

Opinion

As the succession battle begins

By Edwin Madunagu

THE battle for Nigeria's presidency, due to be vacant in three years, on May 29, 2015, has begun. All the political and socio-political forces with a "stake" in the geo-political "movement" of the presidency, including the incumbent presidency, are not only aware of this developing battle and the broad tentative line-up for it, they are also in it. The complaint by the presidency that the campaign is "premature" or is a "distraction" should therefore be seen as a tactical political move by the presidency to slow down President Goodluck Jonathan's already known and potential opponents (and enemies). The presidential caution is formally appropriate and legitimate provided it is recognised as part of the struggle and not a directive or order from an impartial "father of the nation".

It may also be added, for completeness, that provided all "stakeholders" accept that the presidency will not be vacant until May 29, 2015 and accept that it will be filled by an election to be conducted by the state institution prescribed in the Constitution, the activities complained about by the presidency can never be "premature" and can never be a "distraction". The struggle for power - I say power - can never be "premature", and can never be a "distraction". For, if I want to be president in 2015 and recognise that some of my opponents or potential opponents are, as of today, much stronger than I am why should I not start now to prepare and organise "resources", "logistics" and "structures"? And why should the incumbent president - who, even if he is not running again, must have a preferred candidate - not start to prepare for his own succession?

So, therefore, as my friend would say, let nobody pretend: The struggle has started, and it is legitimate. As disgusted as I am, I see it and recognise it. All I want to do in this series is to look at the potential and actually evolving line-ups in this struggle, the background to it, and the national context (political, economic, social and historical) in which it is being engaged. It is these factors that will shape the struggle as it develops and gathers

momentum. The background and context - or factors - include the following elements: Regional mobilisation by the two power blocs; increasingly violent polemics over "resource control" and revenue allocation; terrorism and insurgency; mass insecurity (physical and socio-economic); corruption and heartless primitive capitalist accumulation; unemployment and under-employment; poverty, misery and despair; and bad governance.

Each of these elements can be further broken down as far as we wish or as far as is necessary - depending on whether you are engaging, or how far you are engaging, in micro or macro (general and particular) appreciation and analysis. For instance, the regional mobilisation that the two power blocs are currently executing is at least at three levels, namely: political, intellectual and ideological, and what I may tentatively call "psychological". Similarly, although the *Boko Haram* "insurgency" and the Niger Delta "militancy" can be grouped together, as they are done here, as active armed oppositions to the Nigerian state - aimed at intimidation - they are different both in their logics and in their limits (ultimate possibilities).

We may begin with the following political background: The 2011 general election, especially the presidential contest, was characterised by a lot of bitterness, violence, fear of disintegration, and uncertainty. The crisis was partly inter-party and partly intra-party. It is the latter that is relevant at this point. It started as an internal struggle within the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and had to do with the "zoning" of elective offices, particularly the presidency. The narrative here is that the PDP could not agree on the application of their zoning principle to the concrete situation of uncompleted presidential tenure. One side to the dispute interpreted, re-interpreted and further re-interpreted the principle until the faction started denying even its existence. Eventually this faction, which happened to possess a more "national outlook" and was backed by state power, won the intra-party struggle and presented the official party candidate for the presidential race. The candidate went on to contest and won the presidential election. He was installed, and later confirmed, in office.

Now, a similar - in fact, an identical dispute has arisen, and human experience teaches us what frequently happens when bad history repeats itself. Check out *Hegel*, as modified by *Marx*. Historians may, in future, take the start of this new edition of the "zoning palaver" (as some journalists called it) to be the allegation by one of President Jonathan's opponents that the chief of state was trying to "elongate" his tenure, which should end in 2015. His attack on the president and his foot-soldiers implied that the president is in his final term. The presidency responded somewhat like this: "You lie, Mr. Critic; go back to the Nigerian Constitution and the principle of *indivisibility of presidential term* and you will see that President Jonathan is in his first term, and this first term will end in 2015."

The last general election, conducted in April 2011, was contested by the following political parties, which may be regarded as the leading parties in the country - then and now: the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), the Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), the All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), and the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA). My tentative assumptions here are: one, that the PDP will go through the current "zoning palaver" and emerge with a presidential candidate behind whom the party will again line up "in the interest of the nation"; two, that ACN and CPC will contest the presidential election either separately or in alliance; three, that APGA may repeat its 2011 strategy, that is, fielding no candidate; four, that outside these four "traditional" parties, or their mutations or combinations, the only other power-seeking party that will emerge to contest, or intervene in, the 2015 election will be a radical 'left' party or movement or alliance.

