
The Elite Theory: A Case Study of Nigeria Ruling Class

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the principles of Elite Theory concept which seeks to describe and explain the power relationships in our contemporary society. This theory posits that a small minority, consisting of members of the economic elite and policy planning networks, hold the most power and that this power is independent of a state's democratic elections process. This study established the fact that there are strong links between economic and political powers in any society, even in Nigeria, where the practice is brazen. Also, the study described the Nigerian elite networks which include traditional institutions, economic networks, socio-cultural networks and military elites; their roles and importance in the economic and political formations and developments of the country.

Keyword: Elite Theory, Nigeria Ruling Class, Traditional Institution, Economic Network, Political Formations

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1. BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY: THE ELITE THEORY CONCEPT

Elite Theory seeks to describe and explain the power relationships in contemporary society. It posits that a small minority, consisting of members of the economic elite and policy planning networks, holds the most power and that this power is independent of a state's democratic elections processes. Classical Elite Theorists like Vilfredo Pareto in *The Rise and Fall of the Elites: An Application of Theoretical Sociology*, Gaetano Mosca in *The Ruling Class* and Robert Michels in *Political Parties: A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* and non-classical Elite Theorists like Wright Mills in *The Power Elite*, Floyd Hunter in *Community Power Structure* and G. William Domhoff in *Who Rules America? Wealth, Income and Power* argues that the elites are able to hold power and exert significant influence over the policy decisions of corporations and governments through the positions they hold in corporations or corporate boards. Also, through their financial support of foundations and think-tanks or policy-discussion groups they do influence policy-planning. For example, in December 2009, Forbes Magazine published an article *The World's Most Powerful People*, in which *Forbes* listed the 67 most powerful people in the world (assigning 1 "slot" for each 100,000,000 of human population).

Classical Elite Theory, which is the aristocratic version, is based on two ideas which say that power lies in position of authority in key economic and political institutions, and secondly, the psychological difference that sets elites apart is that they have personal resources, in form of intelligence and skills, and a vested interest in the government. Because they will have so much to lose in case of government breakdown, they strive to make the government work, while the masses do not.

Pareto emphasized the psychological and intellectual superiority of elites, believing that they are the highest accomplisners in any field. He argued that there are two types of elites: governing elites and non-governing elites. Also, Mosca (1939) emphasized the sociological and personal characteristics of elites, and said that elites are an organized minority and that the masses are an unorganized majority. He asserts that elites have intellectual, moral, and material superiority that is highly esteemed and influential. Mosca said that the ruling class is composed of the ruling elite and the sub-elites, and that the world is divided into two groups: ruling class and the ruled class. Robert Michels, a sociologist developed the Iron Law of Oligarchy in his work *A Sociological Study of the Oligarchical Tendencies of Modern Democracy* published in 1968 and asserted that social and political organizations are run by few individuals. He believed that all organizations were elitist and that elites have three basic principles that help in the bureaucratic structure of political organization, which are: the need for leaders, specialized staff and facilities, secondly, the utilization of facilities by leaders within their organization and thirdly, the importance of the psychological attributes of the leaders.

Mills, in his book *The Power of the Elite* published in 1956, claimed a new sociological perspective on systems of power in the United States; in which he identified a triumvirate of power groups - political, economic and military. Mills argued that this group had been generated through a process of rationalization noticed in all advanced industrial societies whereby the mechanisms of power became concentrated, funneling overall control into the hands of a limited, somewhat corrupt group. According to him, there is a decline in politics as an arena for debate, but merely a relegation to a formal level of discourse because the fact of the matter is that power generally lies outside the boundaries of elected representatives.

His view was influenced by Franz Leopold Neumann's book, *Behemoth: The Structure and Practice of National Socialism, 1933-1944*, which looked at how Nazism came to power in the German democratic state. Another scholar, Floyd Hunter, analyzed power on the micro scale in communities. In his 1953 book *Community Power Structure: A Study of Decision Makers*, he examined in detail the power relationships evident in his "Regional City" looking for the "real" holders of power rather than those in obvious official positions. He posited a structural functional approach which mapped the hierarchies and webs of interconnection operating within the city, showing relationships of power between businessmen, politicians, clergy etc. His study helped to debunk current concepts of any 'democracy' present within urban politics and reaffirm the arguments for a true representative democracy.

