

## The ghosts of the past

(**The Guardian**, June 21, 28; July 5, 12, and 19, 2012)

I call the "democratic" dispensation which was inaugurated in Nigeria on May 29, 1999 **Obasanjo's Democracy** - in honour of its founder, General Olusegun Obasanjo. But I must say at once, as an extended footnote, that I am not an "Obasanjo basher", a member of a group of Nigerians who think that no political criticism of the present order, or any major event, will be complete without bringing in or "roping in" Obasanjo, the former president.

We know Obasanjo very well and each day enriches this knowledge. He has remained very active in Nigeria's public life since retirement from the Presidency in 2007. Hence our knowledge of him is always fresh. Obasanjo's credentials are quite "intimidating" and the history of his public life is voluminous. Nothing about Obasanjo can either be whitewashed or be painted darker than it is. This is simply because we know him too well. There is, therefore, no need to embellish any story about him, or to attribute to him anything for which he is not responsible, or to attempt to mystify or demystify him. I said that Obasanjo is the founder of what is called Nigeria's Fourth Republic, but I want to add that this is to the extent that a single individual, on account of his or her role - which may, in fact, be overwhelming - can be called the founder of a political system.

Implicit in the last statement - although this can also be made explicit - is the proposition that neither the 1999 general election (which I believe was an ""arrangement"), nor the 1999 Constitution (which was seen for the first time long after Obasanjo assumed office) created this Republic. Obasanjo did. The "smell" of Obasanjo will remain, whoever is the president of Nigeria, until the system is reconstructed.

Returning to the main subject of this discussion, I want to recall some events which took place in the month of May 2012. These include the ongoing controversy over General Muhammadu Buhari's alleged threats or warnings about possible trouble - or is it bloodshed? - if the 2015 elections are "rigged"; the politics of Justice Ayo Salami's recall; Comrade Femi Falana's robust essay in defence of the radical governor of Osun State, Comrade Rauf Aregbesola (**This Day**, May 2, 2012); private, but voiced, reactions to the death of Comrade Paschal Bafyau, former President of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC); and - the most shocking of all - President Goodluck Jonathan's May 29 broadcast.

The battle over Justice Salami lasted the whole of May, and is still raging. **The Salami case is essentially a political struggle:** a political struggle waged on multiple and shifting platforms -including electoral and judicial. It started on the electoral platform, moved to the judicial platform, and will return to the political. Because the question is essentially political - a question of power - it is ultimately resolvable only politically. Any other resolution is a temporary truce. But the question may be asked: Why is the electoral - legal struggle not as acute in other parts of the country as it is in the Southwest?

The answer can be found in three factors: the history of political struggle in the Southwest; what happened in the 2003 general election (the "capture" of the region by Obasanjo's People's Democratic Party - PDP); the massive rigging of the 2007 general election; and the resolve of the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN) to win back the region which it believed was stolen in 2003. ACN's counter-attack started immediately after the 2003 elections.

The Justice Ayo Salami question can be summarized like this: In the 1999 general election, the Alliance for Democracy (AD) won all the states in the Southwest, but lost the presidential election. Four years later, in 2003, the AD lost all the states it had won, except Lagos State,

to PDP. By 2007, ACN had emerged as the successor party to AD. When the PDP tried to repeat its 2003 feat in the 2007 general election, ACN launched a ferocious counter-attack on two fronts simultaneously: political and legal.

Everyone knows that ACN and PDP are the two opposing vanguards in the fight over Justice Salami. Other forces - including mass democratic forces - are, of course, involved. But it was the vanguards that drew the battle lines, raised the slogans and indicated the lines of march. These other forces are not, by any means, "robots"; they are acting consciously. All I am saying is that they were mobilised by the vanguards. It was they - the other "forces" - that transformed a disagreement between elites into a battle. And we know that a political group which cannot mobilise "other forces" into battle over a strategic question is not a vanguard and cannot dream of winning or retaining power - not even through a rigged election or a coup d'etat.

Emerging as key factor in the successive victories recorded by ACN since the general elections of 2007 was the presence, in the leadership of that party, of a group of educated, brilliant and committed young men and women who had become, even at that time, veterans of democratic struggles - against a succession of arbitrary dictatorships. The result was that ACN won back, through bitter legal battles, three states initially declared for PDP (Osun, Ekiti and Edo). The struggle then shifted to the institution that had arbitrated the political battle - the judiciary. In the 2011 general elections ACN expanded its victories by adding Ogun and Oyo States.

