

POLITICAL ONANISM AND SCEPTICISM IN A DEMOCRATIC COUNTRY

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INTRODUCTION

For the first time in her political history, Nigeria is celebrating the longest period of civil rule. Nigeria has been ruled in the greater part of her history since Independence in 1960 by the Military. Thus, between 1999 and 2010, there had been a consistent, uninterrupted practice of civil rule. It is opined that in spite of this decade of civil rule, Nigeria is still not a democratic society but a democratizing one. This paper argues that political Onanism – the withdrawal of seminal force or elixir at strategic time in the attempt at democratizing, which is widespread, results from the inveterate contradictions and absurdities, which impact on the moral credibility of the democratization of the country's political system. Through the gristmill of Onanism, an ethico-political framework, the paper conceptualizes the thrust of the arguments that political skeptics and sit-tight political office-holders are Onanists, however, on different reasoning. It, therefore, concludes that unless and until there is conscious and deliberate paradigm shift on the part of the government to entrench the minimum standards of democracy, and the political skeptics also suspend their 'suspended judgment' the year 2011 would portend internecine reactions, which will continue to enervate the polity.

Nigeria is celebrating her tenth year of uninterrupted civil rule. Her history, right from Independence from the British in 1960, has had chequered civil rule, interrupted most of the time by the Military. Military intervention in the democratising experiment of the country's political history has continued to be a reference point for the decimated democratic governance. For instance, between 1960 and 1966, Nigeria had a civilian government bequeathed to her by the British colonialist, in a seriously rigged election. On January 15, 1966 the country had the first coup d'état, and the Military subsequently ruled until October 1 1979. There was a civilian 'interlude' between October 1979 and December 31 1983 when the Military struck again. The country continued under the military until May 29, 1999 when a civil rule was again ushered in. Between 1999 and 2010, a decade of uninterrupted civil rule, many Nigerians believe that there is a lot to celebrate, hence the tenth year of Democracy, coinciding with the golden jubilee

celebration of her Independence. Others believe that the journey thus far does not call for celebration but reflection that will help in achieving true democracy in the country.

There seems to be divergent opinions whether or not these ten years are, or should be, regarded as 'democratic' in the truest and widest meaning of the term, as practiced in Nigeria. While those in government – elected and appointed – believe that Nigeria is democratic; opposition parties, civil society organisations and many academics are skeptical about it. This paper aligns with the position of the latter.

In order to achieve the objective this paper, we believe that conceptual clarification is necessary. The terms to be clarified are: political Onanism, political scepticism, democratising and 2011.

CLARIFICATION OF TERMS

YEAR 2011

The year 2011 is significant in the political history of Nigeria. It is the year that general elections will be held after those of the 2007. The Constitution of Nigeria stipulates that general elections be held every four years. Apart from the fact that there will be elections that year, many politicians, especially from the opposition alliances, believe that should what happened in 2007 repeat in 2011, that is, mass rigging, political violence induced by the ruling party against opposition, Police and military partisan and partial intervention in the electoral process, partiality of Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC), false declaration of election results, intimidation of opponents, skewed judicial process, etc., there would be no need to wait for the election tribunals to determine the results of the electoral malpractices.

It is expected that those who 'won' elections in 2007 should complete their tenure in office by 2011. Yet, litigations over the elections still loom in the election tribunals three years after, and less than a year before the general elections. This has led to the concept of staggered elections. For example, Anambra State in the south eastern part of the country conducted its gubernatorial election in February 2010, while some other states will conduct theirs in 2013, as a consequence of the legal battles that trailed the 2007 elections.

The case of the Judiciary seems peculiar because it is seen as the last hope of the common man. Thus far, one can say with some degree of confidence that it has done fairly well. This does not mean that individual members of the judicial institution have not compromised its trust and principles. For in stance, there is a very strong accusation against judges at the Osun State tribunal, who are alleged to have had constant communication with the defendants, a situation that is believed to lead on a skewed judgement.¹

The ruling party, Peoples Democratic Party, also believes that no other party will be capable of wresting power from it that year. So, the year 2011 holds more fears than hopes for the country.

DEMOCRATISING

Opinions differ on whether Nigeria is a 'democratic' or 'democratising' country. Matthew Kukah has said that to call a nation democratic stimulates some praise in the current global system.² So, to say that Nigeria is democratic is to say that the principles and practice of democracy are in place. In this sense, democracy would have been understood as "popular power rule by the *demos* (people)."³ Or as Robert Dahl enunciates, the minimum standards of democracy, or "polyarchy" as he prefers to call it, would have been instituted. These include (1) broad based popular participation in political decision making (2) credible, open, free and fair competition within established and generally accepted "rules of the game" and (3) a normative, which does not just consist of safeguarding procedure and majority rule, but also the acceptance of certain more universal principles, e.g. the respect of rule of law, protection of basic human rights and the safeguarding of the legitimate interests of the minorities and disadvantaged groups within the polity.⁴