Domhoff, also sounded like Hunter in his controversial book *Who Rules America?* He argued that elite classes that own and manage large income-producing properties like banks and corporations dominate the American power structure politically and economically. James Burnham's early work *The Managerial Revolution* sought to express the movement of all functional power into the hands of managers rather than politicians or businessmen, separating ownership and control. But Thomas R. Dye in his book *Top Down Policymaking*, argues that United States public policy does not result from the "demands of the people," but rather from elite consensus found in Washington, D.C. such as non-profit foundations, think tanks, special-interest groups, and prominent lobbyists and law firms. His thesis was further expanded through his works: *The Irony of Democracy*, *Politics in America*, *Understanding Public Policy*, and *Who's Running America?*

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The circulation, composition and character of the core political executive elite in post-colonial Nigeria over successive political regimes are worrisome, because it is the same people, with the same agenda, which are anti-people. The social background and styles of interaction which characterized the circulation and compositions of the core political executive elite in Nigeria are inhibiting progress. Also, the succession of different governments with shifts and influxes of economic resources since independence have limited the scope of the political system.

A careful analysis of government structural changes in terms of policies, members of the political executives drawn from various social backgrounds, and the preferences of the government elite have revealed a difference from societal demands, such as political liberties and civil rights. This is so, because the political executive elites do not account to the people, nor do they require their support, but they depend on the political class which operates through informal and elusive networks linked to political parties and state power. Therefore, this thesis argues that the leadership selection in Nigeria based on the circulation of elites and its networks will not produce positive outcome, but that the leadership selection process should be expanded to allow popular participation of the people.

1.2 Main Objective

The main objective of this study is to show that Nigeria, like every other country is ruled by a very small select group of people, who can be called the godfathers or kingmakers, and that the circulation or selection of leadership is not based on performance or ability to deliver, but linkage to a elite group or network.

1.3 Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- ❖ to describe the Elite Theory principles and philosophies
- ❖ to identify the founding fathers and the positions they hold
- ❖ to explain with relevant examples the elite theory concept in Nigeria's leadership circulation process

1.4 Research Questions

The research questions emanating from the foregoing are:

- ❖ What are the Elite Theory principles and philosophies?
- ❖ Who are the founding fathers and what positions do they hold?
- ❖ To what extent is the elite theory concept true in Nigeria's leadership selection process?

1.5 Scope of the Study

This study focused on the Circulation of Elites and the Leadership Selection in Nigeria. Although, it started off with the concept of elite theory, the founding fathers and their different positions. It also reviewed the different elite networks in Nigeria and how they influence governance at the different levels.

1.6 Significance of the Study

A critique of the Circulation of Elites and the Leadership Selection in Nigeria is important because of its implication for sustainable development and the challenges of deepening democracy. It is important that causes of poor governance in Nigeria be known so that proper interventions could be made. Elite theory helps to identify the pillars of governance in any society, and in cases of problems, they should be the focus. For example, when the government removed the fuel subsidy early in the year, and Nigerians protested, even though, it was the government that did that, the target was the oil magnates, which are seen to be responsible for the increased fuel price due to their corrupt practices

Also, in faraway America, when the Americans protested the poor economy, the target was the Wall Street, and that was why, they occupied it. Understanding the elite theory concept, helps to understand the true governance procedure and how best to call for accountability.

2. POWER ELITE STRUCTURE

According to Mills' (1956) power elite provides key insights into the recurrent nature of contemporary political elite characteristic makeup, just like Hunter (1953: 24) work in communities viewed the elite as composed of those 'able to enforce their decisions by persuasion, intimidation, coercion, and, if necessary force'. Also, Kifordu (2011) in his thesis found the literature relevant in the Nigeria's situation not just at the local roots of national political power but also the convergence of interests through political office-holding. He said that the multiethnic society like Nigeria represents a source of ascent to and retention of political executive power that may be found to diverge significantly from the preferences of more homogeneous (communal) societies.

