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**BULLET VERSUS BALLOT:  
INTERROGATING NIGERIA'S  
4TH REPUBLIC'S ELECTORAL  
CONSULTATIONS**

**Kunle Amuwo**



Covenant University  
39th Public Lecture

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# **BULLET AND THE BALLOT: INTERROGATING NIGERIA'S 4<sup>TH</sup> REPUBLIC'S ELECTORAL CONSULTATIONS**

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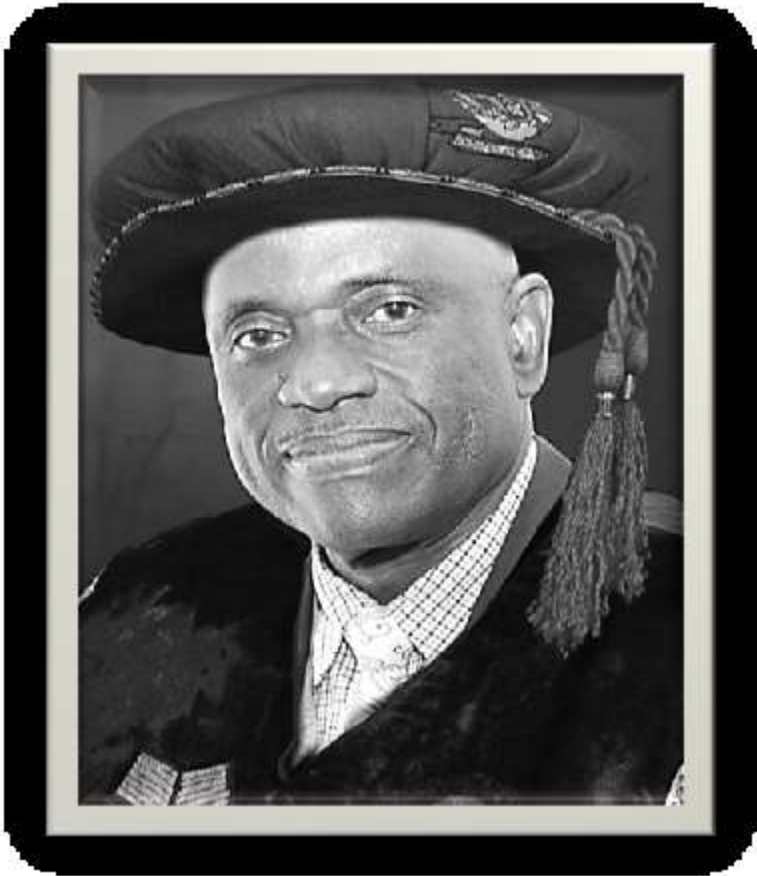
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## **BULLET AND THE BALLOT: INTERROGATING NIGERIA'S 4<sup>TH</sup> REPUBLIC'S ELECTORAL CONSULTATIONS**

*'Kunle AMUWO*

*Election is a complex process and cannot just be the voting process alone -- Olatunji Dare, (2014)*

*Elections are now everywhere but democracy nowhere; elections are ubiquitous. But democracy is still being awaited -- Larbi Sadiki (in Adebani and Obadare, 2011: 311)*

*The present-day (Nigerian) leadership wants money. You cannot have money and honour at the same time --- Maitama Sule*

*A leader is one who knows the way, goes the way and shows the way -- John C. Maxwell*

*A man of character finds a special attractiveness in difficulty, since it is only by coming to grips with difficulty that he can realize his potentialities. Faced with a crisis, the man of character falls back on himself; he imposes his own stamp of action, takes responsibility for it; makes it his own -- Charles de Gaulle*

*The (February 2015) election is not about prayers alone. It is about whether politicians can understand that politics is about service and allow free and fair elections to hold – Matthew Kukah, Catholic Bishop of Sokoto, Nigeria*

*When Nigerians thought that the country was at its lowest ebb, another generation of leaders perfects the act of decadence with astonishing efficiency* – Editorial of *The Guardian* (Lagos), 23 January 2015

*What bullet could not achieve, the ballot may yet achieve* – Tatalo Alamu

### **Introduction and the *Problematique***

One thing on which there is consensus across the board, within and outside the country, is that Nigeria is one of the most badly and poorly governed nation-state on the globe – even though, paradoxically, she is also one of the most and best endowed. Nigeria, Africa's nominally biggest economy, is nothing but a study in copious paradoxes. For one, she is famous for organizing her elections when and as due, even though they have hardly amounted to much from the perspective of redemptive and emancipatory politics in state-society relations and in political economy terms. The people vote but markets and those who politically control them rule the roost at the expense of an increasingly disconsolate citizenry. For another, there are immense contradictions between wealth in a few hands and abject material deprivation for the mass majority; thus the epigram that *Nigeria is rich but (most) Nigerians are poor*, several millions extremely so. The latter point explains the former, that is

to say, the electorate do vote -- howsoever they do so -- but are not entitled to be voted for precisely because they are poor and therefore do not meet the property and material requirements to be so honoured!

This explains why, after making a largely dubious and uninformed choice between what is no more than two sets of bourgeois oppressors -- as they often turn out -- suffering what they must is their trophy. Meanwhile, current lords of the manor run riot appropriating and misapplying public power and public resources for everything save for public purposes. Like the Brits who cobbled the rather sprawling Nigerian federation together for and in their supreme interest, political generals and their objective and subjective allies who made fortunes under venal and unaccountable military regimes between 1966 and 1979 and between 1984 and 1999 have run Nigeria aground. But, clearly, this cannot be in their interest.