The absence of almost all of these principles or the minimum standards of democracy has led the people to stick to the concept of democratising. Ibrahim Babangida clarifies that democratisation is different from democracy. According to him, to believe that both terms are synonymous is to confuse between "the ideal or goal of democracy and the changes which actually characterize democratizing states."⁵ Democratising defines an on-going process, while democracy is the end-product. Therefore, there is a difference between appearance and reality. As Babangida puts it,

Democratisation in the absence of institutionalization leads not to democracy but chaos, disorder and "political decay." But it must be admitted that no nation becomes democratic without confronting the travails of democratisation.... Democratisation is conflict-generating because of its mobilization and participatory components.... Appropriate structures need to be put in place.... What some of us do not realise is that the absence of these structures or better still, the low degree of institutionalization of these democratic structures is the ultimate signal of lack of qualitative movement from a democratising society to a democracy.⁶

Nahzeem Mimiko corroborates the above distinction. He believes that democratising is a procession march to democracy.⁷ In a crisp manner, C. E. Henry

defines democratising as “a dynamic in the institutional and procedural process of a nation that moves such a nation closer to the conditions of democracy.”⁸

From the fore-going analysis, we shall be adopting the use of democratising for Nigeria since we believe that the minimum standards or conditions of democracy have not been met in the past ten years yet.

POLITICAL ONANISM

Onanism is derived from Onan, which in Hebrew means “power, wealth.”⁹ It has to do with the story of Onan, the son of Judah in Genesis 38 wherein Onan enjoyed sexual intercourse with his late brother’s wife, but refused to procreate through her. His action elicited judgement. Onan’s action has been described as “withdrawal system.” The fact is that Onan was not willing, in spite of the fact that he was capable, to raise a child for his late brother, Er. Onanism, therefore, means “the use of the combined quanta of power and wealth by rulers to frustrate a progressive ideology, such as democracy, by attempting to perpetuate themselves in power.”¹⁰ Strictly speaking, Onanism is “the deliberate withdrawal of the seminal force meant to fertilize a system in order to give birth to new desired species to perpetuate the genealogy arising from the inability of the deceased to keep the continuum.”¹¹

This ethico-political frame-work has been used to analyse the transition from military to civilian rule in Nigeria, and also the Third Term Agenda of former President Olusegun Obasanjo. The thrust of Onanism is that the political elites have been able to establish themselves in power and amass so much wealth, albeit corruptly, that it becomes difficult to dislodge them even though the country has not actually progressed by their misrule. They have the power and wealth; therefore, they can dictate the tune of the polity by manipulating the process for their self-interest rather than for the development of the system. In this case, they circumvent shared principles, invent or promulgate skewed ways to perpetuate themselves in power. What Nigeria has witnessed succinctly put is “a deliberate act of denying a legal and moral obligation in order to satisfy selfish and personal interest by withdrawing a life force upon which a system depends for its existence.”¹²

We shall demonstrate later the application of this frame-work to justify that Nigeria as it is presently constituted is democratising, and not yet a democracy. And that Onanism can, and does, lead to political scepticism.

POLITICAL SCEPTICISM

Ordinarily, skepticism means unwillingness to believe; doubt that certain claims or statements are true or will happen. In other words, it is a condition of mind that doubts, for instance, “the doctrine that no facts can be certainly known.”¹³ It tells much about agnostic position on issues. Thus, it can be stated that scepticism means there is no

absolute knowledge or truth about anything, which amounts to the denial of reality. It states further that beliefs are not certain nor are they justifiable or reasonable.¹⁴

Philosophically, however, scepticism in the tradition of Rene Descartes means to suspend judgement, which Moses Makinde refers to as “methodic doubt.”¹⁵ Makinde argues this fact when he said that suspension of judgement as postulated here may not be ephemeral, but may be as long as one lives, or even continues beyond one’s existence. According to him:

When you suspend judgement, you hesitate to give assent to such a judgement because there is no guarantee for its truth. By this fact, my scepticism about Nigerian politics, especially its so-called democratic system of government, arises from the fact that there seems to be no guarantee that there can be a true democracy in Nigeria, not alone in our time as Chief Awolowo had predicted a long time ago, but in the life of our future generation.¹⁶

The fore-going analysis of scepticism appears to be in the negative. However, George Akume, a former Governor of Benue State, middle Belt of Nigeria, and now a Senator, believes that scepticism is not a permanent state of mind. He argues that there is the possibility of changes in the variables that informed the skeptic’s decision. As these variables change, the skeptic is likely to be persuaded to the point of conviction that can lead to conversion of his position. This means ultimately that scepticism is not wholly negative. Akume cites Billy Dudley to justify his position. Dudley had argued that scepticism was “a general intellectual outlook... which does not deny assent but withholds it until justification is given.”¹⁷ Therefore, to cultivate or possess a skeptical mind or attitude is a virtue required to galvanise positive action from the political actors.

