



# Talakawa Liberation Herald (137)

## BIODUN JEYIFO

*I have been with them throughout our trying terms; what then is the reward of such dedication and suffering? They did not defect because of positions; they did not involve themselves in the pursuit of personal gains, and they accepted their fate throughout our trying moments. President Buhari, BBC Hausa Program, Tuesday, October 6, 2015*

### All the president's men: an open letter to Garba Shehu, Senior Special Assistant to the President, Media and Publicity (1)



•Shehu

**D**EAR Mr. Garba Shehu: Greetings! I confess that for the most part, I am directing this open letter to you rather opportunistically because it will attract more attention than if I had written it as a regular piece in this weekly column. But having said that, I should also state that I do have another reason in directing this piece of writing to you and this is the fact that I have found many of your press briefings on affairs in the Presidency very articulate. Indeed, this is such a strong element in my mind as I write this letter that I wish to inform you and the readers of this column that, rightly or wrongly, I have come to rely more on the things that you say about affairs in the Presidency than the things that Femi Adesina, Special Assistant to the President (Media and Publicity) says.

Of course, you do occupy a more senior position than Adesina in the Presidency, but this is not the reason why to me, the things that you say carry more weight than Adesina's press briefings. After all, we all know that, sadly, in our country seniority does not always mean superiority of mind and morality; as a matter of fact, it unfortunately often means the exact opposite. The things you say carry more weight because where Adesina tends to stick to the more mundane and routine aspects of what is going on in the Presidency, you tend mostly to come on the scene on the big issues, the critical factors vital to the success of President Buhari and his administration. Moreover, more than Adesina, in your press and media briefings you seem to speak with an authoritativeness that indicates that you have the President's ear, his full confidence. Indeed, to me the contrast between you and Adesina is like the contrast between Doyin Olupe and Reuben Abati when both men worked with and for Goodluck Jonathan: Olupe was blunt and literal-minded; Abati was suave and articulate even when, on a countless number of occasions, he was defending palpably indefensible actions and policies of his boss, Goodluck Jonathan.

If you have read the book, *All the President's Men*, by Ben Woodward and Carl Bernstein on the Watergate scandal that was made into a highly commercially successful film bearing the same title as the book, you might think that the title of this open letter to you is intended to insinuate an allusion in the reader's mind to that book and the film based on it. As we know, the Watergate scandal revealed a depth of abuse and corruption of power by Richard Nixon that was so monumental that it led to his downfall and that is what both the book and the film titled *All the President's Men* is about. I hastily and vigorously refute any intention in this piece to project onto President Buhari what Watergate

meant for President Nixon - heavens forbid! I wish the President well; and God knows that our country deserves a break after the disastrous reign of the PDP especially in its last stage under Goodluck Jonathan. So rather than a reprise of Nixon's downfall for our current President, what I have in mind by invoking the phrase "all the President's men" as the title of this piece can be highlighted by two outstanding features of President Buhari's ministerial and non-ministerial appointments since he took office on May 29, 2015: first, overwhelmingly, most of his appointees have been men; second, also overwhelmingly, most of his appointees have been men who, in one way or another, have been loyal to him, particularly in the long years of what one could describe as time spent in the political wilderness after his overthrow as military ruler in 1985 through the twelve years from 2003 to 2015 when he ran for the presidency four times before finally succeeding in the most recent of these elections. It is in this sense and this sense only that in this piece, I talk of "all the President's men": few or no women at all; and men who have been with Buhari through thick and thin. In other words, a distinct gender bias and an equally distinct over-personalization of the power of incumbency with special regard to ministerial and non-ministerial appointments, these are the issues that I wish to discuss and reflect upon in this open letter to you, Mr. Shehu.

