

Opinion

Contemporary problems of democracy

By Edwin Madunagu

SO powerful and attractive, and yet so elastic and abused is the concept of *democracy* that it can be used, and has been used or invoked, as an organizing principle for any critique or defence or articulation of any sociopolitical movement, political party or social order. Every intellectual production on democracy proceeds from, or assumes, the general definition of democracy – “government of the people, by the people and for the people” – proposed by Abraham Lincoln about 150 years ago. “Democratic”, the adjective formed from democracy, has been used to qualify all sorts of social monstrosities just as it has been used to mark off genuine qualitative differentiations.

Concerning this “magic” concept, two particular events in modern history stick to my mind. As Lincoln was defining *democracy* in America – a new nation that was built on slavery – those inspired by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in Europe were establishing communist groups, cells and, later, parties of the working people based on concepts of *democracy* which they argued were superior – in terms of human freedom and liberation – to all previously existing concepts. Later, there emerged in Germany, in the fourth quarter of the 19th century, a party called the German Social Democratic Labour Party. Less than half a century later, in the same country, there emerged, Adolf Hitler’s National Social Democratic Labour Party, which was committed to physically liquidating the Communists and the Jews whom they regarded as the same thing or two faces of the same thing.

This article is however not about the historical trajectory or trajectories of democracy – theory and practice. The above ironies of history just sprang up before me as I began the present appreciation. There are three particular simple lessons I learnt and re-learn in the business of reviewing or appreciating political texts. One is that no political text is ideologically “neutral”. Another, the second, is that no serious political critic or reviewer is, or can be, ideologically “neutral”. The third lesson is that what a critic or reviewer – having made his or her ideological choice, implicitly or explicitly – may call the “other side” in an ideological spectrum is

usually not monolithic. A critic or reviewer should therefore be careful about blanket categorization.

The first and third lessons are illustrated in a new book, *Democracy in Nigeria: Thoughts and Commentaries* authored by Dr. Anthony Akinola, a Nigerian compatriot living in Oxford, United Kingdom. I am an illustration of the second lesson. The question on this second lesson is not how well you can pretend, as a reviewer or a critic, to be ideologically “neutral”, but whether you will allow yourself to be so blinded by ideological prejudice as not to see flashes of beauty and deep thought when they appear on the “other side”. I shall come to these three illustrations in the course of this appreciation of Akinola’s important book.

Democracy in Nigeria is a collection of 55 essays written by Akinola over a period of 12 years (2000 – 2012), most of them in the last few years. Almost all the essays were published in Nigerian newspapers, the vast majority in *The Guardian*. The 219 – page book is divided into 10 parts: Part 1: Ethnic rivalry over leadership (7 essays); Part 2: Obasanjo and the third term stigma (4 essays); Part 3: Yar’Adua and exaggerated reforms (4 essays); Part 4: Jonathan and the zoning controversy (7 essays); Part 5: Elections, parties and qualifications (9 essays); Part 6: The monster of corruption (6 essays); Part 7: The fallacy of welfarism (2 essays); Part 8: Religion and religiosity (4 essays); Part 9: Federalism and the Constitution (3 essays); and Part 10: Between optimism and pessimism (9 essays).

The author’s well crafted and carefully balanced 6 – page Introduction, together with his preface, ought to be taken as a separate essay, the 56th. It embodies the political trajectory of Nigeria from independence, passing through the (1966 – 1970) turbulence – hence, I believe, the care and the balance employed by the author. Beyond this literary style (carefulness and balance), however, the Introduction signals the author as a convinced liberal democrat. The well-known researcher and writer on Nigerian politics, A.H.M. Kirk-Greene, who appears to have followed the intellectual career of the author, especially his public commentaries, for quite some time, wrote the Foreword to the book. He scores both the author and his new book very high. Kirk-Greene appears honest in this

judgment.