This position has been empirically demonstrated by Elone Nwabuzor. According to him, “scepticism is a positive thing.”¹⁸ This is so because it is a healthy state of the mind based on “empirical mental bent.”¹⁹ By this, he means that scepticism can be overcome by empirical facts rather than mere political promises or opinions that are a far cry from reality. Thomas’s example of scepticism is handy. He had doubted the resurrection of Jesus until the latter physically showed himself to him. Nwabuzor had demonstrated and supported his position by an avalanche of statistics during the military rule of Babangida. He believed that the skeptics (the hard skeptics, those who refused to change their position and believe in the transition) were wrong judging from the number of people who registered for political participation. Unfortunately, however, Nwabuzor’s premise for his thesis could be right, but the annulment of June 12 1993 general elections widely held to have been won by late M. K. O Abiola, proved right the position of the political skeptics.

POLITICAL ONANISM AS THE BASIS FOR POLITICAL SCEPTICISM

Our concern here is to demonstrate that Onanism leads to scepticism in the Nigerian political development. Again, we shall justify the fact that even though the end-product of democratising is democracy, nothing seriously suggests that the process does inexorably lead to democracy at all times.

The attempt at returning the country to civil rule started with General Yakubu Gowon (1966- 1975). However, some believe that General Aguyi-Ironsi also had a potential democratisation or transition programme. Gowon's transition programme had not been seriously elaborated. But his change of mind to keep faith with the time-table is believed widely to be the immediate reason for the overthrow of that regime.²⁰ The point we are making is that there was a withdrawal. The result is the evolution of the concept of "insincerity argument" which some believe is not scientifically conclusive.²¹ Such withdrawal they argue is not an indication of insincerity as evident in the handing-over exercise carried out by Generals Obasanjo in 1979 and Abubakar in 1999 respectively. However, Adesina Sambo would agree that the perception of insincerity leads to "skeptical, sometimes cynical, reaction to programmes of military disengagement from politics."²²

It is on record that Buhari regime did not put up any immediate or future plan to return the country to civil rule. However, Babangida's transition is credited to be the longest and most elaborate in the political history of democratisation in Nigeria. The result of the regime's Onanism was made explicit in the annulment of June 12, 1993 elections. Dipo Kolawole recounts vividly Babangida's transition programme.

He shifted severally and brazenly, the dates of his eventual handing-over of power from 1990-1992 and later to January 1993 and invariably to August 1993. He deliberately introduced strong obstacles to ensure the eventual failure of the transition programme. He banned and unbanned politicians from participating in politics as frequently as it suited his manipulative tendencies... he cancelled the June 1993 Presidential elections and created a state of political anomie as a result of the annulment of the election.²³

Kolawole further argues that the consequences of the regular insincerity in the transition programmes are political apathy and cynicism. The state of affairs usually provided a 'settling' ground for the next regime. For Abacha therefore, the broken promise of returning the country to civil rule by Babangida was the elixir needed for stabilising his regime. Thus, the questions that were paramount in Abacha's mind included: what are the sources of political scepticism, apathy and cynicism? How can government build confidence between it and the populace?²⁴

Abacha's transition programme did not essentially deviate from his predecessors. The only novel thing in it was that he manipulated the whole process and he emerged as the sole Presidential candidate of the five registered political parties. It was "a withdrawal of seminal force from the program designed for Abacha to succeed Abacha."²⁵ Kolawole observed that "the greatest source of apathy and cynicism and therefore threat to democracy and its sustainability in Nigeria, is desire of General Abacha for self-succession."²⁶

General Abubakar actually handed over power in 1999. Then the Nigerian 'democracy' was tagged 'nascent.' It was intended that it would grow rather than stunt. But events after the 2003 general elections showed that the country was still actually democratising. This is in respect of Obasanjo's Onanism expressly displayed in his Third Term Agenda. It was expected that Obasanjo should vacate office by 2007, having ruled for two terms of four years each allowed by the Constitution. His attempt to arm-twist the National Assembly to amend the Constitution amounts to withdrawal of the force of democracy. The failure to achieve his personal aim resulted in the 'do-or-die' politics he bequeathed to the political system.²⁷ The do-or-die approach to the political system was to the elimination of possible Presidential aspirants by coercion and the emergence of an unwilling, unprepared candidate.

People like Makarfi wanted to contest. Victor Attah wanted to contest.... Several other people wanted to contest. But it was the same do or die or what they call garrison politics that Obasanjo used to push them aside and some of them at gunpoint.²⁸

It was glaring that Musa Yar 'Adua was not interested in contesting for the Presidency. It was Obasanjo who told his party (Peoples Democratic Party) and Nigerians that he had prayed for who would succeed him. He claimed that God had chosen Yar 'Adua as his successor. However, "if Yar 'Adua refuses to do the work, that is between Yar 'Adua and God."²⁹ With God's supposed imprimatur, the party's primaries were circumvented, thus producing Yar 'Adua as the Presidential candidate and Goodluck Jonathan, who was battling with the failure to secure the governorship ticket of his State, as the running mate.

President Yar 'Adua's Administration appears not to be exculpated from political Onanism as well. The case of the gubernatorial re-run in Ekiti State, south west of Nigeria in April 2009 apodictically demonstrates our point. In the middle of the election, the Resident Electoral Commissioner, Mrs. Olusola Adebayo resigned. The reason for her sudden resignation was that she was being pressured to act against the rule and her conscience. Her letter of resignation is instructive.