It is perhaps necessary for me to state that in focusing on these two particular issues, I am not unaware of other issues that have been raised and widely discussed with regard to President Buhari's exercise of his power to make appointments for key

positions in his administration. Indeed, about three to four issues have been very prominent, so much so that they have almost completely eclipsed the two issues that I have chosen to emphasize in this piece. These include the unprecedented delay in making his ministerial appointments; allegations of a palpable "Northern" bias in the non-ministerial appointments; a much publicized disinclination on the part of the President to make appointments from states or geopolitical zones that voted heavily against him in the presidential elections; and alleged intra-party squabbles within the ruling party, the APC, over which chieftains or 'heavyweights' were snubbed and which were 'rewarded' by the President in making his ministerial appointments. In shifting the focus in this piece away from this particular set of issues, I wish to give no indication whatsoever that they are not important. They are important and indeed, no administration, military or civilian, in the country's political history has so far ever managed to escape allegations of being tainted by one or all of these charges in one form or another.

In drawing attention to this important fact of our political history, I do not wish to imply that all that can be said about this set of issues have been said and I have nothing more to add. No, I do have one or two things to add and I shall do so very briefly here, for whatever such additional commentary is worth. Thus, I must say to you and through you to the President that I was deeply surprised and disappointed that a few months ago, he, the President, openly and

rather vehemently asked why anyone should expect him to look to states and regions that voted against him in dispensing presidential favors, either through appointments to public offices or the citing of federal projects. This was extremely far from a statesmanlike statement and moreover, it was politically very myopic for one would have thought that the President and his advisers would have realized that it is in the long-term interest of himself and the ruling party to enlarge their actual and potential electoral plurality by being large-hearted and non-punitive toward the states and zones that did not vote for Buhari and the APC in the recent electoral cycle. In this regard, the Southeast geopolitical zone constitutes a very special case. In line with this assertion, I ask: how in the world could a ruling party that claims to be truly progressive and forward looking adopt a stance of permanent adversarial opposition to the peoples and interests of one of the three major power blocs in the country simply because in one electoral cycle this major geopolitical zone voted against the President?

In asking this question, Mr. Shehu, I wish to draw your attention to one intricate and easily overlooked aspect of that widely publicized statement of the President in which he asked how anyone could dare to contest his right to reward states and zones that voted for him while sticking it to those that did not vote for him. As reported in many newspapers, the President did not say states and zones that did not vote for his party, the APC; quite specifically, he said states and zones that did not vote

for him. It would have been bad enough if in that statement he had based himself on the party; however, it is a thousand times worse that his displeasure, his angst, pertained exclusively and unambiguously to himself, Muhammadu Buhari.

In a slightly different but related register, this same over-personalization of the politics of governance was very, very strong in the explanation that the President gave for accusations of a Northern bias in his appointments to the major non-ministerial posts in his administration. For months, this particular accusation had been rife in the press and other media outlets, so much so that when an "explanation" of sorts came this week through an interview with the President on the BBC Hausa Service, it was something of a relief that he was at last responding to something that had bothered many Nigerians including some of his supporters. But what an explanation, what an explanation! Northern bias was not his motivation, the President said; the appointees were only incidentally Northern; more substantively and subliminally, these appointees were men who had stayed with him loyally through the long years when he walked and toiled in the political wilderness. The epigraph to this letter, Mr. Shehu, is a direct quote from the translated version of that interview on BBC Hausa Service program this past Tuesday.

I readily admit that at a certain level of basic human sentiments and emotions, the quote from that BBC interview that serves as the epigraph to this piece is very moving, very touching in the President's rather simple and innocent belief that his listeners everywhere will readily agree that it is a right and honorable thing to acknowledge and reward friends and supporters who had been unwavering in their loyalty in the darkest periods of one man's travails. But the Presidency is an institution; for far too long our country's governance has been bedeviled by extreme over-personalization. For me as a member of the nation's "commentariat", I had thought that we had reached a pinnacle in this phenomenon of the extreme individualization of the institution of the presidency during the two terms of Olusegun Obasanjo. Now along comes Muhammadu Buhari with a variant of the same phenomenon that seems even more problematic that OBJ's incarnation of power as an instrument, an extension of the self's driving passions and desires. In next week's continuation of the series, I will focus on the gendered and neo-feudal expressions of our current President's version of the phenomenon. Don't worry, Mr. Shehu, my critique will be constructive, though honest and bracing. I want the President to succeed for his success will in the end be more than a personal triumph; it will be a welcome break from the impasse, the political, economic and social calamities that now stalk the length and the breadth of the land.

