



# Talakawa Liberation Herald (97)

BIODUN JEYIFO

## After the deluge: beyond corruption and regional realignment of forces in a post-PDP Nigeria

**I**t is not hyperbolic to speak of a post-PDP Nigeria in mythic terms. To speak of our country as a land readying itself for cleansing and restitution after a great deluge that lasted for a long time and laid nearly everything to waste is to deploy the powers of language and symbolic logic to try to capture what Nigeria has gone through in the last sixteen years. This order of discourse moves us beyond the dry, conceptualist universe of political economy in which a country like Nigeria under the rule of the PDP is described as a failing state.

With the discourse of symbolic and mythic logic, we are much closer to the human and psychic realities of the nation and the masses of its peoples in a period of great travail. For there are parts of the country in which, quite literally, it is as if one is in a physical terrain that looks very much like a land washed over by a great flood, a massive tsunami. Parts of the Niger Delta and the North come to mind here: those parts of the Niger Delta in which farmlands, fishing waters and the entire physical environment have been blighted by oil spills that are never cleaned up; and those parts of the North that have been seized by the Boko Haram jihadist insurgency. But these are only the worst expressions of realities that confront us everywhere in the country in which great suffering and insecurity have become the daily experience of millions of our peoples and the majority of the young that see only bleak futures ahead of them. At any rate, beyond the relatively more benign biblical parable of seven fat years coming after seven lean years, I see a post-PDP Nigeria as a land gearing up for a massive cleanup after a political tsunami, a moral and spiritual valley of death. The only caveat to add here is the necessity of anchoring the symbolic discourse of floods and tsunamis in concrete observations concerning the probable course of capitalist democracy in a post-PDP Nigeria.

It is of course possible, though highly improbable, that the PDP will continue to rule after the general elections of 2015. In that case, I hasten to observe that my reflections in this piece will not have proved futile and delusory; rather, they would have turned out to be prescient in the sense that, by a reverse logic, the deluge will continue, the moral and psychic morass will not come to an end. This is because PDP cannot, and will never reform from within; it will never clean up the Augean stables of filth and rot it has created. If it

rigs its way into perpetuation of its misrule, it will be emboldened to raise impunity to new levels and we and the whole world will be astonished by new forms of monumental corruption, waste and mismanagement of our natural and human resources. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala once said that she would be quite satisfied if she was able to reduce the scale of looting and squandermania in PDP's Nigeria by 4%; in a post-2015 general elections era that maintains the PDP in power at the centre, that 4% will dip into the minus percentile range, that is if it has not already done so. The worst will never reach its bottom in PDP's misrule for what we confront in it is an abyss, a bottomless cesspit. Dear readers, dear compatriots, do not withhold yourselves from dreaming about and working for a post-PDP, post-deluge Nigeria especially as it so happens that there are solid grounds on which to base projections of the PDP's complete rout in next month's elections, these being the roles that corruption and a new realignment of forces among our political elites, our ruling class will play in the presidential elections. Let me explain.

Barring the stealing of victory by the PDP through massive rigging

and a will to use very costly repressive violence to contain mass resistance to rigging, the 2015 general elections will be fought primarily around the twin axes of corruption and the electoral alliance of mainstream politicians of the "core" North and the Southwest. Corruption of course exists in all the ruling class political parties and is to be found at varying levels in virtually all the state and local governments of the country. As almost every commentator on corruption in Nigeria has stated, the scale of corruption in Nigeria is nothing short of systemic: it is the noxious glue that holds everything together among godfathers and clients among our political elites; and it is the nefarious bond that binds the rulers to the ruled with regard to the unofficial and manipulative redistribution of resources between the few thousands of the haves and the millions of the have-nots. Given these factors, the question arises as to how and why corruption has come to loom much larger in the coming February 2015 general elections than it had ever done in all previous elections since the return to formal, civilian democracy in 1999.