This political - legal tussle reminds me of the struggle of judicial appointments and the politics of tax payment "when due" that preceded the hand-over of power by General Obasanjo in 1979; the "two-thirds of 19" battle that followed the election of President Shehu Shagari and his subsequent inauguration on October 1, 1979; the impeachment of Governor Balarabe Musa of Kaduna State in 1981; and the deportation, from Nigeria, of Abdulrahman Shugaba, the Majority Leader of Borno State House of Assembly early in 1980.

The recent harassment of Governor Rauf Aregbesola of Osun State by the Nigerian security agencies and Southwest PDP leaders on the ridiculous and provocative allegations of Islamic extremism and secessionist mobilization reminds me of the type

of politics I witnessed - at close quarters - as a teenage school boy in the city I grew up in the present Osun State. It was in mid - 1960s. The Nigerian National Democratic party (NNDP) had just come power in Western Region and the struggle between this new ruling party and the opposition United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) was tough, bitter and bloody.

One day, a local opposition leader woke up to see a goat roaming his compound. As he was wondering how the goat managed to jump the fence into the compound, two local police officers emerged from nowhere and demanded to know how the goat that had been missing for three days got into his compound. The bewildered man was arrested, taken to the Police station, and accused of stealing a goat. He remained in police cell, without formal charges, until he agreed to join the ruling party.

Not long after this forced change of party membership, two local government officials visited another opposition leader one mid - morning. When the man asked to know their mission, they replied that what they came for required sitting down. The UPGA leader took them to his living room. After another round of greetings, one of the visitors announced their mission: "We think that as a prominent indigene and resident of this city, you deserve to be informed of the local council's new development plans. We are planning to construct a number of new roads and widen some existing ones. But looking at the plans, we saw that one of the most important roads will pass through this your house. We are here to request you to remove the house before the road construction starts next month".

The man sought for advice, weighed his options carefully, and then agonized for a very long time. Eventually, he succumbed. And the non-existent road project was abandoned. But against each of the two events - call them the "roaming goat" and the "fake road project" - there must have been at least a hundred cases of resistance to the logical - and heroic - end. That was about 48 years ago. Governor Rauf must have been eight years old then. Exhuming and utilising, today, this method of political harassment in a theatre that is steeled in mass struggle is political degeneracy of the worst kind. It is even more pathetic that the weapon is being deployed against a clear-headed and courageous activist like Rauf Aregbesola. I refer readers to Femi Falana's **Beyond Aregbesola's treason trial (ThisDay, Wednesday, May 2, 2012)**.

## II.

Former military Head of State, General Muhammadu Buhari, has been a continuous and very bitter critic of PDP and its federal government at least since 2003 when he first contested the presidential election. He claims two main grounds: **election rigging** and **corruption**. Buhari believes that he had actually won the three presidential elections he was adjudged to have lost, namely: 2003, 2007 and 2011. He has warned about revolution and mass revolt. He uses strong language and frightening expressions.

However, in this culture of harsh and, sometimes, hate, language, Buhari is not alone. It is at the moment the dominant language of political discourse in Nigeria. The main targets here are the presidency and the ruling party - which, we must quickly add, always respond in kind. However, although the ruling party and its federal government have several bitter critics, Buhari is different in at least four respects. As a military dictator between January 1984 and August 1985, General Buhari was very harsh especially against corruption and "indiscipline". The memory of that period refuses to fade in Nigerian politics. In the second place, he is not generally regarded as a liberal - either in politics or in religion. In the third place, many people believe that General Buhari's politics and his pronouncements partly inspired the mass riots that greeted the 2011 presidential election result. And, in the fourth place, General Buhari is very popular with the masses of the North, especially the poor. For these reasons - especially the first and the last - Buhari, as a person and as a political leader, is feared - openly or secretly - in the circles of big and wealthy politicians across the country and across all political formations. When I say **all**, I mean **all**. If you ask "you nko, you no dey fear Buhari?" I will admit that I fear him, but not much more than I fear the other prospective contenders for the presidency. Those I don't fear are either dead or are not likely to contest **this** presidency in 2015 or at any time.

