

IMMINENT COLLAPSE OF THE NIGERIA FOURTH (4TH) REPUBLIC: A REALISTIC ASSESSMENT OF MAJOR SIGNPOSTS

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ABSTRACT

The first civilian republic was officially inaugurated in 1959 and lasted eight years before the advent of the military. The second civilian administration barely survived for four years, 1970-1983, the third republic was aborted in the throes of delivery, under General Babangida in 1993, two years after the process started from below. This fourth republic started in 1999 and has recorded many novel firsts: the first civilian administration to last more than ten years; the first to witness three successful civilian successions at the federal level, the first to transfer power from one region to another peacefully. In spite of these firsts, the clamour for total overhaul or drastic return to the past is getting louder. These calls are not emanating from the known military apologists. This development should not be taken for granted as the issue deserves proper understanding and placement. The continued survival of democracy, despite its shortcomings, appears to have guaranteed Nigeria smooth passage and respectability in the committee of sovereign states. The black man should not be seen as incapable of running and maintaining a system which other nations in the third world had successfully run for over fifty years with noticeable gains and societal transformation. There is the need to study the underlying grounds for the sudden romantic appeal of the past and to understand the social adjustments needed to stem the slide from the mundane to the dangerous precipice.

INTRODUCTION

The most benevolent dictatorship is more abhorrent than the most despicable rule of self-government. While the former stripe you of dignity and dehumanizes you, the latter is just an insult of a few months (Late Claude Ake).

Take a look at the Nigerian tabloids and you would be amazed at the number of Nigerians directly and indirectly asking when this current democratic experiment would come to an end. It is both puzzling and instructive that this quest to know the end of the fourth republic in Nigeria comes from even those who are solidly benefiting from the fourth republic administrations. Obviously, there are those who want to know when this republic would cease so as to make necessary consolidative arrangements that would prevent them from wasting what they have amassed over the years. There are also those who cannot wait to hear of the demise of the republic because they truly feel short-changed, denied of access to opulence or simply mortified by the evidence of deepening greed, corruption, mal-administration and societal

stagnation. What appears to be certain and undeniable is that Nigerians of different walks of life are currently engaged in a rather clairvoyant inquest into the life-span of the 4th republic! As social scientists, we need to take cognizance of the submission of Ellen Orswald in *The Dimension of Authority and Power* (Orswald, 2009).

For too long, social science and basic humanities appear to be merely concerned with posthumous analyses, definition of concepts, revalidation of old theorems, paradigms and events. We are comfortable with social aspects that show us to be politically correct and non-controversial! Yet, the social scientists must realize that in the new reality of information age, evaluation of current events and prophetic assessments must be constantly churned out if they are to remain relevant and professional. The gap between the religious prophets and modern day social scientists is disappearing on a daily basis because the information available to us now are ubiquitous, global and compelling.

The words of Ellen Orswald definitely promoted and galvanized the interest in this research work and account for the problematique. Why are people looking forward to the collapse of the 4th republic? What is going on to warrant the inquest? Which group stands to benefit from the failure of the 4th republic, the Activists or the Military? Can we as Political Scientists try to provide answers to the central question: why is the 4th Republic failing and what will replace the fourth republic? Above all, should practitioners of our trade engage in predictive and prophetic analysis?

For starter, we take profound and immeasurable solace in Orswald (2009) who categorically posited that our job has moved from posthumous analyses to prescriptive and prophetic analyses because of the avalanche of information available to us now. Historically too, we recall that as far back as 1964, Columnists, Social commentators and University dons had started predicting the collapse of the 1st republic (that is, two years before it really happened). In 1981, two years before the removal of Shagari and the death of the second republic, political theoreticians like Late Obafemi Awolowo, Prof. Claude Ake and Ayekooto of Tribune stables had written lucid articles detailing circumstances that would force the military out of their barracks, again into political governance. Furthermore, Bola Ige's tirades on the pages of newspapers climaxed into the famous "siddon look" which correctly predicted a transition to nowhere in spite of the elaborate and expensive "Transition Programme" of General Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida.

In short, we are not only permitted to probe into the future, the scientists are amply positioned to use the tools of his trade to analyses today and also show how things will unfold tomorrow. Besides, it is not new to us in Africa as our senior colleagues had done so in the past, with appreciable success. The danger-signposts of the first republic which were documented include the extremely high level of tribal/ethnic divisions which permeated the republic, the obscene regional imbalance

amongst the regions which precipitated tension, jealousy and disaffection, the manipulation of the 1963 Census; the unholy collaboration between the North and the East aimed at limiting the progress of the West through direct and discreet interference together with the weak central leadership provided by the Northern People's Congress (NPC). In February 1964, Ayo Rosiji, the Federal Commissioner for Information alluded to these five factors and predicted (though wrongly) that the police would take over government as was happening in the Latin American hemisphere. By 1981, Prof. Claude Ake and Chief Obafemi Awolowo independently pointed to (1) lack of democracy within the political parties (2) incurable indiscipline within the political class (3) profligacy and reckless spending which depleted foreign reserves and exposed the nation to foreign manipulation (4) rising corruption index which created lazy and unpatriotic overnight-millionaires who added no value to capitalism and (5) ineptitude of the federal government under Shagari's as the major danger signposts of the 2nd republic. This time, with bulls-eye-accuracy, they predicted military agitations within two years. By January 1, 1984, the military had toppled the civilian government of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN).

