# Slave Mentality: The Bane of Development in Africa

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**Abstract**

This paper conceptualizes slave mentality as an attitudinal disposition characterized by general vulnerability to external influence by things or people, dependence, and lack of intrinsic motivation. It identified power, wealth, and foreign allure and cosset as the major attitude values among African leaders. It viewed development as a universal concept with milieu relativity, and by using the cognitive behavioural paradigm, explains the relationship between this attitudinal disposition and under development in Africa. It concludes that Africa can only develop if and only if her leaders are healed of this mentality.

**Key Words**: Slave; Mentality; Attitude; Development, Foreign Allure, African Leaders

## Introduction

Historians and archeologists have used their methods to show that Africa was part of the world's oldest civilizations. Egypt is believed to have developed high level of communication through writing hundreds of years before Christ, and some of the most marvelous human made 'wonders' like the Pyramids and embalmment were part of the contributions of Africa to development. As for political development, Africa also ranked high in the governance and administration of her resources, and had political structures that enshrined checks and balances. A convincing account of Africa's fore position in the match to civilization was documented by Biereenu-Nnabugwu,(2005) who also stated that Africa is human's first home and the cradle of state practice. Anatogu (1994) asserts that there are concrete evidences drawn from archeological findings that Africa had a measure of technological development by BC 400. If these foregoing are factual, and currently Africa has reneged into poverty, and underdevelopment far deeper than any other continent, it becomes imperative that Africans must search inwards for the explanation of the backward movement, with a view to dealing with identified obstacles to developmental recovery.

Many scholars have blamed the West for Africa's underdevelopment. Such scholars believe that slave trade with its accompanying brain drain and human capital depletion, as well as colonization, which engendered massive economic exploitation and psychological traumatization, explains Africa's backwardness. Probably derived from these, or associated with them is the belief by other scholars, especially proponents of African religious orientations that the introduction of religious systems from abroad also contributed to underdevelopment. In this regard, Asemota (2004) asserts that majority of the crises that have harmed African states most are routed in ethno-religious conflicts.

These are plausible explanations, indeed they must have at one point or another ignited acute developmental distress, but some of these factors do not certainly explain fully why the backwardness has been sustained. Perhaps, the most viable explanation may be found in the way Africans, especially African Leaders have continued to derive satisfaction from 'non-normative' values, and looking up to the standards of the West in terms of political, social, and technological development.

## Overview of Development in Africa

Development is viewed by Psychologists as advancement in organization and specialization, which culminates in advanced functionality. Development is therefore milieu determining, it is a step-by-step positive movement that solves social and environmental problems of a people. In the context of this paper, development encompasses higher level of attainment in, and appreciation of civics, science and technology, and security. It stands for adequate provision of transport (air, land and sea), housing, portable water, food, qualitative and milieu relevant education, facilities for good biological and psychological health, impartial justice system, industrialization, environmental protection and poverty reduction. The extent to which a community measures up in the adequacy of these infrastructures, and parameters defines the level of development of the community.

In all these parameters today, Africa ranks lowest as a continent. Some African countries are ravaged by poverty and diseases, some are ruled by authoritarians, many are ravaged by war, violence and famine, and many lack vision and focus. The worst is that most African leaders still believe that foreigners will develop their countries for them despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary (else why should a president spend about US$3b

throttling the globe in search of foreign direct investment that never came?). Another grave offence by these leaders against this continent is their refusal to set a meaningful and acceptable African Agenda for development. They have not been able to set goals and priorities right, so countries in Africa continue in haphazard development, in attempt to gain and retain 'international acceptance'. The resultant effect remains stagnation and sometimes retrogression.

## The Concept of Slave Mentality

This concept is derived from an alternative meaning of slave, which implies dependence; inability to take decisions; and general vulnerability to external influence (by things and persons), and mentality which represents the particular attitude or way of thinking of a person or group ( Wehmeier, 2001). Obi-Nwosu, (2009) explains that slave mentality is an altitudinal disposition which makes a person's thoughts, ideas and perceptions significantly tied to those of other persons viewed as superiors. It also represents a cognitive state in which some objects, persons or beliefs are so valued that they are irrationally viewed as most desirable, models, and worth striving for regardless of other objects, persons, and beliefs that compete for rational assessment and attention.

An attitude is not an observable entity, it is an underlying construct that must be inferred, and it possesses three central characteristics of; always having an object, being usually evaluative, and relatively enduring ( Wrightsman, 1971, Eze, 2007). A forth characteristic is often included in the definition of an attitude: a predisposition toward action, or a state of readiness for motive arousal (Newcomb, Turner, and Converse, 1965). Krech, Crutchfield, and Ballachey (1962) define attitude as an enduring system of positive or negative evaluations, emotional feelings and pro and con (action tendencies) with respect to a social object, while Rokeach (1968) posits that attitude is a relatively enduring organization of beliefs around an object or situation predisposing one to respond in some preferential manner. These views are in tandem with the definition offered by Myers (2006), that attitude is a favourable or unfavourable evaluative reaction towards something or someone exhibited in ones beliefs, feelings or intended behaviour.

