

## Politics and Responsibility: The Post Military Management of the Nation

EKENG NYONG EKEFRE, Ph.D<sup>1</sup>.SAMUEL ASUQUO EKANEM, Ph.D, LLB (HONS), BL<sup>2</sup>, ASUQUO ANTHIGHA<sup>3</sup>

1 & 2.DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL FOUNDATIONS AND ADMINISTRATION.  
FACULTY OF EDUCATION.  
CROSS RIVER UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY,  
CALABAR-NIGERIA

<sup>3</sup>CENTRE FOR GENERAL STUDIES  
CROSS RIVER UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY  
CALABAR- NIGERIA

\*E-mail: [samaekanem@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:samaekanem@yahoo.co.uk).

### Abstract

Democratic governance constitutes an enduring challenge for Africa's most population nation, Nigeria. Despite the symbolic physical return to the barracks by the military since May, 1999 for elected civilian government in the country, politics in Nigeria is yet to be well rooted. Politics has become a form of Military warfare with no 'khaki' but with the entire lethal weapon found in military armoury. The political class is yet to imbibe the real tenets and principles of democracy. This poses a mortal danger to the embryonic political institutions. Nigerian democracy therefore, remains fragile, conflict sensitive and possibly reversible as the legacy of praetorianism and illiberal political culture constrain the progress and opportunities for democratic growth and consolidation in the country. Progress and expectations are widely disconnected. This paper reflects on the form, trajectory and content of democratic governance in post military Nigeria from 1999 to 2012.

**Keyword:** Politics, Responsibility, Management and Nation

### 1. Introduction

The Military in Nigeria has come to symbolize a particular class and class interest, which is that of the military elite clinging to power. This way, the military has acquired a self-perpetuating character in the political life of Nigeria. Like all class and quasi-class formations, this perpetuation hinges on protection and furtherance of the interests of a select few. To achieve this, the military mobilized its poorly positioned "labouring section" against the larger civilian population in a massive wave of militarization.

This made it possible for the military to remain in power for over twenty years. This happened because right from the start, the state in Africa has ascribed a privileged position to the military and has often seen its existence and strength as a prerequisite for the continued survival of the society.

In contemporary society, as we have it in Nigeria, the military is no longer content with enjoying proxy leadership. With a corps of relatively well-educated and highly trained and exposed manpower, and in the context of the prevailing crisis in Africa's development, the military tend to see itself as the heir to state power and as legitimate recipient of public resources. This has been the historical logic that sustained the military in Nigeria for that long.

The inability of Nigeria to foster a sustainable democratic tradition has negative consequences for the country and its development. This made it possible for the military to dominate the post –independent Nigeria in the political arena and so is largely responsible for the present political, economic and social underdevelopment of the nation. Apart from the first Republic that was ushered in by the British, the military in Nigeria has acted as both midwife and terminator of democracy in the country.

With the military "stepping aside" from May, 1999 and an elected civilian government coming into being under the headship of Olusegun Obasanjo, a new "fourth" chapter of democratic experiment began in Nigeria. With the new civilian government, the nature and ideological thrust of the state policies continue to shape the character of the economy and social relations in Nigeria. Neoliberal economic policies and political reforms have impacted on state – society relations, economic and class configurations, social composition of power, social welfare and cohesion in post-military Nigeria. The Nigeria state more than ever remains a contested political project, with trepidation over its course and future. The paper made effort to point to key policy recommendations that may be

vital and crucial in redirecting the future of Nigeria. It posits that leadership should accept responsibility for all their action(s) and inaction(s). There is also the demand for the democratic window to be opened for those that are prepared for leadership.

## 2. AN OVERVIEW OF THE POLITICS IN NIGERIA: 1999 - 2012

Politics has been viewed differently by scholars. From the “ought definition”, according to Ozumba, politics is a “rational activity embarked upon by rational men for the rational reason of appropriating power and position for the rational distribution of resources and good life among members of a political community” (107).