All these assumptions are predicated on "other things being equal". It is the "elements" (background and context) listed above - as they develop - that will determine whether, or not, "all other things" will be "equal". In *Provisional report on Election 2011*, a five-part review which appeared in this column in May and June 2011, I proposed that, at a certain level, the election was

a 'contest' between the two power-blocs in the country: the Northern and South-western power blocs.

Those who did not see this contest, or did not accept the existence of the power blocs, will, perhaps, see it now. Although 'activity' is the mode of existence of political categories (a political category that is not active is dead) a political category is seen more clearly the more serious the crisis in which it is a "stakeholder" becomes. Each of the country's two power blocs is now engaged in 'regionalist mobilisation' of "its" people in response to the current crisis in the country. You can see this mobilisation in two areas, among others: in the high-powered conferences and meetings that are being organised in the two segments of the country; and in the systematic and vigorous ideological promotion, in some of our national newspapers, of the regional mobilisation that is going on.

In my Provisional report, I tried to describe the two power blocs (please, refer to it). I may now update that description. The bitterest enemies of President Goodluck Jonathan are to be found in the two power blocs. The language their spokespersons deploy not only against the president's regime but also against the person of the president is the most "irreverent". But, ironically, the Jonathan presidency stands on the balance of the two power blocs. On the other hand, the most militant supporters of the president are to be found in the South-south geopolitical zone in which there is no power bloc. Again, ironically: This absence of power blocs in some parts of the country may (some would say, "again") save the country's unity - in the short run. But, ultimately, it is the emergence of a revolutionary movement that can save the country - if it is not too late.

Just one observation to end this segment: Nigeria's ruling classes claim the nation as theirs, and each of the two power blocs claims the region where it is located as its. They all believe their claims: they are sole authentic owners! They do not see, or prefer to ignore, the continuous intra-class and inter-class contradictions and counter-claims in which they are embedded and which, in fact, define their very existence.

• *To be continued.*

Opinion

As the economic system, succession battle begins (2)

By Edwin Madunagu

THIS series is concerned with factors that will shape the 2015 general election, particularly the presidential contest, and ultimately determine the fate of that election itself - whether it will take place or not. The factors were listed last Thursday, in the first segment. The list may now be shortened to six "super" factors, namely: the current regionalist mobilisation; revenue allocation and resource control; insurgency and "militancy"; corruption and primitive capitalist accumulation; deteriorating human condition; and "bad governance". The first segment ended mid-way into the discussion of the power bloc mobilisation. We continue from there.

Regionalist mobilisation: How do the current regionalist mobilisations by the two power blocs relate to the call for a Sovereign National Conference (SNC)? First, the two power blocs now accept, in principle, the convening of the conference - although the south-west bloc lays stronger emphasis on sovereign than its northern counterpart does. Beyond this broad agreement the power blocs' current attitudes to SNC reminds me of my late father's favourite proverb. Translated into English, the proverb goes roughly like this: "Dried meat is very delicious, and it would have been wonderful to wait for this our piece of meat to dry. But on what shall we be feeding while waiting for the meat to dry? Does it make sense to starve just because we are waiting for the meat to dry?"

Drawing from my father's question, I can put the attitude of each of the power blocs to the SNC question like this: "We accept the SNC and we think it is now inevitable. But, going by the way things turn out in Nigeria, the SNC may take time in coming. In the meantime, while waiting for the SNC, we must help ourselves". Or, to put it more directly: "It is unwise to simply fold our arms and wait for the SNC. In any case, the current regionalist mobilization is an appropriate preparation for the SNC".

Politics of 'revenue allocation' and 'resource control'

If I am to explain the current politics of "revenue allocation" and "resource control" to young compatriots, I may start my explanation

this way: Nigeria has an economic system backed by law, enshrined in the Constitution, and enforced by the Nigerian state. Nigeria's economic system is capitalist, or what ideologues call "free market." It is characterised, as part of its very nature and logic - and not just by government policies - by exploitation, uneven and unequal development across regions, and gross social and power inequalities. This is the first step in the understanding that we seek, and we must never, even for a moment, forget these introductory points. If we do, we will continue to dance in the air and will never attain any understanding. As a footnote, we may briefly define exploitation, in our context here, as a situation in which an individual or group appropriates the benefits arising from the labour of another individual or group.

