

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS  
LIBRARY

3/196  
L  
36  
L25  
191

# THE TRANSFORMATION OF NIGERIA: SCENARIOS AND METAPHORS

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS  
LIBRARY

BY

ALABA OGUNSANWO



UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS PRESS - 1991  
INAUGURAL LECTURE SERIES

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS  
LIBRARY

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS  
LIBRARY

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS  
LIBRARY

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS  
LIBRARY



UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS  
LIBRARY

THE TRANSFORMATION OF NIGERIA SCENARIOS  
AND METAPHORS

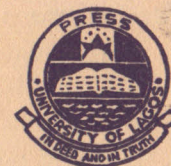
An Inaugural Lecture delivered at the University  
of Lagos on Wednesday, August 8, 1990

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS  
LIBRARY

By

317622

Alaba Ogunsanwo  
*Professor of Political Science*  
*University of Lagos*



University of Lagos Press

1991

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS  
LIBRARY

© Alaba Ogunsanwo 1991

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be used or reproduced without written approval of the author.

First Published 1991

By

University of Lagos Press  
Unilag P. O. Box 132  
University of Lagos  
Akoka, Yaba,  
Lagos.

ISBN 978-017-026-X

## THE TRANSFORMATION OF NIGERIA SCENARIOS AND METAPHORS

MR. VICE-CHANCELLOR Sir, I consider it a privilege to stand here today to give my inaugural lecture. Within four days of my appointment as Professor of Political Science on December 17, 1984, I sent a memo to the Secretary of the Ceremonies Committee requesting permission to give my inaugural lecture immediately on the topic of the transformation of Nigeria. I received a reply stating that I must await my turn. I made the request then partly because it was in conformity with the tradition I was familiar with at the London School of Economics and Political Science where the inaugural lecture announced the appointment of a new professor. The other reason for my request then was my deep aversion for debt as the then Vice-Chancellor was fond of reminding every inaugural lecturer of the fact that he or she was paying a long overdue debt to the University community. So much water has passed under the bridge since December 1984 but I still regard my presence here today, as a privilege for this will be the first inaugural lecture given by any Professor of Political Science in this University since it was established in 1962. Hence I doff my hat to my senior colleagues in the discipline beginning with Professor Babs Williams whose intellectual contributions represented a refulgent example worthy of emulation.

Mine being the first inaugural lecture therefore, some may expect me to concentrate on an exposition tracing the metamorphosis of the discipline from the contributions of the early sages and through the ages to contemporary scholars whose writings have had an influence one way or the other on the art of governance and the affairs of men. It would be a sheer delight to take the audience through the contributions of such deep thinkers, philosophers, theolo-

gians mathematicians and sociologists, legal luminaries of the natural law tradition and their positivists counterparts for their great minds contributed in no mean measure to the art and science of politics today. Such minds as Socrates, Plato, Erasmus, Voltare, Aquinas, St Augustine, Locke, Ricardo, Confucius, Grotius, Maimonides, Hobbes, Machiavelli, Marx, Lenin, Mao, Fanon, Cabral, Kim, Niebuhr, Rodney and others. That in itself would have no doubt been a worthy exercise. We could also take on the task of examining the role of the political scientist in society for even as we stand here today, we are aware of accusations to the effect that the Nigerian Political Science Association has taken over the governance of this country through the ubiquitous presence in strategic areas. We will resist the temptation to do this although the role of intellectuals in the transformation of Nigeria will be treated in the course of this lecture.

If we take political science to mean "the application of the methods of acquiring scientific knowledge to the study of political phenomena", then we must conclude that it implies systematisation, conceptualisation, hypothesis, testing, validation and rigorous analysis. Policy prescription cannot take place in a vacuum of ignorance and unwarranted suppositions nor can it be based on esoteric considerations of such matters as how many angels can stand on the tip of a pin. Nay, it must be based on empirically sound and verifiable data which of course must be predicated on clearly stated theoretical foundations. In the affairs of state, it is necessary to adopt an interdisciplinary approach which takes the form of the homogenisation of the fundamental analytical competences of the basic social sciences — economics, sociology, psychology and political science. This we shall do in the course of this lecture.

The operational definition of transformation that we accept is one that connotes a change in form of character preferably from bad to good or from good to better. It also connotes some degree of fundamentality as may be witnessed

when boiled yam is transformed by pounding as against its merely being fried in eggs. Our use of the concept of transformation is therefore a positive one which nevertheless does not deny the fact that societies do get themselves transformed into decadence owing to the massive failure of leadership and the enthronement of Mammonian values by the deprecators and despoilers who find themselves in the sitting room and corridors of power. In the past forty — four years since I entered nursery school in April 1946 at the age of four, I have been involved in the education industry in Nigeria and can therefore rightly say that whatever I am today could not have been possible without this country Nigeria. I have therefore decided to make her the subject of my inaugural lecture today. I do this also because I believe that as a social scientist, I owe a duty to the past, present and future generations of Nigerians, to contribute my little quota to the solution of the myriad of problems which this country has had imposed on her first by foreign deprecators and then by the parasitic self centred multidimensional elite who to me would appear to have sworn on the Satanic oath which John Milton reported in his *Paradise Lost*:

"To do aught good never will be our task, But ever to do ill our sole delight, As being the contrary to his high will whom we resist. If then his providence out of our evil seek to bring forth good, Our labor must be to pervert that end".

I believe however that there are those who have not taken this oath and it is to them that I issue the invitation to come with me while I pursue not "things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme" but along a via dolorosa which hopefully will bring us to the light at the end of the tunnel and I may hasten to add, not the light of the relentless oncoming train but that of the glorious sun.