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# Talakawa Liberation Herald (138)

## BIODUN JEYIFO

### All the president's men: an open letter to Garba Shehu, Senior Special Assistant to the President, Media and Publicity (2)

**M**ALLAM Garba Shehu: In this continuing piece in the series that began as an open letter to you last week, I wish to start with a question that may come as a surprise to you: When will President Buhari put behind him and finally move on from the travails that he experienced, perhaps even suffered, first from his overthrow as a military ruler in 1985, and subsequently as an unsuccessful presidential candidate three times between 2003 and 2011? In starting this piece with this question, I am particularly mindful of the account that you gave earlier this week of how, during the last presidential electoral campaign, you and your family awoke one morning in your house at Abuja only to find that your house had been surrounded and completely blockaded by heavily armed units of the Nigerian Police. According to the account that you gave of that sinister siege on your house, only the intervention of social media activists through tweets and posts on twitter and facebook accounts on the Internet alerted the country and the world to what you and members of your family were being subjected to. Once that happened, according to you, the besiegers had to leave you and your family alone because they realized that they and whatever evil intentions they had in mind had been exposed on the Internet.

I am almost certain that this was not the only intimidating and frightening experience that you personally had as the Spokesman for the Buhari Campaign Organization, just as I also know that many other members of Buhari's campaign team as well as chiefs of the APC faced untold harassment and intimidation from the PDP during the last elections. As the whole world knows, starting from the Ekiti and Osun States' governorship elections of 2014, the PDP under Jonathan became more and more fascist in its open and maximum use of armed and sometimes hooded state and non-state thugs, kidnappers and enforcers against all opponents, especially of the APC. Indeed, I wish to assert here that though I was and have remained highly critical of the APC as previously a potential and now an actual ruling party, I spoke out consistently and forcefully in this column against those fascist actions and tendencies of the PDP in general and the Jonathan administration in particular. If this is the case, you might wonder, Mallam Shehu, why then am I asking when President Buhari will put behind him the many undoubted travails and humiliations of the years and decades that he spent in what I am in this series calling a political wilderness?

Mallam Shehu, because I consider this a very crucial question, I shall try to respond to it with the greatest clarity and concreteness that I can muster. Thus, I draw your attention as well as the attention



• Babachir David Lawal, SFG, one of Buhari's loyalist non-ministerial appointees

of other readers of this piece to two separate but closely linked and portentous statements that President Buhari has made as an *elected* Head of State. First statement: the states and peoples that did not vote for me cannot expect me to treat them like the states and peoples that voted for me. Second statement: for the non-ministerial posts in my administration that I do not have to submit to the Senate for screening and approval, I have appointed those who have stood loyally with me over the years, first in the ANPP, then in the CPC and APC. As an amateur psychoanalyst, to me these two statements reveal that the President not only has a long memory of those who have worked for and against him, but this memory, this political unconscious, weighs so heavily on his mind and psyche that things that happened years and decades ago still affect his thoughts and actions now, in the moment of his eventual political ascendancy as an elected president.