In Nigeria's economic system, public revenues are collected by the three tiers of government: local governments, state governments and the Federal Government. The categories of revenues to be collected by each tier and by each member of each tier are prescribed in law. The sum-total of the revenues so collected is distributed - partly at source and partly centrally - in line with a complex and complicated formula which can be simplified this way: Each of the 774 local governments keeps what it collects; and each of the 36 state governments keeps what it collects. What is collected by the Federal Government is distributed in accordance with a formula: the local governments are collectively given a fraction; the state governments are collectively given a fraction; and the Federal Government takes the rest - after setting aside some "special funds" for contingencies (such as disasters and environmental degradation).

Another footnote before we proceed. The Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja, is sometimes treated as a state, Nigeria's 37th state, and sometimes as a department of the federal government. Nothing is lost if, in this discussion, we treat Abuja as a department of the Federal Government. The fraction of the federally-collected revenue that goes to the 36 states is shared between these states according to another complicated formula whose parameters and variables include derivation, equality of states, land-mass and population.

The fraction of the federally-collected revenue that goes to the local governments as a whole is shared between them according to a similar formula; but I doubt if the parameters and variables used here include derivation. It is expected that the state governments will share the revenues they internally generate or collect with their respective local governments but I do not know if they do this or "chop" the revenues alone. But I am sure the local governments "chop" their own revenues alone since there is no tier of government below them.

The above is the context in which the current political battle over "revenue allocation" and "resource control" is being waged. The battle can be reduced to the following questions: One: Should the existing formula prescribing jurisdictions for the collection of revenues remain as it is or should it be modified? Two: Should the existing formula for the distribution of revenues between the Federal Government, the state governments (as a whole) and the local governments (as a whole) remain as it is, or should it be modified? Three: Should the existing formulas for sharing the states' and local governments' collective shares of the federally collected revenue between the states and between the local governments, respectively, remain as they are, or should they be modified?

The fourth question has to do with manner the Federal Government distributes "capital projects" across the country from the revenue, or the fraction of the federally-collected revenue, that accrues to it. You will recall that it was the National Constitutional Conference organised by the General Sani Abacha regime that, in 1995, proposed the division of the country into the present six geopolitical zones. Although the draft constitution emanating from that conference was overtaken by events, and was accordingly buried, the proposal for geopolitical division survived. The proposal was not incorporated into the 1999 Constitution but has been used - or claimed to have been used - by mainstream political parties and the governments they control for various purposes including the "zoning" and distribution of party offices, government appointments and location of projects and institutions.

Early this year, the "caucus" of members of the House of Representatives from the North (that is, the three geopolitical zones in the northern part of the country) commissioned a study whose detailed report showed that their region had been grossly cheated in the manner the 2012 federal budget planned the distribution of projects across the country. On the contrary, the report showed that the south-south geopolitical zone had been grossly favoured. As expected this report generated a lot of heated controversy in the community of "stakeholders". (See, for instance, the front-page reports of *The Nation* of February 28 and 29, 2012). From this controversy I extract two particular responses to the original report.

The first response came from politicians and government leaders of south-south extraction. It said that what the northern politicians were complaining about would fall far below their (south-south) due were the principles of "resource control" and "fiscal federalism" to be implemented. The other response came from a south-western legislator. It said that it was wrong and misleading to study only the allocations for one year, 2012; that a study of about five consecutive years would be required to see if there was any "trend" of cheating and favouritism. From the report and the controversy it has continued to generate emerges the fourth question: How should the Federal Government distribute its capital projects across the country and, in particular, across the six geopolitical zones?

The present economic system, whose partial 'attributes' we had earlier listed, generates poverty and impoverishment and allocates incomes between social classes and groups - across the nation - in such a way that the gap between the rich and the poor is progressively widened. The fifth question is: Should this national system, which is continually re-inforced by government policies and practices - remain as it is, or should it be modified or radically changed? This fifth question is the "popular or class question." For lack of a more appropriate name we may designate the first four questions as "national - democratic questions". I must hasten to say, and then emphasise, that our fifth question does not eliminate, or displace, or supersede the first four questions. It stands with them, perhaps at the head.