Democracy in Nigeria is “reader-friendly” and “student-friendly”. By this I mean that Akinola’s new book will attract and encourage a literate person who otherwise suffers “book-weariness” or “book-laziness”; and will be a delight to students of Nigerian politics. In the first place, the book is a collection of essays, not a single historical narrative and analysis; secondly, the titles of the parts, as well those of individual essays, show that the issues treated are not only current but also important and urgent – with some of them, such as *Ethnicity as a permanent phenomenon* (the 6th essay of Part 1), promising to be controversial. The two essays on *Welfarism* that make up Part 7 (The fallacy of welfarism); *Welfarism in a shrinking economy* and *The Pandora box of Welfarism*, are bound, at first, to shock, and then invite, readers who had confirmed Akinola as a thoughtful liberal democrat.

In the third place, each part is preceded by what the author calls *Synopsis*, set in italics, which provides the historical background and context to that particular group of essays. Some of the “synopses” are long and substantive enough to be opinion write-ups by themselves. Finally, Akinola’s language is beautiful, accessible and lucid. But speaking for students, in particular, I would have loved to see Index at the end of the book. This may be considered for the second edition. And in doing this the author may also consider moving the date of publication of each essay from the end to the beginning of the essay. This is to help locate the time of the author’s intervention as the reader begins to read. Also to be considered in a new edition is the need to correct some minor typographical errors like those on pages 34, 36 and 114 and other errors like taking CPC as Congress for Political Change instead of Congress for Progressive Change.

One of the strengths of this book is the sheer boldness – intellectual as well as moral and political boldness – of the writer in talking and arguing positions that are not “popular”, that are “against the current”, so to say. One of such opinions is on the long-standing demand and campaign for the setting up a Sovereign National Conference (SNC). His opinion here comes in the last of the seven essays that make up Part 1: *Ethnic rivalry over leadership*.

I think I should quickly dispense with this point. Akinola had argued strongly for the *rotational presidency* and the recognition of “ethnicity as a permanent phenomenon”. In the end he declared: “The major feuds in the Nigerian polity since independence in 1960 have been mainly over leadership. Be it the Civil War of 1967 – 1970 or the Gideon Orkar-led attempted coup of April 1990, or the crisis we now simply refer to as *June 12*, it has been demonstrated in the course of our existence as an independent nation that *the leadership question is indeed the national question*” (emphasis mine) (page 30).

It is in this context of the author’s almost categorical belief – held over the past three decades – that he declares: “honestly, agitation for another constitutional conference – be it of ethnic nationalities or that of the intelligentsia – no longer excites” (page 46). He continues: “We have had too many conferences in the short history of our nation and maybe it is time we accepted that improving in what we already had is the way forward” (pages 46 – 47). Of course, on both counts – leadership question being the national question and constitutional conference being no long “exciting” – I strongly disagree with Akinola. But I admire his boldness: he is taking the positions in spite of his knowing that they are “unpopular”, in spite of his being known as a liberal democrat and a progressive over a fairly long time. I do not agree with him but his position and his argument enrich my own contrary position. That is one of the strengths of the book.

For a second instance of boldness and “swimming against the current”, some historical background is necessary. The government of President Olusegun Obasanjo had, in 2005, set up a National Political Reform Conference to kick off, I believe, a new process of constitution-making. When deliberations got to the issue of *derivation principle* in the Revenue Allocation debate, delegates from the South-south geopolitical zone insisted “on being paid 25 per cent of revenue from oil, a percentage they would like to graduate to 50 per cent over a five-year period”. (page 50). Akinola fully endorses this position.

• To be continued next Thursday.

Opinion

Contemporary problems of democracy (2)

By Edwin Madunagu

THIS is the second segment of an appreciation of Anthony Akinola's new book, *Democracy in Nigeria*. The first segment ended last Thursday with Akinola recalling one of the demands that came from delegates of the Southsouth geopolitical zone at the 2005 National Political Reform Conference. They had demanded, on behalf of their zone, 25 per cent of the nation's oil revenue and the increase of this percentage to 50 per cent over a five-year period.

