

The Nigerian Political Experience Introspection

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In 1979, a second republic was established as Nigerian leaders installed what they believed was a formidable and reliable democracy by way of the presidential system of governance. Prior to that year, the government had been in the hands of the military since the coup of 1966. Unfortunately, that was not to be, for after four years of party politics, the military returned. Indeed, the country has witnessed an endemic dismantling of democratic government by the military. One would have expected a “sane” system to correct the ills that have led to the collapse of each republic the country has had, but each attempt by the military or civilians leaves acutely desired outcomes. Nigerians at home and abroad, who have braced for the “fall” of the country due to its squandered potentials, have tactically entrenched their minds to secure their personal self, by whatever manner they deem possible. For some, leaving the shores of the Fatherland became inevitable, for others, staying in the country to “play ball” for survival have no better alternatives. This submission by the author is an obvious brief of the history of the Federal Republic of Nigeria the past 35 years, but the lesson here is embedded in the end for the reader.

In 1983, a military regime led by Major-General Muhammadu Buhari assumed power through a coup with a desire to “clean house,” to rid the country of the corrupt tendencies of second republic leaders headed by former President Shehu Shagari. Aided by his chief of staff, supreme headquarters, Major-General Tunde Idiagbon, these two, termed by some as “The Duo” seized power on December 31, 1983, but their legacy was

short lived on August 27, 1985 when another insider, trusted with the task of leading the Army, betrayed such trust and seized power as well from them. That “traitor” was General Ibrahim Gbadamosi Babangida, otherwise known as IBB. It is fair to say that Nigerians, including some in the military, were accustomed and in the habit of soiling the polity and the Nigerian Economy, therefore, toppling General M. Buhari came as no surprise to many. General Muhammed Buhari had begun to wage war against corruption in governance and all aspects of public life. However, “Maradona,” as General Ibrahim Gbadamosi Babangida was fondly called, ensured the demise of the duo’s regime by the 1985 coup and consequently “re-opened the gates of corruption.” After President Babangida’s eight-year rule, the following took up the mantle of leadership: Chief Ernest Sonekan, General Sani Abacha, General Abubakar Abdul Salami, in that order. Unfortunately, you must permit me to say that each successive regime supervised a culture of ruination of our beloved country, a culture which spread from the fabric of the civil service to the grassroots.

To buttress the point made above in one singular example, the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) reported that up to \$2 billion were allegedly stolen by Sani Abacha’s government, while another report suggested that Ismaila Gwarzo, Abacha’s then National Security Adviser paid back \$250 million that had been stolen from public accounts (<http://www.rrojasdatabank.info/corrupt.htm>). When it all appeared obvious that the military finally realized they weren’t exactly what they said they are, they vowed to stay back in their barracks to allow for a lasting democracy for the people in a Third Republic.

This Third Republic was welcomed in ‘good faith’ by all believing that lessons had been learnt by those with the levers of power. Nigerians thought and hoped that history, the greatest teacher, had taught leaders aspiring to serve their people how to get it right, after all it is said that “the third time is the charm.” But, sixteen years from 1999 the country has drifted and witnessed more ruination. President Olusegun Obasanjo became the first Third Republic elected civilian president and was re-elected a second time. Deceased President Shehu Yar’Adua was next, who died in office after two years. His Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan succeeded him and was later elected on his own term. However, in April 2015, Jonathan’s attempt to be re-elected came to a dead end.