It is not my intention in this piece to dabble into a sustained psychoanalysis of the President's every utterance and action. As I see the matter, it is far more profitable for all of us to evaluate the potential and actual *objective* conse-

quences and ramifications of those of the President's actions and utterances that seem to come from his long memory of those who worked for and against him. Objectively therefore, whatever may be the understandable psychological basis of the President's actions and utterances, I wish to state that what should concern us is the fact that he seems deeply inclined to a neo-feudal conception and practice of governance in a constitutional order that is intended to be bourgeois-democratic. As I consider this to be very portentous for our country's future under the rule of the President and the APC, permit me, Mallam Shehu, to explain what I have in mind in making this observation, this claim.

Mallam Shehu, to call a spade a spade, it is nothing but the very height of a neo-feudal act for the President to have said for the whole country and the world to hear that the states and peoples that did not vote for him cannot reasonably expect to be treated like the states and peoples that voted for him. I have not the slightest doubt that in all probability, many of our political leaders of the past and the present operated and still operate on the same basis as the President on this matter with regard to their marked

predilection for punishing those who are against them and rewarding those who are for them. But as far as I can tell, no other Nigerian Head of State has ever publicly stated this openly and with the apparent belief of Buhari that it is a declaration that is so logical, so unexceptionable that no thinking Nigerian can question or fault it. To a slightly lesser degree, the same thing is true of the declared intention to reward those who have stayed loyally over the years with the President through thick and thin: all our political leaders think and act on the basis of this idea, but none but Muhammadu Buhari has ever publically declared it as an underlying idea, a cornerstone of his actions and utterances, at least in this inaugurating period of his presidency.

It is perhaps necessary at this point in the discussion to throw some historical and cultural light on the specifically neo-feudal nature of these ideas and utterances of the President. First of all, in all areas of the world in the long era of its dominance both as a form of political rule and a way of life, feudalism was profoundly *local* in its ideological, social and demographic expressions. The feudal overlord often extended his area of effective political and military hegemony far beyond his locality but fundamentally, those closest to him, those on whom he depended came from his village or his so-called *demesne*. Secondly, in extending the sphere of his rule far beyond his locality, the feudal baron always based himself on the strict policy of severely punishing those who were against him while rewarding those who were for him. Thirdly and finally, as much as it was fundamentally based on locality, feudalism was also profoundly patriarchal and male-dominant: a woman, any woman, was important not in her own right but only insofar as she derived that importance from a male relative – a father, a husband, a brother, an uncle, a male cousin.

Of the about 12 non-ministerial appointments that the President made before sending his cabinet list to the Senate at the end of September, only two are from the South and only one is a woman. This caused considerable consternation throughout the country, significantly even among Buhari's own supporters. Now that the President has explained in the interview broadcast on the BBC Hausa Service last week that those appointees were only incidentally Northern and that his real motive was to reward those who had loyally stayed with him over the years and decades, it would seem that the matter has been laid to rest.

But this is not the case. For where in this piece I have placed my emphasis on the President's neo-feudal reliance on locality, I am absolutely certain that others will continue to place their emphases on the Northernness of those appointees. This is not wrong, not mis-

guided but it misses the fundamental neo-feudalism of the President's presuppositions. To give a telling illustration of what I am arguing here, dear reader, please reflect carefully on the following barely noticed or talked about detail of the President's non-ministerial appointees: only one is a woman, this being the Acting INEC Chairperson who is said to be a sister-in-law of the President. Unlike the PDP rabid dogs of war who have been shouting accusations of nepotism in the appointment of the Acting INEC Chairperson to the high heavens, I am willing to grant that this appointee is perhaps as deserving as any male (or for that matter Southern) appointee. However, the fact remains that Buhari's ministerial and non-ministerial appointees are overwhelmingly male: out of around 56, only six are female. As far as gender bias against women in the appointment of public officeholders in our country goes, this is one of the worst in our recent history.