Every regime, more so a military dictatorship, is concerned, in this permanent struggle for power not only in what the **Opposition** does, but also in the **internal politics** of the Opposition. And so it targets, in particular, the leadership of the Opposition - its election or selection and, thereafter, its policies and activities. From this concern and interest result continuous attempts at co-optation, infiltration, bribery, harassment and even

assassination. It follows that in assessing the leadership of any segment of the Opposition, especially a radical one - such as the Labour Movement - the question is not whether it is subjected to **pressure** from the regime (this is given) but how it responds to this pressure. This general thesis must be utilized in assessing the conduct of the leadership of the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) and its former president, Comrade Paschal Bafyau - who died on May 15, 2012.

I had known Paschal since mid-1980s when he was Secretary General of the Nigeria Union of Railway Workers (NUR). In early 1986, we both met in the 17-member Political Bureau set up by General Ibrahim Babangida's military regime. I did not know, and can still not confirm, how I or any of the other members were appointed. When more than three years later I said this in a closed meeting of the **Left**, a veteran, now dead, said he was the one who nominated me to represent the **Left**. He did not offer more information than that, and I did not pursue the matter or inquire how Comrade Paschal and Comrade Halilu Ibrahim - another labour leader in the panel - were nominated. This, in spite of the fact that, at a personal level, I enjoyed the closest relationship in that Bureau with Comrade Halilu.

As I stated in my own partially published report, members of the Bureau were subjected to intense pressure by the regime. When I noticed this, I decided not to seek allies within the Bureau- despite my close relationship with some members - but to follow my consciousness and the definite mandate I received from the tendency of the Nigerian Left to which I belonged. In particular, I decided not to discuss our work with any member outside plenary and committee meetings.

Comrades Paschal and Halilu must have noticed my stance and, perhaps, also decided to insulate our personal relationship -which was very warm - from the Bureau's work. And when the final showdown between other members, on the one hand, and myself, on the other, came at the end of November 1986, I fought a lone battle. I testify, however, that Comrades Paschal and Halilu, as well as a number of other members, were consistently progressive in their views and submissions. They laboured unsuccessfully to work out compromises between my positions and those of the majority. A particular member, Okon Edet Uya, a retired Professor of History at the University of Calabar and a former Ambassador, was a "wizard" in quickly producing brilliant middle positions between my positions and those of

others. But his efforts also failed. In the event Paschal, Halilu and Uya could not "save" me when the motion to technically exclude me from the Bureau was tabled.

It is well known how General Babangida initially tried - and largely succeeded - in cultivating warm personal relationships with many members of Nigeria's intelligentsia, radical intellectuals, business people, labour leaders and leftists - across the country. He also appeared to have made so many friends in the civil society long before he became military president. Beyond this personal relationships, General Babangida's regime was interested in the internal politics of mass organizations, including the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC). The general's influence in them, up to the end of the 1980s, was, to say the least, substantial.

This influence made it more difficult to fashion out a united revolutionary response to the regime's political manouvres. But this much I can testify here and now and **in defence of history**: Both Comrade Paschal Bafyau and Bashorun Moshood Abiola were personal friends of Babangida. We knew this, but still supported Paschal in the Labour decision of December, 1988 and Abiola in the June 1993 national decision. I also testify that Paschal's closeness -together with that of a Sokoto prince, now dead - to top members of the regime became, at a point, almost decisive in the battle to save the life of a comrade after the abortive bloody coup of April 22, 1990.

It was later learnt that Comrade Paschal Bafyau was to be the running mate to Bashorun Abiola in the annulled June 1993 presidential election. Bafyau did not become the running mate. I don't know if this had any connection with the annulment of the election, but you may wish to read Dr. Adinoyi Ojo Onuka's article **Bafyau: the missing puzzle in the June 12 Saga (Daily Trust, Tuesday May 29, 2012, page 86)**. I testify again: In both the post -June 12,1993 struggle, following the annulment of the presidential election which Abiola won, and the general strike of 1994 which resulted in Paschal's arrest and detention, the labour movement under the leadership of Comrade Paschal Bafyau towed the **massline** and otherwise did the best that it could under contradictory pressures: from the military regime, from conservative politicians, from the Nigerian Left, from liberal democrats, and, of course, from his own constituency, Labour.