Ozumba further opines that politics was for the noble, the educated and the patriot. This reflects the situation in the Greek political establishment until the thirty tyrants debased democracy that eventually led to the killing of Socrates. It was the debasement of democracy that necessitated Plato’s abandonment of his ambition for a political office. This terrible incident led to the writing of *The Republic* and the *Laws* as a means of articulating how politics should be. This has been seen and regarded as the canons of politics and political engineering.

There appear to be some connective from the Greek experience with Nigeria. Here, the military can be likened to the thirty tyrants that debased democracy. For as Ekanem (2012) puts it, “Also, in Nigeria, the military came with all the promises to develop and better the society but at the end, left Nigeria worse than ever” (xvii). This is graphically captured by Oyeboade in an interview with the *News* magazine when he asserts:

*The crime of the soldiers in government, the combatants in government, is that they invite themselves into power and now claim to be the messiah, promising heaven and earth. At the end of the day the military leaves the country (Nigeria) worse than when they came in (18).*

However, the unmitigated tragedy of military adventurism into politics came to an end on 29<sup>th</sup> May, 1999 when Olusegun Obasanjo (a retired General and former Head of State) was foisted on Nigeria by a cabal of retired military officers led by General Ibrahim Babangida. The choice of Olusegun Obasanjo was not for his sterling leadership qualities but was designed and scripted to test the political waters for the return of General Ibrahim Babangida. With this “hidden agenda” of General Ibrahim Babangida who had earlier “stepped aside”, Olusegun Obasanjo became an elected President in the fourth Republic.

The emergence of Olusegun Obasanjo as the President elect was a clear signal that the military had perfected a script to control the political terrain in Nigeria. So, as a trained military officer the President pursued politics with military tactics. The administration displayed a high level of irresponsibility as there was no respect for the rule of law. Nigeria was run as a private estate. The tenets of true federalism were abused through the instrumentality of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). A federal system as we know it;

*Provides a vital conceptual basis for good governance as it emphasizes the two fundamental premises of federalism. First, levels of government, the central government and states (the federating units) are independent, but never subordinate to one. Second, the relationship between the central government and the federating units is horizontal and not vertical ....when any of these elements are vitiated, federalism is compromised and the basis of good governance under federalism is eroded.*

These basic tenets of federalism have been destroyed in Nigeria with the creation of EFCC to tackle states and the central inspired impeachment of state governors there exists no pillars of federalism in Nigeria, hence Natufe asserts;

*Since the inception of Nigeria’s Fourth Republic in May 1999, elected officials especially those on the platform of the People Democratic Party (PDP), have contributed to the erosion of federalism by their actions which have facilitated the entrenchment of unitary practices in a supposedly federal polity. The regular visits, either voluntary or mandated of state governors belonging to PDP, to the Presidency and party headquarters in Abuja for instructions considerably weaken the premise of federalism. The federal government has assumed the status of a national government akin to a unitary system, with the state*

*governments reduced to mere administrative arms of the Presidency in Abuja. Because the state governors have acquiesced to erosion of the fundamental premises of federalism, they lack the audacity to challenge President Obasanjo when it is clear that his policies negate those premises. The establishment of EFCC vividly illustrates this point.*

Rather than challenge the locus standi of the EFCC, federal legislators, state governors and their “robber stamp” legislative assemblies “blindly accepted EFCC as a normal instrument with multiple jurisdictional responsibilities under a federal system” (Natufe,2010). The critical question here is not whether the federal government can establish EFCC to investigate federal institutions, but whether the federal government has the jurisdiction to investigate the fiscal management of the state governments and punish state officials. The role of the EFCC in the impeachment proceedings of state governors, and the fact that the head of EFCC was a member of President Obasanjo’s “kitchen cabinet”, really made a mockery of the institution, democracy and the constitution of the country.

The unitary and the authoritarian way President Obasanjo governed the country prompted Natufe, to declare that the President “...governs Nigeria and the PDP as his fiefdom with state governors and members of the PDP as his indentured serfs whose freedom from servitude depended on their unquestionable loyalty to him”. The role of President Obasanjo in the impeachment of Governor Fayose of Ekiti State is a typical example of bad governance. The subsequent rejection of the impeachment when the Deputy Governor was also impeached and the declaration of a state emergency on Ekiti state on October 19, 2006 showed the depth of decadence of our federal system. The appointment of a retired military officer as the Administrator of Ekiti State was an act of irresponsibility by President Obasanjo. If there were three claimants to the governorship, the judiciary was in a better position to salvage the situation and not the President. The judiciary is legally empowered and is the recognized authority to interpret the constitution and decide accordingly.