• *To be continued.*

Opinion

April 10, 2012

As the succession battle begins (3)

By Edwin Madunagu

THE central proposition of this series is that Nigeria's 2015 general election will be shaped in a decisive manner by a small number of factors, including: the current regionalist mobilization by the two power blocs in the country; arguments over revenue allocation and resource control; insurgency and "militancy"; corruption and primitive capitalist accumulation; deteriorating human condition in the land; and "bad government". If you argue that every election on planet Earth and in real life is shaped, conditioned and ultimately determined by the *environment* in which it is held and that I am therefore not saying anything new or important, I will immediately agree with you, but then plead that I am advancing my proposition because the 2015 "stakeholders" have started to behave as if they are operating in a vacuous, static or non-dialectical environment.

Last Thursday, in the second segment, I reduced the argument over revenue allocation and resource control to five questions. The first four questions relate to the distribution of the country's *national revenue* between the *three* tiers of government (local, state and federal); the distribution of the fraction allocated to the states - there are 36 of them - between them; the distribution of the fraction allocated to the 774 local governments between them; and finally, how the federal government distributes projects across the six geopolitical zones of the country with its own share of the national total.

I ended the segment with the fifth and last question which I formulated as follows: "The present economic system, whose partial "attributes" we had earlier listed, generates poverty and impoverishment and allocates incomes between social classes and groups - across the nation - in such a way that the gap between the rich and the poor is progressively widened. The *fifth* question is: Should this national system - which is continually reinforced by government policies and practices - remain as it is, or should it be modified or radically changed? This fifth question is the *popular or class question*. For lack of a more appropriate name we may designate the first four questions as *national - democratic questions*. I must hasten to say, and

then emphasise, that our fifth question does not eliminate, or displace, or supersede the first four questions. It stands *with* them, perhaps at the head".

All the five questions are important for three reasons, at least. In the first place, they are bound to arise in any type of federation and in any type of social organization and political economy; in the second place, the way the debate over the first four questions is being pursued by establishment politicians and their ideologues can literally set the nation ablaze or derail the 2015 general elections; in the third place, adjustments in the existing principles, rules and formulas for "resource control" and "revenue allocation", coupled with substantial reduction in the level of corruption and predatory appropriations and continuous and sustained pressure from the masses and their organizations can result in some quantifiable, though unstable, amelioration of the harsh material conditions in which the Nigerian masses now live. The irreducible minimum condition for this amelioration deserves repetition: *continuous and sustained pressure from the masses and their organisations*.

What I propose concretely in relation to revenue allocation and resource control is a radical movement from the present political economy in favour of the masses of Nigeria who not only constitute the majority of the Nigerian population, but actually produce the wealth of the nation and literally carry the nation on their shoulders. Such a radical movement - entailing massive redeployment of resources - will *radically transform* the first four questions. Then in relation to "resource control", I propose that a differentiation be made between "control" and "ownership". The reason is that as soon as you interpret "control" as "ownership", you are no longer considering federation, but confederation or even disintegration. I am not by any means arguing here against confederation or disintegration. I am only insisting that you apprehend the implications of your advocacy.

Having said this, my reading of the current debate is that there is now a near-national consensus among the "stakeholders" that the share of the federal government in the federally collected revenues should be reduced and those of state governments (collectively) and local governments (collectively) should increase - correspondingly. It is safe to assume

that the "stakeholders" have worked out the immediate implications of this general agreement - such as the review of "legislative lists".

Although the federal government is more reticent on the question of reducing its revenue share, we know that the government does not stand in the air. It is resting on the social forces that reached the near-consensus mentioned above. No such agreement has however, been reached on the need to retain, or alter, the present formula for distributing the states' share among the 36 states and the local governments' share among the 774 local councils. But the Northern Governors' Forum and the Northern power bloc have taken strong positions on the need for "more equitable" formula. It is not a coincidence that the sociopolitical forces - or the "extremists" within them - that are now in combat over the location of the presidency after May, 2015, are also the ones now threatening to go to war over "revenue allocation" and "resource control".