It is with heavy heart that I am writing to inform you of my resignation as the Resident Electoral Commissioner for Ekiti State. In accordance with the rule of law, the on-going election in Ekiti State was supposed to be the election that will enhance the image of INEC, electoral process in our dear country Nigeria and the whole black race. Unfortunately, the circumstances changed in the middle of the process; therefore, my conscience as a Christian cannot allow me to further participate in the process.³⁰

At the time she was supposed to have acted in accordance with the rule of law, and the dictate of her conscience, she withdrew. The result is extant: she re-surfaced only to act against her conscience as a Christian. If one has to interrogate the concept of conscience, one will agree that it is supposed to be a function of social, political, moral, and spiritual demands, which include “all intellectual acts which discern the goodness and badness of a concrete human act either past, present or future.”³¹ Mrs. Adebayo’s political Onanism has impugned on the integrity of the electoral process. Thus the enthusiasm of the electorate has been dampened, resulting, as it were, in political scepticism.

Another serious act of political Onanism Yar ‘Adua’s Administration engaged in was the tampering with the pivot of Justice Uwais’ Electoral Report. At the inauguration of his government, President Yar ‘Adua publicly declared that the electoral process that brought him to the power was flawed with malpractices. This was the background to the setting up of the Justice Uwais Committee, which recommended among other novel things for the conduct of credible, free, fair and acceptable elections, that INEC’s chairman should be appointed by the President on the recommendation of the National Judicial Council contrary to the present arrangement whereby the President’s appointed chairmen have always done the bidding of the President. The refusal of the President to approve Justice Uwais’ recommendation is Onanistic, and can lead to political scepticism.

In view of our political Onanism, we discover that there is always a succession, willy-nilly. However, the successors thus far have never been the desired ones. The manipulation of the democratising process, whether in the military transition programmes or the civil case, has more often than not resulted in political scepticism by those who were coerced out of the process. These skeptics and their followers spread their tentacles of scepticism; withdrawing their skill and resources from the advancement of democratic process in the country. Secondly, the gross lack of internal democracy within the parties has led to serious problems. Thus, this has resulted in cross-carpeting from one party to another. And those who remain within the party, still aggrieved also become sceptics who believe they should hold their integrity. The lack of internal or intra-party democracy inexorably attests to the lack of democracy at the inter-party level, thus ossifying the point that Nigeria is still democratising.

POLITICAL SCEPTICISM: CONTRADICTIONS AND ABSURDITIES

Moses Makinde enunciates that “there is no democracy in Nigeria.”³² This assertion was made after punctiliously examining the contradictions and absurdities that characterise the Nigerian system as a whole. According to him, the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 by the British is likened to a monstrous couple called contradiction and absurdity. This couple gave birth to two set of twins, the first, indiscipline and lawlessness and the second, greed and corruption. The country ever since has been on a relay race, usually started by indiscipline, which passes the baton to lawlessness, and on to greed, while corruption perfectly finishes the race. Since the ‘finisher’ of the race is usually the most popular, it is not out of place that corruption is so popular and widespread in Nigeria.³³

Makinde argues that “Nigeria is a God-intoxicated society.”³⁴ Yet, it is almost the worst corrupt country on earth. Odumuyiwa’s inaugural lecture titled “A Religious but criminal Society – Any Remedy?” stoutly captures the essence of the contradictions and absurdities in Nigeria.³⁵ Makinde observes correctly when he said “Indiscipline and lawlessness, greed and corruption – have displaced God and substituted MONEY as an object of worship in our society, to the extent that we are neither accountable to God nor humanity.”³⁶ Even though Nigeria is very rich in oil, Nigerians are constantly and perennially experiencing shortage of petroleum products. Nigeria supplies her neighbours with electricity, yet Nigerians are perpetually in darkness, except for individuals who can afford fuel generators. Nigeria fights for peace, justice and harmony in other African countries; Nigerians are starved with these social delicacies. Nigeria is where government and the people pray for peace everyday, yet they sponsor and kill themselves at the slightest provocation. Nigerian leaders go to international places to observe credible elections, they come back home to conduct the worst elections in human history. Nigerian leaders travel out to Asia to understudy the secret of their economic turn around; they fuel the ember of economic sabotage at home. Nigerian legislators throttle around the globe to learn the art or science of law-making, they only come back to lazy away or promulgate unenforceable laws. In Nigeria, government will announce a budget; it will go to sleep or at best implements those aspects that suit government officials and their cronies at the expense of the people, or worst implements projects outside the budget with impunity. Nigeria prides herself in fighting corruption, yet will corruptly dismiss the arrowhead of the crusade for daring to expose the monuments of official corruption. It is indeed a mount of corruption and a vale of reform.³⁷