The transformation of a society can take many paths and we therefore admit that there is no immutable road to fundamental societal change. It is now a well established and indisputable fact that our colonial masters did not just hand over flag independence but had successfully manipulated the transition phase to marginalise and edge out genuinely democratic and patriotic forces who were easily

described as demagogues and rable rousers while installing a coterie of political actors who were expected to operate on shaky infrastructures that simply exacerbated the task of governance. The political culture handed down at independence was that of intolerance of opposition which of course had understandably been the hallmark of colonialism. This was worsened by an attitude to governance which viewed it as opportunity not just to authoritatively allocate the resources of society between competing segments of the community, but a heaven sent chance for self enrichment and aggrandisement creating a situation of wealth from generation to generation. This did not augur well for the country as this attitude instead of being discouraged by inheritors of power was actually built upon and was to see the emergence of large scale Kleptocracy in which the Nigerian masses were the hapless victims.

Iweriebor<sup>1</sup> has contended that in this type of exercise "a cursory historical voyage is necessary for two reasons. Firstly, it proceeds from the premise that an adequate understanding of the internal and external behaviour since nominal independence necessitates an antecedent understanding of the historical character, nature and form of the Nigerian state. Secondly, and building on the first, is the contention that it is only when the nature and character of the Nigerian state, both colonial and post-colonial is properly understood, will sincere remedies emerge for her liberation and subsequent development".

As a multinational state with peoples of diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds; but united by the common experience of colonial exploitation a vigorous address of the national question was not unexpected even during the colonial period. The more so as the colonial authorities themselves had exploited the heterogeneity through the tactics of divide and rule. It was therefore impossible to say "of forms of government, let fools contend" or to allow nationalism to take full control of the direction of demands for change. Instead, the competition for state power was predicated on arousing and engendering atavistic sentiments

designed to create ethnic power bases to ensure electoral victory thus sowing the seeds of future problem.

Nigeria at independence was a deformation in many senses. In terms of forms of government, the formula of federalism had been adopted as being the best suited in the circumstances of the country's diversity. Yet the logic of true federalism was not pursued to its conclusion. The result was a structural deformation which made one region in area terms twice as big as the other two regions put together. The agitation for states creation did not yield any concrete result during the colonial period, instead the myth of one north was created and sustained against the actual reality on ground — a myth that was to be completely shattered within less than fifty months of our flag independence. Had the country not moved at the time it did from a unitary system of twentyfour provinces into a terribly lopsided federation of three regions, perhaps the political landscape would have been different. Within the supposedly one north there was the existence of a semi feudal system of government which the patriotic Northern Elements Progressive Union of Aminu Kano was vehemently opposing. It questioned the fundamental assumption that providence could have been so callous as to decree the perpetual poverty and subjugation of the *talakawas* (the poor and oppressed in society) under the oppressive rule of the *sarakunas* (the rich and the powerful in the society who also unfortunately arrogated to themselves the role of spiritual guardians of the community. "You could not have been poor and belonged to the down trodden unless the Almighty had willed it and to question the enjoyed by the *sarakuna* is to question the wisdom of Allah". Aminu Kano and other right thinking patriots rejected that assumption and their position which the Peoples Redemption Party was to crystallise later may yet be in future the salvation of the down trodden masses in this country.

The second deformation at independence occurred in the area of the economy. We inherited a totally peripheral dependent economy which was outer directed and already effectively cut off by and large from our neighbouring countries economies. The bulk of our imports and exports was with the former colonial master with our agricultural production

The last of the inherited deformations that we wish to consider before going into the real meat of our lecture derives from the practice of colonialism earlier referred to. The concept of a "loyal opposition" was anathema during the colonial period and that was why patriotic elements were sent to prison for sedition and demagoguery. This British convention which had emerged over a long period was transferred to Nigeria and our political actors expected to operate it smoothly when what they had been used to under colonialism was political and bureaucratic authoritarianism tending to consider opposition to government either as treason or at best mischief making. With all the opportunities which were known to come with governance and the deprivation and negation that accompanied defeat and confinement to opposition benches, it was difficult if not impossible for the politicians in power to believe that the party in opposition could ever wish anything more than evil for the governing party which would necessarily lead to conspiracy and plots to unseat the government. Nor was it easy for the opposition party to believe that it would be given a fair chance come the next round of elections hence it was bound to have the same feeling as Lucifer "to be weak is miserable doing or suffering". By mutual agreement then the stage was set for the persecution and manipulation of the opposition and the simultaneous disloyalty of the latter. All these would of course not augur well for the country.

In the circumstances already described where independent Nigeria was born with deformations none of which was congenital, the question of transforming the country would appear straightforward. The transformation would necessarily have to proceed in three directions — ideological, cultural and technological. It is now universally accepted that man as a social being, is imbued with the three attributes of consciousness, creativity and independence which the Koreans call *chajusong*. The level of his consciousness affects the extent to which he can unleash his creativity and creative genius in the process of building a never and more fulfilling

life removing himself from the shackles of ignorance, disease poverty and from exploitation by fellow man thus achieving an independent life. Nigeria's ability to transform herself and transcend the inherited deformations would require a proper understanding of the forces at play, the place of the country in contemporary international scene, a proper assessment of our strengths and weaknesses and a determination to go higher than the Olympus and repeat with conviction Cassius's assertion that indeed "men at sometimes are masters of their fate". To do this, we need a leadership with clear vision and ideological orientation attuned to the greater heights Nigerians could attain if properly led and motivated and if their creativity was unleashed. We needed a stable environment in which well conceived programmes and projects would be implemented. Not the stability and quietude of the grave or the ossification of a degenerate bureaucracy but an environment in which public policy will be informed by the genuine interests of the masses of the Nigerian people propelled by the Maoist conviction that the people and the people alone are the motive force in the making of meaningful history and unless their unbounded creativity is unleashed in the proper direction, all else will be in vain.