Nigeria has never been at such crossroads with the eminence of potential fragmentation, leaving citizens with severe irreparable damage. Nigerian leaders exhibited a reckless display of poor governance skills during the third republic, leaving Nigerians perplexed and frustrated to the point of going in search of a new “messiah” to safeguard the future of their children, and the wellbeing of the country. The gross exhibition of a lack of fairness, justice, probity and accountability reached alarming proportions. For example, despite the soaring oil revenues accruing to the country until very recently, Nigerian reserves from such oil sales have been dismal. The compensation of legislators has been recorded as the highest globally. Reports by the former governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN), and current Emir of Kano Sanusi Lamido, that \$20 billion of the country’s oil revenue was missing, a statement that eventually cost him his job as CBN governor. These jaw-dropping headlines are just a few news stories that tugged at our hearts. As oil prices fell, the government’s penchant for squander and imprudence resorted to borrowing to pay workers who had gone for five months without

pay. These actions spoke volumes to Nigerians about the total disregard for decency or lack of the rule of law, and the zero principles of accountability.

In the middle of this recklessness, an emerging insurgency began by a ragtag band of marauders sweeping across the North Eastern region, through the Middle Belt areas including Southern Kaduna, maiming and killing residents, dispossessing them of their land and property while leaders watched without action as if combating the insurgency and keeping the peace in the country was not the responsibility of the elected leaders. The historic abduction of about 300 young girls from their secondary school in Chibok, Borno State by Boko Haram, saw a coalition of global leaders pledging human and military support for Nigeria, to help wipe out this pandemic insurgency. However, such global “capital of aid” from those experienced in techniques of search and rescue was very quickly squandered by the powers that be in the pretext that the situation was under sovereign control. President Jonathan had acknowledged that “Boko Haram members or sympathizers may be present in government and security agencies: some of them are in the executive arm of government, some of them are in the parliamentary/legislative arm of government, while some of them are even in the judiciary. Some are also in the armed forces, the police and other security agencies” (Solomon, 2012, p.10). Yet, he has failed to wield the big stick against these enemies of Nigeria. Former President in the third republic, Olusegun Obasanjo, stated that his administration and that of late Yar’adua generated into the country’s foreign reserve account \$40 billion and \$60 billion respectively, accusing President Jonathan of mismanaging over \$25 billion crude oil savings his government had left behind. General Obasanjo similarly scolded Goodluck Jonathan for dwindling the foreign reserve, which he regretted had declined to \$40

billion. Besides mismanaging the economy, the former president further attacked Jonathan's administration for promoting corruption and failure to confront insecurity challenges in the country (<http://www.africanexaminer.com/again-obasanjo-blasts-jonathan-accuses-him-of-squandering-oil-revenue-foreign-reserves>).

The brief as summarized thus far, only speaks to the lack of statesmanship and the vacuum of true leadership qualities in Nigerian leaders. It berates the country for not possessing a single Nigerian leader who emulates, resonates with or imbibes any of the great attributes of great historic global men and women who imbued everyone with fascinating courage, fought their societal ills for their people. Men and women of candor whose work and great life's stories will forever remain monumental in every human mind. Consider the likes of Nelson Mandela of South Africa, who spent 27 years in jail for the love of his people, stood firm to denounce apartheid, spoke with courage and refused to compromise himself even while in prison because he cared about the welfare of his people. He stated that "I have fought against white domination . . . black domination. I have cherished the ideal of a democratic and free society in which all persons live together in harmony and with equal opportunities. It is an ideal which I hope to live for and to achieve. But if needs be, it is an ideal for which I am prepared to die" (Clinton and Annan, 2003, p. 42).

Martin Luther King Jr., a theologian and preacher, of the United States of America fought against domination and segregation against blacks. He did not care about his personal gain but that of humanity. Mr. King did not go the Nigerian way of demanding for special access and privileges from white friends in power to the detriment

of the minority. He chose otherwise, stood up, denied himself privileges, fought segregation but eventually paid with the ultimate price of death because he was too resolute for his enemies. While addressing blacks on the imprisonment of Rosa Parks who refused to give up her bus seat to a white passenger, he said:

There comes a time when people get tired. We are here this evening to say to those who have mistreated us so long that we are tired . . . tired of being kicked about by the brutal feet of oppression. . . . For many years, we have shown amazing patience. We have sometimes given...the feeling that we like the way we were being treated. But we come here tonight to be saved from that patience that makes us patients with anything less than freedom and justice. (Lewis, 2013, p. 58).