Nigeria is where a minister will ‘town-cry rebranding but will disobey the National Anthem the following minute. Nigeria will voluntarily set up a negotiating committee with labor unions only to blatantly renege to sign or implement its contents until they embark on industrial action that will rob the country of huge sum when

quantified. Nigeria talks about the rule of law, whereas the rule of the jungle prevails. “Disobedience to the rule of law is a poison to democracy and civilized life.”³⁸ Nigeria advertises the dividends of democracy whereas the contents are more hardship for the poor and more abundant life for the political elites and the compradors. Nigeria is where law-makers are the prominent law-breakers with impunity. Nigeria is where government announces pay cut for her officials only to increase their budget approval rate in order to compensate themselves on the supposed pay cut. Nigeria is where people being tried for corruption that normally are supposed to be shame-faced will give money to market women who appear in court with tumbrel and traditional uniform to sing the praises of criminals. Nigeria is where security agents haul innocent citizens into prison while they protect known criminals. ‘Little criminals’ suffer the consequences of the breach of the law, ‘big’ one walk the streets free with numerous chieftaincy titles. All these and basketful of others social and spiritual maladies space does not allow us to mention make for political scepticism, thus ensuring that our political exercises are “everlasting experiments in political failure.”³⁹ These contradictory absurdities have ossified the skeptic’s belief that if things continue like this, democracy will continue to be a utopian ideal.

These contradictions and absurdities are empirical facts that make case for the hard skeptics – those who believe that we should doubt methodically. That is to say, suspension of judgement should outlive us. This means that there is no foreseeable hope that these factors that enervate political participation will be changed positively. These accentual factors are worse because they permeate both the government and the governed. It becomes a vicious circle. Thus the hard skeptic will continue to suspend judgement; steer clear of the political ‘dirty’ waters and never envisage any positive change in the political variables that can persuade him to change his position. As Makinde puts it,

My scepticism rests on my suspicion that these, truly, are incurable for now or in the near future, especially as they have grown their wings from top to bottom.... This situation is so bad that it has become spectacularly scandalous.... Awo had said that we cannot see Democracy in our life time. To this I shall add, not only in our life time, but also in our next generation, if situations remain as they are.⁴⁰

From the fore-going analysis, it appears that the sceptics are hard on their decision to remain aloof from the political system, perhaps justifiably so. But what if the current situation changes, will the sceptics change their position?

THE PROGNOSIS OF ONANISM IN SCEPTICISM

Thus far, we have tried to appreciate that the government of Nigeria right from Independence has been the bane of political development. And the problem rests with the leadership. This is resultant from the fact of political Onanism, which we have tried to show, which usually leads to political scepticism. At the point of political scepticism, the sceptics do not foresee a change in the inveterate factors or variables that have ossified their position. In fact, these factors are recurring and empirical.

There appears to be a twist of thought in the behaviour of the sceptics. Even though they have deliberate, measured and analytical tolls to demonstrate why they cannot commit themselves to the polity, their reaction, it seems to us, apodictically exemplifies political Onanism. The argument here is that political Onanism is a situation whereby the political seminal force is withdrawn so that the process is not fertilized. While we have demonstrated this on the part of the government, the argument here assumes that the sceptics also act in the same vein with the government. The sceptics suspend judgement on the political situation. Thus, they do not participate. Their non-participation amounts to withdrawal of their skill, wealth and foresight from the fertilization of the political process.

This argument is against the background that if everyone is a political skeptic, political agitations and struggles that led to the democratisation of the country would not have taken place. Today, we have around us political activists, civil society organisations, unionists, market women, pro-democracy and human rights activists and even beggars who fought the military. Many of them do not participate in partisan politics, whether as an error of judgement or deliberate personal principle and integrity. The fact is that through their active participation in the country is at least democratising. By the token of this reality, the sceptics should 'suspend their suspended judgement' and participate in active politics so that the country can move on in the political march.

The hard sceptics may be uncomfortable with the above conclusion. They have their reasons. If the government is an Onanist and the sceptics Onanists, then the system may be left to run spontaneously. But this is not possible. The system needs, and will always need operators. However, historical facts may further justify the skeptic's position. For example, Chief Awolowo was described as "the best President Nigeria never had."⁴¹ The electoral process that denied him the Presidency is widely believed to have been maliciously manipulated against him. For him therefore, it was better to watch the political drama with the hindsight that the country was not prepared for democracy and its condiments. This scepticism appears justified.

Another example is the case of the late Bola Ige. It was Ige, after the political frustration that the system thrust on him, decided to "*siddon look*." *Siddon look* is a tactical withdrawal from active politics. This could be as a result of the frustrated efforts to change the system for the better. The government of Obasanjo felt that his Onanistic

posture would not do the system any good. After being thoroughly pressured, he joined the government as a Minister. Unfortunately, and as if to justify the position of the sceptics, Ige was murdered in his bedroom. And nobody has been brought to book for the dastardly and fatal act. This again encourages scepticism, apathy and cynicism.