Moreover, Mills' (1956) argued that power elite model is most revealing about the 'major national power' and it is believed to reside in the 'political, economic and military domains' as seen in the triumvirate power structure which is assumed to be behind most of the decisions made within today's enlarged and centralized Nigerian state bureaucracies and the power elite's superior position in decision making affects the lives of ordinary people. He also argued that they occupy the strategic command posts of the social structure, in which are now centered the effective means of the power and the wealth and the celebrity they enjoy and this is why they defend those interests that imply power, affluence and prestige. The defence of these interests and the means employed in such defence guarantee the power elite's continual retention of control in society, as seen in Nigeria where the likes of Obasajo, Akinjide, Dasuki, Ciroma, Okpara, Ojukwu, Ikoku, Shagari and Awolowo, just to mention a few, continue to be household names in Nigeria's leadership structure today.

According to Kifordu (2011), in Nigeria, the political class represents the source of selective recruitment of members of the national executive who depend on state resources rather than the typical Nigerian social structures for their survival, they depends on state resources instead of feedback from society to realize their political class aspirations. He said that the state, as an organization, can thus be singled out as the means for accumulating political power and wealth mostly to the benefit of the power elite members.

Also, Mills (1956) stated in a way that is particularly applicable to Nigeria, the 'unity' of the power elite rests not only on 'the development and coincidences of interests among economic, political and military organizations' but also on 'the similarity of origins and outlook, and the social and personal intermingling of the top circles from each of these dominant hierarchies' (p. 292). He acknowledged the indirect influence of class attributes, which can stem from ethnic, regional and religious groups, in addition to political party formations that can be controlled by individuals linked with both informal networks and formal state institutions.

Domhoff's description of the 'power elite' as a network-operated organization also makes particular sense in the Nigerian context, but not that of an 'institutionally based group that works to maintain the basic social structure from which the upper class greatly benefits', as claimed by Domhoff and Dye (1987: 190). However, the idea can be more productively applied as an integrative network system for articulating traditional, military, bureaucratic, economic and political power that mostly benefits the political class usurpers of state resources instead of the social classes; and it is important to know that the Nigerian power structure cannot be considered as limited to triumvirate power elite, as defined by Mills (1956/2000), because there exist traditional, socio-cultural and religious institutions in addition to the political, economic and military institutions.

2.1 Elite Networks, Organizations and Institutional Support

Adekanye in his 1993 Inaugural Lecture at University of Ibadan titled Military Occupation and Social Stratification identified five major civilian elite groups apart from the military in Nigeria. They are 1. The Intelligentsia. 2. The Bureaucrats. 3. The Business Group. 4. The Organized Labor, and 5. The Chiefly Estate (traditional institutions). He argued that the Nigerian civilian elite groups are abandoning their affiliations to seek military relevance which can be noticed in their struggle for

...their universities' minuscule quota of placement into the National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, Kuru, Jos, since being a member of the very exclusive club, the NIPSS Alumni Association, has come to be perceived as one of the easiest ways of achieving recognition and rapid rise under military aegis. (Adekanye 1993: 35)

Kifordu (2011) argued that the social background of the political executive elite is relevant for understanding the nature of the ties of the Nigerian postcolonial elite with state power and executive roles, and exchanges, mutual benefits and exclusion are viewed as indispensable in the emergence and development of social networks. The functioning of social network has practically underpinned elite circulation, composition and character in Nigerian political executive offices since the end of the colonial era. He said that the Nigerian political elite can be considered to substitute for and persist with a 'typical' level of legitimacy, i.e. based on a widely embracing but selective network of elite individuals or groups. However, Wedel's (2009) current elite network analysis appears to assume a less pyramidal pattern and to portray elite networks as more pervasive and irresponsible. Also, a critical outlook on elite networks seems more current and incisive, as it emphasizes the role of 'flex nets' (or informal flexible networks) that accommodate a set of 'shadow elite' described as 'as elusive as they are ubiquitous' (p. 20)

Rather than climbing Mills' pyramid of the political, military, and business establishment, members of flex nets wield influence by forging coincidences of interest among an array of roles across organizations, whose boundaries and purposes often blend. But reviewing the Nigerian elite networks, Kifordu argued that they are elusive, and the only explanation for it is the avoidance of accountability and the furtherance of self-interests which are at variance with social demands. He further argued that in Nigeria, social networks which depict the interpersonal or intergroup interactions across selective social, cultural and political divisions can be observed as drawing their existence from typically complex and bureaucratically articulated organizations spread across the multiethnic and multicultural groups within society. Also, organizations such as political parties, the military and ethnically or network organized groups seeking political power in contexts such as Nigeria are respectively disciplined by formal and informal norms and values. Although, it is important as argued by Lourdes (2002) that institutional values can be 'circumvented or manipulated by certain individuals or groups of actors', to serve certain interests such as maintaining political power and its trappings:

[T]he elite is not simply those who have the most; they could not have the most if not for their positions in the great institutions. For such institutions are the necessary bases of power, of wealth and of prestige and at the same time, the chief means of exercising power, of acquiring wealth, and cashing in the higher claims for prestige (Mills 1956: 9).

And the Nigerian experience seems to offer various examples of institutional interventions by influential political actors who capitalize, say, on changing circumstances and extant institutional resources, to access and extend office power in exclusion of other aspirants.

2.2 Nigerian Political Elite Circulation

According to Pareto (1939), and Zuckerman (1977) the circulation of the elite in political systems is determined by a process through which 'new' persons or groups from broader society are admitted into governmental offices for dealing with policy issues. This concept is useful for identifying the type and extent of renewals, at least, nominally, of elite members who ascend to political offices from the larger society. Also, Keller (1963/1991) qualified 'elite circulation' as 'the process whereby individuals or groups gain access to or lose their hold on elite positions' (p. 228). If translated to political executive office-holding, elite circulation in a particular power sphere implies access to and exit from political offices through processes of recruitment. Keller further argued that in open political systems, elite circulation occurs through the institutionalization of recruitment policies that spell out entrance conditions while making office tenure last no longer than desirable.

Therefore, elite circulation in political offices thus encompasses not just changes in the recruitment pattern of the elite to high government positions but also the political and institutional tenure of office positions. His approach to elite circulation reflects the pluralist view of political office renewal through periodic free and fair elections, meaning that political power renewal is then assumed to be associated with political stability through the renewal of persons and ideas that mostly support the political system. However, in looking at the Nigerian situation, there is a need to identify the factors that impede the expected elite circulation in political executive offices in Nigeria through a sub-elite type linked directly to society.

Albert (2006) argued that sub-elite nodes were said to serve not only for socialization with the non-elite below but also for recruiting persons from lower strata of society. They are embodied by 'godfather' financial patrons that operate informally, though sometimes under the tacit approval of top executive government agents, and sometimes, sub-elite roles played by traditional rulers. Although, they cannot seek or hold formal political office but who can use their informal position to link office-seeking with office-holding in the central government and maintain direct links with both grassroots and top-level executive elite circles, especially within the national executive (Vaughan 1995, 2005). In Nigeria, the important issue about sub-elite roles is how their interests are channeled through exchange relations into the national network that informally constrains elite circulation in political executive offices. 'Sub-elites' do not circulate directly in political executive office, but as holders of informal powers they are instrumental to the operatives of the wider network based on their direct contact with grassroots members, and therefore, are the kingmakers. Traditional elites act under varied contexts as agents with the capacity to influence elite circulation, to support government actions and to legitimate continuity in formal political executive office; they are part of the non-governing elite as defined by Pareto (1968). So, informal elites are both participants and contact nodes in the complex network that cuts across different social boundaries, serving as a link to likeminded actors and to recruit persons who avoid changes in circumstances to inherit political offices at the national executive level.

With the help of the sub-elites, Prewitt and Stone (1973: 24) say:

The ruling class then retains its advantages despite the advances of democratic thinking. The rulers continue to siphon off an undue amount of the social surplus for personal benefits; they continue to make laws which reflect their own world views and which serve their special interests; and they continue to control the selection of the persons who will inherit their positions.

In essence, informal elites constitute an influential contact group through which control over the selection of the inheritors of formal political power and roles may be exercised in the Nigerian case.

3. NIGERIAN ELITE NETWORKS

Having said earlier that Nigerian power structure cannot be considered as limited to triumvirate power elite, as defined by Mills (1956/2000), because there exist traditional, socio-cultural and religious institutions in addition to the political, economic and military institutions defined by Mills.