The answer to this question is simple and unambiguous: under the Jonathan presidency, more

specifically under the Jonathan administration's endgame to the PDP's era of arrant misrule, corruption has far exceeded the systemic to become extra- or para-systemic; it no longer has rhyme or reason, method in madness, or logic in illogic. Trillions of naira and tens of billions of dollars vanish or are unaccounted for, even as government workers and contractors are unpaid; state governors go cap in hand to Abuja and return with near empty bowls, month after month. The looting frenzy has reached dizzying heights of impunity and this is why corruption is the first and perhaps main issue of the coming elections. Additionally, this is why short of massive and violent rigging, Jonathan and the PDP will lose as they more than deserve to do. Most Nigerians are focused on corruption as the main issue of the elections, especially given the myths, legends and facts concerning Buhari's alleged distaste for corruption The U.S. and the European Union will in particular be keenly watching the outcome of the elections and the main reason for this is also the scale, the extra- and para-systemic nature of corruption in the Jonathan presidency and its offshoots around the country.

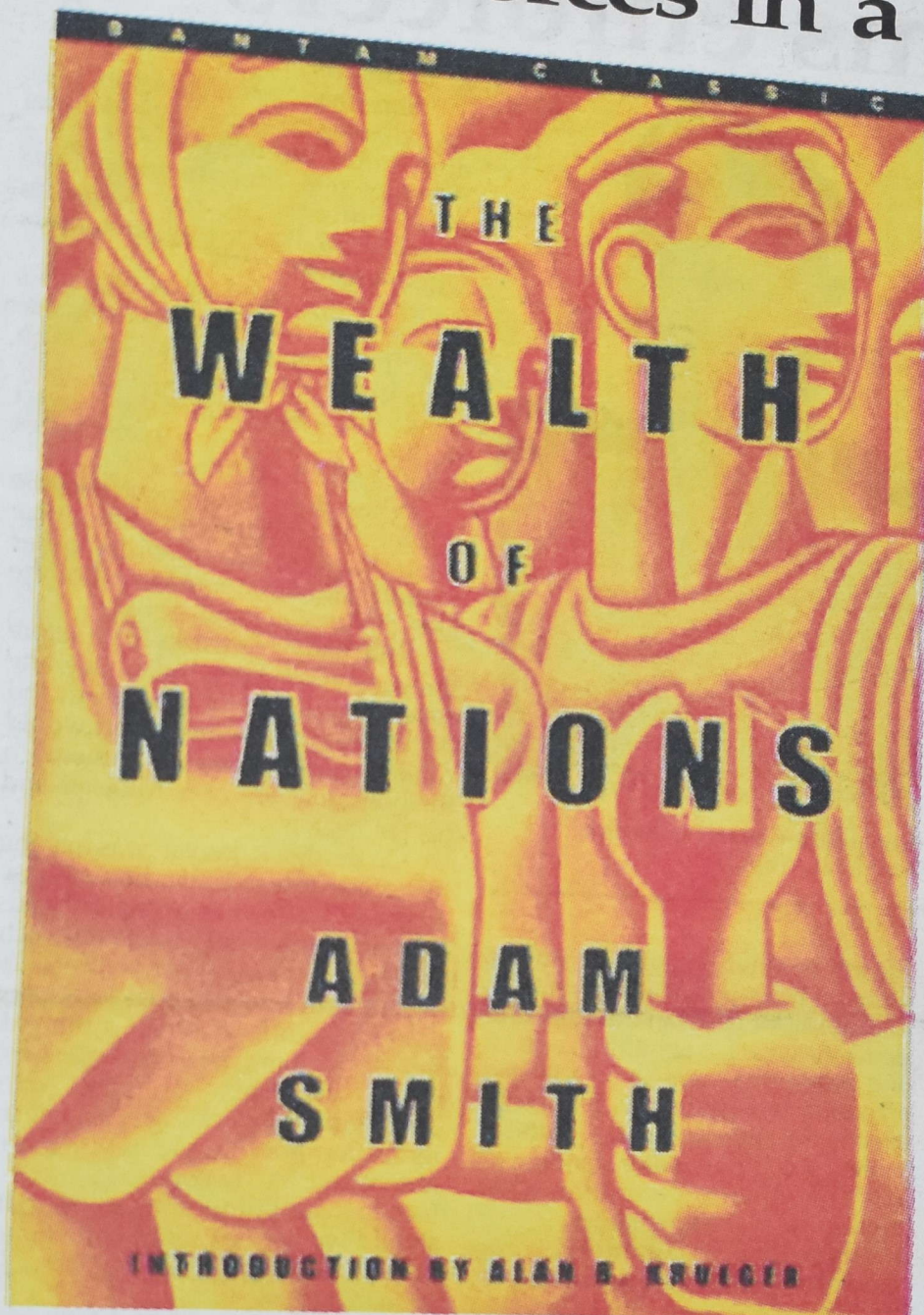
And of course the other big issue in the election is what is being described as the return of power or, more specifically the presidency, to the North, this in an alliance that brings large segments of mainstream political forces of the "core" North with those of the Southwest. This is an infinitely more complex issue than the unifying and idealizing "ABJ" (Anyone But Jonathan) battle against corruption. In the postindependence political history of the country, this is not the first time that this sort of alliance has happened, the NPC-NNDP alliance of the 1960s being the first time that a joining of forces between the North and the Southwest came to power in the center in our country. But this time around, the alliance will not be a simple repetition of history, a mere regrouping of similar ideological and programmatic tendencies. In the earlier case, the two parties did not completely merge, for the simple reason that neither the NPC nor the NNNDP wanted to lose its regional identity in a single party in which regionalism was or could be completely subsumed into a national party whose regional currents took second place to a nationwide plurality. Now the allied forces have merged into a single party of diverse and even contra-