Anthony Akinola fully endorses the Southsouth's position on this question. He says: "Their insistence on this position gives the writer (that is, Akinola) much joy in certain respects. The first ground of support emanates from the belief that if the oil wealth had resided somewhere else, the issue of how much they wanted as payment would not have been as contentious. And if the oil wealth had resided in the territory of one of the so-called majority ethnic groups the so-called minority groups might have been made to feel grateful for the tiny crumbs that come in for them." (Page 50).

There are two brief comments I would like to make here. First, I would have loved to find out how many "progressives" from the major ethnic groups would support Akinola's first "ground" unconditionally, that is, without qualifying it to the point of emptying it of every meaning. I have often posed this type of challenge to my friends and compatriots. Second: The author's robust stand on this oil revenue allocation debate gives useful insights into his conception of democracy – that it goes beyond "free and fair and credible" elections. For me, also, there is in the very idea of democracy, not only the principle of equality but also the consciousness that the application of equal measures to unequal entities or situations does not remove the original inequality. The late Chief Anthony Enahoro held this position and called it *equitocracy*.

Running through Anthony Akinola's *Democracy in Nigeria*, in virtually all the 55 essays, are what, I think, the author would call "attributes of democracy". These are in lieu of technical and didactic definitions, which, however carefully and liberally crafted, are always found to be defective and contradictory and, therefore, self-defeating. I

have, myself found that every attempt at improving on Lincoln's general definition has ended in intellectual disaster. Here is a sampling of what Akinola regards as "attributes of democracy": "A nation is qualified to be called democracy if it respects agreed rules and procedures" (page 32); "...democracy as an idea which, among other things, is about respect for the rule of law, free and fair elections and freedom of the individual within the confines of the law" (page 37); "...true democracy is about a people making a choice between alternatives" (page 124).

Akinola admires what he calls the "British approach to democracy" and believes Nigerians have a lot to learn from it. He urges: "We must learn as a matter of urgency that an election is not a matter of 'do or die'. Elections must be free and fair, and a people represented by those they have duly chosen" (page 130). Commenting specifically on the last British general elections 92010, Akinola says: "The campaign lasted barely four weeks and not a single related death was reported. There were no fraudulent issues with ballot papers, or the outcome of elections. Voters' registration cards came through the post, as the ages and addresses of every person resident in Britain are available in the records. (Election day was not declared) a public holiday; people enthusiastically exercised their mandates during their free time" (page 130).

Furthermore, Akinola's testimony continues: "There were neither police officers nor armed soldiers at the polling stations, neither were there party officials to monitor voting" (page 130). I honestly share Akinola's admiration for the British electoral culture in comparison with what obtains in Nigeria. I would, however, insist that the root of the difference between the two cultures cannot be found in our "backwardness", "poverty", "illiteracy", "corruption", "greed", etc – which themselves need to be explained – but more crucially in the capitalist path of development that Nigeria's ruling classes have chosen and imposed on the country, a path of development that passes through primitive capitalist accumulation and its "do or die" tactics.

It is not an argument to say that Britain is also a capitalist country. To this I would simply respond that the path of development that led Britain to becoming a fully developed and central capitalist country – including global exploitation and unequal relations – has been closed forever. It is no

longer open for Nigeria or any other developing country for that matter. This point may be put differently: Any developing country that insists on following the path which Britain or America followed to what they are now will be stunted, and then stuck. Forget the illusion about South Korea or Taiwan. But that is for another day.