3.1 The Traditional Institutional Elite

Scholars like Vaughan (1995 and 2005), Chazan (1986), Coleman (1994) argued that historically, traditional authority structures enjoyed elite privileges and prestige while exercising a measure of authority over their respective subjects. Also, Mills (1956) shows that status symbols or 'prestige' 'buttresses power, turning it into authority, and protecting it from social challenge' (p. 89). Vaughan (2005), Adjaiye and Mishawa (2006) found out that right after independence, the emergent and succeeding post-colonial elites gradually assumed chieftaincy titles aimed at reinforcing their informal and formal powers. They assumed the roles of power-brokers and network arrangers that traditional rulers informally assumed to reinforce the network objectives of the political class.

For example, Forrest (1993) and Osaghae (1998) argue that the christened 'Kaduna Mafia' of the 1980s, was a political executive power and role allotting network and the dynamics of 'godfather' politics since the 1990s as argued by Albert (2005: 79–105) are traditional identities (ethnicity, regional origin and religious affiliations) represent a major platform for engendering political executive appointments and patronage exchanges through networks. The role of traditional institutions like the Oba of Benin, the Obi of Onitsha, the Oni of Ife, the Tor of Tiv are examples of power brokers in the political leadership of Nigeria, even though, they are traditional leaders.

Also, the hierarchic structure of ethno-regional and religious affiliations in Nigeria seems to promote a pecking order of traditional elite leadership that supports the wider elite network as it converges at the national level of executive government, because the Nigerian elite network for sustaining political executive power are provided by consistent leadership. Hence, network leaders function to ensure the coherence and objectivity of their membership. Mahmudat (2010) in his work said that the dilution of the intra-elite power tussles that often plague leadership successions at the elite level of politics in Nigeria requires the mediatory powers of regional leadership.

Vaughan (2005: 125) and Suberu (1997: 401–425) explained that apart from perpetuating 'narrow interests', traditional rulers of northern Nigeria seem to be associated with political 'alliances' and indications of special ethno-regional affiliates for 'appointments' to 'leading' political executive offices. They further suggested that the elite appointments might thus be linked to elite selectivity rather than competitiveness and inclusiveness if similar individuals or groups with vested interests appear regularly in political executive offices over time and space. The implication of the outcome of selective elite appointments could be a prevalence of ascription and power inequalities that inhibit the achievement of the liberal-pluralist ideal of cross-cutting social inclusion based on education and competition.

In post-colonial Nigeria, traditional institutions affect the circulation, composition and character of the political executive elite in other respects as well through their participation in elite networks. The institutions represent certain politically valued identities such as ethnicity, region and religion, which Smith (2008) argued that these identities are constructed and harnessed by the political class, and transformed into political support for those who seek and hold political executive office. Therefore, the traditional rulers of Nigeria are part of a political class that backs the political executive officeholders. They legitimate the patriarchal system through which the power structure of age and gender operates, to the chagrin of the youth and women participants in political processes.

Even though, they are ineligible for elective and appointive political offices, traditional leaders are a contact group whose activities straddle the political class, the political executive and the Nigerian masses. Therefore, following classic elite theory, of Mosca (1939) Pareto (1968/1991) where the elite are either governing or non-governing with the latter divided amongst those who do and those who do not influence the former the traditional rulers of Nigeria are amongst the influential non-governing elite.

3.2 The Socio-Cultural Elite

According to Kifordu, (2011), education and profession are socio-cultural resources harnessed by the political class to create the elite network of Nigeria; and serve mainly for the bureaucratic organization of political power. Weber (1968: 225) postulated that bureaucratic administration means fundamental domination through knowledge, but in addition to this, bureaucratic organizations, or the holders of power who make use of them, have the tendency to increase their power by the knowledge growing out of experience in the service. In other words, the bureaucratization of political power is significantly connected to the expansion of knowledge, as well as with the sustenance of power over time and its use as an instrument of mass domination. While Mills (1956/2000) argued that the bureaucracies of today's states, economic corporations and military establishments are enlarged and serve as means of power never before seen in human history.