The calamitous politics of the 4<sup>th</sup> republic speaks to the indescribable and unquantifiable damage right-wing and conservative military rule has done to popular understanding of electoral or liberal democracy – or, for that matter, democracy *tout court*. With routinely stolen electoral mandates staring us in the face as well as governments and Parliaments steeped in legitimacy deficits, Nigerians are entitled to ask when the grand circus and charade going on in Abuja and in most of the 36 state capitals will come to an end. In other words, when will democracy

– Nigeria’s post military brand of democracy -- come to an end? This is akin to what happened in the late 1980s/ early 1990s when, across the African continent, ordinary folks as well as then emergent social movements were asking when independence would wind down!

Nigeria’s 4<sup>th</sup> republic is a still-born foster child of the military’s rather ill-tempered and brisk political liberalization programme. It edited and audited out any and every form of progressive and radical politics, ideas and personalities. It accommodated only those – military and non-military alike – who swore, by their acts, that they were game for what was a mere transition to civilian rule, a pacted elite programme, not a serious engagement with genuine democratization and popular democracy. In conceptual terms, liberalization is not a deep process: “it allows citizens to enjoy greater rights and freedoms only insofar as this is compatible with preserving existing power structures and the privileges of their immediate beneficiaries” (Fomunyoh, 2001: 43).

On the other hand, democratization entails a broadening of political space, an expansion of opportunity for political participation and mobilization, and the establishment of credible processes and institutions that allow for change or renewal of political leadership through elections (Fomunyoh, 2001: 42-43). Invariably, those who fought the military to a standstill and to the finish – encapsulated by the Diasporic National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) and similar groups within Nigeria – became

little more than spectators from the side lines in favour of a rather compact set of military apologists, contractors, praise singers and beneficiaries who, in serious and decent climes, should have no business with the business of running the public sphere.

Unlike in Benin Republic, where Francophone West Africa's inaugural and only successful Sovereign National Conference (SNC) used this instrument to re-negotiate state-society relations, Nigeria's extremely limited civilianization (equivalent term for liberalization) process was incomplete. This explains continued military jackboots: David Mark, a political general infamous for his contempt for the poor at the height of military suzerainty, runs the Senate; another, Olusegun Obasanjo, a former dictator, the republic's first president for eight listless years, and a third, also an ex-strongman, is the All Progressive Congress (APC) presidential flag bearer in the February 2015 electoral consultation, his fourth attempt, in a row, at the country's *magistrature supreme*.

Political parties have been hijacked and privatized by money bags and god-fathers – 'god-motherhood' is an emerging sociological phenomenon -- who abrogate or subvert the electorate's will during elections and negate their hopes for democratic dividends thereafter. There is hardly any level playing field for electoral politics precisely because power and resources are unevenly distributed between, on the one hand, the ruling elite – the political fraction being its nucleus, to the extent that politics is the principal thing and arguably the most profitable game in town –



and the mass majority, including popular forces and their objective spokespersons and organisations.

The major *problematique* or thesis of this piece is that because of the incomplete nature of the transition from military rule to civilian rule in May 1999 and the nodding attention paid to it by the ruling PDP at the centre and in several states, Nigeria's elections can hardly be free and fair, let alone free from fear! The Lords of the Manor depicted above for whom democracy and politics are no more than a strategy for winning and retaining power will not allow this to happen. It will take a serious pan-Nigerian political struggle to achieve this crucially important objective. The best Nigerians can hope for today – and work towards -- that is, as the fractured, national political economy is currently structured and organised, are fairly credible elections that majority of the electorate can adjudge as a fair representation of their electoral will.

In a further elaboration of the enunciated *problematique*, I will suggest that at the root of a structural explanation for the absence of free and fair elections in Nigeria – as well as elections that are free from fear – is the philosophical and existential distinction that can be made between the *right to life* and the *means to live*. The former is encapsulated by a congeries of constitutionally-stipulated and guaranteed basic civic and political rights -- right to life itself as well as right to assemble, hold views and opinions and disseminate same, worship, work, recreate, with the caveat that

your rights end where the rights of your neighbour begin. They are also justiciable, that is to say, they are enforceable and can be enforced in a law court whenever they are infringed upon. The latter – the means to live – include the import of the state's primordial responsibility to ensure citizens' security and welfare, but, more importantly, the crucial provisions in Nigeria's 1999 Constitution (as amended) for the state to take seriously and ensure the material and economic well-being of the people.

The most important, from the perspective of democratic politics as a liberatory, emancipatory and empowerment project, is the provision that the Nigerian state shall provide citizens with free education from the primary level to the tertiary level. The provision is, however, abridged by that untoward legalistic caveat: 'when and as practicable'. And to imagine that since the 1979 Constitution, when this provision was first introduced, it has remained nothing but a dead letter! To be sure, this is part of the country's classical class struggle: disempower the masses to not access education in order to more easily perpetrate its undue exploitation and use it as a cannon fodder during, say, electoral consultations. Yet until the post-May 1999 Obasanjo government bowed to the World Bank's enslaving ideology of market forces and economic user fee, children of peasants across the nation-state – an army of dynamic young men and women before, during and after my own generation -- had been able to access higher education through generous higher education subsidies. All of that has, mercilessly and unfortunately, receded to a very distant past.