On the foundation of Lincoln's "general definition" and "attributes of democracy" such as those that punctuate Akinola's book a political movement may mobilize a nation to fight to erect concrete democratic structures. I believe that is what the author had in mind when he said: "A nation can decide its own structure of democracy" (page 85). Earlier Akinola had argued: "The so-called advanced democratic nations of the world have varied political arrangements – the presidential/congressional system in America, the Westminster parliamentary system in the United Kingdom, the presidential/parliamentarianism in France and the collective presidency in Switzerland. Why must Nigeria be the copycat nation?" (page 74).

Akinola also greatly admires, and has been deeply influenced by America's political system, their model of democratic constitutional presidentialism. This is putting the point very mildly: Akinola loves American democracy. Although he also admires the British, he would prefer the presidential system for Nigeria – for reasons of our country's ethnic and religious "cleavages". It is because of these "cleavages" that the author very strongly advocates *rotational presidency* in this book and he has consistently done this in the past 30 years. He shows his admiration for the American system partly by contrasting it with some other political systems. One of the contrasts sketched in this book – the one between America and the defunct Soviet Union – is deeply *ideological*. This is an illustration of what I said at the beginning of this series – a political writer's inevitable ideological inclination and a reviewer's inevitable ideological preferences.

In the fourth essay of the book, *Presidency is the issue*, Akinola says: "Had the defunct Soviet Union followed the path of the United States of America by putting appropriate democratic structures in place, rather than indulging in many decades of sloganeering, it might have survived until today. Nigeria can only learn from the history of others if its own is not to be continuation in the chapter of failed nations" (page 33).

There are two pertinent comments I wish to make on Akinola's proposition. The first is that there are several elements of America's political system that are truly admirable *if taken in isolation, if freed from their capitalist/imperialist integument* – a liberation which would happen one day, a liberation that would transform America literally into a "paradise" on earth. The political elements that await liberation from capitalist/imperialist integument include America's federalism, constitutionalism, bicameral legislature, the role (and power) of the Congress, and the principle of equality of states in Senate representation. *Democracy in Nigeria* has made the American political system much clearer to me. But this clarity only further convinces me how wonderful it would be – for the masses of America, for the masses of the world – to remove the capitalist/imperialist integument.

The second comment is that the founders of the United States of America and the Soviet Union set out to create different types of society; they "dreamt" of two different worlds; and, more critically, they had different ideas and different plans on *how* to move from the present to the future. In the course of building the Soviet Union, succeeding regimes committed errors – grave and tragic errors – in addition to objective historical difficulties, some of them foreseeable and foreseen, others quite unforeseeable. My proposition is this: The founders of the Soviet Union and the country's succeeding regimes must be judged in the context of the type of society and the world they said they were committed to creating and the methods they proclaimed.

The *Left* is harsh in their judgement of the Soviet Union not because Lenin's successors committed more atrocities than the founders and subsequent rulers of America, or failed to commit themselves to building America-type society as Akinola obviously believes they would have done. The *Left* is harsh on post-Lenin rulers of the Soviet Union on the grounds of what they had proclaimed, the ideology and vision they invoked, the hopes they raised among the toiling and oppressed masses of the world, including those in slavery, those being colonized, those being visited with genocide by capitalist and imperialist expansionists. The *Left* is harsh on the grounds of acts of heroism and martyrdom the post-Lenin rulers inspired across the globe, including Nigeria.

• To be continued next Thursday.

Opinion

Contemporary problems of democracy (3)

By Edwin Madunagu

THE following statement should, perhaps, be made at this point: Crucial in understanding and appreciating Anthony Akinola's *Democracy in Nigeria* is not forgetting that the author takes the country's existing capitalist ("free market") political economy not only as given but also as *unchanging*. He takes for granted that carrying out the reforms advocated in his book would leave the basics of the capitalist ("free market") economy not only invariant but also unthreatened. I felt Akinola's silent assumption throughout the book but more strongly in his consideration of corruption and welfarism. I believe you will not, especially if you are a Leftist, be able to fully appreciate this book unless you take this point into account and see, in spite of this, what I have called "flashes of beauty" and "products of deep thought" the book embodies.