It therefore, appears to be true and apposite to state in the affirmative that politicians and social scientists predicted the fall of the 1st and 2nd civilian administration even while the government were still in power. Today, the world is essentially knowledge-based and successful government can only be driven by owners of ideas. The academic is certainly a prime mover for the promotion of social values and awareness in politics, commerce and religion. Moreover, in the human jungle of ignorance characterized by a steady flight of wisdom and rationality, where ethnic and religious sentiments are easily exploited, the academic is indispensable as a torch-bearer shedding light on the society, polity, governance, injustice, use of power and the enduring propensity of man as a political animal (Tunde Adeniran, 2011, p.265).

FUNCTIONALISM AND COMMUNICATIONS THEORY

Two theories which capture and cover a good deal of the issues highlighted in this study are the functionalist theory, often called functionalism and the communications theory. Perhaps, it is the inability of person and bodies engaged in the running of this nation, to fully understand the roles and functions allocated to them, which explains the reason behind the growing calls for military return. Functionalism places emphasis on the diligent performance of roles by officials and competent fulfillment of responsibilities allocated to statutory bodies. The ineptitude of the federal legislative bodies (Senate and House of Representatives) would impact negatively on the Legislative Arm.

Incompetence of the Police and Ministers means that the Executive is shackled while corruption in the courts of law simply results into perversion of justice and judiciary failure. Perhaps the distance between the government and the people being ruled can be explained strictly through insufficient communication between both

parties. In the course of this work, readers may be struck by the fact that, in Nigeria of 2011, the political atmosphere epitomizes the negatives of the two conceptual paradigms. Elected officers and other functionaries do not appear to know their roles and end up performing woefully while the statutory organs created for pivotal functions of the state have not been able to fully function as expected. As if this functional imbalance were not bad enough, we also have the grave burden of insufficient communication between leadership and followership. It is obvious that this display of functional imbalance and insufficient communication have resulted in public despair and angst consequently manifesting in calls for the return of the Military.

CONTEMPORARY NIGERIAN POLITICS

Students of History and Political Science should be frightened to see how Nigeria of today closely resembles the "decadent society" described in the 1930s by the Indian sage, Mahatma Ghandi. On his journey between Johannesburg and India, Ghandi told his followers that Capitalism would be difficult to defeat because it taps its success from the most vibrant energy of the young, the greedy, the ambitious and the most imaginative men and women in the society. Ghandi predicted that in spite of the rosy future of the capitalist countries, a time would come when capitalism would also produce a "decadent society which would be characterized by politics without principles, wealth without hardworking, commerce without morality, pleasure without conscience, education without character, science without humanity and worship without sacrifice". It would be hard to argue that Nigeria of 2011 does not exhibit each of the seven indices listed by Mahatma Ghandi.

In the political sphere, every aspect of politics has been obscenely monetized. The process of seeking nomination for elective office, the ratification process, the electoral contest between parties, the voting exercise, appeal to the judicial system, swearing-in-ceremony and other political processes now attract huge financial demands ranging from millions to billions of Naira. The concept of service has been turned upside down as the people you want to serve (and also the voters) now openly demand for money before commitment. From cross comparison along states boundaries, the average cost of clinching the seat of Local Government Chairman ranges between N25 million and N40 million. Presidential contests exceed the billion naira mark. Senatorial aspirants who do not have more than N200 million in their dormant accounts would not be advised to pursue such office. It is even suggested that the contest in the year 2015 would require more that the present calculations (Adewale, 2010, 17)

The high monetization of politics has implications in three grave areas (a) the elimination and forced removal of the working class from seeking political office since no honest, hardworking Nigerian can boast of accumulating such sums of money (b) the absence of quality hands in the critical segments of the political leadership. This explains how drug barons and 419ners gained seats in the Senate

and (c) the loss of public confidence in the major institutions of governance and the rise of public ill will and angst against the Fourth Republic (Opeyemi, 2010, 104). A serious form of disenfranchisement is going on in the republic via the emphasis placed on cash-backing for public positions. This is indeed a fundamental negation of democracy. As pointed out by Babatope (Tribune of 16th August 2010) the barrels of gun have now been replaced with the wands of cash as the essential requirement for public office in Nigeria.