Alas at independence, the leadership that could take the bull by the horn and mobilise and unleash the creative force of the Nigerian people in the proper direction was not to be found within any sector of the multidimensional elite — the political, bureaucratic, military, business, religious or educational segments. Having been thus condemned to mediocrity and visionless leadership determining the agenda of the nation, we could not but find ourselves in the quagmire of misdirected energies and actions. We fell into the hands of men with Belial qualities who were largely false and hollow, even when their tongues dropped manna "and could make the worse appear the better reason to perplex and dash maturest counsels; for their thoughts were low. To vice industrious but to nobler deeds Timorous and slothful". Sooner rather than later, the true character of the

Nigerian political elite emerged and seized control of events. A conflict within the Action Group (the ruling part in the Western Region and opposition at the centre) over distribution of largesse to party faithfuls, was seized upon by the ruling coalition at the centre (the N.P.C. and the N.C.N.C) to split and castrate the opposition. The internal Action Group conflict was to provide the ammunition needed for the treasonable felony trial which was used to decimate the opposition party. That task having been achieved, the two ruling parties at the centre were now to confront each other in a quarrel that saw a realignment of parties.

The deliberate whipping up of ethnic chauvinism by the politicians and the undermining of the state through financial malfeasance (revealed in numerous enquiries) shifted the attention of the Nigerian people away from the needed task of transforming the nation from its inherited stage of economic and ideological backwardness to the energy dissipating issue of sharing the national cake whose modality of baking appeared of no concern to the ruling elite. In the absence of nobler goals or ideals set by the leadership, the fissiparous tendencies and the centrifugal forces inherent in a multinational state like Nigeria were given the field day resulting first in the so called Tiv riots which the politicians were compelled to invite the Army to quell in 1964, thereby drawing them into the political realm. The hung elections of 1964 and the travesty of the electoral process in the Western Region in 1965 followed by polymorphous violence and assault on the state machinery in an environment in which ethnic chauvinism had been elevated to the level of primary contradiction, inevitably prepared the ground for the military rebellion of January 15, 1966 led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu which was hijacked by reactionary elements in the Nigerian Army owing to faulty execution. The non-preparedness of the General Officer Commanding the Nigerian Army, Major General J. T. U. Aguyi Ironsi for the task of Head of State shoved on him, led to his reliance on bankrupt civilian advice which led to the concatenation of events — some violent and cataclysmic

— resulting in the counter coup of July 29, 1966 and the destructive civil war which started less than a year later.

It may well be argued that objectively, the country's multidimensional elite has since independence represented a particular social category whose class character has held it together in the determination to hold on to power and that it is only divided by the nature of and struggle over the accumulation process. This position would be essentially correct as both moslems and christians, northerners and southerners do often sit in rooms of companies to share profits without reference at that point to ethnicity, religion or state of origin which they resort to only to deceive the masses in the process of consolidating power.

In all those events, the Nigerian masses were deprived of the benefits which successful transformation of the Nigerian economy would have brought their way. They were to be the hapless victims of the bankrupt policies of the multidimensional elites. They were manipulated and made to serve as cannon fodder in a way initiated, instigated and incited by members of the elite. Even while the tribulation of the people lasted, some members of the elite could not restrain themselves from agglutinating wealth from the public coffers on both sides of the divide. It very much illustrated the true character of this vulturous class.

The thirty months internecine war mercifully came to an end in January 1970 and it would appear that another opportunity had arisen for the proper questions to be addressed and tackled in the proper way. Let me state clearly that for this exercise, I see no reason for heaping encomiums on the elite for preserving the territorial integrity of the country for it was in the first place their policies of divisiveness and aggraisement which plunged the masses into the tribulation and it was only fair to expect that those who collectively committed the crime would bring it to an end one way or the other. Opportunities were lost immediately after the civil war for we failed to harness for developmental purposes the scientific and technological ingenuity displayed by our compatriots during the civil war. Nevertheless the govern-

ment embarked on reconstruction and rehabilitation as well as consolidation of the twelve state structure earlier announced by the Federal Government on May 27, 1967 as a last ditch attempt to prevent the secession of the then Eastern Region by removing one of the complaints against an oversize north.

Well meaning efforts were made by the Gowon administration to address what were then identified as the key problems of the country. For instance, the series of indigenisation efforts designed to transfer ownership and control of the Nigerian economy to Nigerians were well meaning but they assumed the existence of a national patriotic revolution which of course had not taken place and which is still being awaited. The efforts also assumed that ownership of enterprises automatically meant effective control by the new Nigerian owners. While part of the efforts got sabotaged by unpatriotic elements who fronted for foreigners, that in itself did not detract from the well meaning intention of that administration and its successor which endeavoured to widen the scope of the Nigerian Enterprises Promotion Decrees. All of these came at a time that the country's earning capacity was tremendously increased by the sharp rise in oil prices in the world market. The enormous earning from the exportation of crude oil posed a challenge to the country's leadership which unfortunately failed to take the proper decisions. Indeed the then Governor of the Central Bank, Clement Isong, openly lamented in a nationally televised programme which I moderated that the country was a wash with so much liquidity that by implication our problem was how to manage or spend the money!