Comrade Paschal Bafyau was essentially a consensus builder. He displayed this uncommon skill in the "negotiations" within the labour leadership - several of whose members were clearly to the right of Paschal. There were, of course, more radical elements than Paschal in the NLC leadership. But I doubted, and still doubt, if any of them could have maintained the essential unity of the movement which, at that time, was its main strength. In revolutionary struggle, Comrade Paschal Bafyau honestly tried to follow the "middle course". But the "middle course" as Leon Trotsky argued in his **Permanent Revolution**, is always the most difficult - for it requires a strong revolutionary leadership to pursue successfully in class struggle - even in national struggle - whenever the question of power is sharply posed as was the case in the period after June 12, 1993.

In Nigeria, the "middle course" strategy has led many committed activists to non-revolutionary affiliations and, ultimately, to non-revolutionary politics. It led Paschal and several other comrades to the Peoples Democratic party (PDP) and other non-revolutionary parties. But, unlike some of my comrades, I still regard these "middle course" individuals as comrades - hoping that the development of the struggle will either bring them back to the fold or exhaust their "tactical" arguments. But unfortunately, several of these comrades have died - when the conditions for this "new turn" are yet to be created. So it has happened in the case of Comrade Paschal Bafyau.

### **III.**

The annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election which Chief Moshood Abiola won was not the only, or the first, instance this Nigerian was sharply confronted by **class power**. But I must quickly add that the class to which I refer here is not "enemy class", but Nigeria's capitalist ruling class, a class to which Abiola was a pre-eminent and, in some respects, exceptional, member. An earlier instance of this type of confrontation - with Abiola as prime casualty - was the leadership struggle within the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Nigeria's ruling party in the Second Republic (1979-1983), a party of which Abiola was a prominent member, leader, financier and publicist - but obviously not a "power broker", as was demonstrated between 1981 and 1982.



This proposition can be broken down, expanded, and made clearer. Moshood Abiola was a prime casualty of class struggle in the annulment of the June 1993 presidential election, an election that he won. But this was not the only instance in which Abiola became a prime casualty of class struggle and class power in Nigeria's political history. The other instance, which I recall, occurred during the Second Republic. The class struggle - a term that is here used in the singular - has external and internal components, that is, class struggle is simultaneously **between** classes and **within** classes. In the annulment of the June 12, 1993 election the internal dimension of the class struggle, that is, the struggle within Nigeria's ruling class, was decisive: the ruling faction took the final decision and its political - military leader assumed the responsibility. But it acted partly in fear of the popular masses, that is, under external class pressure.

This column has made the preceding proposition several times and in various ways since 1993. So many people have adduced so many reasons for General Ibrahim Babangida's annulment of "June 12": the military's unwillingness to relinquish power, the North's unwillingness to yield power to the South, Babangida's personal unwillingness to relinquish power, the fear of the new government exposing the military regime's corruption, the machinations of "antidemocratic" elements in both the military and the civil population, etc. Some, or even all, of these factors - or other factors - may be validly cited. But one factor that was significant, even if not dominant, was the fear within the ruling bloc, of segments of Abiola's mass and militant entourage which had demonstrated the potential to carry the electoral struggle beyond Abiola and beyond the election. I would like to enter a reminder here. At least on three separate occasions between 1987 and 1989, General Babangida publicly said that although his military regime might not know who would succeed it, it knew who and what would **not** succeed it. By "who and what" here is meant, not individuals, but social forces and social systems -except to the extent that living individuals may **symbolise** social forces and social systems. I remind readers that General Babangida made it clear that his regime - to the extent that they could control events - would not be succeeded by ideological "extremists" and "extremism". A couple of years earlier, General Theophilus Yakubu Danjuma had said, in a well publicised interview with **The Guardian**, that it was unthinkable that a military junta would take the risk and commit a whole nation in seizing power without a clear idea of what would succeed it.

I would like to propose here that the ideological block which has prevented several political historians and analysts from seeing the specific place and role of the **Nigerian Left** in the 1993 struggle and its aftermath - a block that leads chroniclers and analysts to dissolve everything into "pro-democracy activism"- has been very harmful to the full understanding and appreciation of that period. "Pro-democracy activism" was a historical fact. But although the **Nigerian Left** participated in that movement, it also acted independently as a specific social force. General Babangida and his successors saw it. Surviving leftists in that struggle may have to speak up - or include this issue boldly in their public memoirs. Not for self-glorification, but in order, at least, to dissolve some of the mysteries surrounding "June 12".