Bereft of the means to live, the Nigerian electorate is little more than a pawn on the chessboard of the political elite's manipulation of ethnicity and religion for electoral gains. Yet, in practice, multiple factors influence electoral outcomes. Since 1999, the use to which faith-based and ethnic platforms have been exploited to fight personal and partisan political battles supposedly in favour of the political elite's so-called ethnic collective and faith conclave – a classic case of methodological individualism – has become so perverse and venal that some pertinent observers have suggested that what we presently witness in Nigeria is not democratic governance but criminal activity garbed in official respectability.

Most Nigerians suffer double jeopardy within this context: not only is it the case that political leaders at all levels are hardly accountable, they also systematically abuse the people's basic human rights. So, even the right to life is for millions of Nigerians, daily eking out a living at the periphery of the fractured neo-colony, little more than a sham, an oddity *writ large*. For the Human Rights Watch (2007: 2), "in violent and brazenly rigged polls, government officials have denied millions of Nigerians any real voice in selecting their political leaders". Over time this pattern of relations between the *electorate* and the *selectorate* in power has become a veritable structure of constraints against the former both in terms of meaningful political choices and economic prosperity.

Two important and mutually reinforcing insights further enrich the foregoing conceptual exegesis. One, John Saul, veteran Canadian Marxist scholar, says that the prevalence of the liberal perspective has led to ‘a narrowing of the terms’ of the discussion of democracy in Africa. This has produced what he refers to as the ‘political science of democratization’ but has all but neglected the ‘political economy of democratization’ (Cited in Adebani and Obadare, 2011: 315). This essay attempts an analysis of the latter.

The second insight comes from Sudipta Kaviraj who in the place of electoral democracy or rampant electoralism – in which elections are held with theological devotion but with very limited social dividends -- juxtaposes what he calls substantive democracy, “an alternative, Tocquevillian reading of democracy’s success – which is not just a continuation of a system of elected government, but *the capacity of the government to produce long-term egalitarian effects*” (Adebani and Obadare, 2011: 327, emphasis mine).

### **Theoretical Insights**

Empirically theorizing the nature and character of the post-colony in different African countries appears useful in understanding why some polities are doing better than others even when they share not too dissimilar colonial experience. I tease out my experience from the three African countries, including Nigeria, where I lived and worked in the past decade or so until February 2014.

In South Africa, the post-apartheid state has proved fairly functional since the first post-Apartheid elections in April 1994, both in terms of protecting the citizens' basic human, civil and political rights (the right to life) as well as meeting their material needs (the means to live). The basic public goods and services that only the state, not the private sector, can effectively procure and provide – electricity, potable water, roads, housing, education, health, etc. – are available and, again, fairly affordable. Compared only to the domestic wing of the Johannesburg International Airport, the Murtala Mohammed International Airport in Lagos is, with due respect, like a typical housewife's kitchen!

On a related register, a platinum company in Johannesburg generates more electricity for its own internal use than the PDP federal government has generated for the entire country since 1999! Nigeria may have become, since April 2014, Africa's biggest economy after a rebasing of its GDP, but she is so only nominally. Pretoria is several streets ahead of Abuja in terms of the depth and sophistication of her financial markets, infrastructure, institutional strength and corporate governance (*Africa Confidential*, 15 November 2013). The South African state also provides safety nets and social grants to the black majority -- the most brutalized and deprived during the long, dark Apartheid years – as well as other groups.

Senegal is, materially, a much poorer country than the two African giants, yet the political stability it has enjoyed since 1960 with only

four presidents since then – Leopold Senghor, 1960-1980; Abdou Diouf, 1980-2000; Abdoulaye Wade, 2000-2012; and Macky Sall, 2012 till date – has contributed to engendering a functional state. The post-colonial state provides the basic services – including a well-organized public transportation system in Dakar, the capital -- and they are affordable. A fixed telephone line and 24/7 internet services cost some \$60 dollars monthly! When you default you are cut off and will only be reinstated for a fee by a largely impersonal public bureaucracy that has neither permanent friends nor permanent enemies but only the public interest. The dividing line between public and private interest may be thin, on occasion, as in South Africa, but it is hardly blurred.

How does the Nigerian typology look like? Except for a few fleeting years in the otherwise much-maligned 1<sup>st</sup> republic, 1960-1965 (but which, arguably, by the advantage of history's hindsight, is the country's golden era) when it was fairly developmental both at the centre and in the regions (Amuwo, 2008), it has over the years lost its relative autonomy. Long, tortuous years of rule by reckless and feckless political generals and its continuation by other means by their civilian surrogates since 1999 has translated into the state's capture by the political elite and other fractions of the ruling elite (business, bureaucratic/technocratic, the military-commercial complex, chiefly estates, mainstream professional bodies, organic cum palace intellectuals, etc.).

There are two levels of analysis here. One, the Nigerian post-colony has proved efficient over the years in matters where force or coercion is needed and much less so in matters related to welfare provisioning for Nigerians. Military politics – or *militics* – and egregious and hard-nosed impunity and venality by the military and its civilian inheritance elite have conspired to rob the state of its public allure and presence – that is, its *stateness*. *Statism* (its negative, coercive vis-à-vis) rules supreme. So there is nothing intrinsically wrong with the state *qua* state in Nigeria; but more than something is wrong with the current Nigerian variant of the post-colonial state. This has to be fixed and urgently so by a fraction of the political elite interested in the country's genuine democratization and popular, humanistic development. The second level is the response of the state to on-going multi-pronged contestation of its hegemony by an avalanche of visibly angry groups of varying hues, arguably the most extreme being the Boko Haram Islamist and terrorist insurgency group.