The import substitution strategy of industrialisation which had been adopted earlier, was intensified while the massive importation of consumer goods including food items became the order of the day. While a ₦30 billion four year development plan was announced in 1974, it came at a time when another intractable conflict was to lead the administration to making a monumental error the consequences of which are

still with us today to the shame of the civilian advisers of that government. The announced commitment by General Gowon in 1970 to hand over power to civilian politicians in 1976, after a nine point programme would have been implemented — including of all things the eradication of corruption, — appeared feasible when the announcement was made as 1976 appeared so far away. However, debtors know that even twenty years would soon roll past and Gowon's promise was a debt which by 1974 it became obvious he would not wish or be able to pay. To soften the blow of 1976 being unrealistic and no new date set for the hand-over, — we now know from Gowon that it would have been in the middle eighties — the Federal Government announced salary awards with arrears backdated several months and conditions not actually contained in Chief Jerome Udoji's recommendations but which went by the popular parlance of the Udoji awards. The announcement set in motion spiralling inflation and threw the economy out of gear as the private sector felt compelled to match the awards in the public sector.

Increased income not accompanied by increase in productivity simply represented unearned income which went into the procurement of luxury items and consumer goods that Nigeria did not produce. This singular action, coupled with the earlier special contractor prices for projects to be implemented in Nigeria, led to the commencement of the serious siphoning of our earnings from petroleum to foreign countries to pay for the fancies of the elite. Indeed the corruption that was to be eradicated had taken such a turn that the services of the then Chief Justice had to be solicited to prevent exposure of such cankerworm through affidavits sworn to in courts. Chief Justice Elias announced ahead of time that his Supreme Court would await with pleasurable expectation any case of *Mandamus* requiring a judicial officer to perform his task by allowing an affidavit to be sworn to. That was a promise before hand that his court would throw out any case that might come up making it possible again for the judiciary to be used for the exposure of

corrupt practices in government. Thus the exposure of the massive corrupt practices involved in the cement armada when government officials ordered seventeen million tons of cement from abroad in several shady deals knowing fully well that the capacity of the Apapa Port was 1.7 million tons, has to wait until Gowon's administration was kicked upstairs by the 'junta boys' as they were fondly called. The bribe of the salary awards had apparently failed to achieve its objective but the consequences of these staggering awards were already being felt.

That the Nigerian polity was shaky under Gowon was already clear as the controversy over the national census of 1973 showed as well as the increasing demand for the creation of more states from members of the elite who would stand to gain new capitals and bureaucracies. Some of these problems and others were to be tackled by Gowon's successors who with military precision, attempted to get the country to start walking on its feet again instead of appearing to walk on its head. While in the circumstances of 1975 and 1976 the actions taken and the programmes set in motion appeared radical and even revolutionary, in fundamental terms they were merely palliatives and did not touch the basic infrastructural foundations of the decadent socio-economic system which the elite had put in place. For instance, some big elephants were able to pass through the eye of a needle simply because in the circumstances of a capitalist economy they could reasonably be expected to have acquired their property not altogether through fraudulent means or kickbacks. The regime however did Nigeria and Africa proud at the international level and the assassination of General Murtala Mohammed in February 1976 in an attempted coup was greatly lamented except by the enemies of Africa.

The transition programme to civilian rule euphemistically called a political programme announced by General Murtala Mohammed in 1975 was set in motion with the appointment of a Constitution Drafting Committee with the mandate to come up with whatever form of government that would

seem appropriate to Nigeria judging by our sad experience during the First Republic. The emphasis was to be on consensus politics in the hope of transforming the political landscape. The outcome of the exercise which went through a public debate for one year, officially monitored by this lecturer among others for the Political Department of the Cabinet Office, and then through a Constituent Assembly marked by its turbulence and acrimony over the diversionary issue of the Sharia. The final product did contain some provisions which it was hoped would sanitise the political system. Provision dealing with the Public Complaints Commission, Code of Conduct Bureau and the Code of Conduct Tribunal in addition to legislative powers to investigate and check corruption in public life were departures from the country's experience in the First Republic. However, in reality, all was false and hollow. More promising were the constitutional devices designed to ensure that the political parties to be recognised as legitimate operators in the system would not be organisations representing purely narrow ethnic interests. Also remarkable was the attempt to write or indeed entrench in the constitution the phenomenon of largesse by directing that ministerial appointments and commissionership at the state level must reflect the Federal character in order not to leave any segment out of the chopping opportunity that governance was supposed to provide.

The point needs be made here that nothing had happened up to that point in any fundamental way to create the impression that malfeasance in government would be very seriously dealt with through heavy penalties designed to serve as prophylaxis. Indeed, if anything, the outcome of the enquiries conducted under Murtala Mohammed's regime specifically left the former public officers with a lot of their loot on the grounds that given Nigerian circumstances such properties acquired beyond the legitimate earnings of the officials concerned might have somehow been acquired without real malpractices. Consequently, the question of what governance is for was not to be seriously addressed

317622

during this period and was to be the bane of the Second Republic as it was of the First and will definitely be of the Third Republic, no matter how much reorganisation goes on in the armed forces. In a comprehensive survey conducted throughout the country in 1979 in which ABU and UNILAG students and staff were involved, Haroun Adamu and myself found disturbing trends in the Nigerian electorate. Our findings were published in the book *Nigeria, the making of the Presidential System the 1979 General Elections*.