Within twelve years (1999-2011), the incompetence of the institutions of government has been revealed to all. When corruption is added to such incompetence, the result is dismal failure and total inability to deliver the mouth-touted dividends of democracy. In those twelve years, the highest echelon of the police has been disgraced (Tafa Balogun's trial and imprisonment), the federal legislature could not correctly read and interpreted a written constitution during the prolonged illness of President Yar'Adua and lately the ugly revelations which gravely question the integrity of the judiciary, especially the Federal Courts of Appeal and the Supreme Court (Salami versus Katsina-Alu). From these three examples, the incompetence of the executive arm, the legislative arm and the judiciary had been established. However, the rot is not limited to the federal level alone as equally serious disclosures abound at the state and local government levels.

In spite of the establishment of anti-corruption agencies, there is compelling evidence that the illness continues to fester and spread like an active virus. The Corruption Perception Index (CPI scores) of Nigeria for the last three years continues to get worse in 2008, 2.7 out of 10, in 2009, 2.5 and 2010, 2.4. (The Punch Newspaper, 20/9/2011). Corruption continues to ravage every sphere of governance and government activity. It shows itself in public works, education, commerce, economic development, etc. Prof. Niyi Akinnaso made the point clearly in his article published by the Punch when he said:

The effect of political corruption on education is almost pervasive. The persistent embezzlement of Universal Basic Education and Normadic Education funds guarantees Nigeria's continued membership of E-9, that is, nine countries blacklisted by the United Nations as educationally disadvantaged because of their high illiteracy rates... There is also a correlation between political corruption and disease control. The diversion into private coffers of the funds meant for vaccines, drugs and hospital facilities has led to deaths from preventable and treatable diseases (Akinnaso, 2001).

The cumulative impact of corruption in Nigeria's welfare is confirmed by the poor ranking given to the country in the Human Development Index. We are now 145th position out of a total of 172 countries. It is precisely this deterioration in the living standards of Nigerians, coupled with the fact that life did not appear to be so hard under the military that is now leading to the romanticization of the age of military rule amongst the masses.

The unwillingness or lack of capability within the political class to make necessary political adjustments to our 'federalism' further compounds a bad situation. The lopsidedness in the divisions of power and authority, both in fiscal and non-fiscal areas would continuously provoke tension and bitterness in the polity. In a polyglot like Nigeria where heterogeneous identities and demands exist, only a truly progressive and transparent practice of the federalism can allay the fears of domination, marginalization, insecurity and social injustice. The seeming confusion of leadership to tackle this problem directly leads to growing unpopularity of both the fourth republic and the operators of the structures of democracy.

The emasculation of the middle class in Nigeria, through dubious policies of the civilian administrations has done the greatest damage to democratic rule and credentials. There is no denying the fact that, under the military, there was an expansion of the middle class as well as obvious improvement in its fortunes. This class is made up of teachers, engineers, University lecturers, senior civil servants, professionals like pilots, architects, medical doctors, principals of schools and colleges, journalists etc. In the past ten years, many people who once thrived in the middle class were relegated to the lower class of the Low Income Group (L.I.G) where acute poverty and social deprivation exist. Yet, these are people who always provide reasons and justifications for change of government. Protests, strikes, lock-outs, demonstrations and occasional confrontations with the Police are trademarks of the middle class and there is no denying the fact that these efforts have been on the increase in the past three years, Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU), Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC), Medical Doctors, Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), and other Civil Servants and even the Police have all been on strikes. The reports and write-ups from the middle class have been critical and very negative lately. It does appear as if the ground is being prepared for military intervention. This is perhaps why the tabloids are full of demands and calls for the sweeping change or direct intervention from the military.

THE CURRENT DOOMSDAY SCENARIO

The plight of democracy in Nigeria would not have been as bleak as it is today if only Nigerians had felt the impact of government. Unfortunately, over the past two years, the people have seen more politics than governance. For about eight months, during terminal illness of Late President Yar'Adua, the people did not see any government activity but only witnessed politics of retention of power in the Northern Nigeria versus politics of constitutionalism. As soon as God sorted that out through the death of the late President, Nigeria entered into the politics of where the next Presidential Candidate should come from, the politics of Zoning. While that was going on, we entered the real politics of election and re-election which ended on the 29th of May, 2011. The politics of ministerial nomination and confirmation followed and till date, the southwest is still seriously involved in its politics of under-representation and denial of political equity. While all these politics went on, the

roads suffered neglect, staff salaries got delayed, education suffered neglect, the health sector got no attention and the people do not feel the impact of government.