Now virtually a prisoner of the ruling elite, the Nigerian state is hardly a public agency. Several rounds of orthodox market reforms since the Ibrahim Babangida years in power (1985-1993) have effectively *retrenched* and *entrenched* the Nigerian state into the hands of state managers and political leaders. Thus the state has been signally unable to discipline and socialise the market in favour of society's most vulnerable precisely because there is no ideology or philosophy of good or popular governance espoused by them, let alone followed through to do so. The state's *credit*

*contract* with the World Bank and the IMF routinely trumps its *social contract* with the Nigerian people. Yet, according to Economics Nobel Laureate Professor Joseph Stiglitz, unfettered markets often fail to achieve even their limited objectives – such as higher living standards and material well-being -- in contradistinction to broad-based values such as social justice and distributional equity. Similarly, poverty may increase even as the economy grows whilst unemployment represents markets' most dramatic failure (Stiglitz, 2004: 292; Amuwo, 2009: 45).

Markets are, thus, not some infallible or sacrosanct financial institution; rather they are political contraptions that can and do fail, manipulated as they often are by monopolies, oligopolies, the great powers and venal and self-serving ruling elites. A classic example in Nigeria is the way pump prices of gasoline (petroleum and petroleum products) are politically determined and obey everything except market forces. This same state that worships on the altar of market forces is the principal institution in society for both beneficence and punishment. This largely explains why politics and elections amount to *battle royale*, if not outright war, between those in power and those outside of it, peeping in.

### **The Ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP) and its Manifest Destiny**

Rather infamously and unflatteringly described by our own WS, Nobel Laureate Professor Wole Soyinka, as a 'nest of killers', the PDP, self-described as Africa's largest party, has been little more



than a power machine and a machinery for the massive looting and despoliation of the people's' collective patrimony. Determined to rule the country forever in the manner of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) of the short-lived and rancorous 2<sup>nd</sup> republic, it has systematically repudiated, since May 1999, the notion of politics as a public vocation, as an epiphany of commitment to Nigerians' welfare and security. At its formation in 1998 with the late Shehu Musa Yar'Adua's well-heeled People's Democratic Movement (PDM) as its arrow head, the PDP, a broad-based neo-conservative bloc wanted nothing but to position itself as the discredited political military's privileged replacement. According to a former US Ambassador to Nigeria, John Campbell, "the PDP stood for nothing except power for its leaders and the public knew it" (Campbell, 2010: 86). Since 1999, having used power -- and having been used by power -- the PDP has grown in power into what famed columnist Tatalo Alamu calls "a fascist, terror machine from which the entire nation is seeking liberation" (Alamu, 2015: 3).

In those years, the party has hardly enunciated any cogent policy blueprint or coherent ideology of governance that Nigerians could debate and buy into – aside of its empty sloganeering of 'power to the people', as if to mock the long-suffering masses. To the extent that it lacks grand ideas, visions and strategy of people-friendly development and people-regarding republic, it has no choice but to routinely resort to the instrumentalization of primordial sentiments attached to region, religion and ethnicity. For

Oluwajuyitan (2014a: 20), the PDP “has never really come out with clear-cut agenda to define its visions of Nigeria”. From a pan-Nigerian perspective, Obi (2011: 372) contends that the country’s politics is bereft of “concrete issues, ideology, principles or a clear national vision”, such that politics is “a high stake contest for raw power and resources”. As elsewhere argued, “(W) here ideologies are lacking and political formations are bereft of identity – as in Nigeria’s 4<sup>th</sup> republic – we are confronted with the efflorescence of several look-alike political parties differentiated only by the fatness of the purse of their main sponsors and the unique mannerisms and idiosyncrasies of their leaders” (Amuwo, 2009: 52).

Under PDP’s watch, about 10 per cent of the population – national and state legislators; executives of federal, state and local governments and an army of political appointees --gulps about 70 per cent of the resources. For venerated columnist and master satirist, Professor Olatunjii Dare, “the PDP is the big brother that can provide the infrastructure of the stomach, despite manifest failure in so many fronts”<sup>1</sup>. Indeed, the ruling party spends too much money on itself. This explains why recurrent expenditures have always bested capital expenditures in the country’s annual budgets. The 2014 figures are, respectively, 72.71 per cent and 27.29 per cent<sup>2</sup> which are a far-cry from World Bank’s suggested 60-40 ratio. Governance was expected to gulp N3.7 trillion out of

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<sup>1</sup> “Jonathan was unprepared for governance – Dare”, *The Nation*, 17 July 2014, p. 51

<sup>2</sup> “The Economy”, (Ed.), *The Nation*, 14 January 2014)

the total budget estimates of N4.6 trillion, prompting some editorialists to lament that this “smacks of wild economic planning”<sup>3</sup>. The political elite may have indulged itself beyond what is *ear-marked*, which is often different from what is *eye-marked*!