Members of the electorate were well aware of what was going on and were conversant with personalities competing for power. Asked to name the political party which in their view represented a haven for corrupt and morally decadent Nigerians, across the country one party was conferred with that accolade by an overwhelming majority — the NPN National Party of Nigeria. What was revealing was the extent to which that knowledge or awareness was not allowed to determine the candidate preference of the respondent for in many cases, the factor was not considered important enough to dissuade the respondent from voting for the party's candidate. The 1979 elections conducted under the overall supervision of the military regime, while generating controversy, were indeed the freest and fairest elections involving political parties ever conducted in the country since the December 12, 1959 elections. In spite of that, we have catalogued the various malpractices which occurred even in the militarily supervised elections of 1979 as well as the role played by members of the judiciary in perverting the course of justice through the imposition of ridiculous penalties unknown to law, and the use of purported discretionary powers where the law in question specifically ruled that out.

The exit of the military from power in October 1979 saw the birth of the Second Republic and the full play of party politics with every registered political party controlling the government of at least two states. The performance of the politicians in the Second Republic reflected a lemming like attitude of a strong determination to commit *harakiri*. It was as if "judgement had fled to brutish beasts and men had lost their reason", for, kleptocracy was writ large and an

uncontrolled massive assault on the resources of the nation was carried out. What Nigerian students called "lootocracy" was unleashed using both brazenly tactless and some clever means to effect the diabolical plans. Multimillionaires and billionaires emerged out of nothing except that they belonged to the ruling political parties. The illgotten wealth was siphoned abroad and also vulgarly displayed locally. We now know that the sum of \$17.1 billion could not be accounted for during the period 1979 October to December 1983. Even now after years of trying to trace the money, the Chase Manhattan Bank of New York that was given the task cannot find a clue as to how such money vanished from the Nigerian coffers.

The military had left some \$5.1 billion in reserves in 1979 while the country earned some \$51.6 billion from oil and non-oil exports between 1979 and December 1983. By the time the military returned on December 31, 1983, we were already indebted internally and externally to the tune of some \$26 billion. That meant that within four years and three months we had had access to over \$82 billion and had, of course, frittered it all away. There was no doubt that government was "sweet" and that what was at stake was enormous in terms of governmental power over enormous resources. In these circumstances, political power continued to be a life, and, death matter, a do or die war in which no rules of fair play would be acknowledged as existing except by the foolish or naive politician. The media were full of revelations of massive corrupt practices about which it appeared no one could do anything. Unfortunately for the peripheral capitalist economy in operation, most of the money was unpatriotically siphoned abroad as the \$17.1 billion which could not be traced by the Chase Manhattan Bank showed. This figure does not include the shady deals involving over-invoicing, transfer pricing and other means of siphoning the country's wealth.

The structure of the economy had remained the same — import oriented in all dimensions as the so, called made in Nigeria items depended entirely on the importation of raw

signified their willingness to see a change in a manner that will maintain the chain of command and esprit de corps of the military. The result confounded the views of a naive legislator who had asserted that because the Army was under the headship of a "northerner", President Shagari as a northerner should not have any fear of action being taken by the army — what simplistic naivete!

The return of the military to power effective January 1, 1984, raised the question of whether the first interventions by the military in 1966 had been successful if it was found necessary to return again this time around. What would have to be done to ensure a sanitisation and effective cleansing of the polity to make it unnecessary for the military ever to come back again. That the carefully planned and executed transition programme of the Mohammed/Obasanjo regime did not achieve a lasting success was clear for everyone to see. It could not have achieved a lasting success in terms of stability and viability of the Second Republic because no such foundation had been laid for such. Either you have in place an exceedingly painful and unbearable penalty for those committing malfeasance in public office and so deter people from doing so and keep kleptocrats or thieves away from power through deterrence or remove the reasons for thieves wanting to go into political office. Neither was done before 1979 and the result was clear.

The military that returned to power on January 1, 1984 confronted two broad problems — a shattered political landscape with major functionaries of the regime having been allowed to escape into self imposed political exile, and a shattered economy with foreign indebtedness of a magnitude unknown to the new leaders before they took over. The question then was what to do in these two directions for the answers would be meaningful if Nigeria was ever going to be transformed. In 1982 and 1983, four sentences had been handed down by the judiciary in this country which we consider germane to our discussion of punishment for crimes committed. An Area Court in Jos, Plateau State, sent a Nigerian to jail for twenty-one years for stealing a goat. Two

Area Court judges in Kano had earlier sentenced two Nigerians to different terms of imprisonment: One to twelve years in prison and twelve strokes of the cane for stealing a cow and another to fifteen years in prison and fifteen strokes of the cane for stealing a motorcycle which incidentally was recovered from him. In none of those cases did the Nigerian Bar Association raise its voice nor was the voice of any so called human rights group heard when the judiciary meted out those sentences to fellow Nigerians. In 1984, a Military Governor saved a poor Nigerian who had been in prison for two years awaiting trial for allegedly stealing a packet of cigarette. On the opposite side of the travesty of justice was a magistrate in Lagos who handed down a sentence in 1983 of a fine of two hundred and fifty Naira in a case involving a Nigerian caught at the airport with suitcase full of guns — revolvers which armed robbers use to invade our homes, kill, rape and maim innocent Nigerians. No one asked whether the magistrate had taken a bribe or was drunk in handing down such a non-sentence in that dastardly situation.