Boko Haram insurgency: From "revenue allocation" and "resource control" we move to the *Boko Haram* insurgency as factor that could derail Election 2015". On Monday, April 9, 2012, the first anniversary of the start of the 2011 general elections, Johnnie Carson, the American Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs, delivered a lecture, *Nigeria, One Year After Elections*, at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, DC. The lecture was attended by high-ranking officials of the Nigerian Embassy as well as prominent American-based Nigerian academics. It enjoyed wide publicity and attracted animated commentaries in America and in Nigeria. There were also heated - and, in places, abusive - arguments on the merit of the lecture.

My impression after reading the full text of the lecture was that if it was delivered by a Nigerian in Nigeria it would not be regarded as a "great speech" as Americans would say - although it would be rated brilliant. Although I found Carson's lecture nauseatingly *patronising*, I consider his key propositions significant enough to be isolated and commented upon.

Johnnie Carson's theses and statistics on the socioeconomic situation in Nigeria and, in particular, Northern Nigeria, include the following: "Living standards (in Nigeria) are the

same today as they were in 1970s and nearly 100 million Nigerians live on less than one dollar a day"; "Nigerians are hungry for progress and improvement in their lives, but northern Nigerians feel this need most acutely"; "Life in Nigeria for many is tough, but across the North, life is grim"; "A UN study shows that poverty in the 12 most northern states is nearly twice that of the rest of the country"; "The statistics are disturbing, but they are not the whole story. Poverty in northern Nigeria is increasing"; "While 91 per cent Nigerians across the country considered the April 2011 elections to be fair and transparent, most people in the far north backed opposition candidates that did not win".

On the *Boko Haram* insurgency, Carson said: "Today, *Boko Haram* is not monolithic, homogenous organisation controlled by a single charismatic figure. *Boko Haram* is several organisations, a larger organisation focused primarily on discrediting the Nigerian government, and a smaller dangerous group, increasingly sophisticated and increasingly lethal. This group has developed links with AQIM and has a broader, anti-western jihadist agenda...". Carson believes that "*Boko Haram* capitalises on popular frustrations with the nation's leaders, poor government service delivery, and the dismal living conditions of many northerners". And then this: "Although *Boko Haram* is reviled throughout Nigeria, and offers no practical solutions to northern problems, a growing minority of certain ethnic groups regard them favourably."

On how to respond to the insurgency, Carson said: "To fix the *Boko Haram* problem, the government will have to develop a new social compact with its northern citizens. It will have to develop an economic recovery strategy that complements its security strategy. It will have to draw on the support of northern governors, traditional Hausa and Fulani leaders and local officials and organizations. The Nigerian government should consider creating a Ministry of Northern Affairs or a development commission similar to what it did in response to the Niger Delta crisis". He was convinced that "by demonstrating the benefits a pluralistic society has to offer, the government can deny *Boko Haram* and other extremists the ability to exploit ethnic and religious differences". My comments will follow in the next segment.

• *To be continued.*

Opinion

As the succession battle begins (4)

By Edwin Madunagu

THE third segment of this series ended with a fairly long summary of what I consider the most essential "findings" and "propositions" in Johnnie Carson's lecture, *Nigeria: One year after elections*, delivered on Monday, April 9, 2012, in Washington, to mark the first anniversary of the beginning of the 2011 general election in Nigeria. Carson is the American Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs and he spoke at the American Centre for Strategic and International Studies. The summary I made may be divided into four parts, namely: statistics and conclusions on the socioeconomic situation in Nigeria generally and in Northern Nigeria in particular; essential character of *Boko Haram*; how to respond to *Boko Haram*'s armed insurgency; and general political assessment.

Socioeconomic situation: Johnnie Carson said that living standards in Nigeria are today what they were 42 years ago, in 1970; and that, today, "nearly 100 million Nigerians (out of an estimated 160m) live on less than one dollar a day". Implicit in this compound statement is an invocation of a lot of research results, statistics and mathematics. If you are arrested by this and allow yourself to be provoked in one direction or the other, you may lose the general ideas Carson intended to convey or endorse. So, stick to the ideas of poverty, stagnation and degeneration: "Nigerians are hungry for progress and improvement in their lives, but Northern Nigerians feel this need most acutely"; "Life in Nigeria is tough, but across the North, life is grim"; a "UN study shows that poverty in the 12 most northern states is nearly twice that of the rest of the country"; and *Poverty in Northern Nigeria is increasing* (emphasis in the original text).