In the same vein, in December 2013, the Federal Executive Council (FEC) granted approval for the purported expansion of the National Assembly complex at a staggering cost of N40.2 billion. Earlier, the federal government had committed funds to build a big Banquet Hall at the State House, having adjudged the existing one too small<sup>4</sup>. Lack of political will on the part of the Jonathan presidency stalled the implementation of a major recommendation of the Steve Oronsaye-led committee that 220 agencies out of the existing 541 should be scrapped. A major rationale was that many of them have over-lapping functions. The President reportedly reneged at the point of implementation.<sup>5</sup> Small wonder the PDP federal government is increasingly perceived by Nigerians as a rogue government. Witness: a picture story in October 2014 depicting members of the Nigerian Human Rights Commission (NHRC) during their rally in Lagos against ‘misrule, terrorism and bad governance’. Some of the banners read as follows: “Stop rogue regime”; “How to be a PDP leader –

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<sup>3</sup> “Budget’s N3.7 trillion recurrent intolerable”, *Punch*, 14 January 2014)

<sup>4</sup> See “Yet another legislative profligacy” (Ed.), *The Guardian*, 7 January 2014)

<sup>5</sup> “Budget’s N3.7 trillion recurrent intolerable”, *Punch*, 14 January 2014

disobey court orders, seal courts with soldiers, steal public funds, recruit armed thugs, import illegal arms”.<sup>6</sup>

It is perhaps no sheer coincidence that “of the 23 PDP governors that emerged at the onset of the 4<sup>th</sup> republic in 1999, 17 were either in jail or facing prosecution” (Oluwajuyitan, 2014). It is equally not fortuitous that virtually all the country’s electoral consultations superintended by the PDP have been nothing but brigandage *par excellence*. On the 2003 elections, the Transition Monitoring Group (TMG) – Nigeria’s coalition of NGOs and CSOs working on elections and how to safeguard their sanctity – described PDP members as “electoral fraudsters that do not believe in election as a means and mechanism of leadership change”. It also characterized it as ‘the civilian equivalent of a coup d’état’ (Adebanwi and Obadare, 2011: 325). For the International Crisis Group (ICG), the 2007 elections “in the view of Nigerians and the many international observers alike, were the most poorly organized and massively rigged in the country’s history” (ICG, 2007: 1). Obasanjo had, rather infamously, said that the elections were a ‘do or die’ for his party and government. The 1999 elections, umpired by the Abdusalam Abubakar military junta, was no better. By most accounts, the presidential and National Assembly polls were blighted by massive corruption in at least a third of the states (Obi, 2011: 378). The 2011 elections

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<sup>6</sup> *The Nation*, 17 October 2014, p. 10).

appeared relatively clean and credible but only in relation to previous consultations.

To sum up this section, two major factors account for the nature and character of the elections conducted thus far in the 4<sup>th</sup> republic. One, elections have often been programmed to achieve pre-determined results. In 1999, candidate Obasanjo had to win and in 2007, he selected a frail and fragile but apparently relatively incorrupt Yar'Adua to succeed him. He also could not have lost! Two, sitting governments and entrenched ruling parties do not easily lose elections. Will history repeat itself in February 2015? But I digress.

Almost as a rule of thumb, all sitting governments and entrenched parties perpetrate different levels and intensity of electoral malfeasance, each according to the material, financial and human resources at its disposal. The PDP would appear to be well ahead of its often splintered opponents not only because it has more resources to outmuscle and outfox its competitors, but also because its own candidates are often less popular.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> *Interview with one of Obasanjo government's leading organic intellectuals, Abuja, January 2011.*

## **Structural Violence against the Nigerian Electorate**

In the nexus between politics and governance, the Nigerian political elite prefers, too naturally, the former to the latter. Politics, in theory a public vocation in the public interest has been reduced, in practice in Nigeria, to its minimalist and largely self-serving notion of winning and retaining power. Governance is more complex, more onerous and more demanding. It imposes on those in power -- howsoever they gained it -- to discharge the responsibilities attached thereto and increase people's happiness in a very tangible, concrete and substantial manner.

In the past 16 years, there has been a marked absence of purpose in the government at the centre with the ruling party literally wallowing in doubts about its own public mission in power. When ministers are appointed, it is not so much because of their relevance to the people's well-being as because of their loyalty to the president and their perceived value-added to his quest to retain power. This explains why there is little or no concrete momentum towards a functional state. There is little evidence that PDP presidents have taken institution building seriously and have given more than nodding attention to enforcing the social or public purpose of the state. The result, to paraphrase a corporate analyst, is "the tragedy of low expectations"<sup>8</sup> on the part of the Nigerian people.

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<sup>8</sup> *Nigerian Tribune, 1 November 2013*

The following are the principal elements of structural violence:

(a) *Tyranny of Economic Growth*

Economic growth has taken place since 2000 but majority of Nigerians have not fared better. For Ekpo (2015: 43) “it remains paradoxical that robust growth in the economy results in rising poverty”. GDP growth in 2014 was 7.4 per cent in 2014 up from 6.2 per cent in 2013. It had averaged 6.8 per cent between 2005 and 2013 and a little above 5 per cent between 2005 and 2008-9. “While growth matters for poverty reduction”, continues Ekpo (2015: 43), it is growth associated with deliberate distribution that will have a greater impact on poverty. If there is no distribution then the impact of growth on poverty remains negligible”. As the UNDP’s 2013 report entitled *The Rise of the South: Human Progress in a Diverse World* pointed out, Nigeria’s impressive growth is not matched by corresponding strides in human development indices such as employment generation, access to education, health facilities, potable water and decent infrastructure.<sup>9</sup> Macro-economic stability which is the battle cry of the ruling party’s economic team appears to sit comfortably with rising poverty. The team is constantly persuading itself that the economy is well managed, unmindful of the stark reality that over 70 per cent of Nigerians -- about 112.47 million Nigerians -- are

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<sup>9</sup> See “An Agenda for improved governance” (Ed.), *Nigerian Tribune*, 7 January 2014.

classified as poor; with about 100 million virtually living as destitute!