It is my very humble view that Nigeria needed for once to begin to hold public officials accountable for their performance in office. Those who had pillaged, ravaged, looted and destroyed the treasury thus bringing us to the position of a laughing stock in the community of nations should deserve a higher punishment than what the Area Court Judge handed down to the person who stole only a goat. Other Nigerians had been executed for armed robbery even in cases where the amounts involved were small. To my mind, the Buhari/Idiagbon regime had been right in principle in insisting that political office holders account for their performance in office. It was a precedent which, had it been properly executed and sustained, would have given us some hope that perhaps in future only clean men or men with clean intentions would offer themselves for the service of this nation. The implementation was badly handled. They should have started from the Federal level where the government controlled tens of billions of dollars and where party functionaries sucked us dry. Instead they started with those with

minor offences left the major culprits until the saving hands of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (IBB) came in and released all of them through some contrived subterfuge. It would seem however that the little in the direction of sanitisation which the Buhari/Idiagbon regime had put in place had not been lost on Nigerian students, for since 1987 demonstrating university students starting with Jos had always carried placards calling for the return not of some decrepit politicians but of Idiagbon.

It would appear to me that the Babangida administration is taking a different approach to the problem which is related to the second alternative I had already mentioned. The administration's contention is that one way of making politics less attractive to those whose only purpose for running for office is to loot the treasury would be to take government out of huge chunks of the economy, create numerous and unlimited avenues for wealth acquisition in the private sector and reduce the chances of or opportunities for straightforward grabbing of money by political office holders. This is part of the logic for privatisation of government owned enterprises which as we said earlier had already been privatised by the public functionaries put in charge of these enterprises. This is quite different from the view although it complements it — that believes that the engine of growth in a capitalist economy ought to be in the private sector and that in the history of Nigeria private enterprises have always proved more profitable for their owners than government owned enterprises had proved for government coffers. In my Independence Day lecture at the auditorium of the Nigerian Law School in Victoria Island on September 28, 1989, I expressed serious doubt as to whether this strategy of transformation will succeed given what I called the known weakness of the government in the face of combined opposition from the patriotic left wing and from the right in the establishment.

Nothing so far has happened to compel me to change that view and so we may find ourselves arriving in 1992 having failed to transform either the economy in a meaningful way

or the political landscape in a way that might guarantee the longevity of the Third Republic. From the words of the Commander-in-Chief at Jaji on June 29 1990, it would appear that he believes there are some officers in the armed forces who perceive governance as providing opportunity to get rich. He is right but such officers share the same view with Nigerian politicians and other members of the multidimensional elite. They all live in the same society and can see what goes on around them. Stories are told of colonels in the Army who live in places where they have to make do with well water — that is where water is available at all and of Lt. Colonels whose private jalopy cars have to be pushed every morning to start when Captains gingerly enter their BMW cars and drive away with no fuss at all and with beautiful cheeks to boot! We will return to the military elite later.

The 1992 that one therefore foresees, is one in which the high stakes in governance would have been retained and the name of the game would still be survival of the fittest and the roughest in an environment of winner takes all; in which all the current good works of Mass Mobilisation for Social and Economic Recovery (MAMSER) to conscientise and arouse the masses may come to nothing. The ready resort to statism ethnicity and religion that has recently been dangerously elevated to the level of primary and dominant contradiction by the selfish elite, will further poison the atmosphere come 1992 and the removal of any restraining military arm. For it is our experience in this country that in order to remain in positions of power, so as to continue to loot the resources of the state, members of the elite have not hesitated to use religion to fan the embers of hatred and intolerance. The "trapped" Nigerian economy according to Ayagi<sup>3</sup> would not of course have been out of the doldrums as the heavy external debt which we have to continue to service and amortise will constitute an unbearable drain on the country's earnings. In a situation in which graft and massive embezzlement will return with fanfare with reports in the media, the sense of alienation of the masses

police men who should objectively be their allies and comrades in arms. This situation will not however remain like this indefinitely and herein lies the great danger for the leadership of the Nigerian armed and disciplined forces. They owe it a duty first to themselves and to this nation to ensure that the welfare of their lower personnel is not ignored or better still, is actively pursued. Failure to do this will render their present seats and future abodes nothing but kegs of high explosives which can be ignited with the greatest prejudice.

The entire American Armed Forces are taken care off by the Pentagon — Department of Defence and they enjoy a socialist life within a capitalist environment in many cases having their own shops where goods are cheaper than in civilian shops. Whereever they serve in the world, the satellite dish brings to them television programmes as seen by those in continental United States. They have their own armed forces television and radio service and are totally self sufficient in many things. That is why I described them as living a contented sheltered socialist life in a capitalist environment well assured that those who manage the economy and political system recognise the importance of keeping the armed forces happy and contented. Will our leadership learn from that experience and be in to address the issue of the welfare of the rank and file of the armed and disciplined forces? Their failure will spell doom for the elite for we will never be able to rule out a mass based revolutionary upsurge which in future will not besitate to recall retired officers whether civilian or armed forces with a view to making them pay with their lives for acts of omission and commission of the past. The Commander-in-Chief in his June 29, 1990 speech at Jaji hinted that radical reorganisation of the military and reduction in personnel will soon be embarked upon following the lessons of the April 22, 1990 attempted coup. It is to be hoped that the right lessons have been learnt from that unfortunate event and that the greatest caution will be exercised in the planned reduction to prevent any unplanned disintegration.

In my lecture on the Challenges of Change in Africa to the same graduating set at Jaji on July 11, 1990, I made the

point inter alia, that change is the law of nature but such change can be handled in such a way as to ensure that minimal disequilibrating forces are unleashed in particular where these are inimical to the larger society. We cannot and must not take the position that what we say and wish to do here and now, given the present circumstances, must somehow remain valid for ever. That is beyond any human being or human organisation to proclaim. The task of leadership is always to understand the forces at play at any one time, assess strengths and weaknesses and take appropriate action to minimise risks and threats. Change will come whether we like it or not and every leader should have an interest in managing change and seeing that it goes in the proper direction but there is always the contingency and the unexpected and this must be made provision for.