Mallam Shehu, it is banal and unremarkable to say that both in our country and in the world at large, we are no longer in the feudal age. But feudalism did once exist and rather strongly in some parts of our country, principally in the North but also in some parts of the Southwest. For this reason, remnants of feudal modes of thought and behavior survive among many of our political rulers and leaders. As someone who is not a member of the APC or any of our ruling class parties but passionately hopes that we shall soon put the aimless and wasted years of the reign of the PDP behind us, I was deeply disturbed, even offended and alarmed by President Buhari's declaration that the states and peoples that did not vote for him should not expect to be treated like those that voted for him. I do not wish to provide fodder for the mad war dogs and bad losers of the PDP to continue their nation-wrecking battles against the President. But the President must recognize that we are no longer in the feudal era; we are in a plural, multi-ethnic and constitutionalist era in which crude, patriarchal and neo-feudal ideas about which groups or communities deserve reward or punitive action can be made the benchmark for governance. The matter is made even more onerous by the fact that President Buhari maybe the most powerful embodiment of these neo-feudal ideas and behavior, he is not a lone voice or figure in the new ruling party, the APC. I had thought that I would conclude this series this week. But the necessity to locate the President among other neo-feudal elements within his party makes it necessary for me to extend the series by one more week. So, Insha Allah, we shall bring the series to a conclusion next week.

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## BIODUN JEYIFO

### All the president's men: an open letter to Garba Shehu, Senior Special Assistant to the President, Media and Publicity (3)

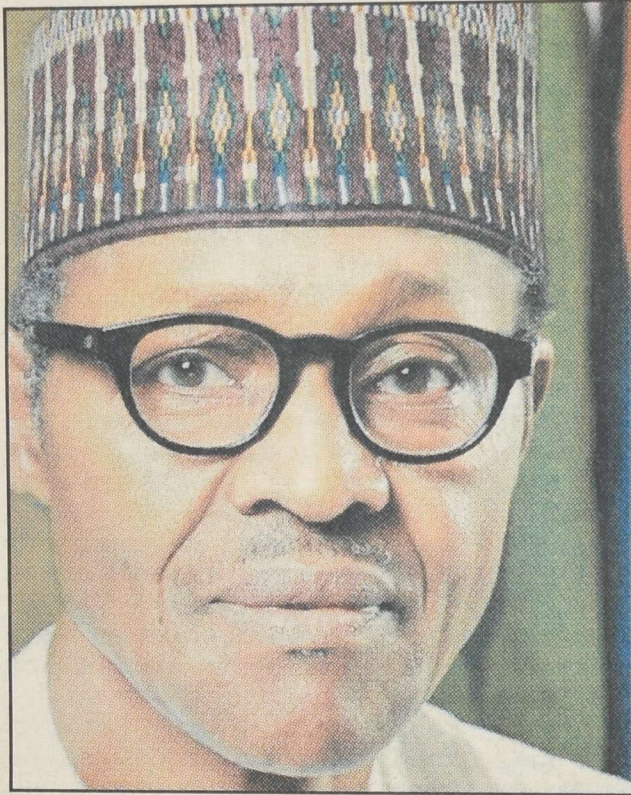
If you will do justice to me, as an elected Nigerian president, let them look at the Constitution a Nigerian president works with, there are people who will closely work with me that don't need to be taken to the Senate. If I select people who I know quite well in my political party, who we came all the way right from the ANPP, the CPC and the APC, and have remained together in good or bad situation... will that amount to anything wrong?

President Buhari, BBC Hausa Service Interview, October 13, 2015

**M**ALLAM Shehu: This has been a long letter, but we are close to its end. So far, one unspoken but underlying reason for writing this letter is the fact that, like most other Nigerians - in particular those who were adults when President Buhari was a military ruler - I am trying to figure out if the *elected president* will be different from the *military ruler* and if so, in what consequential manner this will be manifested. With regard to this consideration, there is also this particular factor in my motivations: as a military ruler, the President had a widely known and much deserved reputation for holding strongly and rather inflexibly to his ideas and beliefs; indeed, he was known to be so indifferent to what people in general thought about him that the only people to whom he gave his ear were associates and confidants among his inner circle of supporters and followers within and outside the military. The infamous Decrees Numbers 2 and 4 of 1984 were the ultimate testimony to this aspect of the President when he was a military ruler.