Some have argued that political scepticism is not an innate vice or virtue. It is driven by the unpleasant experiences and contradictory absurdities that characterise the system. This school of thought believes that the political skeptic has an orientation that is borne out of fear and apprehension. This fear, it is thought, is unfounded, which the skeptic holds to be real.⁴² However, those who hold this point of view are those who are politically successful in terms of Nigerian politics. For them, what the sceptics need to do is to come out of their cocoon and join the winning party. But it appears to us that the fear and apprehension expressed by the sceptics are real. This has been established even by Nwabuzor who sees scepticism as a virtue. His empirical study justified his thesis, but the antithesis, which is the annulment of June 12 1993 elections remains an irredeemable factor to entrench the position of the sceptics.⁴³

POLITICAL SCEPTICISM AND THE MARCH TOWARDS 2011

One may conclude without serious equivocation that the political sceptics have justifiable grounds to abstain from active or partisan politics in Nigeria. One may also add that the prevailing situation may not change before 2011, thus justifying the disillusionment of the sceptics. However, we have also shown that the sceptics have a moral burden. This is in line with their perpetual withdrawal that has established the 'criminals' in power. These political 'criminals' are those who further exclude or alienate the skeptical elites from participating in politics so that there will not be radical challenge. For the hard sceptics, the sceptics who joined the government have more often than not performed disappointedly either as a consequence of systemic problem or human factor.

One can also interrogate that attitude of the sceptics whether or not they are patriotic to the course of nation-building. This is in respect of their outright non-participation in the electoral process. It is our belief that the sceptics know that not all politicians are bad. We also believe that both the government and the sceptics have serious roles to play in the democratising process. The sceptics must realise that the government has repeatedly used its power to exploit the political system to its advantage. If the sceptics uncompromisingly hold fast to their position, it is likely that the system will continue to replicate its kind of leadership in the polity. Thus, the examples of the political process in Ghana and South Africa should persuade the sceptics. These countries have their political hiccups, but they are being celebrated as quintessence of electoral process in Africa today.

The recent political development in Ekiti State, Nigeria in respect of the April 2009 governorship re-run elections should also persuade the sceptics. In spite of the

Onanistic manipulation in the process, the electorate demonstrated an unusual bravery in the midst of insuperable conditions orchestrated by the government and Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC). The electorate needs political support, and should the attitude they displayed during that election spread across the country come 2011, much positive development would be achieved.

The incandescent performance of Rev. Fr. Moses Adasu, a former governor of Benue State, who was a Catholic Priest, now dead, should also persuade the sceptics to change their position. Adasu believed that the ‘dirty’ water of Nigerian politics could be sanctified by the incursion into politics by both seasoned and integrity-driven sceptics and real Christians. Many Catholics pressed for the excommunication of Fr. Adasu, thus invoking the 1983 Code of Canon Law that stipulates that “Clerics are forbidden to assume public office when it means sharing in the exercise of civil power.” They further insisted that Fr. Adasu violated Canon 287 no. 2 that states: “They are not to play an active role in political parties or in directing trade unions unless in the judgement of the competent ecclesiastical authority, this is required for the defence of the rights of the Church or to promote the common good.”⁴⁴ Such provisions make suitable candidates skeptical and at best reduce them to criticizing the government and politicians.⁴⁵

The travails of Nuhu Ribadu, rather than discourage or dissuade the sceptics should persuade them to join in the process of positive change of the polity. Ribadu was the former Chairman of the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC), whose dismissal from the Nigeria Police was politically motivated for daring to declare the monumental corruption government officials have perpetuated over the years. Ribadu’s case is a contradiction of action: sacked at home, celebrated outside. In May 2009, he was one of those invited around the world by the US’ House of Representatives Committee on Financial Services to speak on the global effects of corruption. His passion and doggedness in the fight against corruption was unequivocally displayed in the paper he presented. In it, he elucidates the helplessness of the victims of corruption and the contradictory absurdities that characterise the Nigerian government commitment to fighting corruption. He says in part:

Corruption is killing Nigeria, and it is killing across the African continent. I urge you to view the fight against corruption as the ultimate humanitarian effort, for surely there is no stronger chain to shackle the poor to their lot.... Corruption makes democracy impossible because it subverts the will of the people. A select few, with so much *money and authority*, continue to steal elections and make a mockery of the notion of government by the people or for the people. Nigeria today is the worst example of electoral theft in the world.... Corruption is one of the greatest crimes the world has ever known. But those who are suffering the most from its poison are the least able to fight it; their resources, their health

and wellbeing, and their futures have been stolen away. There is no surer salt in the earth of democracy than representative governance.⁴⁶

This should be a fountain of encouragement to the sceptics because Ribadu has every reason to resign to the cocoon as the hard sceptics do. Only recent, after the demise of President Yar 'Adua was he reinstated and retired, obviously as a demonstration of his principled stand against corruption. People were really hard on the government when he was sacked. President Goodluck Jonathan believes Ribadu deserves a fair treatment which he now gets.

On the part of the government the need to resolve its self-contradictions is necessary before 2011. The spirit in the off-spring of the monstrous couple – indiscipline, lawlessness, greed and corruption – must be exorcised of their negative impact on the society. The lip service being paid to the fighting of the ‘monstrous children’ of Nigerian contradiction and absurdity in the political arena must turn to pragmatic action. In other words, the government must be seen doing concrete things towards removing these factors. Corruption is at the base of political underdevelopment in the country. Those in government are believed to be more notorious for this. “Much of these resources have been stolen and stashed abroad by Politically Exposed Persons (PEPs) and their proxies.”⁴⁷ Farida Waziri, the current Chairman of EFCC, observes correctly when she assessed the civil rule in Nigeria in the past 10 years.