The post-Civil War practice of zoning and rotating party and government offices was started, not by the current ruling party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), but by the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), the ruling party of the Second Republic (1979-1983). At the beginning of that political dispensation, after a 13-year military dictatorship, the NPN constructed a system of "zoning" and "rotation". The party divided the country into four zones: A, B, C and D. The whole of former Northern Region, comprising 10 states in the then 19-state structure, was designated Zone A. The former post - 1963 Western Region (plus Lagos) was designated Zone B. The present Southeastern zone, which was part of the pre-Civil War Eastern Region, was designated Zone C. The remaining segment of the country, that is, the present Southsouth Zone was designated Zone D.

As no reconstruction can be "perfect", especially when the construction engineers are deeply divided by competition for primitive capitalist accumulation, there were some "imperfections" in this zoning arrangement. During the negotiation that produced the agreement, some leaders of the party argued that the minorities of the former Northern Region, that is, the present Northcentral Zone should either be constituted into a zone or merged with the Southern minorities under Zone D. The "power brokers" in the party took note of the argument and saw its merits, but still decided that the arrangement remain as described above.

The next thing the party did was to integrate party and government offices and designate four offices in this composite list as **first class**. These were: President of the Federal Republic, Vice - President of the Federal Republic, President of the Senate and Party Chair. In

the wisdom of the party, the choice of President was restricted to Zones A and B. Alhaji Shehu Shagari from Zone A was latter chosen as the party's presidential candidate, a decision many believed was informed, if not compelled, by the choice of Chief Obafemi Awolowo as the presidential candidate of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). Shagari came first in the search for a personage with strong credentials and without blemish -to confront Awolowo, considered as their main opponent. The Chair of NPN was given to Zone B, the Vice Presidency to Zone C, and Senate Presidency to Zone D.

Although the positions of President, Vice President, Senate President and Party Chair were **first class** positions which had to be equitably shared nationally and were so shared by the ruling party after the general election of 1979, there were other "juicy" and "sharable" positions. These included Deputy Senate president, Deputy Speaker of the House for Representatives, Majority Leaders and Party Whips in both Chambers, first - class ministers, etc. These other positions were equally shared - but not only to NPN leaders and nominees of its "Power brokers". Some of them went to the Nigerian People's Party (NPP) with which NPN was in alliance at the national level. But the four first - class positions were exclusive to the NPN. No alliance could touch them.

Everything seemed to have worked well and every "stakeholder" appeared to be happy. But not for long. Problems soon arose over how to apply the zoning principle in the period beyond the first presidential term which would end in September 1983, and thereafter. Now, the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, like the present one which it inspired, allowed a president to run for a second - but final - term if he or she so desired and was nominated by his or her party. This notwithstanding, many "stakeholders" in the NPN believed that there would be a rotation of the four first -class positions and, indeed, of all "zodable" positions, at the end of the first presidential term in 1983.

One of the party leaders who held the view of four-year rotation was Chief Moshood Abiola, the Chair of Ogun State branch of the party, arguably the greatest financier of the party, whose newspaper, National Concord, waged a bitter propaganda war on behalf of the party and against the opposition Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN). Abiola had his eyes on the Presidency of the country, and did not hide it. But the power brokers in the party decided not only that Abiola would not get the presidential ticket of the NPN to contest the 1983 or 1987 elections,

but also that he would not become the National Chair of the party - whether the zoning principle continued or died. What was their reason? **"The President of the country is not for sale"**.

#### IV.

The third segment of this series ended with the "shooting down" of Chief Moshood Abiola's ambition to become the presidential candidate of the ruling National Party of Nigeria (NPN) - and, hence, the president of Nigeria - by the party's "power brokers". This happened in the first of quarter 1982. A few months earlier these same "power brokers" had decided that Abiola would not chair the party. Though the party enjoyed Abiola's continuous financial support and huge "bail-outs" at critical moments, the "power brokers" felt that the presidency of the country should not be "for sale" - a loaded formulation which, in the context of the history and internal politics of the party, could be interpreted in several different ways. On June 12, 1982, the "power brokers" formalized their decision by having the incumbent President, Alhaji Shehu Shagari, re-nominated, in a specially convened presidential nomination convention, as the party's presidential candidate in the 1983 general elections.

