

PROPOSING OBINOMICS AS A PANACEA TO ‘AESTHETIC’ MANAGEMENT OF PUBLIC RESOURCES IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

In *Either/Or* as well as in the *Stages of Life's Way*, Kierkegaard distinguished between three stages of existence: the aesthetic, the ethical and the religious; each stage manifesting as what drives an individual's choices and how the individual lives his life. The choices of the individual at the aesthetic level, either subjectively or in objective relations to public interests are generally toned by egoism, pleasure seeking, instability and of course irresponsibility. Unfortunately, it has been such aesthetic characters of instability, lack of direction and selfishness that have dominated the Nigerian public space, with their self-serving or aesthetic mismanagement of public resources, and the attendant poverty amidst wealth in the country. Against that backdrop, the paper projects Obinomix, a coinage from ‘Obi’ and ‘nomix’ to capture the governance footpath of prudence, probity, disdain for waste and strategic allocation of public resources of Mr Peter Obi, as the governor of Anambra State, Nigeria between 2006 and 2014, as a panacea to the aesthetic management of public resources in Nigeria. The paper first establishes that the current narrative of poverty amidst wealth in Nigeria, is a consequence of aesthetic management of public resources. This is followed by a brief interpretative overview of the morality and modesty as above-aesthetic that characterized the person and policy directions of Obi as governor of Anambra state, hence his outstanding achievements. Then after pointing out a few evidence of the claims of aesthetic management of public resources in Nigeria, the paper mainstreams the basic principles of Obinomix, as gleaned from Obi's speeches and treatises as panacea to aesthetic management of public resources in Nigeria.

Introduction

Nigeria, as a country is richly blessed with both human and natural resources. * such that, properly managed, should have easily translated into wealth and prosperity for the

country and her citizens, but, the economic reality over the years in the country is very poor. In almost all measurable human and economic development indices: per capita income, gross domestic product, mortality rate, education, power supply, average life span, security, infrastructure, etc Nigeria ranks low. In September 2021, Nigeria, with more than 93 million people below the poverty line, competitively emerged the poverty capital of the world, having garnered more number of poor people, than similar people in the two most populous countries of the world, China and India, combined. (IMF: 2021: 24). According to (World Bank, March, 2022) four in every ten Nigerians live below the national poverty line. Awoyemi highlights that more than ninety percent of Nigeria's population is poor and 'exists largely at the mercy of fate' (2022:45-45). Similarly, the results of the Harmonized Nigerian Living Standards Survey prepared by the National Bureau of Statistics, showed that 69 percent of the population fits the 'Nigeria poverty profile'.

Among the many reasons that have been fingered for the paradox of poverty amidst wealth in Nigeria is poor leadership profile, narrowed down to poor, visionless, selfish, inefficient public resource management. John Ugoani, (2020:30-39) notes that because "huge finances arising from natural resources are stolen by individuals and corporate bodies due to bad public management to the national development ... brings about the situation where plenty people live in poverty in the midst of wealth." Most Nigerian leaders not only lack the fiscal discipline and public resource management dispositions and skill to steer the ship of state to prosperity for citizens, but also fundamentally lack the proper personality existential adjustments.

The Problem and Purpose of the Paper

The simple problem identified by this paper, is that the visionless, selfish, inefficient public resource management of most Nigerian leaders over the years is a reflection of their aesthetic level of existence, characterised by pursuit of personal happiness, pleasures of the moment, and lack of long term goals. Kierkegaard discussed the aesthetic sphere of existence, as the sphere when an existing individual appeals to his inner experience to establish himself, as a mark of self identity. To be sure, the individual, at birth, exists as an anonymous member of the public who wants naturally 'to be like the others, to become a copy, a number, along with the crowd'