*(b) Fiscal Recklessness and Financial Profligacy*

Since the return to democracy, fiscal rascality has been the norm at all levels of government. At the centre, the ruling party's fiscal and financial policies and practices have been characterized by budgets that are hardly implemented; run-down external reserves and Excess Crude Account and abandoned projects. Passage of national budgets has been a constant object of delay occasioned by wrangling between the Legislature and the Executive and a political body language in the two principal organs of power that neither delay in passage nor poor implementation really matters. After all, in Nigeria's perverse and distorted electoral democracy, there is hardly any direct correlation between good performance in office and re-election. According to the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) data, external reserves dropped by about 7 per cent from \$44.8 billion in November 2013 to \$41.4 billion in February 2014, at a period oil prices were spiralling upwards.<sup>10</sup>

In the same vein, the Excess Crude Account declined within a year from \$11.5 billion to a paltry \$2.5 billion. There are other unbelievable stories and statistics. The Petroleum Product Pricing and Regulatory Agency (PPPRA) issued over N331 billion kerosene

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<sup>10</sup> Oyetunji Abioye, "External reserves drop by \$3.4 billion in 3 months", *Punch*, 20 February 2014



subsidy certificates to the NNPC in 2012 alone!<sup>11</sup> The PPPRA, NNPC and 72 firms reportedly stole N1 trillion subsidy money.<sup>12</sup> In January 2014 alone, ‘Federal government overspent by N105.47 billion’.<sup>13</sup> Through a blend of incompetence and venality, the federal government had about 12, 000 abandoned projects valued at N7.7 trillion, that is, after contracts had collected some N2.6 trillion in so-called mobilization funds. The Niger Delta Development Corporation (NDDC) has followed suit: between 2005 and 2011, it recorded over 285 abandoned projects that reportedly would require about N1.4 trillion to complete. Yet, between 2000 and 2009, the NDDC had an average annual budget of N100 billion and, since 2010, N250 billion.<sup>14</sup>

Nothing seems to escape the looting mentality of the ruling party and government at the centre. The Service Wide Votes (SWV) was set aside for emergency purposes and is strictly meant for national infrastructural development. According to Adeola Olamilekan, Chair, Public Accounts Committee (PAC), House of Representatives, alerted the nation, in December 2013, to the fact that, between 2004 and 2012, “successive governments spent a whopping N4.17 trillion as against N1.8 trillion approved by the

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<sup>11</sup> Taiwo Adisa et al, “Kerosene Subsidy: Representatives Query PPPRA over N331 billion claim certificates”, *Nigerian Tribune*, 20 February 2014.

<sup>12</sup> *Punch*, 19 April 2012

<sup>13</sup> Bolaji Komolafe, *Vanguard*, 11 April 2014

<sup>14</sup> “Time for reforms at the NDDC” (Ed.), *Punch*, 16 January 2014

National Assembly as SWV component of the budgets”.<sup>15</sup> Over N1 trillion was allegedly spent on publicity and publication of various government programmes! In the 2014 budget estimates, two federal ministries proposed to spend N305 million on typewriters and PR.

*(c) An Enigma called Power/Energy*

Like the Turn Around Maintenance (TAM) of the country’s moribund refineries that gulps billions of naira annually with pretty little or nothing to show for it, Nigeria’s electricity sector has become a veritable black hole. According to *The Guardian* editorialists, “what obtains in the power sector is a deliberate abuse of the people’s rights through some dubious commercialism. Since 2000, all sorts of partnerships and commercial arrangements, gulping trillions of naira have dehumanized Nigerians”.<sup>16</sup> Presidential pledge by Obasanjo, to wit, “On my honour by the end of 2001, Nigerians will begin to enjoy regular, uninterrupted power supply” came to nought, but not before \$16 billion was frittered away. In his 2014 New Year message, Jonathan pledged to strengthen the sector’s regulation and closely monitor power delivery to increase it beyond 18 hours daily! Whereas Abacha left behind 8,000 megawatts of electricity and Babangida before him, 6,000, the current figure is less than 3,000!

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<sup>15</sup> *Punch*, 31 December 2013

<sup>16</sup> “Mr President’s 2014 promises” (Ed), *The Guardian*, 16 January 2014

*(d) Non-diversification of the National Economy*

A major element of structural violence has been the failure of the ruling party to wean the economy off its suffocating over-reliance on oil earnings and rents. Since 1999, each of the three successive governments so far would promise vigorous actions on the dossier whenever oil prices nosedive, only to renege once prices pick up and it has enough for monthly allocation sharing. Now, suddenly, the chicken has come home to roost. The central government has transited thrice in 16 short years: from *reform* through *transformation* to *austerity*, with the Harvard-trained Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala firmly in the economic and financial saddle. We ask, following Osuji (2015: 64), “how can we speak of any achievement when the economy has virtually been run aground?”