The first target of corruption is the political class.... The experience with our democracy since 1999 is typical. The political process has diminished transparency with every election. The immaturity of the political class manifests at every stage of the process. From nominations to the conduct of the elections proper, the process has been fraught with violence, thuggery, bribery and manipulations. Perhaps, Nigeria will go down in history as the country with the most litigated electoral results.... It is regrettable that many people still associate politics with corruption, greed, self-serving, extravagance, superficiality, cronyism, etc. among other failings.... We must accept that our politics is not good enough at this stage of our development.⁴⁸

If the government exercises its political will, these can be substantially addressed before 2011. The clout of democracy dividends is summarized in the *Compendium Par* 567, which impels the government to appreciate the thrust of democratic system. It states:

They must show appreciation for the democratic system “inasmuch as it ensures the participation of citizens in making political choices, guarantees to the governed the possibility both of electing and holding accountable

those who govern them, and of replacing them through peaceful means when appropriate.”⁴⁹

To achieve this, we strongly recommend the Ghanaian option, whereby the Constitution makes provision for the establishment of National Commission for Civil Education. The Commission should be, as in that case of Ghana, entrusted with the responsibility of mobilizing, sensitizing and educating the citizens on their civil rights, duties and responsibilities. The Commission is to be empowered to ensure a development of a true democratic system in which the principles of the Constitution forms the basis of “the citizens’ defence and guarantee for their individual and collective freedom.”⁵⁰ It is widely believed that the Ghanaian Commission succeeded substantially in encouraging and inspiring the citizens to defend their political and civil rights. Through the mobilization efforts of the Commission, it is believed that the Ghanaian would further “demand for the justifiability of the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy enshrined in chapter six of the constitution.”⁵¹ Nigeria deserves no less than this before 2011.

CONCLUSION

We have argued that the year 2011 stimulates serious attention from both political gladiators and the opposition. The political sceptics, informed by the historic political Onanism, believe that it is pertinent to suspend judgement or to doubt methodically. By this, since the government cannot avail itself of the political disabilities that have characterized the polity, it is not necessary to participate. This informed position inversely hits back on the sceptics because their non-participation is a demonstration of political Onanism. It also helps the politicians to entrench and consolidate their stronghold on the polity thereby further enervating the poor and the sceptics alike.

Thus, there is the need for a paradigm shift: on the side of the government, there should be actual step towards ensuring an enabling political environment for all to participate in the process. One urgent way is to fight corruption which is the most vociferous among the ‘children’ of the monstrous couple. This is important because the first target of corruption is the political class. On the side of the sceptics, they cannot continue to stay away as that will not better the lot of the people and the polity.

In order to mobilize, sensitize and educate the citizens before 2011, there is the urgent need for the Ghanaian option. The full implementation of the Justice Uwais’ Panel is a *sine qua non* for building confidence in the citizenry and demonstrates the claim of the government that it will always be committed to the course of credible electoral process and respect for the rule of law. With the appointment of a new INEC chairman, which has been popularly acclaimed, the government should also give him the policy and financial independence to operate in order to justify its true status of independence. It is

only by so doing that we believe that all the projections that 2011 will bring more grief than the country has ever had will be faulted.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ The members of the Tribunal were alleged of having regular phone conversations with the defendant's lawyers. All their conversations are published in the *The News* magazine with the caption: "The Scandal of Judges: How Osun Tribunal was Compromised" in its 14th July 2008 issue.
- ² M. H. Kukah, "Democracy, Legitimacy and the Struggle for Justice" being a lecture delivered at the memorial convocation in honour of late Abraham Adesanya, in *The Nation*, May 4, 2009.
- ³ C. Ake, "Rethinking African Democracy" in *Journal of Democracy*, 2/1, winter 1991, 32.
- ⁴ See the Speech of Professor Dirk Berg-Schlosser of Phillips University, Germany at the Opening Ceremony of the International Conference on "Problems of Democratisation in Africa" in O. Omoruyi, et.al. (eds.) *Democratisation in Africa: Nigerian Perspectives*, vol.1, Benin City: Hima & Hima Ltd. 1994. 302.
- ⁵ See Address by General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida, at the Formal Opening Ceremony of the International Conference on "Problems of Democratisation in Africa" in O. Omoruyi, et. al. (eds.) *Democratisation in Africa: Nigerian Perspectives*, 307.
- ⁶ Babangida, 307.
- ⁷ N. O. Mimiko, "The Abacha Administration's Democratisation Programme and the Prospects for Democracy in Nigeria" in D. Kolawole and N. O. Mimiko (eds.) *Political Democratisation and Economic Deregulation in Nigeria under the Abacha Administration 1993-1998*, Ado-Ekiti: Department of Political Science, 1998, 13. See also N. O. Mimiko, "Nigeria's Aborted Democratisation Programmes 1986-1993: An Introduction to the Issues" in *Crises and Contradictions in Nigeria's Democratisation Programme 1986-1993*, Akure: Stebak Books, 1995, 6.
- ⁸ See E. C. Henry, "Economic Adjustment and Political Reform: Are they Compatible? Being a paper presented at the 1993 International Studies Convention, Acapulco, Mexico, March 23-27, 1993.
- ⁹ L. Hicks, "Onan" in G. A. Buttrick (ed.) *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Illustrated Encyclopedia*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962, 602.