I do not know how old you are, Mallam Shehu; I do not know if you were already an adult when those decrees were promulgated by Buhari's military administration, but I can tell you that the pleas, the remonstrations to the young man that Buhari was as a military ruler to reverse himself and his administration on those obnoxious decrees were not only made throughout the length and breadth of Nigeria, they were also made widely in the international community. But to all these pleas Buhari remained totally deaf, even arrogantly and contemptuously so. Against the backdrop of this aspect of Buhari as a military ruler, as we are gradually getting to know the President as an elected ruler, one question that I and I suppose many other Nigerians of my generation will be asking is whether or not the second coming of Buhari will show a ruler who is willing to listen to and reason with people outside his inner circle of advisers and confidants. In essence, this boils down to who the President will put first, Nigerians from all parts of the country, especially the teeming majority of the talakawa North and South, or his inner circle of confidants.

Mallam Shehu, if the President does not know that the words of the quote that serves as the epigraph to this concluding piece in this series of letters to you provides no justification, none at all, for almost exclusively drawing his non-ministerial appointees from his inner circle of loyalists, let him know that people are not as



•Buhari, Tinubu and Saraki, "Where will these three take the ruling party and the country?"

gullible, as naïve as he apparently thinks. Every thinking and politically savvy Nigerian knows that the non-ministerial appointees of elected Nigerian presidents that don't have to be sent to the Senate for screening constitute the inner core, the "kitchen cabinet" of the President; they wield far greater influence on our elected presidents than cabinet members that have to be sent to the Senate for screening and approval. Indeed, Malam Shehu, I do hope that you are aware of the fact that several commentators have pointed out that many of the ministerial appointees whose names the President sent to the Senate for screening were also selected on the same basis on which the inner core of non-ministerial appointees were chosen, i.e. loyalty to the President over the years and decades from military rulership to four attempts to become elected president, first in the ANPP, then in the CPC and finally and successfully in the APC.

Some pundits have even plausibly argued that the real reason why it took the President so long to make his ministerial appointments was not because he wanted to choose the best and the brightest but because he had to weigh and decide carefully among the large throng of loyalists who had worked for him over the years and decades. In this respect, "loyalty" in this context more or less means "fealty"; not surprisingly, fealty is a word that comes to us from the feudal age when all who served a baron did so on the basis of "fealty" sworn to the overlord. Indeed, the distinct neo-feudal overtone here is strengthened by the President's extension of "reward" to those personally loyal to him to states and peoples that voted for him. In other words, it is one thing to reward *individuals* that have been loyal to you; it is another thing entirely to reward or punish entire *states* and *peoples* that voted for or against you; when the two are combined, you have as close as it is possible to neo-feudalism in a 21<sup>st</sup> century plural, multi-ethnic, federal, democratic and constitutionalist state whose wealth and resources do not come from inherited estates but from rents collected from extractive

oil and gas industries. In such an historical context, it is very shocking that the President can be so open, so blatant in linking rewards and "punishments" to those who show or do not show fealty to him, Muhammadu Buhari. Because I wish the President well politically, I sincerely hope that he can and will be made to abandon these distinct neo-feudalist strains in his actions and utterances this early in his presidency before they become entrenched as defining features of his administration.