What I still have to say in this appreciation can be streamlined and re-arranged under five themes: The question of "cleavage": ideology, ethnicity and religion; the "leadership" question: the "zoning" principle together with collective, collegial, rotational and single-term presidency; "welfarism" in a restructured economy; corruption as lubricant of capitalism; and the philosophy of hope. In continuing with the appreciation I may have to refer to ideas which, though Akinola's, are not explicitly stated in this book but in his other works that I have also read.

In the Synopsis to Part 4, titled *Jonathan and the zoning controversy*, the author says: "The politics of Nigeria has little or no ideological content; what divides Nigerians are their ethnicity and religion" (page 79). Three pages later, under the essay *History of leadership crises*, the author repeats the proposition but adds a third factor: "The noises about the direction of the presidency in 2011 should remind us that our nation is not divided by ideology, but by religion, region and selfish interests" (page 82). This proposition is repeated in several essays in the book. If you dig deep into, and analyse, Akinola's third factor, "selfish interests" – unless it is a slip of pen" (which anyone who has read this book and other works of his will almost swear is not) – you will sometimes come face to face with what he seeks to deny, that is, *ideology*. This point notwithstanding, I think I know what

the author has in mind: I think it is a matter of emphasis; but this emphasis, which we may be tempted to overlook carries important implications which the author then employs theoretically – namely, that the political parties that now occupy Nigeria's democracy space can coalesce into a handful of large and, perhaps, national, parties.

Akinola's proposition can be reformulated as follows: Several factors, including ethnicity, religion and ideology divide Nigerians; but in politics (or the type of politics we used to call "bourgeois politics") which the ruling classes and their power blocs completely dominate, ideology takes a back seat, and ethnicity and religion become dominant, though not exclusive. If the author accepts my modification that rests my case; but if he rejects it I shall then take another step in another direction and propose that the fact that different political groups are found in the same party does not mean that there are no ideological differences – sometimes serious differences – between them. Groups with deep ideological differences may come together for a strategic objective, such as *national liberation*. Check the Kuomintang (KMT) in China during the anti-Japanese national resistance, the African National Congress (ANC) in South Africa and the National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) in Nigeria between 1944 and 1950.

I do not want to be misunderstood on this question. So let me put my proposition in context. Akinola employs his own proposition – of no ideological, or no serious ideological, differences – to argue that the tens of political parties which now operated in the country can coalesce into a handful of national parties – a development which will now be strengthened if *rotational presidency* is adopted and inserted in the nation's Constitution. See, in particular, the essay *Fusion, not alliances* (pages 113–115).

My counter proposition is in three parts: first, that there are ideological differences in Nigeria's politics; second, that amalgamation of parties can still take place even in the presence of ideological differences; and third, that, conversely, the fact that this amalgamation takes place does not mean there are no ideological differences. However, as in the historical examples cited above (KMT, ANC and NCNC) the coming together of

parties – I mean serious parties – with ideological differences is usually for a strategic objective. Once that objective is realized, or is in sight, the differences, hitherto underplayed, begin to surface and the hitherto monolithic party begins to "fall apart".

The case for *rotational presidency* is, arguably, the strongest and most passionately argued proposition in *Democracy in Nigeria*. Reading through Akinola's argument that literally litters the book and those works of his that are not accommodated in the book I think the full title of his proposition should be: *Collegial, rotational and single-term presidency*. For the "collegial" part of the proposition, Akinola says in the essay *Presidency is the issue*: "The argument that a potential president should be intelligent, competent and patriotic cannot, in any way, be faulted. However, those with such qualities can be found in all the geopolitical zones of the Nigerian federation. The time will come, and it may not be long, when we see conventional wisdom in a remodeled presidency that is made up of an elected leader from each of the geopolitical zones. The position of president who combines the functions of Head of State with that of the Chairmanship of the Collegiate can be based on rotation" (page 35).