The central idea which Carson was trying to convey in these statements is that of relative deprivation and impoverishment of the North and the urgent need for remedial measures – more particularly in the "12 most northern states", that is, in the states of the Northwest and Northeast geopolitical zones. This idea is not new and has recently been voiced even more strongly by leading politicians, bureaucrats and academics of Northern extraction. What is different is the spe-

cific statistics, and the fact that the statement in question was made, and statistics provided, by a foreigner – not just a foreigner, but a senior official of America's State Department and an authoritative representative and spokesperson of the world's only super power on African Affairs.

Let me say at once that, in addition to being angered by Carson's patronizing language, I was baffled by his statistics. But his ideas cannot baffle anyone who understands that a capitalist economy, particularly an underdeveloped one, in a global regime of neoliberalism, is characterized by *uneven* and *unequal* development. But, then, how exactly did Carson obtain his statistics? If I answer my own question and say "from the UN" as the man himself claimed in respect of some of his figures my situation will not improve – for UN's figures on "underdeveloped" nations, and the adoption of these figures in Nigeria, also baffle me. Nigeria's public institutions and functionaries – like many Nigerians – generally don't have regard for figures. They just throw them around. Today you read that the poverty line is one American dollar per day. The next month you read that it is one dollar and a half; then two dollars. An estimate may be 95% today and 70% tomorrow. The next day it is 99% and then 60%. Controversial statistics are refuted with equally controversial statistics.

Life for many Nigerians is very harsh, and harsher still for those of them in the North, says Johnnie Carson. Many Nigerians would agree with the first segment of this statement. But there are disagreements – sometimes, bitter disagreements – on the second segment. Carson provided statistics – quoting some sources. Several people have responded, also with statistics, that life in other regions or areas in Nigeria are as harsh as, if not harsher than, in Northern Nigeria. There are angry debates on who and who are responsible for the "harsh conditions" in Nigeria and "harsher conditions" in the North. Put differently: there is a general agreement, strengthened by daily revelations, that Nigerians in positions of power – in the political economy, in business, in the bureaucracy and in government – have been responsible for the harshness of life in Nigeria; but there is no agreement on the geopolitical distribution of the *thieves* and

rouges, nor on the bases for calculating the relative intensity of the resulting poverty across states and regions.

My simple proposition here is that the presentation of this question is incomplete and, therefore, misleading – if understanding is indeed our aim. No one will deny as I said earlier, that Nigeria's socioeconomic development is uneven and unequal. But this inequality and unevenness is not only *horizontal* (that is, across the regions), but also *vertical* (that is, across social classes and groups). Development, we must never forget, is, above all, the development of people. The other critical element is that the two systems – horizontal and vertical inequalities – are so integrated that you cannot understand the former without appreciating the latter. A simple exercise: Let an honest and patriotic researcher get the list of one thousand richest Nigerians and the sizes of their wealth, as some American journals do. Then distribute these one thousand Nigerians to their geopolitical zones. Juxtapose these statistics with the statistics on poverty levels across the zones and the geopolitical distribution of *indicted* multi-million thieves since 2007, and see if your current arguments or positions require a review.

Essential character of *Boko Haram*: According to Johnnie Carson, *Boko Haram* is, today, not a monolithic organization controlled by a single charismatic figure, but "several organizations". He believes there is a larger *Boko Haram* organization which is "focused primarily on discrediting the Nigerian government" and a "smaller, dangerous group which is increasingly sophisticated and increasingly lethal". This latter *Boko Haram* group, according to Carson, "capitalises on popular frustrations with the nation's leaders, poor government service delivery, and the dismal living conditions of many Northerners". Carson also suggested that "although *Boko Haram* is reviled throughout Nigeria, and offers no practical solutions to Northern problems, a growing minority of certain ethnic groups regard them favourably".

To those who may be disturbed, for one reason or the other, by Carson's suggestion that a small deadly branch of *Boko Haram* is "favourably" regarded by a "growing minority of certain ethnic groups", let me say that there will be nothing

strange in a situation where a movement in Nigeria, or elsewhere, is more favourably regarded in one part of the country. Social contradictions don't develop evenly, and hence, a *rupture* in a set of social contradictions – even when the latter are national in character – may not occur nationally. My proposition is that what we are seeing is not a rupture in a simple contradiction but a rupture in a tissue of contradictions.