dictory ideological and policy orientations and as a consequence, we are about to enter into an almost totally unprecedented space of ruling class politics in our country.

The parameters for apprehending this new space are already being set around very familiar oversimplifying ideas and perspectives. Perhaps by far the most common among these is the view that the new President will be Northern and Muslim while the Vice President will be Southern and Christian. This will certainly be the dominant view in the Western press and even within the ruling circles in Europe and the United States. And to be very candid about this, the thoughts, the emotions and the aspirations of a very large segment of the Nigerian electorate are also driven by this particular perspective. But like the question of corruption, this subject of a balancing act between a Moslem North and a Christian South begs the question of how a post-PDP Nigerian ruling class will be different in policy, programmes and issues from the era of the PDP and the long military interregnums before it. This is quite apart from the fact that the North is neither wholly Moslem nor the South wholly Christian.

Perhaps the most important consideration of all is the fact that the APC being unlike any other merger of disparate ideological forces we have ever seen in the political history of this country, we are almost certainly on the cusp of a new order of political discourse in a post-PDP Nigeria. In this, our beginning observation is that the present coalition within the party is centre-right, with the proviso that a center-left formation is slumbering underneath the present dominant formation. There are some among those reading this piece who will think that these reflections are premature or perhaps even meaningless in the context of present-day ruling class politics in our country. These caveats, these objections will be our starting point in next week's concluding essay in the series as we focus on what sort of capitalism a post-PDP ruling class party will institute as a replacement for the present vacuum that combines a looting frenzy with a thoughtless, fundamentalist and unregulated capitalism driven by a latter-day primitive accumulation of the basest and most unregenerate kind that the world has ever known.

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### After the deluge: beyond corruption and regional realignment of forces in a post-PDP Nigeria (2)

*My generation has failed... we are gone. We are a spent force.*

*President Jonathan, at the launching of his reelection campaign in Lagos*

**P**ARADOXICALLY, the most eloquent testimony so far in giving an indication that we are very close to a post-PDP Nigeria came from no other person than President Goodluck Jonathan himself at the flag off for his reelection campaign in Lagos this past Wednesday. It is a universal phenomenon for all incumbent administrations in liberal democratic countries to be defensive in reelection bids, especially where such administrations - like that of Jonathan - have performed abysmally poorly. But at the launching of his campaign this past week, Jonathan went far beyond this norm. He was not only defensive, but he was pretty close to being defeatist; moreover, he gave a clear, unambiguous indication that the source of his defeat is not Buhari and the APC but nothing less than history itself. How did he, how could he make such a devastatingly negative summation of his political legacy at a rally to launch his reelection campaign? Let me explain.