This now brings me to us— bloody civilians — whose task it normally should be to steer the ship of state and authoritatively allocate the values of society between competing centres. In what direction are we transforming the Nigerian economy? In what direction do the people want it to go? When last this question was posed to them by the Political Bureau set up by President Babangida, resounding answer was given to the effect that the socialist ideology should be the guiding principle for the organisation of the Nigerian-society. This was understandably rejected by the military elite which could not see itself operating that system successfully. That decision tallied with the view and interests of the larger segment of the non-military elite which since 1988 and in particular from 1989, has been gloating over the publicised collapse of socialism in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. As far as they are concerned the lunch is over and there is no room for debate any more. The Nigerian masses should see that the future lies in free enterprise economy within a democratic environment of periodic elections.

What they have often failed to address is whether their panacea has worked in any third world country lacking patriotism, national, group and individual discipline and inundated with elite parasitism. I have in my wide travels covering 35

countries in all the five continents had the opportunity of seeing the living conditions of the masses all over the world. My most recent experience was in Latin America some of whose countries have been independent for upwards of 175 years. Theirs of course have been free enterprise economies with periodic elections held for the people to decide who rules. In many of them the problems of mass poverty, unemployment, ignorance, illiteracy, disease, prostitution and deprivation have continued with attendant crimes against individuals, society and the state. These countries do not possess colonies whose resources could have been milked for the benefit of their peoples for they themselves are former colonies currently immersed in the morass of neocolonialism. Perhaps it is their examples our elites want to emulate. I am not sure, but do we have that much time on our hands? This is where the fate of the non-military elite is closely intertwined with that of the military. Together they must devise a way of transforming the Nigerian economy such that it caters for the well being of the majority of the Nigerian people. Together they must renounce attempts to use religion and ethnicity to divide the Nigerian masses for otherwise they will find themselves playing the dangerous game of riding on the tiger's back only to end up inside it. We are aware of an alternative recently put forward. Dr. Ibrahim Ayagi<sup>4</sup> has suggested in his book *The Trapped Economy* a non-ideological strategy for transforming the nation. His suggestion of removing the second tier of governments sounds good in theory. It cannot however be expected to transform Nigeria without first dealing with the question of what is governance for which is a fundamental issue as far as the elites proclivity to agglomerate and agglutinate with impunity what properly belongs to the people, remains high. The fight for the centre will attain an even more desperate and do or die dimension.

Vice-Chancellor sir, I cannot conclude this lecture without paying tribute to my students past and present who at the last count numbered 14,723 since I first started lecturing at University of Ife now Obafemi Awolowo University in 1971. They have constituted an invaluable inspiration to me and to

my efforts to excel myself each time I appear before them for I take them as the future leaders of this country. There were occasions when I had concluded that even with my professorial knowledge I could not have produced a better answer than the one before me. I had not hesitated and will never hesitate in future to award all the full marks to such answer. I will not mention the names of such students although I can see some of them in this auditorium and I doff my hat for them. Yet it cannot but continue to cause us great sorrow to see the present stage of education in this country. We as parents and members of the older generation must bear responsibility for the sorry state. Are we not as parents too motivated by the pursuit of wealth from morning to late at night, to have enough time for children? Do we have the time to observe what type of kids are growing up supposedly under our roofs or do we just leave them for teachers to discipline and bring up? Do we know what company the kids are keeping while we are out pursuing Mammon? Do we try to compensate for our neglect by letting these same kids have access to luxurious cars when they are not ready thus leading to unnecessary deaths, maiming of limbs and accompanying sorrow? Do we encourage them in the path of crime by providing money for them to engage in illegal purchase of question papers? Do we thereby tell them that good old hard work no longer pays and they can just rest on the oars their parents had acquired in different circumstances? Are we by example telling our kids that lying and cheating pay huge dividends and that consequently they should forget the path of rectitude? Those of us who are teachers of the leaders of tomorrow, do we really earn our pay or are we delinquent? Are we aware that very serious students submit the names of delinquent and truant lecturers to the National University Commission (NUC)? Even if we are not so aware, are we courageous enough to call it quits when we know deep within us that we can no longer say to ourselves that the tax payers money we earn as salaries can in good conscience be described as justly earned? What respect do we expect from our students when they know that we get by with little effort? Are we the elders as contributors to public policy prepared to urge

government to remove the glaring contradictions in its educational policies and practices and thus give merit and ingenuity a chance? Or do we speak out only when our own kids become victims of those contradictions? Do we indeed recognise the importance of the role of education and technology in transforming society? If so what have we done individually and collectively to urge a change in the value system and to be ourselves catalysts for change? Are we alarmed by the increasing gulf between us and the advanced countries and the rate of that increase? If we are, what steps are being taken to ensure that the second scramble for our soul and body will not see us totally enslaved in the near future? These questions need to be understood and answered if indeed we are to be sure that our present generation of students will in fact be the future leaders of the country and not just puppets in the hands of those in other capitals who want to continue to call the shots. The future is now. And if the future is now, we must address fundamental issues and questions.

