. Since independence, Nigeria has experienced series of coup de tat as a means of ushering in military governance. Exercise of human rights was not allowed during military reign. The death of Ken Saro Wiwa and other nine Ogoni leaders was an example of trampling on human rights. In between some military administrations, political party activities were banned. The military gets to power and maintain the power through force. There was nothing more, nothing less. Democratic governance too is not exempted from force. Electioneering processes are marked with violence, crises, intimidation. Elections are marred with snatching of ballot boxes, intimidation of voters etc. Policies were forced on the masses. For example, the masses aversion to the removal of oil subsidy on January 1, 2012 was portrayed through several avenues such as mass demonstration, labour union strike. There were convergences in public places such as Gani Fawehinmi Square in Lagos. However, the government responded to the protest through the use of military personnel who were out to distort the process of protest. The privatization of some government parastatals during Obasanjo's regime was done through coercion of the masses through the mass media.

Pareto (1968) argued that elite have exclusive qualities including "education" "intelligence", "shrewdness" and "union" that distinguish them and qualify them to hold a political position. The recruitment into the elite class can either through ascription or achievement, birth or godfatherism. Names abound of parents, especially fathers, who ensure their wards' and or family members' entrance into the political class was made possible. Olusola Saraki, Olussegun Obasanjo, Late Lamidi Adedibu, Late Lam Adesina are all examples of elites who also have their wards fully involved in politics. The transition to the elite class is facilitated by "godfatherism" or "clientilism". There are cases of leaders who attain political powers through the help of godfathers. The political godfather has a huge influence in the induction of a non-political elite or the recycling of the old political elites into political offices. Worthy of note in the process of acquisition of power by the elites is the presence of traditional and religious leaders. The influence of religious leaders is reflected in the visiting of churches and prayer camps by contestants prior to election. Prior to 2015 general election, a popular Nigerian man of God was entangled in a controversial statement of opening the gates of hell for the members who failed to vote for his presidential candidate. Traditional leaders, too, are not left out. They are carried along from time to time in some states' administration. During election, they are usually visited

by politicians to legitimise their interests. The 2015 gubernatorial election in Lagos State, for instance, was almost lost to the opposition party due to the statement of a traditional leader that went viral on the social media. In addition to the relevance of traditional case, Okonofua (2013) argued that the Sokoto Caliphate maintained the sole dominance of who rules the nation either during democratic or military rule. According to Julius (2014), military retirees, most especially the retired military generals, are actively participating in Nigerian administration even during civilian government. Tenuche (2011) argued that this elite group, apart from involving in active politics as political office holders, also acts as political godfathers ensuring the continuity or discontinuity of protégées in political offices and positions. Campbell (2010) mentioned military leaders like Theophilus Danjuma, Ibrahim Babangida, Mohammed Abubakar and Olusegun Obasanjo as examples of military men turned politicians who had loyalists in government. Three of these men were former military heads of state and all carried out a coup d'état one point or the other in their military careers. These same set of men proved relevant, especially in issues relating to security.

Julius (2014) also contended with the argument supporting the sole dominance of military elites in the democratic process. He argued that the argument is quite incomplete as there are contentious issues of "the influence, control and authority some other characters outside the military elite network" who also play better part in the political drama. He asserted that the Nigerian political terrain in the fourth republic is not dominated only by the military elites but that the administrative prowess of the military elite is diluted by the technocrats, businessmen and professionals who have proved to be dominant and influential from 2007 upwards. He supported his arguments from the analysis of the occupants of the 228 political executive cabinet positions between 1999 and 2007 under the Obasanjo's civilian administrations with military officers having 17.5%, technocrats 19.7%, intellectuals including university lecturers 18.4% and businessmen 13.1% of the cabinet. These people were needed in governance because they were versed in human resource skills, international political economy, management of the economic and socio-political affairs of the state both at the local and global levels and the craft of governance. Military elites need other experts to gain legitimacy, safeguard their personal interests and portray their authoritarian attributes under the guise of collaborative disposition with civilians (Adesola & Ako-Nai, 2010). Kifordu (2011) identified five elite networks within the core political executive elites in Nigeria namely: military elites, socio-cultural elites, economic elites, traditional institutional elites and the political elites. Parry, (2005) explained that the scope of elite activity include finance, business, bureaucracy, military, education and different other areas. Okeke (2014) also argued apart from political elites, there are military elites, business elites, economic elites, bureaucratic/administrative elites, educational elites, economic elites, social elites and even sports elites.

On the other hand, Okonofua (2013) argued for the dominance of the Hausa-Fulani aristocratic elites in the Nigerian national politics since independence till date. The power hold of the aristocratic class according to the Okonofua (2013) is through the politics of population, control of military and economy. He argued that the population of the northern region of the country, the seat of the Hausa-Fulani aristocratic elite, has always been doctored, even right from the colonial days till present, to favour the northern hemisphere of the country. By this explanation, the military becomes highly partisan and loyal to the Caliphate. He argued further that at some point in Nigeria, seven out of the nine military heads of state were from the north. The exceptional two still danced to the tune of the aristocratic elites. Similarly, oil economy, which is the heartbeat of Nigeria economy, is dominated by the Hausa-Fulani aristocratic elites, as the larger part of the oil blocks are owned by northerners. Kifordu (2011), while agreeing that

we have five elite networks within the core political executive elites in Nigeria, also supported the domination of northerners in Nigeria politics. He argued that nine of the fourteen executives since independence till 2011 hailed from the northern region of the country.