The re-nomination of Shagari, or rather, the humiliation of Abiola, did not however end the debate on "zoning" and "rotation" within the NPN. Rather, it intensified the debate on the general question of sharing the "national cake". But while the debate was still going on, the National Secretary of the Party announced that zoning had been abolished. The National Chairperson immediately countered: "Zoning remains". A party elder intervened and offered a compromise: "Zoning remains, but not for the presidency". The compromise was rejected as it satisfied neither the "power brokers" nor the "democrats". The debate was suspended during the 1983 elections - which Shagari won in a "landslide" - but was resumed immediately after. It was still going on when the army struck on December 30, 1983 and scattered everything.

You may wish to compare this narrative with what happened in People's Democratic Party (PDP), the current ruling party, from the time Dr. Goodluck Jonathan became Acting President in February 2010 to the conclusion of the 2011 general elections. And as a footnote, let students of political history check, without superstition or mysticism, whether Abiola's

encounter with internal class power in June 1993 had any connection with his experience in the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) in June 1982, exactly 11 years earlier.

When a young friend of mine phoned to break the news to me that President Goodluck Jonathan had just announced, in his May 29, 2012 broadcast, that the University of Lagos (Unilag) had been renamed Moshood Abiola University of Lagos, I was horrified. I asked him to await immediate negative and possibly violent reactions. The young man called again about an hour or so later to inform me that the students of that University had started demonstrating against the presidential bombshell. Apart from being fundamentally opposed - like many other Nigerians - to this whole culture of **renaming**, this act of wiping out history, I felt that the president and his advisers ought to have known that Abiola's case was very different from previous cases of **renaming**.

The status of each Nigerian ruler previously honoured with renaming was first recognised by the Nigerian state before - or simultaneously with -the act of **renaming**. Some of them were given state funerals or state-supported funerals. None of these has happened in the case of Abiola. The facts may be re-stated: Moshood Abiola clearly and convincingly won an election into the office of Nigerian President - an election organised and conducted by the Nigerian state, as any other election in Nigeria. He thereafter refused to negotiate away his victory with the military dictatorship which demanded this negotiation. This act made him a hero. He continued the resistance in detention until he was killed. He then became a martyr, in addition to being a hero. These are basic historical facts that I do not think can ever be denied or distorted. By the same token, they do not require any embellishments.

One final clarification. In the wake of the public anger over the May 29 presidential renaming of the University of Lagos, a middle-aged man resident in Calabar phoned to ask me if I sincerely believed that the election through which Abiola won the presidency was, and is, the fairest and freest election in Nigeria's political history. I was immediately reminded of the experience of Jesus Christ during the Holy Week, the period between Palm Sunday and Good Friday. But in response I simply asked the man if he expected an immediate "yes" or "no" response. He answered in the positive while I answered my own question in the negative. I asked him to come down for a discussion.

When we met later that day, we started with a light-hearted discussion of the Holy Week, especially the questions Jesus Christ's persecutors and "agents provocateurs" asked him with the intention to trap him - whether he answered "yes" or "no". There are several of such questions, but I picked two. The first question thrown at Jesus was: "Is it right to pay tribute (meaning 'tax') to Caesar?" To understand the question some reminder is required. The area where Jesus was born and where he did his works was approximately the pre-1948 Palestine. That area was, in Jesus 'time, a Roman colony with Pontius Pilate as colonial military governor.

The Emperor of the Roman Empire was Caesar. So, to ask Jesus whether it was correct for colonized Palestinians to pay tax to Caesar's Empire was to deliberately put him in an impossible position. For, if he answered "yes", that they should pay tax, he would be declared a traitor to his compatriots' struggle to be free; and if he answered "No", that they should not pay tax, he would be committing treason against Emperor Caesar. Either answer carried serious consequences. Jesus saw the trap. He asked them to bring him a coin. He took it and, pointing to the image on it, asked: "whose image is this?" And they answered: "Caesar's image." To the original tempting question Jesus then gave the well-known answer: "Give to Caesar what is Caesar's and to God, pay Him His tribute". Then came the second question in our selection. The tempters started with a story: "Once upon a time there was a woman. The woman got married, but the husband later died. She married a second man, and the man again died after some time. The unfortunate woman continued to lose one husband after another... until she lost the seventh husband. By now she had become old. The woman later died". The tempters then asked Jesus: "When this woman meets the seven men in heaven, which one of them will be her husband?" Jesus again saw through the tempters' motive and refused the trap. He told them: "In heaven, there is no marriage".