Jonathan started his speech at the event by apologizing to government workers and contractors who have not been paid their salaries, wages or due recompense for work done. But he quickly went beyond this defensiveness and both in tone and substance he began to sound as if he was not only battling Buhari and the APC but against all past administrations before his own. He asked his audience at the event as well as the whole nation to ask all his predecessors what they had done with the nation's wealth. On corruption he stated emphatically that if all the past governments we have had in Nigeria had played their parts in fighting corruption it would not have heightened beyond control today. It is of course very strange for an incumbent President to admit that corruption has gone beyond control in his time in office; far worse is it for the same President to declare that the failure was not only his own but, collectively, that of all past administrations and, indeed, his whole generation. Thus, while the Chief Host at the event, Dr. Segun Mimiko, described Jonathan as "the most abused and negatively profiled President in the history of this country", the "oga patapata" himself made the declaration that serves as the epigraph for this piece about not only himself but his generation: "My generation has failed... we are gone. We are a spent force".

It would of course be erroneous and misleading for me to give the impression that Jonathan at that launching of his campaign more or less conceded defeat by Buhari and the APC. Nothing could be further from the facts, the truth than such an observation, such a claim. Indeed, the essential point of my comments on what transpired at the PDP rally in Lagos this past Wednesday is to highlight the fact that Jonathan included Buhari, APC, Obasanjo and all past administrations



• Shagari



• Buhari



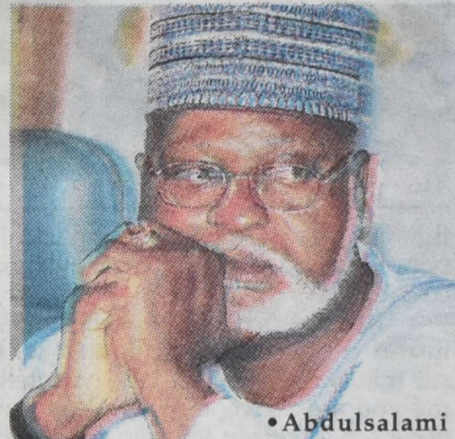
• Obasanjo



• Babangida



• Shonekan



• Abdulsalami



• Abacha



• Yar'Adua



• Jonathan

• "All failures?"

in our country in the monumental failure that he admitted and bemoaned. In essence then, what Jonathan was saying amounts to a declaration that both he and Buhari, both the PDP and the APC, and both his administration and all past governments in our country put together are failures.

At this point, I take note here and draw the reader's attention to the fact that Jonathan in his speech at that rally again and again compared himself to Buhari and logically, he presented his opponent as a worse failure himself, as indeed a previous ruler of the country unfit for being returned to the seat of power. That is the voice, the promptings of candidate Jonathan who wants to win at all costs and come what may. But we must, I urge, pay attention to the weight of historical and political contradictions bearing down on Jonathan as "the most abused and negatively profiled President in the history of this country", as Mimiko put it. Thus, the essential point I am making here is that almost against his own conscious aspirations and desires, Jonathan at the rally to launch his reelection campaign gave more than a mere hint of a subconscious intimation, an involuntary presentiment that we are on the cusp of a political space, an order of governance that is post-PDP. If the PDP loses the coming elections - as it should and probably will - then we will be plunged into that new political space very soon. But if the PDP rigs itself into perpetuation of its admitted "failure" then of

course the day of reckoning will be delayed yet again. In this series, I take the position that that day of reckoning, that new space of political discourse and possibility is at hand and we must prepare ourselves for it.