Attitudes have three components of cognitive, affective and conative. The cognitive component included the beliefs, perceptions, ideas, and information someone has about the attitude object or issues, the affective component refers to the emotional feelings about; the liking or disliking of the attitude object or issue, which also may be understood in terms of respect, liking and sympathy for positive affect, and contempt, fear and repulsion for negative affect (Writghtsman, 1977). The conative component refers to ones policy orientation toward the attitude object, event or issue, or ones stance about how the attitude object or issue should be treated or related with in specific contexts.

## Components of Slave Mentality

The cognitive component: This consists of the strong beliefs and ideas held by the possessor, and the interpretation given to his/her and other persons' actions and reactions whether real or imaginary. For instance, one with this attitudinal disposition believes that his/her position (of authority) can only be challenged by those that are perceived as superiors, consequently they must be appeased, or that the opportunity provided by the position must be used to elevate him/her to perceived higher socio-economic pedestal so as to meet up with perceived superiors on all possible parameters (including possibly using the same kind of cars, living in the same environment or exerting influence over several segments of the  society). They exhibit obsession for upward comparison: comparing people's standard with theirs, not regarding antecedents. They are always besieged with thoughts of how to deal with obstacles to acquiring or retaining those 'best things of life' and values considered as prime. Such persons are generally absolutic and irrational in their thinking and beliefs (the do or die mind set).

The affective component: People that exhibit slave mentality show great emotional attachment to the attitude class, objects or values, to the extent that they experience high levels of anxiety (or depression) if there are threats to realization of the values, or dismantling of the belief system. Such strong emotional ties seem to explain why they never experience saturation with the attitude ideas, objects or values.

 The conative components: relates to how the attitude event, object or value is treated. It is the behavioural or action component. Persons with slave mentality adhere rigidly to their orientation and do everything possible to defend their actions. They invent all sorts of explanations, and may use coercion and intimidation to retain the use of, affiliation to, or preservation of the attitude object or value. Their actions may also include dismantling of perceived obstacles irrespective of cost.

**Major Attitude Objects (Values) Among African Leaders**
*Power*
For our purpose, power means the ability to control other people or things, and the position of the political control of a country or state or a fragment of such. In Africa, power has become deified, so the quest for power has completely replaced the quest for industry, creativity, search for knowledge, and spirituality. Most African elites have literally subjugated themselves to be enslaved by this value. It is this slave mentality that explains why they think of power as not only the ultimate achievement for humans but also as worth more than life itself. With this cognitive frame, they do anything they perceive as helpful to acquire and retain power, including: killing others (perceived as real obstacles), changing the laws of their countries, states or fragments thereof, and causing conflicts and violence.
Ready examples include the crisis in Sudan and the hunger in Zimbabwe, the Charles Tailors/Johnson's episode in Liberia, and Military insurgence in parts of Africa. This mentality also explains why the Nigerian constitution could not be properly amended because the third term clause failed, the Boko Haram insurgency, and why Egypt and Syria are torn apart, to mention but a few.

The point that is very important here is that these leaders and elites use all resources and energies available to them to service their master (power) to the detriment of developmental programmes and efforts. State resources are hence wasted in struggles and counter struggles.

*Wealth*
Acquisition of wealth is the next major problem of the African elite. The passion for superfluous wealth has again enslaved African leaders. The native African orientation is that wealth belongs to the community. Indeed, up to this moment, several African communities still own prime factors of production in common. In traditional Africa also, a person's influence is measured by the number of lives he/she touched positively, not the amount of riches and property he/she acquired. Now, African leaders have imbibed the capitalistic culture of the West without the discipline that should go with it. They accumulate so much wealth that they become wealthier than their states: such wealth indeed no sane person would desire. They are therefore enslaved, and it is this slave mentality that explains the level of sleaze that exists in governmental circles all over Africa.

*Foreign Allure and Cosseting*
Probably a product of the first two 'masters' is the third master of leaders in Africa- the affiliation to 'powers' outside Africa. Most of these leaders have become subservient to powers outside Africa, not because they wish to explore possible assistance from these countries towards the development of the countries they head, but merely to avoid criticism and possible repatriation of ill-gotten wealth stored away in these other countries. These foreign countries become more important to them, such that the so called African leaders feel more at home outside; they imitate them and desire strongly to be part of them. It explains why African leaders cannot strongly condemn external forces that ignite or sustain violence in parts of Africa, and why Africa must swallow international resolutions and 'laws' hook line and sinker, even when Africans were not consulted when they were put together, when they clearly negate African culture, are likely to generate tension, and may not be in tandem with present realities on ground in the continent or particular country. The more unfortunate thing is that these leaders pay lip service to the democratic ideals and people's oriented governance, and only learn the negative attributes which characterize their attitude states, and sometimes connive with foreign nationals to short-change mother Africa, thereby succumbing to western hegemony, instead of partnership. Indeed, the west have foisted her idea of development on Africa ( Ake, 1982)

**Theoretical Framework**
The cognitive behavioural paradigm offers good explanation of how African leaders' slave mentality was internalized and has become a major threat to continental development.
This paradigm holds that human beliefs, thoughts, ideas, and perceptions determine behaviour, and that when the behaviour is reinforced, it becomes repeated and consequently internalized. As explained earlier, slave mentality as an attitudinal disposition has its cognitive component. 'Victims' of this disposition perceive wealth, power and acceptance by, and imitation of foreigners as the highest ideals of life, view altruism as weakness and primitive, and believe that the end justifies the means. They therefore shun justice and fair play and put up all kinds of fight to acquire and retain power, wealth and foreign acceptance/ influence.