My visitor appeared to have enjoyed my story but assured me that he was not planning to tempt or embarrass or trap me with the Abiola question. He was sincere, he swore. I laughed over it and equally assured him that I was not suspecting him. I then answered the man who is an academic: "I wish to be on very firm ground and insist on comparing only like things. I can swear not that Abiola won the fairest and freest election in Nigeria's history - although this could well be so - but that Abiola's election on June 12, 1993 was fairer and

freer than the other two transition presidential elections in Nigeria's post - independence political history, namely, those of 1979 and 1999. Beyond this, Abiola's victory was more convincing".

I told the man that I closely observed and followed the three elections - although I was emotionally involved only in one of them - that of June 12, 1993. I told him: "Moshood Abiola won that election. Let the Nigerian President first officially rehabilitate this piece of history by declaring Abiola the elected president in the June 12, 1993, election. Appropriate forms of immortalisation may then be considered.". I refused to comment on the alleged illegality of renaming the University of Lagos without the National Assembly's approval. "That is not the issue" I told him.

My visitor did not appear satisfied. He would have preferred a straight "yes" or "no" to his original question. His attitude irritated me because I expected him, as an academic, to appreciate my cautious response and, beyond that, my own ideological orientation and political preferences - both of which he knows. To hit back I asked him a question that was not directly related: "Do you remember, or do you know, a very significant event that took place in Nigeria on October 25, 1993, in the course of the pro-June 12 protest?" He, of course, said "no". I then asked him to go and do his research and get back to me if he wished.

## V.

On Sunday, June 17, 2012, THISDAY newspaper carried a front page news report titled **2015: North, Southwest plan new alignment**. I wish to pull out four paragraphs from that report. Together, they summarise the story. I am arranging them sequentially. **First:** "A new alignment aimed at fostering a strong political relationship between the North and the Southwest ahead of the 2015 election is underway, THISDAY can reveal". **Second:** "With this arrangement, the North seems to be moving away from its traditional political ally, the Southeast, to Southwest". **Third:** "According to sources close to the ongoing talks, leaders of the CPC (Congress for Progressive Change), ACN (Action Congress of Nigeria), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) and other smaller opposition parties will team up with aggrieved PDP members to form a formidable platform to produce a single presidential candidate".

The **fourth** paragraph is a quote from an interview which a "source" granted the newspaper: "Take your due from what happened in Senegal and Ghana recently where the incumbent was defeated. This is surely going to happen in Nigeria this time around". The full report is short and the reader may wish to make a quick reference to it. But what I wish to do here is to look closely at the newspaper report, focusing on the propositions embodied in the four paragraphs highlighted.

An immediate criticism can be raised against the first two of the four propositions. The criticism relates to how the **This Day** reporter used the categories "North", "Southwest" and "Southeast". These categories are historical and geopolitical. They make sense; and the way they were employed by the reporter also makes sense. But they make sense only at a certain level of perception - a level of perception that is admittedly popular in contemporary Nigerian politics. By this I mean that the reality which is here described by the reporter would be so described by most politically conscious Nigerians, including not only politicians and activists, but also well - educated elites.

The employment of the categories "North", "Southwest" and "Southeast" together with the formulation of the first and second propositions would make some scientific sense in addition to being popularly understood if in that opening paragraph (first proposition) the reporter had embedded the fact that he meant, not the regions as such, but the dominant and hegemonic forces in these regions. But even this "explanatory note" would be implicitly contradicted by the details of the report which show that some of the political forces mentioned are rising, but non-dominant, forces. It is these details, rather than the popular formulation in the opening paragraph, that captures what the reporter had observed.

What the reporter did was to substitute two political parties (ACN and CPC) for two geopolitical regions (Southwest and North), thereby making two successive approximations: first, approximating ACN and CPC to hegemonic political forces in the Southwest and North respectively; and second, approximating these approximated hegemonic political forces to the respective regions. Whereas the ACN- approximation has some justification, that of CPC does not. This brings us to the third selected paragraph.