If the proposition had stopped here readers of my column in *The Guardian* newspaper would notice that Akinola's position (formulated above in 2006) completely coincides with the position I have, myself, held for a long time. But Akinola had continued: "Because of the belief that Nigeria is one important nation of the world whose political leader deserves a face, the preferred model here is one on which a zone hold on to the position of Head of State and therefore, the title of President for the duration of a single term of whatever number of years the Constitution prescribes. The members of the Collegiate will be entitled to seek re-election. When we have done this we will have built our nation and its democracy on a rocky foundation" (page 36).

The whole "collegial" arrangement, Akinola suggests, is for the future. In the interim, he stands by *rotational presidency*. He also argues for a single-term tenure for the rotational presidency. In fact he thinks that anyone who supports the key arguments of rotational presidency will also see that a single-term tenure will strengthen it. He argues

this last proposition explicitly in several other more recent essays including *For single term rotational presidency* (page 99–101).

I recall that Akinola wrote a piece, *The case for a collegial executive*, which was published in *The Guardian* of April 26, 2002. Five days later, on Thursday, August 1, 2002, my column carried my response, *Collegiality or collectivity? My position in this response was that while applauding Akinola's brilliant and rare proposition, what he actually offered was neither "collegiate" nor "collective", but just rotational*. However, since I now assume that his 2006 essay, which I had already cited copiously and approvingly, supersedes that of 2002 (which is not even included in the present book), my 2002 argument is no longer relevant here.

In August 1988 I received, in my capacity as Acting Editorial Page Editor of *The Guardian*, two previously published papers written by Akinola on rotational presidency: *Nigeria: The quest for a stable polity: Another comment*, and *An open letter to the Constituent Assembly*. I considered the papers important enough to make personal photocopies and preserve in my library. They are still with me. The first publication was based on his book, *The search for a Nigerian political system* (1986). Ten years later, in 1996, Akinola came out with *Rotational presidency* (1996). All these go to show that Akinola has been long on this issue; and his position has been consistent.

In the essay *Welfarism in a shrinking economy*, Akinola says: "Welfarism is about the health, happiness and general well-being of the individual. A nation which assumes the responsibility of providing for the health, happiness and general well-being of its people(s) is regarded in political parlance as a welfare state." (page 155). The author identifies "free education", "free health care", "unemployment benefits", "old age state pension" "subsidised housing", etc. as welfare programmes and he approvingly recognises Great Britain and the old Western Region of Nigeria (under Obafemi Awolowo) as having practised welfarism. But he believes that welfarism depends critically on the "availability of funds". In 2001 he said, in relation to Nigeria, that, "the funds are simply not there for an idea whose time deserves to come" (page 157). My question is: Why are the funds not there?

• To be continued next Thursday.

Opinion

Contemporary problems of democracy (4)

By Edwin Madunagu

THE third segment of this appreciation of Anthony Akinola's *Democracy in Nigeria* ended with my presentation of the author's views on *state welfarism*, which he defines as the assumption of "responsibility of providing for the health, happiness and general well-being of the individual". It is indeed pleasing to see that Akinola relates welfarism to democracy or, as our politicians would say, "democracy dividends". But, as we also saw in the last segment, Akinola was of the opinion that, as at 2011, there were no funds to inaugurate a welfare programme in Nigeria (page 157). Ten years later, in 2011, Akinola was still of the same view.

To promise to mount welfarism at this time, Akinola argues, would be "tantamount to dangling a carrot before the eyes of the hungry and playing on the ignorance of the people" (page 157). This is a very strong view and it is correct – but only if you assume the inviolability of the current capitalist political economy – which the author implicitly does, as noted in the opening paragraph of the preceding segment. In his second essay on welfarism, *The Pandora box of welfarism*, Akinola offers a more effective and realisable solution to the problems to which welfarism is being considered: "The various governments should be supporting small-scale industries, investing in agriculture and education, with a determination to taking our young men and women off the streets and into the employment market" (page 159).