Thrust upon hapless Nigerians has been annual budgets that do little to dissimulate government’s insensitivity to their plight. The 20014 federal budget was anomalous in one sense than one. It catered more for the servicing of former warlords and senior militants in the Niger Delta than for the country’s security and armed forces. Whereas a whopping N59 billion was allocated to cover the stipends and allowances of 30,000 of them and their reintegration under the Amnesty programme, N45 billion was allocated to the armed and security forces. Only the authors of the

budget know why it was christened ‘Budget for Job creation and Inclusive Growth.’<sup>17</sup>

*(e) Outlandish and Unprecedented Corruption Engendering Embarrassing Poverty*

By most accounts, from within and outside the PDP political family, the filth, rot and stench of corruption in the Nigerian political economy in the past 16 years is nothing but sordid. It has damaged the country’s image within and outside the continent and ensured that the future of our youth was abrogated yesterday. Those who misappropriate massive public funds are also responsible for industrial-scale electoral malfeasance. What is sketched below is no more than the tip of an iceberg:

- In 1999, Obasanjo donated N130 million to the PDP on behalf of himself and his unidentified friends (Amuwo, 2009: 52);
- Fast-track to 2014/2015 – the age of the billions and the trillions -- Professor Jerry Gana, a constant feature in all governments since the Babangida years (1985-1993), of the AGIP fame (Any government in power) donated N 5 billion to President Jonathan’s re-election campaign, on behalf of himself and his equally unidentified friends. He would clarify later on behalf of the ruling party that the

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<sup>17</sup> *Punch*, 24 January 2014

over N21 billion raised at an Abuja launch – only a few days after austerity measures were announced -- was also supposedly meant for the completion of the PDP Abuja secretariat;

- The public spat between Obasanjo and his deputy, Atiku Abubakar, pre-2007 elections, about the illegal diversion of oil monies in the Petroleum Technology Development Fund (PTDF) allegedly to fund their re-election in 2003. Mutual accusations and counter-accusations showed a pattern of the regime's spoils system: cronies, aides and associates got access to easy yet public money for personal use, conspicuous consumption and, ultimately, vote purchase from an increasingly impoverished population (Amuwo, 2009: 47);
- The so-called 'oily bribe', another oil contract scam involving ENI, Italy's biggest oil company and Shell in connection with the purchase of a Nigerian oil field OPL 245 worth \$1.1 billion with about half used to bribe Nigerian officials and intermediaries. Ranging from thousands to millions of dollars, beneficiaries expended the funds on aircraft and armoured cars;<sup>18</sup>
- The fuel subsidy scam continues unabated in 2015 as the central government plans to spend N1.22 trillion;

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<sup>18</sup>"Another oil contract scams: This time will Jonathan punish Nigerian involved?" (Ed.) *The Nation*, 8 October 2014, p. 19.

- Most perilously, corruption has caught up with the Nigerian military. Some Nigerian soldiers on the battle front against Boko Haram told CNN in January 2015 that they lacked weapons and bought their own uniforms. Yet, In the past three years, over N3 trillion was committed to defence in federal budgets;
- Illegalities *par excellence* in apparent slush funding by political parties, with none of the agencies charged with their oversight function – INEC, EFCC, ICPC and Securities Exchange Commission (SEC) -- effectively doing this. In the process, public funds are not judiciously expended and the weak are not protected.<sup>19</sup>
- Abuse of power comes to the fore also in the farm sector. Where so-called investors without milling capacity or investments are preferred to experienced and well-honed ones, fuelling rice smuggling into the country in industrial-scale proportion. No less than 3 metric tonnes was brought in from Cotonou alone in 2013 largely because of its low tariff of 30 per cent, compared to Nigeria's that was hiked, rather thoughtlessly, from 30 per cent to over 1000 per cent.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> "Flush out Slush Funds" (Ed), *The Nation*, 20 January 2015, p. 19.

<sup>20</sup> "Rice and Wrongs", Ed. *The Nation*, 21 January 2015.

### *(f) Professional Non-Democrats in Power*

To the extent that many of the operators of Nigeria's 4<sup>th</sup> republic either participated actively in military rule; did business, were cosy with it or were absent from pro-democracy barricades of the time, it is not always evident that they understand the nature and character of the democratic project they preside over. For these visible personages in the 4<sup>th</sup> republic, democracy – not unlike military rule – represents no more than a strategy for winning and retaining power. They are an ever present danger to the country's nascent democracy. They will do well to take a cue from the following Obama statement in a November 2013 speech on immigration at San Francisco: "we've got this Constitution; we've got this whole thing about separation of powers. So there is no short cut to politics and there is no short cut to democracy".<sup>21</sup>

### **The Leadership Question**

Absent in much of the contemporary Nigerian political elite is the spirit of political evangelism and reforming zeal fired by commitment to the cause of political nationalism and Pan-Africanism found in a cross-section of the immediate post-independence elite. This is a crucially important point because as the leaders go, so go the people, suggesting that the leader can

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<sup>21</sup> See Linda Feldman, "Is Obama an Imperial President?" *The Christian Science Monitor*, 21 January 2014.

make a huge difference – sometimes difference of epochal dimension, for good or for ill.