The aesthete for Kierkegaard is always interpreting life as though ‘on the stage’ and not taking life too objectively. In public resource management, aestheticism manifests itself as earning and spending on the immediate or the here-and-now needs, neglecting investment in policies and structures with long term benefits for majority of the people. (Jones, 1975: 87) Aesthetic approach to public resource management chooses the moment at the expense of the future because for the aesthete ‘It does not matter what I choose because it will turn out equally well or, alternatively, equally badly.’ According to Storletten and Jakoben (2015: 337 -349) If he (the aesthete) does ever adopt long term goals or wish to chase certain maxims, this is done in a purely ‘experimental spirit. The purpose of this paper therefore is to project the evident and exemplary above-aesthetic, selfless, public resource management and fiscal discipline, here termed Obinomics of the former governor of Anambra state Mr Peter Obi, while in office as a negation of the trappings of aestheticism in the management of public resources in Nigeria. This paper projects Obi’s evidently responsible and unprecedented altruistic management of public resources, traced to his level of existence and argues that, the principles of Obinomics should be mainstreamed into management of public resources in Nigeria.

The paper proceeds, first by introducing the person, tenure and public resource management approach of Mr Obi, otherwise called Obinomics from the available records of his achievement while in office. This is followed by a brief review of the aesthetic tendencies that has dominated public resource management in Nigeria. The principles of Obinomics, from the personality disposition of the public resource manager, to the management of the pressure from acquaintances and management of the public resources to the benefit of the greatest majority, then follow as the panacea to the prevailing of aestheticism in public resource management in Nigeria. It is important to underscore that the major source of the information here are Mr Peter Obi’s public speeches online about his tenure as governor of Anambra state, supported by a few other online reflections and appraisals of his tenure.

Peter Obi’s Tenure as the Governor of Anambra state and the Foundation of Obinomics

The foregoing argument that the level of existence, character, disposition of each public office holder, as an individual, come to bear directly on how he handles public interest

in his care played out clearly in management records of Mr Peter Gregory Obi, as the governor of Anambra State. Anambra state under Obi witnessed an unprecedented frugal and prudent management of public resources overcoming the immediate, short term, self centred, consumerist, imprudent, wasteful, non futuristic tendencies in the economic and fiscal policies of most Nigeria public office holders such that as at the time he left office, while other states were counting their debts, the Anambra state treasury had more money than Obi met it. Steve Osuji assesses Obi's tenure this way.

Before his arrival in office, it was common knowledge that Anambra suffered nearly one year of salary backlog stretching back to the time of former governor Chinweoke Mbadinuju. Unpaid pensions and gratuities were taken for granted. His government cleared the backlog of the worker's entitlements running into billions. At his exit in office in 2014, not a dime of wage was owed to any worker. No contractors were owed and not a kobo of debt did Anambra state owe anywhere. (Osuji, 2022:9)

Anambra state under Obi, was also rated by the Debt management Office of Nigeria as the least indebted state just as the Nigerian Senate also judged Anambra the most financially stable state. Obi's administration won the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation prize of \$1m for the best performing state on immunisation in the South East of Nigeria. Obi as governor and as a person, unlike the aesthete who 'lives constantly in the moment, absorbed in moods, governed by caprice' against the ostentations that prevail among public office holders in Nigeria, carried himself in a very modest and prudent decorum. He was not extravagant, flamboyant, noisy, reckless, and unpredictable with monetary resources contrasting Obi and average Nigerian politician's way of life, another analyst wrote: "You can normally recognize a Nigerian billionaire from a mile off but for a Nigerian wealthy businessman, in charge of a state coffers, to wear thrift as a mark of pride, have such a Spartan discipline, Victorian purity, exemplary humility, and honesty and reputation for being frugal, prudent and accountable, in a country with a history and culture of ostentation and wasteful expenditure by public officers, is traced here fundamentally to his personality disposition." According to Alex Otti (2020: 20) "Obi's character, as governor represented integrity, authenticity, presence and affinity with stability" all of which are lacking in the aesthetic person.

It is this Obi's firm character and strong persona that came to bear on his administrative skills, managerial acumen, dynamism, unusually brilliant, innovativeness, progressive leadership, and honourable disposition in managing public resources which contributed immensely in resetting and reshaping the hitherto pervasive mindset of profligacy in public service that is regarded as Obinomies.