The author argues very perceptively and convincingly that "our young men and women should not be made to wish for their 65th birthday to come sooner than it should be" – a reference to Ekiti State government, which announced a plan "to provide" *state pension* "to citizens aged 65 and above". He believes that the idea of state pension is at present unrealistic in Ekiti State, "one of the poorest states of the Nigerian federation, a state that totally depends on 'handouts' from Abuja for its survival" (page 158). Again, the author is right if the present political economy is decreed as fixed. (We may here simply define political economy as the system of production and class and sectoral distribution of wealth in a polity).

There are two other comments I have on Akinola's views on welfarism. As I asked at the close of the

last segment: Why are there no "funds" or "where-withal" to mount a welfare programme in Ekiti State or, indeed, in Nigeria as a whole? My reading of Akinola on this question is that he blames a number of factors, including corruption (country-wide), government's dependence on "handouts" (Ekiti State) and general economic "downfalls" (global). But there is no consideration of the political economy, the existing systems or structure of production and distribution of wealth ("market economy").

There is no critique of the contract system (which I may describe as a breeder of corruption on a massive scale), the unequal exchange between Nigeria's national economy and other economies, the national structure of income distribution including the massive, but "legal," appropriations by "public officers", the ruling socio-economic philosophy and the predatory class character of the Nigerian state which has mounted a "permanent war" against the masses of our people. These – and, of course, corruption – are some of the main sources of surplus appropriation in the Nigerian economy. I would therefore propose: When you consider all these factors, you are likely to come to the conclusion that there may never be the "funds" or the "where-withal" to institute welfarism in the country. That is, assuming that the existing structure of production and distribution has no alternative.

Akinola's critique of "state pension" and his counter proposal – investment in agriculture, education, etc – brings to my mind two different perspectives on satisfying urgent human needs. One was offered by my late father long ago and the other by Paulo Freire in his book *Pedagogy of the oppressed*, also long ago. My father's perspective comes as a poser: "Dried meat is, indeed, delicious; it would have been wonderful to allow this piece of fresh meat to dry. But then, what shall we be eating while waiting for the meat to dry?" I think the Ekiti state Government was trying to answer my father's poser by instituting state pension for the aged while planning productive investments, which we see as medium-term projects. And we must not forget that investment in people-oriented programmes requires an ideological and political shift since it involves massive class re-deployment of national resources.

The second perspective on "poverty alleviation", the one from Paulo Freire, rests on the difference between what he calls "false charity" and "true generosity". True generosity, he says, "consists precisely in fighting the causes which nourish false charity. False charity constrains the fearful and subdued, the 'rejects of life', to extend their trembling hands. Real generosity lies in striving so that those hands – whether of individuals or entire peoples – need to be extended less and less in supplication, so that more and more they become human hands which work and, by working, transform the world". Paulo Freire wrote from his base in rural Latin America where he was working with landless peasantry, the poorest of the poor. This type of statement, which, I believe, Akinola would endorse – as it generalises his own position – cannot, however, be directed at the Ekiti State Government under Governor Kayode Fayemi. But it can be directed at Nigeria's ruling classes and Nigerian state as an entity.

The author tries throughout this book to be "level headed", to be civil, decent and non-combative, to make his points as strongly as possible but without antagonising or deliberately courting antagonism. He is a convinced constitutional democrat who would want Nigeria to develop peacefully through continuous reforms, without revolutions or military interventions, convinced that "democracy, even as crude as it is in Nigeria, is more acceptable than the most benevolent of dictatorships". (page 22). But Akinola almost lost his temper while discussing the "monster of corruption" (pages 121-53). He is not alone. It is on the question of corruption that he mentions the possibility of massive revolt and "violent revolution" in Nigeria. He warns a point: "Corruption itself is one culture that could soon compel violence in the Nigerian polity".