In last week's opening essay in this series, I identified two factors as the twin pivots around which the defeat of Jonathan and the PDP in the coming elections revolve. These are, respectively, corruption and the coalition of mainstream politicians of the "core" North and the Southwest as the dominant formation within APC. In this concluding piece, I now add that these are expedient but not sufficient indices of a true post-PDP political order in our country; expediency, I am urging, is not the same thing as sufficiency. This is because neither the war on corruption nor a realignment of forces among our political elites, nor indeed a combination of the two factors will produce a political order that will clean up the colossal rot and end the great suffering and insecurity for millions of our peoples that the PDP has left as its political legacy for any successor government, any new ruling party in our country. Thus, the fundamental question is or will be the sort of capitalist or bourgeois democracy that comes into being in a post-PDP Nigeria. To put this in very blunt terms, the question is whether a post-PDP Nigeria will still be a pseudo-bourgeois, "agbero" or "area boy" capitalism with its thieves' headquarters

at Aso Rock or a people's progressive capitalist democracy. How do the twin factors of corruption and the realignment of forces that will be at the centre of the coming elections relate to this fundamental question?

Concerning corruption, there is a joke making the rounds of elite political circles in the country at the present time that is very pertinent to the subject of our discussion in this piece. Here it is: at the very earliest indication that Jonathan and the PDP are losing the presidential contest, say a few hours into the vote count, many private jets will fly out of the country as the kleptocrats and "lootocrats" close to Jonathan and the PDP flee the country in terror of the punitive measures they expect from Buhari. To this, I add the following questions: What of the kleptocrats and "lootocrats" close to the APC and the other ruling class parties, will they also take off in their private jets or will they feel secure in the knowledge that only miscreants and felons close to the PDP will face the day of reckoning? Will the war on corruption extend to a much needed project to end the monumental waste and squandermania that are endemic to virtually all our ruling class political parties, state governments, National Assembly men and women, local government bureaucrats and their hundreds of thousands of cronies and supplicants? Will the privatization of national and public utilities and assets that are no more than another form of

looting since they do not conduce to functioning capitalist enterprises continue or will a post-PDP administration undertake a massive review and revision of the privatization bonanza for the rich and the powerful of the land? And finally: corruption has many faces and wears many masks that hide its gaping wound on the body politic: will a post-PDP dispensation strip away the masks and get to the beating, pumping heart of the nation and its millions of looted lives or will it be business as usual with a mere change of the cast of characters?

The coalition of big political forces of the "core" North and the Southwest that is the dominant formation within the APC presents an even more complex factor in any preliminary projections into the political order of a post-PDP Nigeria. The popular view, the common assumption is that this is largely a Hausa/Fulani/Kanuri and Yoruba alliance to which politicians of the other zonal and ethnic groups of the country are very important and very volatile supplements. While this is not an entirely factitious view, it is nonetheless a massively oversimplified perspective on the politics of a post-PDP Nigeria. Nigeria is not different from virtually all the other multiethnic and multicultural democratic countries of the world in which any political plurality that confers hegemonic domination on a ruling party is usually necessarily based on alliances like the one that produced the APC. But what is lacking in the dominant political discourses in Nigeria is the recognition that in all the coalitions and alliances that produce ruling parties in the bourgeois democracies of the world, politicians not only represent their zonal, ethnic and religious groups but also their class interests, especially as these are based on the forces and means of production from which their wealth and power are derived.

Perhaps the most concrete way to express this is to pose the question as to whether the terms "centrist", "center-right" or "centre-left" can be applied to the APC in particular and, more generally, the political order that will supplant the reign of the PDP. The answer is of course yes, a resounding yes. But the question is not being asked now, as we approach February 14, 2015. But it will be asked thereafter, no question about it, that is if the coming elections move us to a truly post-PDP Nigeria. Beyond the "corruption sublime" of the PDP era, and beyond the return of power or the presidency to the North, the fundamental question of redistributive justice for all our peoples will be raised; and it will be raised in a manner that was not possible when we were all so completely absorbed during the reign of the PDP by the social, moral and spiritual ravages of corruption. In other words, if and when corruption becomes reduced to a scale not higher or worse than we find in most countries of the African continent and the world, we will then face the real challenges and problems of producing a 21st century capitalist democracy that is either functional and bourgeois or social-democratic and popular or perhaps even a brand new combination of these two archetypal forms.

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