Badly governed, poorly choreographed, the 4<sup>th</sup> republic is in search of a new breath. Akinlotan (2014: 80) puts the low quality of political leadership on parade:

*Since the time of ... Obasanjo, through the reign of Umaru Yar'Adua, now under the subversive rule of Dr Jonathan, leadership recruitment has been so flawed and polluted that only the worst have been able to claim Aso Villa. Chief Obasanjo was a megalomaniac without the redeeming feature of ideological or moral conviction ... Yar'Adua was somewhat more honest and altruistic than his predecessor, but he was entirely lethargic, superficial and permissive. Dr Jonathan has blended in himself the worst qualities of his two predecessors. In him, pedantry, egotism, superficiality and despotism reach their sublime worst.*

This explains why governance has been turned into what Dare (2014: 64) calls 'jamborees without end'. Writing in September 2014, he elaborates:

*In keeping with this jamboree tradition, a high level Executive-Legislative team, led by ... Dr Okonjo-Iweala has just completed its mission in the UK and in the US where it held meetings with 'Diaspora Nigerians' in London, Washington, New York and Houston ... The practice (of Diaspora supporting home) has been going on for decades and will continue as long as there are so-*



*called Diaspora Nigerians with obligation to discharge back home. No Executive-Legislative intervention was required to start, and none is required to sustain it. The team that Dr Okonjo-Iweala led to London ... was preaching to the choir ... You court the choristers so that they do not migrate elsewhere. But this particular choir is not the type that migrates. Though domiciled abroad, it is part and parcel of the Nigerian reality, You do not need to make a round trip of 20,000 miles at huge cost to an anaemic exchequer to preach to it.*

Leadership is not about projects, important as infrastructure is in a typical neo-colony such as Nigeria where our leaders have to be prodded, in an extremely humiliating manner, by the so-called international community, to respect the laws of our own land. In a fundamental sense, leadership is about the thoughts and ideas behind the infrastructure, as well as regaling one's compatriots about the grandiose ideas behind and the benefits of democracy. It is also about character, integrity and a sense of shame. Genuine leaders will do exactly what they say and say exactly what they do.

There are contradictory testimonies in this respect. One, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the late Sardauna of Sokoto, reportedly said the following to his cabinet: "Anyone of my ministers that wants to do business should resign and do so and I will help you, but you cannot be a minister and businessman at the same time ... *I don't want to die and leave behind plenty money; I want to be remembered as having worked for my people and not as someone*

*who has accumulated wealth*” (Emphasis mine; cited in Salihu, 2015: 44).

Two, five fleeting days to the end of his tenure in 2007, Obasanjo flagged off the contract for the second Niger Bridge. That was a huge scam because, according to then Works minister, Hassan Mohammed Lawal, recently let go in a bargain plea on charges of public thievery, no contract had been awarded! (Akaeze, 2015: 4).

Three, on a campaign trail in January 2015, President Jonathan regaled his audience about how, under the so-called Transformation Agenda of his government, Nigeria is now enjoying food sufficiency and food security. He was quite oblivious of the fact that a couple of days earlier a CBN report had shown that inflation rate had gone up, no thanks to rising food prices!

Perhaps more importantly, neo-fascist tactics of cheap propaganda and endless celebration of fathom achievements recall the happily defunct regimes of Babangida and Abacha with, respectively, Association for a Better Nigeria (ABN) and Youths Earnestly Ask for Abacha (YEAA), both of which ended in predictable grief. Real achievements speak for themselves; they don't need propaganda. My worry is that impressionistic youth may think that, coming from the nation's president, it is the way to go.

## Concluding Remarks

I have argued in the foregoing that military and elite pact that birthed the 4<sup>th</sup> republic in May 1999 has not worked. There is, thus, the need for a new paradigm of state-society relations and a brand new social contract and governance paradigm that will launch Nigeria on the path of genuine democratization and popular empowerment.

The structural violence thesis may also find expression in the use to which security agencies are put in the February 2015 elections either as a pawn in the chessboard of the ruling party or as committed patriots to the Nigerian state and people. The SSS, Police, the military and para-military forces – that is the *securocracy* and *securocrats*– should disobey all unlawful orders no matter their source. INEC also comes into sharp focus. Its shambolic distribution of Permanent Voters Cards (PVC) may have given it unwanted negative publicity, but few, if any, can impugn the character of Professor Attahiru Jega, its Chairman, as well as, notably, a former President of the highly regarded Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU).

Let me reiterate a major point developed both implicitly and explicitly in this essay: it is too late to have free and fair elections in February 2015 -- let alone elections that are free from fear. Fairly credible elections are a possibility but they have to be exacted at a cost, including through eternal vigilance and standing to be counted on the side of political truth and social justice.

The most critical political struggle in the aftermath of the forthcoming polls – irrespective of the party that wins at the centre and the presidency – should be centred on bringing the state back into the public sphere and space where it really belongs. Why we are where we are today, with all the shenanigans of the political elite the Nigerian people routinely put up with, is because the Nigerian state ceased long ago – arguably since Babangida rolled out, rather deceptively, the first set of orthodox market reforms in the mid-1980s – to be a public agency that gives happiness and welfare to Nigerians.

Once the state is brought back in – that singular fact alone – will ensure that corruption, clientelism and cronyism – the three ugly brothers -- do not foster their nets any longer. Public resources will be released for public goods provisioning. Free and fair elections will not happen suddenly, but we will be on the road to recovering it as a prized trophy for this generation and the ones to follow. The ballot would have, by then, almost fully supplanted bullet!

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