Even though he focused on the triumvirate elite structure in industrialized societies, the likely lesson for Nigeria is that holders of executive power deploy bureaucratic power to rationalize their objectives by concentrating and centralizing authority despite regime changes. Also, Michels (1968/1991) believed the elite capacity to rationalize political power and roles was derived from possession of 'superior knowledge' which affords elite leaders 'an almost insurmountable advantage over members who try to change policies' (p. 16). The consequence of this is what he calls 'the price of increased bureaucracy' is 'concentration of power at the top and the lessening of influence by rank and file members' (ibid.).

Bassey (2009: 31) in his study also linked 'western education' and 'higher education' inter alia to 'cultural elite status in Africa' including Nigeria. He argued that the 'advent of colonial rule and Christian missionary activities' often initiated political changes. However, Kifordu, (2011) concluded that in post-colonial Nigeria, a fundamental aspect of the elite network is the systematic conversion of formal education through bureaucratic rationality to stabilize the selective circulation of individuals or groups in political executive offices. Paradoxically, while formal education enhanced the discontinuity of colonial rule, it also reinforced the continuity of the elite in political executive power and authority in the post-colonial period.

3.3 The Economic Elite

Even though, the economic elite are generally expected to exercise powerful and dynamic roles in industrialized and industrializing societies, Keller (1963/1991:83) cautioned the overestimation of their strategic importance as 'the existence of an all powerful economic ruling class is no longer valid'. Mills (1956/2000) also holds this position by rejecting the idea that 'the political apparatus is merely an extension of the corporate world or that it has been taken over by the representatives of the corporate rich' as postulated by Marxists (p. 170). His reason for the shift away from a superior role for economic power hinges on Weber's (1968) assertion that the distribution of honor in a society does not solely depend on economic power but also and perhaps more importantly on status symbols. This implies that there is a possibility of informal power permeating both economic and political institutions for the furtherance of self-interest. Looking at the Nigeria's situation, network-based interactions are probably used as a platform for diverting answerability away from its formal axis, which is the people's preference, as argued by Jenkins (2007) who said that this diversion implies a shift of answerability from de jure accountability to de facto accountability, which enjoins public office-holders to respond to interests outside those formally recognized in the constitution.

Therefore, in Nigeria, disclosing the collusion of elite power with economic interests through corruption and patronage can provide additional insight into the direction of the political executive elite responsibility in terms of the social group(s) to which the political executive responds through time and space.

3.4 The Military Elite

Kifordu, (2011) argued that military participation in politics is an important institutional component of the quintuple Nigerian political elite alliance that controls the federal government. According to him, the contradiction between the usual role of the military as territorial guards and its sudden transformation into a 'vanguard' of political power, as in Nigeria, makes a prominent input into the analysis of military roles in the country. Heywood spoke of the atypical role of the military in civilian government considered as "(...) guarantors of domestic order and interest group" rather than "alternative to civilian rule within the executive machinery" (Heywood 2002: 379–384). Adekanye (1999) in his various works on military studies has argued that in Nigeria, the military is not only actively engaged in Nigerian politics, but it can be assumed to act as a source of continuity in political executive power and positions, because the transformation of the role of the military in Nigeria paradoxically implies its centrality as a network node, either as a powerful initiator of continuity and office longevity or as a reinforcing agent of power reproduction over time and space. Former military officers like General Obasanjo, David Mark, Ahmadu Alli, Buba Marwa, and many others are actively involved in politics to confirm this assertion.

According to Mills (1956/2000: 11–12, Dye (1978) and Kurtz II (1987), military political actors in Nigeria seem to share a similar traditional and socio-cultural background with the traditional rulers and bureaucrats in a way that is likely to translate into an interlocking of power and roles. They describe 'Interlocking' in critical elite analysis to implies an interchange of positions before or during office-holding, i.e. amongst people of 'similar origins' who permanently 'maintain a network of informal connections' In Nigeria, it is important to understand the crucial role of interlocking in the accumulation and retention of political power and positions, especially within the national executive government, as it explains elite attitudes towards power-holding. Omodia (2009: 36) argues that both military and civilian elites seem to accumulate influential, parallel or convergent social roles, meaning that a military or civilian elite individual who holds chieftaincy titles also shares in executive offices that permit, the 'authoritative allocation of state resources'. So, regime changes can provide a milieu not only for analyzing the composition and character of the political elite according to regime and office standards but also for observing the type of elite (military or civilian) that tends to circulate in executive offices as political regimes and resources change over time.