There is no justification in the 1999 constitution of Nigeria as a federalist treaty for state governors especially those of PDP controlled states to have accepted the unconstitutional interference of President Obasanjo in the affairs of the states. Also, the attempt by President Obansajo to amend the constitution so as to have a third term was indicative of the failure of politics and governance in the country. How can this situation be explained?

The explanation for this development can be situated in two inter-related phenomena. The first was the military background of President Obasanjo that molded his mentality and anti-federalist policies. The second one was the weak personalities that emerged as state governors and elected legislators both at the federal and state levels. For the purpose of this paper, our focus will be on the first phenomenon. The intrusion of the military in January 1966 ushered in a systematic dismantling of federalism in Nigeria, in favour of a military-command system. President Obasanjo is a product of this military – command system. He effectively operated this system during his regime as a military head of state in 1976-1979.

Through the election of a former military dictator as their President in a civilian democratic rule, Nigerians unwillingly entrenched the military command system of government, which is inimical to good governance and federalism. With his military background President Obansajo does not in any way appreciate the need to separate party and state jurisdictions. For him, party intrusion in state legislative jurisdictions is a normal political activity even under a federal system. The authority of the PDP National Executive Committee was a replication of the Supreme Military Council under the military, in which Obansajo was an active participant. This military command structure is what guided President Obansajo’s administration, hence is choice of Chief Anthony Anenih and Dr. (Col) Ahmadu Ali who were also former police and military officers respectively.

Characteristically, the command system of President Obansajo has infected the state governors. The state governors run the states as “personal farms” with the state assemblies and local government areas as departments under the Governor’s office. This command structure has continued till date in all states in Nigeria.

However, President Yar’dua was to bring some degree of respect to the rule of law. This was done to launder the image of PDP that was badly battered during the eight years draconian rule of President Obasanjo. Again, with the flawed electoral process that brought in President Yar’dua he needed to do something to gain some legitimacy. So, the respect to the rule of law was the hallmark departure from the President Obasanjo administration. But the health of President Yar’dua did not allow a full assessment of his personality as a President.

President Yar’dua ill health and other political developments in Nigeria during his short-lived tenure unearthed the true depth of the underlying spirit of Nigeria’s nationhood. This also put to a simple test, the character of our political leaders, who are supposed to be advocates of sound democratic political culture. The health of

President Yar'dua reveals the parochial interests of the nation's political, tribal, and religious leaders and this has made nonsense of the character of sound political leadership as prescribed in every healthy presidential democracy. It is most absurd to note that the political class has turned Nigeria's democracy on its head. This development demonstrates that the noble democratic governance has been deliberately drowned in the pool of negative political scheming, (Gwegwe 2010).

A keen observation of the event of the hospitalization of late President Musa Yar'dua in King Faisal Hospital in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia revealed the bitter conclusion that Nigeria's institutional framework has become too weak and so cannot carry the burden of due process and the rule of law. Transparency and Accountability are products of the culture of due process; the rule of law, on the other hand, promotes Justice and Fair Play. These principles constitute the pillars of every healthy society. Without these, political leadership can never be of benefit of the masses. It is due to lack of these pillars that Nigeria is still regarded as one of the poorest countries in the world despite the abundance of human and material resources that the country is endowed with. This situation has also provided us with the clue as to why Nigeria that is the sixth largest producer of crude oil in the world is still importing petrol and kerosene and there still exists scarcity of these products. This sad reality is supposed to pose a huge challenge to our political class and leaders, but instead of tackling this, they have with selfish intent allowed the country to drift deep into the ocean of anarchy and disintegration. The present political dispensation has confirmed the fact that Nigeria's greatest problem is tribalism. Gwegwe (2010) agrees with this assertion when he posits:

*...Nigeria's greatest problem is tribalism. It is owing to the deep rooted culture of tribalism that successive administrations have not been able to effectively fight corruption in the country. There is an unwritten law in Nigeria that forbids citizens from exposing or prosecuting fellow tribesmen for corrupt practices. That is the reason why public servants that earn less than N12m annually will build mansions and own fleets of exotic cars worth N500m and still be conferred with chieftaincy titles without verifying the sources of the sudden wealth of their kinsmen and women.*

Nigeria has become a country where you must have your tribesperson in a position of authority for you to be employed, given a major appointment or awarded a big contract. This anomaly is largely responsible for why the issue of tribal lineage is considered far above every other factor in the Nigerian society. Tribalism plays a key role in political engineering in Nigeria, hence the country sacrifice meritocracy on the altar of tribalism. Indeed, tribalism can only become rife in a country where there is no regard for transparency, accountability, justice and fair play.

Again, tribalism promotes and nourishes poverty. It encourages general laziness in the citizens. Since we have tribal-induced bureaucracy that is why people that sow nothing at times reap bountifully in almost every aspect of the national life. This negates the principle of nature. The more tribal agenda is being promoted above constitutional provision, the closer we move to the source of the country's disintegration.

There exists a solid connective between the current political tension in the country and tribal interest. There is an avoidable clash between forces of democracy and that of tribal interests. This tribal sentiment is what poured fuel into the flame of insurgency in the mould of Boko Haram. The Northern axis of the country believes that based on power sharing arrangement in the ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), the period spanning between 2007 and 2015 is that region's turn to cling to the Nigerian Presidency. The emergence of Goodluck Jonathan as the President is a breach and an interruption of the northern political sail. This has made it pertinent for the north to disregard the spirit and letters of the constitution of the country. The deep tribal sentiment has forced the political class and elites to forget the fact that even presidential democracy has a character.

This points to the fact that several people seek political power for reasons outside the rendering of quality leadership. Both the military and political class see themselves as the source of power and this accounts for the reason why most public officers use power as if it were their personal property. This way, power most times has been abused by those in position of authority. The recent illegal, unconstitutional and criminal removal of the de facto Speaker of the Kogi State House of Assembly points to this fact.

The foundation for the constant abuse of political power can be traced to Obasanjo's militarized politics. This is premised on two things. First, Nigeria's position as a fail state under Obasanjo's kind of democratic etiquettes, principles and freedom are no longer harmonized and permuted but intertwined with disequilibria forces, which disproportionately act and transform the citizenry into everlasting corruptible generation (Nurudeen 2).

Second are the pathological symptoms and chronic signs of power – mongering that explicitly manifested in the nation leadership style from 1999-2007. This is graphically captured by Nurudeen when he says; “...the egocentricity was so obvious that it had even reached its ‘peak value,’ where other significant moral indexes like human conscience, patriotism, discipline, accountability, honesty and nationalism have been swept under the carpet” (3).

The description of the eight year rule of Obasanjo by Nurudeen above provides an insight into the moral content of that administration. This is indicative of the fact that the post- military politics lacks the moral weight of responsibility to steer the ship of state transparently and accountably.

The Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Presidency has been the most volatile and unsecured with an alarming record of abuse of power. This can be seen in the illegal suspension of the President of the Court of Appeal and the refusal to recall the Court of Appeal’s President till date, despite the National Judicial Council (NJC) legal advice and opinion on the matter. This singular act and the illegal and unconstitutional way through which, Bakassi was ceded to Cameroun and the blatant refusal to seek the review of the International Court of Justice’s (ICJ) ruling show the present administration as lacking in capacity to assert itself both locally and internationally.

The recent give away of the nation’s wealth in the name of privatization to some retired military officers and former government functionaries portray the present administration as lacking in character when it comes to transparency and accountability. The resources of the nation has not been effectively managed to bring about growth and development of the country. The government seems to be at a cross road about the security situation in the country. The fuel subsidy scam, the unavailability of petroleum products, failure of government to meet its promise on electricity supply and the poverty situation in the country confirm that this government is not responsible.