Many Nigerians are angry with Johnnie Carson not for highlighting poverty in Nigeria and particularly in Northern Nigeria, but for linking the *Boko Haram* insurgency with poverty and impoverishment (the process that generates, perpetuates and intensifies poverty). One of the objections – from Akinola Muiz, writing from Italy – reads in part: "With the dearth of infrastructural development, 90 per cent of Nigerians are permanent tenants of crippling poverty. It is very glaring in all the six geopolitical zones. Armed deviants do carry out robbery operations in banks, streets, market places, churches, mosques and other choice targets, that can be linked to poverty as a result of socioeconomic alienation or other societal factors. But bombing innocent citizens while praying in churches or in their homes should never be linked to poverty by any rational mind". (*The Guardian*, letter-to-the-editor, April 30, 2012). This is a sound objection.

In response to this objection, however, some people may argue that the poverty in the North is deeper than the national average and, hence, that responses to it could be more drastic. Some others may argue that poverty is a factor, but not the only factor, in the emergence of *Boko Haram*. Yet, some others may argue that *Boko Haram* is not a *direct* response to poverty but that it *capitalises*, or feeds, on "popular frustrations" engendered by poverty. It may also be argued that different people may react to the same provocation differently. Now, interrogate each of these hypothetical responses against what is already confirmed about the insurgency and see if you will agree with me that we are dealing with a rupture in a tissue of contradictions, not in a simple contradiction. That tissue produces a uniqueness.

• To be concluded next Thursday.

Opinion

As the succession battle begins (5)

By Edwin Madunagu

In this concluding segment, we shall round off our discussion on the Boko Haram insurgency, respond to Prof. Wole Soyinka's recent proposition, and then conclude the series. On how to respond to the Boko Haram insurgency, Johnnie Carson, whom we have been discussing in the last two segments, said: "To fix the Boko Haram problem, the government will have to develop a new social compact with its northern citizens. It will have to develop an economic recovery strategy that complements its security strategy. It will have to draw on the support of northern governors, traditional Hausa and Fulani leaders and local officials and organisations. The Nigerian government should consider creating a Ministry of Northern Affairs or a development commission similar to what it did in response to the Niger Delta crisis."

Carson's prescription is another approximate statement of what I may call Comprehensive Strategy. Metaphorically, this strategy may be put like this: "Drain off the water in which Boko Haram and other extremists currently swim and their capacity to do evil, or even to exist, will wither away." Adapting our metaphor, draining the Boko Haram waters, according to this version of the Comprehensive Strategy, translates to four main actions, namely: developing a new social compact with Northern Nigerians (which necessarily includes dialogue with Northern Nigerians); enlisting the support of Northern governors, traditional Hausa and Fulani leaders, as well as local officials and organisations; complementing armed response with economic response; and creating a Ministry of Northern Affairs or Northern Development Commission.

A number of provisional observations and comments: One, on the face of it, the strategy is perceptive and bright; the elements are humanistic. Two, there is no element of this strategy, or its various possible combinations, that has not been offered by Nigerians in Nigeria. The difference in this particular instance is that all the elements of the strategy have been packaged in a short lecture. The third comment is a question: Who, what and where exactly are the Boko Haram and other "extremists" in this strat-

egy? I ask this simple question because the strategy calls for a "new social compact with Northern citizens" and the mobilisation of northern governors, traditional Hausa and Fulani leaders as well as "local officials and organizations" - in fact all the virile social forces in the North. So, who and where are the Boko Haram and the other "extremists"? Are they spirits? Are they all outsiders?