The word 'nomies' used in forming the compound word Obinomies according to online Wiktionary is from ancient Greek (nomos, "law," "conventional practices" ideas, norms). The addition of prefix to 'nomies' thus indicates the "laws" of the discipline or area denoted by the prefix or norms of a specified person or state. According to online Collins Dictionary, nomies is used in naming a specific kind of economic policy or one associated with a (specified) public official. Examples are terms like urbanomies, Reaganomies (the economic policies Ronald Reagan). A few other similar terms with the suffix nomies in Wiktionary include Trussonomies, (economic policies of immediate past UK Prime Minister) Dengonomies, (economic ideas and policies of Chinese politician Deng Xiaoping) Chiconomies, (the struggle to appear chic on budget) etc

Obinomies thus indicates the laws, conventions, practices that guide[d] (Peter) Obi. Obinomies is the' public fiscal discipline, resource management and economic principles that demonstrate a properly adjusted above-aesthetic, value system of the manager, with a personal moral conviction to do the right thing always, driving these values into the acquaintances of the manager, equipped with good education and cognate experience of having grown personal wealth which are applied into government business enterprise to make it progressively profitable by continuously investing in human capital, through education which assuredly translates to other development metrics, grow wealth by patronizing locally made goods and improve on the living standard of the people with a habitual saving culture to guarantee the future, with an eye constantly on global or competing human development indices as a measure of progress. According to Steve Osuji, (2022:9) "From Peter Obi's speeches, treatises, policy directions and actions... it is easy to glean that his political economy and philosophy are rooted on mastering the basics and building there from to create, a glorious future. Obi is grounded on policies that are huge in social impacts and with high human development indices. The central factors in Obinomies are the personality of the manager which is a function of the level existence, in the Kierkegaardian sense, of

the manager, managing the undue pressures of acquaintances, understanding government as business empire writ large, basically investing in human capital which will drive infrastructure, economy, security, job creation, power, political participation to mention but a few.

Aestheticism in Public Resource Management in Nigeria

By aestheticism in public resource management, is meant on-the-moment, aesthetic public resource policies and practices that do not have permanent or lasting favourable outcome for the people. It is characterised by lack of continuity, stability and focus, changing course according to mood or circumstance. This results in approximation of personal interest over public interest, the moment over the future and so on. But, to situate the discourse properly, a few instances may suffice.

The first evidence of aesthetic management of public resources in Nigeria is manifested in high cost of governance, attributable to both structural and operational factors, especially from the point of view of accretion of power portfolios of spiral recurrent component relative to the capital component of the fiscal expenditure. In a newly released report by the independent Corrupt Practices and other Related offences commission (ICPC) it is shown that, as a result of expensive governance structure, less than 30 percent of the Federal government revenue were allocated to capital projects. Another clear example of aestheticism in the management of public resources is the fuel subsidy scam, which according to available records has gulped more than 8 billion dollars in ten years, accounting for more than 70 percent of Nigeria's expenditure, about 4 percent of GDP and 118 percent of capital budget. To compare what has been spent on fuel subsidy, just to artificially keep domestic fuel price low and other sectors, Nigeria's total allocation for education, in ten years is about 2.2 billion dollars and it is not much higher for welfare. Infant mortality in Nigeria remains unacceptably high at 90.4 per 1000 live births. In 2018, only about 20 percent of the country's roads were paved. The 8 billion dollars spent on fuel subsidy could have helped to address the many suffering sectors. Instead of putting appropriate machineries in place to rehabilitate the nations four refineries and as a result, the short term approach to management of public resources is the reason for the on-going subsidy regime. The result of aesthetic approach to public resource management, as in the fuel subsidy economics, is that few greedy

individuals make enormous personal gain leaving majority of the citizens at a net personal loss. Reflecting on the situation, Jibrin Ibrahim (2019:7) “what Nigeria has lacked in its recent history is a leadership with a vision and a sense of enlightened self interest serving the common good or society, the leadership serves their own interest of getting legitimacy, respect and even the material gains they seek. The leadership approach of most Nigerian leaders rather has been on the basis of greed and myopic selfishness.”