The security (or better, insecurity) situation in Nigeria is frightening for both the wealthy and the poor, the level of collective fear has moved progressively from normal to horrid, and now, to hopeless; while the Niger Delta militants and kidnapers have become subliminal in their operations, the Boko Haram bombers of the North have kept the government scampering for hide-outs. If government, with all its security agencies could be so easily bullied, the plight of the common man is best imagined. The implication of the foregoing is that actual governance involving concrete provision for the people gave way to mere politics of jaw-jaw that had no impact on the people.

THE WAY FORWARD

The only way out is for President Jonathan and all state governors to abandon politics (urgently) and immediately embark on governance and decision-making which would have direct bearing on citizens lives. The distance between government and the people can only be breached if the President and the state executives can declare a moratorium on politics and use such time to win back peoples' confidence. The administrators must be conscious of the fact that governments in the third world exist not only for the distribution of amenities but also to provide social entertainment for their people. Any African government which fails to realize that it owes its people the duty of entertainment would blame itself ultimately since the public entertainment industry which could take minds away from day to day struggles has not been fully established. If, within the next six months, the federal and state executives can deliver meaningful services in road construction, power generation, agriculture, effective security and trial of high profile corruption cases, there would be a reduction in the number of people looking forward to the demise of civilian democracy.

Imaginative re-engineering of the political structures by the federal government would remove the rug under the feet of the critics. A new look and practice of federalism would be required, the introduction of state Police under well thought out and streamlined conditions would be necessary to promote security and give meaning to the position of state governors, as Chief Security officers of their respective states. The Zero-sum politics of winner takes all needs fundamental adjustment and recruitment into leadership positions cannot continue along the narrow, clannish, almost aristocratic lines which we see today. Some names are beginning to sound like recurring decimals just because recruitment avenues into leadership cadre in Nigeria have been shut to those regarded as outsiders. Names like Shagari, Tinubu, Ige, Obasanjo, Saraki, Nwodo and co are beginning to sound dynastic in our democratic experiment.

Through electoral arrangement or through a review of the 1999 constitution, the middle class, as the holders of morality and the custodians of conscience, must be given adequate space for participation in governance and electoral system.

Competence, integrity, track records, good pedigree, educational attainments and linkage to other nations must not be sacrificed for money in the politics of Nigeria. If civilian democracy would thrive and accomplish the goals of modernization and development, then, the president and his advisers must design means and ways of ensuring vibrant middle class participation in civilian democracy (Aluko, 2006, 31).

Nigeria must move away from Ghandi's postulation of a decadent society where people become wealthy without hardwork, where people without character are regarded as educated. We must remove ourselves from politics which lacks principles, or commerce without morality. Drug dealers, kidnappers, traffickers in human beings, suppliers of ladies and children for adult pornography all consider themselves to be "business men", in Nigeria. Our people no longer make distinction about the sources of wealth and every day we see the glorification of evil in our daily lives. The job of orientation and re-orientation must be strengthened in such a way that appropriate agencies can apply to courts for legal deferment of recognition for those whose sources of income appear questionable and those whose conducts appear to tarnish the image of the country.

If the current civilian administration can courageously create special courts to try cases of corruption in Nigeria and simultaneously fast track the process of obtaining due justice, then democratic governance would have permanently endeared it to the people. A lot can also be done in the mass Communication industry. Federal and state government are still represented in the electronic media of radio and television stations but the same cannot be said of the print medium where government owned tabloids like Daily Times, New Nigeria, Sketch, Herald, Tide, Daily Post etc are all dead. It is becoming increasingly difficult for the opinions, views and explanations of government to reach the people. Even in the developed countries, the governments expend huge resources to ensure that people get to hear their own side of the story. The high cost of electronic gadgets like radio and television in addition to the problem of power supply in Nigeria would compel any discerning administration to re-invest in Newspaper publications. In the absence of reliable information from both sides on an issue, citizens tend to jump to conclusions on the side of the person shouting most. To neutralize mischief and reduce the incidence of blackmail, federal and state governments should renew their interests in printing and publication of dailies and periodic magazines which would explain and clarify policy decisions to the citizenry.

CONCLUSION

Taking a cue from the persistent calls from some Nigerians that the fourth republic has outlived its usefulness, this study attempted to look at the reasons why such calls are becoming pervasive. Operating from the combined theoretical prisms of the Functionalists and the Communicationists, it posits that roles and functions allotted to persons and bodies have been badly managed in the past twelve years. Moreover,

the breakdown of communication between the rulers and the ruled, for a sustained period of time, is enough reason for the people to start glorifying the return of the military to power. The study concludes that in the event of systemic failure on the part of civilian operators of our democracy, the only group that is viably organized and can also boast of controlling the instruments of violence is the military. However, it is suggested that five measures that can be taken to avert the doomsday prolong the lifespan of civilian rule and the fourth republic in Nigeria. The study observes that it would take strong political will and human determination to pursue the fundamental political re-engineering necessary to sustain civilian democracy. Divine Goodluck may also be needed!

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