No nation has ever developed meaningfully and certainly not in the present day and age just being a nation of shopkeepers and consumers. We cannot expect Nigeria to be transformed when the consumption mania and the bitter struggles to share the national cake that is still not yet baked take over from the necessity to become a producing nation. We cannot transform Nigeria if our proclivity and propensity to spend prodigally completely frustrate national attempts to develop. We cannot transform the nation when every Dick and Harry, who through all kinds of dubious means, has laid his hands on the most outrageously luxurious cars, believes that Nigeria owes him an obligation to provide the foreign exchange for him to procure spare parts instead of using such for production purposes. We cannot transform the country successfully when we pointedly refuse to ask the level 03 or level 17 officer where he obtained the wherewithal to live very extravagantly and clearly above his legitimate earnings. We cannot transform the country successfully unless we recognise the importance of the most significant resource that the country possesses — human talent.

We have deliberately adopted myopic and inimical measures which weigh us down and prevent us from reaching to the heights. Our educational system has been virtually collapsing on our heads as increasingly the school system turns out lower and lower quality products with the obvious attendant consequences of garbage in garbage out. Public policy itself is enmeshed in a web of contradictions and those of us who should know are too blinded by personal interests to recommend or accept what is best for the country. How many of us in the University community would accept an organised lack of uniformity in the remuneration system in order to attract and retain the needed teaching and research staff in the professional disciplines? Why should it not be possible for basic decisions to be taken by government and for these to be accepted by the university community with the understanding that all is in the national interest? Why for instance should the government not concentrate its limited funds for the university system in the areas of pure sciences and the social sciences and humanities thus allowing a massive participation in the professional disciplines leading if need be to situations in which the Professor of finance, engineering, law, medicine, architecture, accountancy or dentistry is able to earn as much as a hundred and fifty thousand naira a year as the attracted resources would dictate? Why should a Professor of Greek or French insist on earning the same thing as a Professor of surgery when to everyone around the difference is clear? Will measures designed to attract and retain our most competent talents in the country not stem the massive tide of flow to the Middle East and make our university system better within the framework of a free enterprise economy that the country's leadership seems to have settled for?

If we move to a different level, why should government insist on biting more than it can chew? Why, in the absence of political will, determination and resources, should government stubbornly insist on holding on to all universities and building more when it is clear even to the mentally daft that the job is not being well done but that instead we

continue to saddle the country and generations yet unborn with huge foreign debts when this need not be the case? Should it not be possible for the government within its own free enterprise philosophy, to accept that, it can only fund effectively a given number of universities and thus allow the private sector to be a partner in the process as envisaged by the 1979 Constitution, upheld by the Supreme Court but unfortunately decreed out of existence by the Buhari government? Can we learn from the experience of Japan where seventy-five per cent of university students are to be found in private universities and where most of the 455 universities are private? Must we continue to be disgraced internationally with government going cap in hand begging for foreign loans to sustain our educational system? Is there any example of a country that has successfully transformed itself in this way leaving the development of its human talents to the mercy of international do-gooders? There are many questions that we can raise and endeavour to understand for it is by so doing that we can as members of the older generation beat our chests and individually proclaim mea maxima culpa.

We have been holding aloft now our flag independence for thirty years but are we on the road to effective transformation? Are the multidimensional elite mentally decolonised to the extent of seeing what is in our country's genuine interest or are we at sea with no one really in control? Should we continue to say nay to honesty, discipline, purposefulness, resourcefulness and dedication? I have raised more questions than answers but I would rather accept the Chinese saying that says "Seek not to know all the answers but to understand the questions".

Mr. Vice-Chancellor sir, my task is done but I should leave the audience with the write up of my late uncle Chief L. A. Onojobi 1902 to 1989 who less than a year before his departure from this small earth, wrote to all Nigerians and I quote him.

## TO ALL NIGERIANS IN SEARCH OF A NEW NIGERIA

Through the Secretary to the Federal Military Government.

After several decades of colonial rule, at the dawn of 1st October, 1960, Nigerians embarked on a vessel named "Independence" in search of the New Nigeria of our dreams and to slay the Dragon that went by the name of Imperialism.

The embarkation was accompanied by a big fanfare, dancing and merriment. Amid all these festivities the vessel sailed without the Captain and the pilot who had gone ashore.

After roving about the seas for over a quarter of a century without landing at any port everyone on board became restless and thought it was time to take the bearings of the ship to know where we were. A radio message was sent out and a reply came from Abuja that N.N.S.L. "Independence" was still in Lagos port, that the Dragon (Dishonesty) was on board among the Crew, and that the Captain and the Pilot were back in their respective villages.

All on board held a meeting and decided to send for the Captain and the Pilot if anyone could give their names and addresses. A young Sailor came forward and said that he did not know their addresses but he had seen their names on their pictures in their cabins. The Captain's name was "DISCIPLINE" and the Pilots was "HONESTY".

The PROBLEM now facing us is where to find these two officers to bring the vessel "Independence" to a safe harbour of our New Nigeria and how to identify the Dragon.

With compliments.

L. A. Onojobi (I. C. - 1902)  
Yaba, Lagos,  
April, 1988.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor sir, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, I rest my case. Dedicated to Funmilayo Beatrix Felicity Wambui.

END NOTES

1. Iweriebor: is a final year B.Sc Political Science Student, University of Lagos, 1990.
2. Otubanjo is a reader in political science, University of Ibadan.
3. Ibrahim Ayagi; "The Trapped Economy"
4. op. cit.

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS  
LIBRARY

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS  
LIBRARY

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS  
LIBRARY

317622

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS  
LIBRARY

36  
L  
36  
L25  
791

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS  
LIBRARY

**THE TRANSFORMATION OF NIGERIA:  
SCENARIOS AND METAPHORS**

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS  
LIBRARY

BY

**ALABA OGUNSANWO**



UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS PRESS - 1991  
INAUGURAL LECTURE SERIES

UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS  
LIBRARY