One of the main statements of the 2003 general elections in Nigeria was that the Alliance for Democracy (AD) had disintegrated as a fighting electoral force except in Lagos



State under Governor Bola Tinubu. Beyond this, it could be said that by April 2003 the party had been discredited as the leading political organization of the Southwest power bloc. Between 2003 and 2007, a new political party, the Action Congress (AC), rose from the ashes of AD -just as AD had risen from the ashes of the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) (Second Republic) and UPN had risen from the ashes of the Action Group (AG) (First Republic).

As I have said several times in this column, Nigeria's two power blocs (Southwest and Northern power blocs), the only power blocs in the country, possess and have demonstrated the ability to recreate their organisational forms (political, sociopolitical and socio-cultural). Despite its failure to attain its projected organisational growth and spread, and strike an alliance - or a merger - with another rising political party, General Muhammadu Buhari's CPC, the AC significantly expanded in membership, influence and power between 2007 and 2011 and went into the 2011 general elections as Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN).

What the **ThisDay** reporter was referring to as the North "moving away from its traditional political ally, the Southeast, to Southwest", is the current efforts of the ACN and CPC to re-start the alliance / merger negotiations which collapsed just before the 2011 general elections. The popular perception - which is neither entirely wrong nor entirely correct - is that the ACN is a Southwest party while the CPC and All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP) are Northern parties. But the ruling Peoples Democratic party (PDP) cannot be so described. That is one of the key differences between PDP, on the one hand, and the opposition parties, on the other.

I would then proceed to propose that PDP is, in content and form, a national party of the Nigerian ruling class **as a national ruling class** and that if the current negotiations between the ACN, CPC (and ANPP) result in a merger or, at the very least, a practical and realistic alliance, then for the first time since the end of the Civil War Nigeria would be having more than one autonomously formed, and truly national, ruling class parties. I say "autonomously formed" because General Babangida's Social Democratic Party (SDP) and National Republican Convention (NRC) of (1989 -1993) were national in the sense ascribed to PDP. If the ACN/CPC/ ANPP merger/alliance talks succeed the new entity will immediately attract and acquire several entrants and become as big and national as the PDP.

What I said in the preceding paragraph are mere projections based on "if" and "if" like all cautions projections. I cannot go beyond the projections made here because not only

are there many "unknowns", there are known factors - such as the role of the state and imperialism - which may become big and significant and even decisive as the situation develops. We know, for instance, that mere popularity does not automatically translate to electoral victory, nor does even having the largest number of votes cast always results in victory. We also know that it is today as difficult to have a free and fair election in Nigeria as it is to have the major contestants accept the result of a truly free and fair election. We also know that even if we have a free and fair election and a true result, the entire process will still be confined within the boundaries of what I have elsewhere called **minimum electoral democracy** - on account of the absolute objective impoverization and marginalization of the masses imposed by the neoliberal capitalist political economy.

Nigeria became independent in 1960 with three power blocs (Northern, Western and Eastern) and as a federation of three regions (North, West and East) and three main political parties, each dominant in one of the regions: Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) in the North, Action Group (AG) in the West, and National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (later National Council of Nigerian Citizens) (NCNC) in the East. Neither the national political crisis which started in the West in 1962 nor the creation of the Midwest from the West in 1963 substantially changed this national pattern. They only resulted in the expansion of the area of dominance of the NCNC westward across the Niger, to the Midwest and altered the pattern of alliance in the new Western Region (minus Midwest). The **Crisis and Civil War** (January 1966 - January 1970) ended with the disappearance of the Eastern power bloc. It has not re-appeared, nor has any other power bloc emerged.

The ruling party in the Second Republic (1979-1983), the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), was not like any pre-Civil War political party. It was national from the start. It was the product of the lessons which Nigeria's ruling class, as **a national formation**, drew from the Civil War. No other national party of the ruling class emerged; and attempts to construct one from the coalition / alliance/merger of opposition parties did not succeed until the dispensation collapsed in December 1983. The NPN bore a resemblance, in its national character, but definitely not in ideology, to the NCNC in Southern Nigeria in the first decade of its (NCNC's ) existence (1944-1954). The current dispensation started in 1999 with the emergence, again, of only one national ruling class party: the People's Democratic Party (PDP). As I said earlier, if the current alliance / merger talks succeed then for the first time since the Civil War the

country will have two powerful national ruling class parties. And then? I shall, in the near future, take this up in the course of a historical survey of political alliances in Nigeria.