I concluded last week's installment in this series by stating that part of my concerns in this long letter, Mallam Shehu, is the fact that neo-feudalism is not a trait, a mode of thought and behavior that is exclusive to the President within the leadership of the APC as the new ruling party. Little did I know when I wrote this observation into the concluding segment of last week's piece that the same newspaper that carried my column would publish an account in which Nasir El Rufai, the Kaduna State Governor, one of the leading intellectual lights of the APC, a man who had savagely pilloried the late President Umar Musa Yar' Adua for being so parochial, being so nepotistic that his inner core of advisers and confidants came exclusively from his area of Katsina State, this same El Rufai was reported to have told a town hall meeting last week that people from the part of the state that did not vote for him should expect little or nothing from him. El Rufai's brilliance is indisputable even if his opportunism is not easily forgettable; if he can be this crudely neo-feudalist, there is much to ponder on where the APC is headed as our new ruling party. The talakawas of all parts of the country and those who struggle for and on their behalf must start a dialogue now with the leaders of this new ruling party.

This preceding statement brings me to perhaps the thorniest or most convoluted expression of neo-feudalism in the APC, specifically the one that pertains to the Leader of the Party, Ahmed Bola Tinubu, aka "Jagaban". Tinubu's political "estate" within the

APC, unlike Buhari's, is not based on those who have been loyal to him over the years and decades; rather, his "estate" is based on those who have been his beneficiaries in the long war of attrition and conquest against the PDP. Ask no questions as to how he amassed the vast war chest that was in many instances used successfully against the PDP; the only thing that is important is that a great number of chieftains and heavyweights in the APC and before that the ACN, owed their political lives, their very survival on Tinubu and his control of that war chest. This was the basic rationale of his colossal political influence since 1999, at least before the formation of the APC and more specifically, before Tinubu's encounter with Muhammadu Buhari as incumbent president. There is a telling lesson here from the feudal age: the baron on whom the supreme feudal overlord obtained his sovereignty over all the baronies in the land was always the first to go, the first to be done away with. In plain language, Tinubu seems to have reached the limits of the reach of his political "estate" in the suggestion, the imputation that Buhari is one of his "beneficiaries". This is not untrue, but it is a gross simplification; nevertheless, it is being peddled widely within and outside the ranks of the APC.

Finally, there is Bukola Abubakar Saraki whose political "estate" within the APC is actually pre-bourgeois, pre-feudal and pre-modern in that his brand of cynical and opportunistic horse-trading had always existed in all historical polities prior to the modern full-blown bourgeois democracies. When he seized control of the Senate leadership with the great majority of his votes coming from the defeated minority party, he spoke and acted as if this was the most natural thing in the world of representative democracy. It isn't it but this is beside the point. The "point" was that Saraki was successful and the party was unable to do anything to either reverse his "victory" or even call him to order. In effect, Bukola Saraki's cynicism and opportunism hang like specters over all factions within the APC, at

least in the present period when "estates" and "franchises" are being negotiated and traded in the new ruling party at the same time that what the party really and truly stands for remains unclear, even to its own ideologues and within its rank-and-file followership. The real worry within the ruling party itself and the country at large is that there are dozens, perhaps scores of other "Sarakis" lurking within the heart and soul of the new ruling party waiting for their chance to strike it big and rich, change and progress be damned.

Mallam Shehu, all is far from well with the APC as the new ruling party and the President has a large share of what needs to be corrected in the affairs of the party. If perhaps there seems to be too much "Dogon Turenchi" in my use of words like "neo-feudalism" and "fealty", permit me to say that what I have been arguing in this long letter is really quite simple and straightforward and it is this: we are still at an early stage in both the administration of this President and the time of the APC as a new ruling party; before it is too late, before he becomes known as a ruler who chooses those he favors or disfavors depending on his past and recent experiences, Muhammadu Buhari should strive to be the president of all parts of the country, the parts that did not vote for him as much as those that voted for him. He must especially devote himself to a better life for all of our peoples that have for so long been set aside by the wealthy and powerful few for whom the wealth of the nation was indistinguishable from their personal richness and well-being. If he does these things, his example will redound on his party, the rest of the political class and the nation. I don't know about Bukola Saraki but the President and the Party Leader have it within their grasp to transform the APC to the first ruling party in our country's political history that begins to make a real, beneficial difference at home and abroad.

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