To checkmate, the situation, what follow are the principles of Obinomics that show Peter Obi’s selflessness, altruism, resoluteness in cutting down the cost of governance to the barest minimum and the savings from there ploughed into the state which resulted in an unprecedented turn around in the fortunes of every facet of Anambra state life which negate aestheticism in Public Resource management.

Basic Principles of Obinomics that Negate Aestheticism in Public Resource Management

In the light of Kierkegaard’s notion of stages of existence that the choices an individual makes and how the individual’s lives his life is a reflection of the individual’s level or sphere of existence, Obi’s stellar performance as Anambra chief executive, is interpreted here as a reflection of his existential sphere which should be the first principle of Obinomics as a guide to choosing, a responsible leader or public resource manager. Available information on Obi’s person, private and business life before public office, shows he was above aesthetic. This was the basis for which Professor ABC Nwosu and others nominated and asked him to venture into politics for the first time in the build-up to the 2003 general elections in Anambra state. The first principle of Obinomics therefore, is the existential disposition or level of the leader, at least as attested to by common public opinion. Since no one can give what he does not have, Obinomics as a public resource management philosophy, requires that only those who have demonstrated above-aesthetic attributes of integrity, responsibility, fairness, moral rectitude, sense of equity in human and political relations, in their private lives should be allowed into leadership position to manage public resources. The practice therefore of nominating, supporting, and electing publicly acclaimed, outright and avowed criminals into offices to manage public resources, expecting them to give what (honesty,

integrity, accountability or transparency) which they do not have is a political cum management insanity.

The second principle of Obinomix, expected of a manager of public resources is a demonstrated temperate, prudent attitude towards the material. Peter Obi, as governor and manager of public resources demonstrated this properly adjusted attitude towards materialism. Obi is usually quick to talk about his materialistic prudence. He said he owns just two pairs of shoes from midmarket British chain Marks and Spencer, prefers a 200 dollar suit from Stein Mart to a 4000 dollar Tom Ford suit, and always insists on carrying his own luggage, rather than paying someone else to do it for him. In his words 'I only wear black shoes and I have just two pairs of it and I travel with them. These shoes cost \$49.99 (approximately \$50). He also said I have only one wrist watch and I have won it for 17 years. A wrist watch is only meant for keeping time, nothing more. Those who pack them, I don't know what they are doing with it. Obi also said he had only one officially built house in Nigeria and that house is in Onitsha Anambra state. In his words, 'if you see any other house, apart from the one in Onitsha, that they say belongs to Peter Obi, confiscate it.' On moderation with the material using the Christian and Christ as reference point, Kierkegaard wrote "That which distinguishes the Christian narrow way from the common human narrow way is the voluntary. Christ was not someone who coveted earthly things but had to be satisfied with poverty – no he chose poverty." For a man, like Peter Obi, who can afford bags of shoes, designer watches, and houses in choice location in the best of Nigeria and beyond and a man who has been entrusted with public funds of a state for eight years, to live such a frugal life says a lot about his properly adjusted personal attitude towards the material life, hence he was able to channel public resources appropriately. Obi also demonstrated that a leader should never live large on public resources beyond what he could afford as a person before and after office. Even his children are not spared of the frugality. His 30 year-old son, he said had no car while his other child is a happy primary school teacher, a rarity in country where a politicians name often opens doors to more lucrative jobs. In the choice of leaders it is important to take a look at aspirants lived attitude towards material acquisition.

The third principle of Obinomix' requirement for leadership and management of public resources is good and sound education. From the records of Mr Peter Obi in the public

domain, he is well educated. His academic background in Philosophy as his first degree, from UNN, then several management programmes from some of the world's best Ivy league universities like Harvard, Oxford, Cambridge, London School of Economics, Columbia Business School, Kellogg School of Management to mention but a few was a very important disposition for his leadership vision and actions in managing human and state resources for the welfare of majority. Education is a very fundamental means of building the dispositional superstructures and infrastructures of a leader that define and hold the humanness he brings to bear on his leadership and management capacity. Good educational background is an important consideration in choosing among many aspirants.