- ¹⁰ J. A. Onimhawo and B. O. Igboin, “Onanism: A Moral Evaluation of Political Power Retention in Nigeria” Monograph Series 1, 2008, 5.
- ¹¹ Onimhawo and Igboin, 5.
- ¹² Onimhawo and Igboin, 8.
- ¹³ A. M. Macdonald, (ed.) *Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary*, Great Britain: W & R Chambers Ltd, 1981, 1208.
- ¹⁴ G. Akume, “Political Scepticism as an Impediment to the Sustenance of Nigerian Democracy: The View of a Sociologist in Politics” being a lecture delivered at the 2004 Annual Alumni Lecture of the University of Ibadan, September 24th, 2004, 4.
- ¹⁵ M. A. Makinde, “Political Scepticism: Nigeria and the Outside World” Inaugural Lecture Series 167 of the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, March 9th, 2004, 15.
- ¹⁶ Makinde, 15.
- ¹⁷ Akume, 15.
- ¹⁸ E. J. Nwabuzor, “Scepticism and Transition: A Confrontation with Research Data” in O. Omoruyi, et.al. (eds.) *Democratisation in Africa: Nigerian Perspectives*, 258.
- ¹⁹ Nwabuzor, 258.
- ²⁰ A. Sambo, “Transition to Democracy in Nigeria: Possibilities and Limitations” in O. Omoruyi, et.al. (eds.) *Democratisation in Africa: Nigerian Perspectives*, 212.
- ²¹ Sambo, 212.
- ²² Sambo, 212.
- ²³ D. Kolawole, “Apathy, Cynicism and the Abacha Transition Programme” in Kolawole and Mimiko (eds.) *Political Democratisation*, 4. See also O. Dare, “A Failure of Skepticism” in *The Nation*, May 12, 2009, 62.
- ²⁴ Kolawole, 3, 5.
- ²⁵ Onimhawo and Igboin, 26.
- ²⁶ Kolawole, 9.
- ²⁷ Onimhawo and Igboin, 29-36. See also M. Haruna “Still on Yar’Adua and Politics 2011” in *The Nation*, April 29th, 2009, 64.
- ²⁸ See the Interview with CAN Secretary, Samuel Salifu in *Daily Sun*, May 4th, 2009, 30.
- ²⁹ *Daily Sun*, May 4th, 2009, 30.
- ³⁰ See the text of the resignation letter of Mrs. Olusola Ayoka Adebayo, the Ekiti State Resident Electoral Commissioner in *The Nation*, April 29th, 2009, 1.
- ³¹ J. A. Onimhawo, “Conscience and Accountability in the Third Republic” in L. Mbefo (ed.) *The Nigerian Journal of Theology*, 7/1, 1993, 27.
- ³² Makinde, 28.
- ³³ Makinde, 14.

- ³⁴ Makinde, 18.
- ³⁵ For the religious contradictions in the country, see for instance, E. A. Odumuyiwa, “A Religious But Criminal Society – Any Remedy?” 19th Inaugural Lecture, Ogun State University, 27th February, 2001.
- ³⁶ Makinde, 17.
- ³⁷ See for instance, B. O. Igboin, “The Mount of Corruption and the Vale of Reform” being a paper presented at the Annual Conference of the Nigerian Association for the Study of Religions, at the Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, September 2007.
- ³⁸ Makinde, 21.
- ³⁹ Makinde, 19.
- ⁴⁰ Makinde, 36, 39.
- ⁴¹ See M. A. Makinde, *Awo as a Philosopher*, Ile-Ife: OAU Press, 2002. See also H. I. D. Awolowo, *A Memoir of the Jewel* (ed.) M. A. Makinde, Ile-Ife: OAU Press, 2003.
- ⁴² Akume, 7.
- ⁴³ Nwabuzor, 258.
- ⁴⁴ Cited in E. M. Ezeogu, *Bible and Politics: Can Nigerian Catholics Baptise the “Dirty Game” of Politics?* Enugu: SNAAP, 2007, 47.
- ⁴⁵ Ezeogu, 45.
- ⁴⁶ N. Ribadu, “Capital Loss and Corruption: The Example of Nigeria” in *The Nation*, May 20th, 2009, 9.
- ⁴⁷ F. Waziri, “How Corruption Undermines Democracy” being a lecture delivered at the First Anniversary of the *Nigerian Compass* Newspaper at Isheri, Ogun State. For details, see *Nigerian Compass*, May 27, 2009, 46-47.
- ⁴⁸ Waziri, 47.
- ⁴⁹ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, Citta del Vaticano: Liberia Editrice Vatican, 2004.
- ⁵⁰ F. Falana, “Elections: An Essential Element of a Democratic Society (1) in *The Nation*, May 4, 2009, 49.
- ⁵¹ F. Falana, “Elections: An Essential Element of a Democratic Society (2) in *The Nation*, May 6, 2009, 52.

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