These questions are not rhetorical; several contributors to this discussion talk of as Boko Haram and other "extremists" have no human embodiments. Carson added to our confusion when, in his well-reported lecture, he said: "There are also some who say that Boko Haram is comprised mostly of non-Nigerian foreigners, and that the group is being funded by a handful of resentful politicians nursing their wounds from the last election. This would be deeply unfortunate if true, but I have not seen any evidence to support either of these theories". In other words, Johnnie Carson doubted what President Goodluck Jonathan's National Security Adviser said on the culpability of the ruling party's zoning arrangement as a factor in the escalation of the Boko Haram insurgency. So, the question, again: Who are the Boko Haram and other extremists? My fourth comment on this Comprehensive Strategy is that the strategy appears to forget what the popular narrative tells us of the origin and dominant character of the original Boko Haram. This narrative says that Boko Haram started as an Islamic religious sect with long and resilient religious antecedents. It does not appear that the organisation has lost this attribute. If you examine the elements of the Comprehensive Strategy, you will see explicit and implicit responses to poverty, alienation and opportunism. But there is no explicit response to Political Islam, a strong element of the current narrative of Boko Haram. There should be an explicit statement of principle regarding state and religion - such as secularity of the Nigerian state - in every comprehensive response to Boko Haram. In the final analysis, however, how you respond to Boko Haram is dictated and shaped - in large measure - by what you are (including your relationship with the Nigerian masses) and what Boko Haram is (including what the organisation says it wants).

What I still have to say to conclude this series can be sketched around an address, Mission - the future, delivered by Professor Wole Soyinka at the opening of the second South South Economic Summit in Asaba, Delta State, on Thursday, April 26, 2012. Although the direct proposition which dominated newspaper reports of the closely-packed 18-page address was in the last two pages, the build-up to it began about half-way into the speech. My understanding of the proposition can be presented this way: Given the strong and protracted resistance of the Nigerian state to the call for a Sovereign National Conference (SNC), and given that the prospects for such a conference are now as low as ever, and given that the Nigerian situation continues to deteriorate, Nigerians should now begin to do those things that an SNC was being called upon to do. In other words, we should now begin to act the SNC, rather than continue to call for it.

In practical terms, Wole Soyinka proposed: "Let each regional grouping with compatible ideas of the ultimate mission - the future of the humanity for which they are responsible - begin to call the shots, and relegate the centre to its rightful dimensions in any functioning federated democracy. Let each state call its own conference of peoples to articulate in just what direction they wish to direct their leaders and relate to the centre and other states. Let each regional grouping and its member-states single-mindedly project and pursue their strategies for the enhancement of the quality of life and the dignity of their peoples, quarry into their resources to extract the material required for their very existence, material that they can exchange among one another based on their spatial developmental advantages - in short share among themselves areas of specialisation, substituting strength for the weakness of their partners, expertise for deficiencies in one member or the other."

A close reading of the text will show that Wole Soyinka did not call for disintegration, neither did he "give up on Nigeria", as some people have alleged. In the first place, he said, in the course of his proposition, that "collaborating states" need not even be contiguous. What matters, according to him, is a "community of interests." In the second place, he proposed that the "constitu-

tional envelope" that currently holds the different units of the country together should be pushed as far as possible, but without actually bursting it, and that the "courts of arbitration should interpret those areas where it might appear that the envelope has been pushed too far." Thus, Soyinka remained within the framework of Constitutionality and One Nigeria. But my worries are not banished.

We may recall that in the opening segment of this series (April 26, 2012), I reported my observation of the beginnings of regionalist mobilisation in parts of the country. In the second segment (May 3, 2012) I observed that politicians had begun to do something to help themselves in lieu of Sovereign National Conference (SNC). That was when I gave the parable of "dried meat". My substantive comment on Soyinka's proposition is that if the "constitutional envelope" is pushed to the limit, the political momentum so generated may be too powerful for anyone to prevent the "bursting" of the envelope. In any case, given the present weak state of the country's judiciary (to say the very least), our "courts of arbitration" will be unable to prevent a bursting or to stop its escalation if it takes place. Effective interventions may then be left to stronger, more decisive, institutions of state, including the armed forces. And the bubble will burst. Perhaps, then, a conference of combatants, which will neither be sovereign nor national, will take place.

Wole Soyinka's proposition is addressed to the governments and people of the various states and regions. My understanding is that there is no fusion of "government" and "people" here. In that case, I have two points to make. As regards the governments, I would only repeat that the process of collaboration has in fact, started. As regards the people, however, I would predict that official resistance to Peoples Sovereign Conferences - similar to what we now see at the "centre" - will appear at state and regional levels. But, beyond this, given the complexity of Nigeria's social formation at all levels, the real problems of organising people's conferences at these "lower" levels would not be less daunting than they would be at the national level.

• *Concluded*

• *This column goes on break for the rest of May.*