The resilience exhibited by Dr Martin L. King Jr. was one that liberates the mind, which is why most of the civil right activists united and stood together with him. His death, the price he paid for humankind, dismantling segregation in his country. Today, the result of Martin Luther King's struggles made it possible for the election and re-election of the first black President of the U.S.A., Barack Obama and it is fair to say that King's struggles inspired black South Africans to hope for and witnessed the prisoner becoming the first black president, Nelson Mandela, and the abolition of apartheid.

Well, Nigerians here we are, despite no white domination after 55 years of independence, Nigerians themselves exercise a "brutal feet of oppression" over their fellow citizens by the deliberate misuse of people's resources and selective maltreatment of non - privileged Nigerians including the squandering of the future resources of our children. Consider the selfless struggles endured by these two great men, Mandela of

South Africa and Martin Luther King Jr. of the USA. They ensured through their struggle equal opportunity for all their people, including those yet to be born. Had Martin Luther King Jr. never fought the way he did, Barack Obama might never have been president of the U.S.A, while Nelson Mandela might have probably died or been killed in jail and apartheid may still have been alive.

The kind of headlines you read about Nigerian leaders are not the kind of stories you should be reading about employees entrusted with leadership: “Information available to [newspunch.org](http://www.newspunch.org) suggests that a mind-boggling sum of \$700 million was allegedly found in the house of Nigeria’s Minister of Petroleum Resources, Mrs. Diezani Alison Madueke (<http://www.newspunch.org/exclusive-700-million-raw-cash-found-in-petroleum-ministers-house-jonathan-covers-up-2>). This is the same minister who witnessed the sacking of four Group Managing Directors under her stewardship within a four-year period, leaving her job intact. In fact, President Jonathan thought she was doing a great job. He has even emulated the minister’s example by firing the inspector-general of police and several other top hirelings, including members of the governing councils of federal universities.

2015 is a milestone in Nigeria. Now, General Muhammadu Buhari, whose ‘most desired’ government by Nigeria’s needs was interrupted by General Babangida in 1985; the patriot general who attempted to bring sanity into governance in 1983, but was foiled, now has another chance, only this time, it’s a mandate by majority of Nigerians through the ballot box. History has been made, for by simply exercising their mandate to electing

Buhari as president, and the willing concession by President Goodluck Jonathan, Nigeria may yet see the kind of statesmanship - like qualities witnessed in some countries.

Nigerians have elected a citizen dedicated to self denial and focused on uplifting our great country through fair, just and accountable ways, something never witnessed in the Nigerian polity in a very long while. The president-elect has lived his life with only one dedication apart from his family, bringing back sanity and human decency in the ways government and citizens think and do business. Many Nigerians attest to the fact that General Buhari is a patriot who has not been allowed the chance to prove his love and passion for Nigeria, and possesses skills at taming the country's "killer," corruption.

In a battered country and economy like Nigeria, where governance has been reckless, with wasted oil revenues, infrastructural decay, epileptic power supply, unemployment figures, about 40%, poor agricultural output, and with an overt dependence on oil resources, no one should envy the president-elect because of the responsibility he will inherit. For example, he has to bring our schools and hospitals from the brink of collapse, cut waste in government, restore sanity to public life and inspire the electorate to dream big and hoping to change Nigerians' moral consciousness. The question for Nigerians is; how patient would they be, as this patriot begins the repair process. It is no secret that repairing something takes time compared to how little time it takes to destroy it. It is important that everyone realizes they need to be a part of this revitalization agenda, if fallen bridges, damaged roads, dilapidated schools and battered hospitals are to be reconstructed, and jobs created for the graduates leaving colleges. Nigerians must not only allow the President-elect to do what it takes to save the country

from imminent collapse, they must support him to do just that! This is about fairness, justice and accountability all the way!

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