In spite of the fact that the president's office is not formally reserved for any region or ethnic group, minority group outside the northern region has never received popular support to govern the country. The exceptional case of Goodluck Jonathan was largely out of sheer luck when his boss, Musa Yaradua, who hailed from aristocratic family in Katsina state, died. His second term was frustrated by the northern elites through various strategies in order to gain power back (Okonofua, 2013). Jonathan was succeeded by a Fulani man from Katsina state. According to Akanle et al. (2021), the dominance of Fulani people has brought about critical security and survival challenges in Nigeria in the recent past. The persisting crisis in Jos has also been traced to this development (Akanle, Adejare and Busari, 2019).

The degeneration of elites in power and the replacement by a new set of elites from the non-governing class of elites or from the higher class of the masses was proposed by Pareto. This situation occurs when the powerful gets weaker and weaker day by day and loses relevance. This is anchored on several predisposing factors such as rise of stronger and more composed elites and possible revolutionary stance of the masses. Julius (2014) observed the gradual loss of relevance of military retirees in contemporary Nigerian politics. BBC News (2007) reported that the economic and the professional elites have formed a formidable force against military domination. While the former is on the increase, the latter is on the decrease. However, it is worthy to note that the military retirees have not completely faded out in Nigerian polity as 2015 general elections ushered in ex-military head of state, General Muhammadu Buhari, as the president. He gave some key positions to ex-uniformed men though bureaucrats, technocrats and intellectuals were given viable positions as well.

Circulating Elites in Nigeria

According to Okeke (2014) elite factor cannot be separated from the social, political and economic settings of every nation. By implication, the social, economic and political settings in Nigeria cannot be divorced from elitism. In the same breath, Arowolo and Aluko (2012) posited that governance, government institutions are dominated by elites who say the tune of the music. They are few but they determine what policy formulate and implement directly or indirectly. They have absolute hold on power. The level of stability and progress achieved in any society is dependent on the *elites' function* and *elites' ingenuities*. It is in this vein that democracy in Nigeria can be seen as evolving and subject to criticism in its current status. This is partly because political office holders at local, state and national level are not always a reflection of popular choices. They are usually party choices and sometimes foisted on the party by powerful party chieftains. Military dictatorial rules have largely failed to authenticate the many rationales behind the take-overs from both military and democratic rulers. All political elites proclaim year in year out at each electoral campaign that the previous administrations have ended up deceiving the masses; they believe that their own administration would bring about the desired relief to the people. However, the promises usually end up as a mirage.

Adesola and Ako-Nai (2010) posited that a considerable number of political actors in 1999 were still the same set of political actors in 2003. One can argue that these same set of political actors still featured 2015. For instance, Obasanjo, who began the political administration in the fourth republic made sure that successive candidates after him were his loyalists. This was done to have a representative in government who would protect his and his

loyalists' interests. This situation accordingly culminated to what can be termed patron-client or godfather-protégée network both at national, state level and even local government level. This has sometimes resulted to unhealthy rivalry or competition which has greatly destabilized the nation's political stability (Oteh and Eze, 2012). Going beyond the submission of Adesola and Ako-Nai (2010) about the same set of political gladiators since 1999, one can argue that since independence, one can see transparent traces of circulation of elites in both military and democratic administrations in Nigeria. Though they are from different democratic and political epochs, the elites produce the same results because of the same ideological stance they possess – protection of their selfish interests at the expense of the interests of the masses. This, to a large extent, has undermined development in Nigeria and the lots of the masses remain same despite change in governance either military or democratic.

Various policies and programmes have been formulated and implemented by different administrations, both military and democratic alike, but their impacts in elevating the masses to better standard of living remain insignificant. This is as a result of the fact that the elites in power have the same or similar interests even though they represent different regimes or administrations – it is just a story of old wine in new wine skin. It is pure circulation and re-circulation of people with the same interests despite their alliance with different political backgrounds. A critical look at the success of Operation Feed the Nation (OFN), an agricultural programme introduced by Obasanjo's military dispensation between 1976 and 1979 is very instructive. Even though a lot of funds and popularity attached to this programme, poverty and hunger still persisted during and after its implementation (Ojo and Adebayo, 2012; Adeniran, 2013). Another example is the Green Revolution Programme of Shagari's democratic administration (1979-1983) which was meant to consolidated purported success of OFN and provide food exportation opportunities, yet the country remains a rentier state even in terms of food items. The wife of the first military president, Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (1985-1993), introduced the Better Life for Rural Women programme but the programme turned out to be better life for rich women as a high percentage of the nation's rural women dwellers still co-habit with abject poverty. Similarly, the Vision 2010 of the Abacha Military Government (1993-1998) turned out to be a mirage. Among others, the National Economic Empowerment and Development Strategy (NEEDS) programme of Obasanjo's civilian government (1999-2007), 7-Point Agenda of the Musa Yar'Adua's administration (2007-2010), Transformation Agenda of Jonathan's government (2011-2015) were just outlet pipes for money squandering and diversion by big shots in government.