They now deify themselves and force their people to literally worship them. They enjoy whatever they perceive as the good things of life and purchase houses in all parts of the globe. This reinforcement strengthens their assumptions and beliefs, and encourages the vicious cycle among successive leadership elites.

**Slave Mentality as Inhibitor of Development**

It was earlier mentioned that the three major attitude objects are power, wealth and foreign allure, and the cognitive behavioural paradigm adopted to explain the pathway through which slave mentality has devastated Africa. The extent to which these attitude objects (or values) are pursued by African leaders have also been put in perspective.

It is persuasive that it is the perception of power and its use in Africa that has led to virtually all the conflicts in present day Africa. Many African leaders become very 'untrue' to their country people and some hatch crises through their divide and rule strategies so as to retain power. The catastrophes that Libya and other North African states went through in the recent past, the crisis in Sudan and Mali, the hunger in Zimbabwe and the Boko Haram threat in Nigeria are just few glaring examples of this.

As for Wealth, as an attitude object, Nigeria's underdevelopment provides a good example of where service in government is taken to be a gold mine instead of avenue for service towards development of the society. In this regard, Okoye (2000), indicted the political culture (political orientation and attitude towards the role of self in the system). He asserted that the character of political representation is largely influenced by the prevailing culture, thus office holders do so in the context of their perception of politics in society. According to him, the prevailing political culture in Nigeria highlights politics and top government appointments as business ventures and avenues to deal with perceived obstacles to the achievement of selfish ends; therefore it would appear utopian expecting many political office holders to be truly people-oriented in accordance with their oaths of office. This explains why the laws are deliberately punctuated with loopholes (Obasanjo, 2000), why there seem to be many individuals who are 'richer' than the country, and why poverty is still very palpable in the society. Nigeria is not the only country in Africa where this culture exists. Many other African countries especially those endowed with mineral resources and oil share this fate. The point is that when people who are supposed to protect, and apply public funds for common good (developmental projects) become 'slaves' unto wealth, they become thoroughly corrupt, and corruption is an anti- thesis of development.

Foreign Allure and Cosseting is the third attitude value among African leaders that have assumed pathological dimensions. In this regard, they hook onto countries outside Africa, regardless of objective assessment of these countries' foreign policies. Again, the continent has not really become independent in policy matters, because of low self efficacy perception among the leadership. This explains why they often swallow all forms of derogatory labels. It also explains why some of the leaders paint catastrophic pictures of their states so as to obtain 'foreign aids', which of course they embezzle. More significantly, most of these leaders (Nigerians as first examples) perceive all things foreign as desirable and superior, including wastes. For this reason, they invest huge sums of diverted public funds in private deals abroad, and use foreigners to dope their states (call to mind the power sector saga, yet to be resolved) These activities and political anchorage not only deplete resources meant for developmental projects, but blinds these leaders to the urgency of self assertion, and the fallacy of technology transfer.

**Summary and Conclusion**

Slave mentality, which makes African leaders to seek and cling to power, riches and foreign allure and cosseting, is conceptualized as an attitudinal disposition in which these attitude values are irrationally and absolutically held in esteem, high and above all other values. Such irrational perceptions blind the 'victims' from objective assessment of all other possible options, and inhibits altruistic behaviours.

The cognitive behavioural paradigm helps to explain the pathways through which this attitudinal disposition affects the behaviour of African leaders and consequently engender conflicts and violence, corruption, and collaboration with foreigners to strip Africa of true political, social, and psychological independence.
This attitudinal disposition is therefore seen as the fundamental problem that hinders the development of Africa.

**Recommendations**

African political systems need a thorough overhaul, to remove vulnerability of individuals to assuming absolute power when they ascend to the leadership of their countries. It is therefore recommended that social scientists in

Africa should develop a system of state administration that harnesses the 'green spots' of western democracy and fuse them into African cultural orientation, by so doing, African developmental paradigm can be defined.

Secondly, universities in Africa must brace up to the challenge of producing real African leaders for the future by inculcating African value system and orientation in the youth alongside whatever disciplines they choose to specialize in. This will hopefully ensure that this problem of self underdevelopment does not linger to the next generation.

As an immediate remedial step, it is recommended the psychological screening be made mandatory for aspiring leaders; both political and bureaucratic. This, it is hoped, will reduce the number of psychologically unfit people that run the affairs of African states.

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