The government instead of accepting responsibility for its failure has been trying to provide irrational justification for the several problems of the country. This can be seen in President Jonathan’s speech at the 2012 conference of the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) held in Abuja, where he said that he is the most vilified or criticized President in the world. Furthermore, the presidential aides have been very vocal in the defense of the government. This has created political problem between the legislature and the executive arms of government. The Senate as a result of this had to come out openly to ask the president to warn his aides about their utterances.

Also, the recent apology of the Information Minister, Labaran Maku, (who has been described as a careless talker by the Senate President, David Mark) to the Senate on his comment about the National Assembly’s resolutions provides a platform to assess the level of responsibility of the present democratic regime of Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. A government, it can be argued is supposed to accept responsibility for all its action(s) or inaction(s). Where this is not the case as it is here, the verdict rationally should be that the leadership is irresponsible. It is the constitutional duty and responsibility of the government to protect lives and properties of the citizenry. What we presently have in Nigeria is the constant killing of the citizens on almost a daily basis with no justification.

### **3. Recommendations**

This situation in Nigeria is not beyond redemption if only the political class can accept full responsibility for the present problems of the country. The political class needs realize the fact that they have failed the Nigerian electorate that voted for them. They should see their failure as a challenge to turn things around. The acceptance for full responsibility will be the first step towards redirecting their focus from action(s) and policies that brought the country to this sorry- state.

Again, political leaders need to accept the fact that leadership is for service to the country and not to satisfy the personal aggrandizement of godfather, self, tribe and cult groups.

Furthermore, political parties in the country should evolve a political system that will promote internal democracy. The pattern of picking candidates by the political parties should reflect transparency. Candidates for a particular office should emerge through a process that really reflects the wishes of the majority of the members the political party. There should be no imposition of candidates by privileged few or cabal as is presently the case.

The political parties should be structured to have supremacy over its elected officials like the President, State Governors and others who are allowed to hijack the structure of the parties on the basis of patronage. This system has led to the emergence of all manners of persons as members of the state and national assemblies. This practice of anointed candidates of the President and Governors has led to weak and debased characters and personalities we have in the “supposed hallowed” chambers of our assemblies. This in turn affects the quality of legislations and the over- sight functions of the assemblies since they lack the moral strength to question the

activities the President and the Governors who put them there. This also explains the rubber stamp nature of our various Houses of Assemblies including the National Assembly.

The political parties should have ideological base and manifestoes that will function as a compass for all those elected under the platform of the parties. It is the lack of these basic principles and ingredients of democracy and politics that has bred the self-showmanship and lack of focus leadership we now have in Nigeria. This has equally contributed to the irresponsible styles of governance that we are witnessing in the country.

The political parties should evolve a mechanism to ensure that the best candidates that are well prepared and equipped emerge as candidates. Indeed, the party can organize internal debates to ascertain the preparedness of their candidates.

Finally, the political parties should monitor the activities of their elected officials to ensure that they follow the parties' programmes. This will help to strengthen the supremacy of the political parties and engender political development and democratic culture based on well-articulated ideas and belief of all members. Political parties should be formed based on ideological inclinations and not on all comers' affairs.

### Conclusion

From our analysis, it is clear that the present democratic structure in Nigeria was erected on a faulty logic. At the inception, there has been an inherent contradiction between the tenets of democracy and that of autocracy as symbolized by post-military warlordism that exacerbates socio-economic problems that paved way for garrison democracy in Nigeria. The ruler's efforts to manage external challenge and the transformation of old military officers and dictators into emergency democrats, establish local power based throughout the country. The military by orientation and trainings is not an institution or establishment for the management of a nation. The failure of the post military leaders to effectively harness the abundant resources of the nation is an indication of the fact that human and material resources cannot be commanded to function. What is required are the basic principles of management combined with an intellectual attitude that is consistent, logical, ideological and liberal.

The post-military politics in Nigeria witness the incessant privatization of public sector companies via patronage and clandestine economic exchange with foreign markets. This period also provides a fertile ground for Godfatherism, clientelism and patriomonialism that are against the tenets of rational and responsible politics.

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