Even though, a regime change to military rule usually implies inclusion, it is important that we know that it is not necessarily inclusiveness in terms of a realistic social interest representation, but of more of military personnel than civilian politicians in supervisory roles (i.e. those political executive offices that are charged with policy control). In Nigeria, however, civilian politicians are needed in an attempt to bridge the social gaps that a closed military style of governance may engender. But Dudley (1982) argued that because authoritarian political systems and actors are aversive to opposition, contrary to liberal systems, the admission of civilian politicians is probably a façade aimed at legitimating social control rather than promoting social participation. Therefore, the fusionist (military-civilian blend) manifestation of elite composition that the Nigerian polity suggests since colonial rule and over regime types can be said to project an important elitist pact for fostering special interests while at the same time maintaining mass acquiescence.

3.5 The Political Elite

According to Keller (1963/1991) and Lane (1997), in the study of elite theory, the political elite occupy the apex of the hierarchy, because they do not simply have the capacity to form combinations with other elite types in the political power structure, but also because of their role as initiators and supervisors of policies with pervasive social outcomes. For the fact that the political elite stratum integrates various segments has special implications for power structuring, based on functional differentiation, liberal thinkers like Hannan and Carrol (1981: 20) hold the view that the political elite power structure should reflect a variety of skills (e.g. legal, entrepreneurial, bureaucratic) and permit participation and 'effective opposition to coercion'. Therefore, they constitute a basis for analyzing the characteristics of the core political executive elite, as political executive elites are all political elites though not all political elites are political executives.

However, Przeworski (1991:11) associates the selection of candidates for political offices under the 'political liberty' precept with 'the free choice of leaders by citizens in an open election contested by political parties from all shades of life'. This therefore, make political parties an important political institution for organizing political power and channelling public interests. Although, Kifordu (2011) argues that political institutions, such as political parties, may be weakened by special elite interests in the Nigerian polity, because they are subjected to the same state control as the major national economic resources. An example of a strong political elite group in Nigeria, is the Kaduna mafia, and its role in the circulation and selection of political leaders in Nigeria cannot be over emphasized. In this country, the Kanuri-Fulani connection has always been a big issue, and after the Babaginda ad Abdulsalami reign, the Minna-Mecca phenomenon began, and we see it playing out.

Michels (1968: 78–79) says that Political parties are being transformed into 'fighting parties' which uses quasi-military patterns of tactical procedures to dominate the opponent so as to curtail the democratic spirit found in its 'primitive and genuine form' for advancing the people's interests. And this explains the militarizing of the Nigerian state by Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) until its one time chairman, Ahmadu Ali described the late Adedibu as the Garrison Commander of the Oyo politics. Military tactics of force, thuggery, killings and maiming are their 'tools of democracy'. Kifordu further argues that even though, the core political executive elite of Nigeria are emerging from different social backgrounds, does not automatically imply an extensive and deep sense of social representation and responsibility. But rather, it means that the political elite can transform unexpectedly upon ascending to political executive power by appropriating state resources and denying accountability to the very foundation of political power found in open systems – the people. Instead they are answerable to the political class that depends on state resources for its survival; they are parasites, contrasting with the Marxist outlook on inequality as derived from economic factors.

4. CONCLUSION

Responding to the research question that seeks to know whether the elite theory principles are applicable to Nigeria leadership structure; this paper has explicitly shown that the leadership structure of the country is still in the hands of a small select group who are still power brokers and kingmakers. We have the Yar'aDuas, Shagaris, Dasukis, Gowons, Buharis, Babagindas, Abubakars in the North, and the Awolowos, Ojukwus, Okaparas, Ikokus, Akintolas, Obasanjos, Oduduwas in the South, just to mention a little. The study reveals circulation of the composition of the same core elite group with common social background, selective informal networks integrating political class supporters, recurrent appearances and socially dysfunctional attitudes characteristic of elite circulation, composition and continuity in political executive offices. The implication of this set up is mismanagement of state resources without positive outcome. Also, the continuity of the elite group in political power lead to the weakening of the institutions those are supposed to support the development of the political system. Therefore, to correct this anomaly which marginalizes the wish of the people, actions should be taken to create enabling environment for more citizens' participation, for a healthier democratic state called Nigeria.

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