The fourth principle of Obinomics is that the leader must have a demonstrated skill for running government like a business, in fact like his or her own personal business with all the best strategies that keep business afloat profit wise. Obi as an individual has transparent history of personal wealth, a very good cognate experience he brought into handling public wealth. While in government, Obi made sure public resources ran on lower input and higher output such that government never went bankrupt anytime. Instead of buying a bullet proof car for N150m, for the office of governor, Obi said, as governor he decided to use the same amount to buy 50 vehicles, N3m each for high government officials. It was possible for him to buy the bullet proof car and waste another public fund for the government officials' vehicles. It is on record that, during his time in office instead of government spending money hosting special unnecessary visitors in government house, the governor himself visited those high profile visitors, and that way shifted the exchange of visit expenses to the visited or the host thus saving that cost for government. As a governor, Obi in his official movements consistently flew economy class, even when he could have used state funds to fly business class or even charter private jets for official trips. This was pure business mentality. Instead of government spending money maintaining governors lodge in Abuja, which the governor might not pass a night in for weeks, Obi said he gave out the building to UNICEF for their official use and maintenance, while the agency funded one or two projects for Anambra state. In the same vein, Obi said he stopped unnecessary cooking and partying in government house, reduced his convoy to five vehicles, did not use aides when he as

a person could carry on, as a demonstration of the business acumen needed in managing public resources.

The fifth principle of Obinomix is that the leader must make it clear to all his supporters especially party men that money politics, in terms of using money to buy or influence one's way into public office, is not part of his practice for that is the foundation of corruption for political office holders. Obi has always been against influencing voters' choice, either in the party primary election or in the main election with money or any form of inducement for political advantage. Any leader who buys his way into office must necessarily find a way to get his money while in office. In Obi's words, 'there is no how, someone will buy his way into public office and you expect him to serve you sincerely when he or she gets into such office. Certainly, such a person is going into the office to enrich himself, to recoup what he spent on his way to the office.' This, possibly, was one of the reasons Obi left the Peoples Democratic Party, as a party and its presidential primaries in particular. Leaders therefore who trade wealth, not values, who induce with money or material not with their vision for the office are not likely going to be obinomial while in office.

The sixth, and as important as the former, is to make it clear also to yourself, to your family members, friends and close associates that the opportunity of being in public office, does not confer special economic privilege on the occupant of the office or those around you more than the ordinary citizens who put you there. Obi demonstrated this while in office in several ways. No one heard so much about other Obis while Peter was the governor. Obi's wife, Margaret, children and close family friends were made to know it from day one that, his being elected to the office of the governor does not translate to their being enriched. There was no office of first lady and all that it attracts which, Obi said, is a major way of increasing cost of governance and siphoning government funds. There was no member of Obi family in any appointed government position during the time of Obi as governor. Obi also reported that the commissioner for lands wanted to give him land in a very choice area of Awka, the state capital, but he directed the commissioner to give the land to a woman who had served government for 35 years yet did not have a piece of land.

The seventh and in fact the strongest pillar of Obinomix is to allocate and invest the greatest chunk of resources of government to human capital development (education)

which is the globally acclaimed fastest way to lift people out of poverty and drive other development programmes. The greatest part of government resources during Obi's tenure was spent on education: equipping schools, motivating teachers, building new schools etc "hence by Obi's 4th to 6th year in office, Anambra state had the best educational system in Nigeria in terms of infrastructure, facilities, study environment and personnel. It was not by chance that Anambra state candidates became all round best in national examinations ranging from WAEC, to JAMB, Unity Schools entrance examinations and moved from the 26th to the 1st position in national ranking. Obinomics understands that education in all its ramifications is the soul of the modern world. According to Steve Osuji, (2022) Obi says that any opportunity he will have in the future, to make policy directions. "his first duty would be education, the second education and likewise the third." So instead of spending money dealing with the effects of lack of empowerment which education offers by donating to direct charity to the poor, Obinomics invests in public institutions like schools, hospitals, etc which empowers citizens and improves the quality of their lives than giving money directly to people.