The multiple direct and indirect resultant effects of these failed projects are social problems which disrupt the social order in the society. It affects social interactions, relationships and individuals behave in the society. It undermines solidarity and promotes disunity. Unemployment abounds, kidnapping is becoming a norm, violence is on the increase. The much-acclaimed Nigeria having the fastest growing economy is just a paperwork as the larger percentage of the masses remain poor. Though the economy is growing on the paper, some people's lives are going downward. This is because the leaders are blind to the sufferings of the people and deaf to their plights. No country can experience development when the leaders turn deaf ears to the plights of its masses and blind to see the deteriorating conditions of the people they govern.

That poor level of development in concerning remains obvious in the light of lived realities poverty, poor infrastructure and lingering economic hardship prevalent in the country. Several decades after independence and many years into civil governance. Ihonvbere (2013)

argued that Nigeria is a little better off than what she was at independence. Kuka (2012) explains that Nigerian is like a nation flying without black box. This position can be linked to the 'I don't care attitude' of the Nigerian elite class. . Since independence, there have been reforms, restructurings, minor adjustments here and there in diverse forms. This reality translates to what Arowolo and Aluko (2012) see this as a reflection of elite tendencies that are reflexive of pursuit of personal glorification and promotion selfish ambition rather than the pursuit of altruistic policies that are embedded in people-driven and nation-building ventures.

Sadly, the elites see themselves as different from the masses. Worse still, some members of the alienated masses accept this distinction by treating the dominant elites with preference. A striking example of this can be seen in the explanation given by Hisbah, an Islamic law enforcement agency, on why they give exemption to the rich in enforcing their rule which was the case with the absolving the son of Muhammadu Buhari, Yusuf Buhari, and his wife of all charges against them during their 2021 wedding in Kano (Shuaibu, 2021).

The perception of being different from and not reprehensible by the masses makes the elites in Nigeria embark on projects that favour them. However, the electoral period brings both elites and masses together. This is when the elites see the need to really mingle with the less privileged and redo their *omoluabi* (being virtuous). This time, they need the masses to legitimize their political positions and offices. They sometimes recruit thugs who are readily available to carry out their dirty jobs. These thugs unleash terror like a necessary commodity. They snatch ballot boxes; intimidate members of the public, attack sponsor's oppositions. They are sure of being covered because of the high caliber of people who send them errands. They are not afraid of security personnel (Obakhedo, 2011). Because of the surety of their godfathers, they disrupt the peace and tranquility of the society at will. However, after the election, the class difference comes up again as the elites become inaccessible to the masses. Most of the thugs are dumped. They are to be picked up again when another election is around the corner. They have been turned to periodic workers.

It is worthy of mention that the power tussle in the country's leadership game has resulted to various societal issues and problems at each level of government. Several agitations resulting into national problems most especially Boko Haram, militancy, religious killings, ethnic killings and secessionist agitation are borne out of the need for recognition, entrance into the ruling elites, feeling of marginalisation and others. Some ethnic groups are of the opinion that the nation's leadership is their birthright thereby resulting into calculated steps to hold on to power. This determined action has led other ethnic groups to complain of being sidelined in the leadership "one Nigeria" and denied access to her treasuries.

Again, it is important to note that the pursuit of selfish interests by Nigerian elites has resulted into poor infrastructures, increasing level of poverty and misery in the country. There are deteriorating hospitals, crumbling infrastructure in institutions of learning, bad roads that are nothing more than death traps, epileptic power supply, money gulping parastatals, transportation sector that is begging to be driven, flown and sailed etc. The physical and social infrastructures are allowed to rot as the elites have provided alternatives for their personal needs: foreign health treatment, foreign education, special cars for bad roads and many more. The need for the transformation of Nigerian elites values is evident in this analysis. Pursuit of selfish interests must be dropped in order to meet the demands of the masses and achieve a forward-going nation for both leaders and the led.

Concluding Remarks



To this end, Pareto's theory has been brought to bear within the rubric of circulation of elites in Nigeria. Going by our analysis, there is no asking that Nigerian polity is indeed elite polity. We have also tried to show that elites are different in nature and dimension. Importantly, our analysis shows that Pareto's elite theory must be cautiously applied in Nigeria. This is because Pareto's analysis of politics, to a large extent, require proper understanding and possible modification to bring about development in its application in Nigeria. Also, it has been shown that change in governance is nothing more than mere circulation of elites as there has really not been a change in the political atmosphere and achievements of the leaders since Nigeria gained political independence in 1960. In the same vein, the presence of many classes and their activities are immanent as long as they do not conflict with the interest of the Hausa- Fulani aristocratic elites that have remained relevant over the years. Similarly, the influence of traditional and religious leaders in the control of national affairs remains a concern of elitism. In the final analysis of elitism, it can be adduced that Nigeria can benefit from the ruling of elites if their values are reformed to accommodate the wellbeing of the masses and general development of the country.

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