Similarly the next principle of Obinomics is that public resources should not be spent outside the public interest it is meant for just to please anyone, for religious reasons, for friendship or solidarity reasons.

A constant slogan of Mr Peter Obi, is: from consumption to Production. Obinomics prioritizes production in terms of establishment of industries and most importantly patronizing locally made goods, for that is one sure way to improve the people's economy, reduce poverty and create jobs. As governor Obi patronized Innoson motors instead of importing cars from overseas. Udea furniture built the furniture used in government house. General government economic policy was always on production and less on consumption, for that is the globally indispensable principle of economic growth.

Obinomics has a lot to do with statistics, hence one would not hear Peter Obi speak on any issue without mentioning the statistics of where that particular issue is doing well and using it to compare local experience. During and after office, Obi always referred to different countries' human development indices on power, education, agriculture, and uses them as models and guides for governance policy direction. Awareness of the

prevailing indices and statistics act as check to a leader's tendency to always consider himself the best, not until, he looks at himself through the mirror of another person. That is why a constant eye on global, continental, national statistics act like a check and guide on whether one is improving or not, making public resource and fiscal discipline measurable.

Borrowing, that is if it is extremely necessary, is allowed in Obinomics only if it is for production and not for consumption. Borrowing for instance to pay salaries, to service debt, is *Obinomically* wrong. Borrowing for instance to improve infrastructure which will in the end drive the economy to regenerate and pay back the loan with profit to the state can be allowed. Obi is always citing the example of Tafawa Belewa who borrowed about a million dollars in 1964, to build 1000 megawatts of electricity. He also mentions, America, though the largest economy in the world, still borrows but with emphasis on channelling the funds to productive capital ventures rather than recurrent consumption expenditures.

Obinomics encourages savings as a culture in the management of public resources. Obi is always citing the example of china with 10 billion dollars saving in 1980 and in 2017, had gone up to 12trillion while Nigeria, keeps going down. Given the fact that many fundamental, political and unforeseen factors contribute to the global economy, the only way a country could safe guard, the future is to as a habit, keep some resources in the days of abundance for the possible unforeseen days of scarcity. Obi displayed this when he left billions of naira and millions of Dollars in Banks for the incoming administration. Osuji establishes the above-aesthetic thinking behind Obi's saving

Obi had a 50-year strategic savings plan for the transformation of Anambra into a modern and self-sustaining state. Foreign currency savings in state bonds and fixed dollar income deposits were long term projections to place Anambra in best financial stead to grow and develop in the manner of first world states

Conclusion

The philosophic position here is that the wasteful, poor, irresponsible management of public resources of most Nigerian leaders, as witnessed which is a symptom of a deeper, moral ethical and spiritual crises, (Eisenstein, 2011:23) of the aesthetic lives of most Nigerian leaders can checkmated with the application of the principles of Obinomics.)

Getting it right in the public sector, therefore, is about getting it right in the existential frames or structures of the public resources manager. The reason is that there is an indissoluble link between of a public officer's self management, self order, existential perspectives, aesthetic dispositions to the material life and how he manages public resources entrusted to him. (Palazzo, G. & Scherer, A.G. 2006) conceptualize the interplay of psychological forces in the discharge of one's public life. It is therefore necessary to take seriously the level of existence, in the Kierkegaardian manner, of those who aspire to be entrusted with public resources. To entrust public resource to a person who has not been able, as an individual, to rise above the natural aesthetic tendencies, is to say the least, to give a nod to wasteful public resource management, fiscal indiscipline, corruption, consumerism to mention but a few.

Obinomics has been projected as a panacea or a sure way to cut the red tape plaguing what remains of Nigeria's public resource management economy, to cut expenditures, root out corruption, invest in power, education, remap the nation's infrastructural deficits and provide solid ground for job creation and lasting productivity, invest in security by providing reasonable social enterprise for the frustrated youths. Principles of Obinomics if brought to bear, is the way to cure the aesthetic tendencies in Nigeria's public resources management. To get it right in Nigerian public resource space, it is argued that the demonstrated level of existence of the would-be leader should be seriously taken into consideration because that is kind of existential attitude he is going to display while in public office.

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