In the essay titled *The iniquity of corruption*, written in July 2011, Akinola says: "Nigerians now call for a revolution, which is to say that there can be no peace when the majority of our peoples live in abject poverty, while a tiny minority lives in gluttonous greed". This is a categorical statement. It is as categorical as it is philosophical and radical. But he goes on to add: "The majority of our people love democracy and are peace loving; however, disruptive tendencies can find easy recruitment in the

ranks of the uneducated and the impoverished. It is both in the short-term and long-term interest of our nation that we enrich our people educationally and economically. To be able to do this, we must put an end to corruption and greed". (page 139).

In the latter statement, we see something that looks like ambivalence: to be for revolution or to be against it? Akinola is, however, different from some latter-day "liberal democrats" who know, deep down in their hearts, that only a revolution or direct divine intervention that can check the tide "iniquitous" corruption in this land and begin to reverse it; but they regard revolution, its leaders and its agents and foot soldiers as evil; actual revolutions are regarded as "disorders in nature". Akinola's dilemma is genuine. One can offer an opinion on this dilemma. But fake liberal democrats often behave like cats, which would like to eat fresh fish but would not want to wet their feet.

Under the essay *Beyond mere grumbling* (still on corruption), the author says – in anger, I believe: "There is this assumption that politicians have sacrificed their time and resources to get into public positions because of their patriotism. This may be true elsewhere but not in Nigeria. Most of those who hold public positions in our society today are where they are because of the alluring prospects of power, fame and fortune. They would not be in politics if it were otherwise" (page 151). Then follows a "call for action" a page later: "if we are genuinely concerned about our plights and rights, maybe it is time we organize our lives into a non-partisan group, subscribed to by patriotic Nigerians across the various divides. The trouble with Nigeria is significantly that of a followership that would rather grumble, than act collectively in pursuit of desired objectives" (page 152). The essay was written as recently in October 2011. We shall return to this simple, but important, proposal.

In addition to its other attributes already listed, *Democracy in Nigeria* is also a narrative in the history of politics in contemporary Nigeria, particularly in the current political dispensation – which they call the *Fourth Republic* but I continue to refer to *Obasanjo's Republic*. The book will be particularly useful to students of history and political science.

• To be concluded next Thursday

Opinion

Contemporary problems of democracy (5)

By Edwin Madunagu

It is now time to conclude this appreciation. Anthony Akinola's *Democracy in Nigeria* is appearing at a particularly depressing period in the history of the country: It is a period in which many sincere patriots are frightened and pessimistic about the future of their nation. And to be frank with myself, as well as with my readers, the current appreciation is, in a sense, a statement of faith and hope, a statement of optimism about the survival of Nigeria as a corporate political entity. I try to banish all thoughts about Somalia, Rwanda and former Yugoslavia.

Even then, I would not have embarked on this appreciation, let alone utilizing that opportunity to restate my faith, hope and optimism, if Akinola's book had not been an intellectual product that exudes not only honest patriotism and optimism, but also creativity, freshness and boldness as well as strong and resilient conviction - from the first page. Each day that breaks witnesses literally uncountable number of productions, in various literary forms, on the same subject engaged by Akinola in his book - democracy in our country, Nigeria. But I would say with every sense of responsibility and moderation that most of these productions - or, more strictly, those that I see - are simply manifestoes of opportunism, cynicism and hypocrisy.

Although Akinola and I belong to different "ideological camps" with different sets of ideas on how (the route to take) to attain a genuinely human and humane Nigeria, I can affirm, also responsibly, that Akinola's *Democracy in Nigeria* is not one of the mass productions on "democracy" I have just characterized. Each of the 55 essays in this book presents us with propositions or assertions for debate or reflection.

Beyond all this, however, is another attribute of *Democracy in Nigeria*: there are several ideas in the book that I can propose for inclusion in the radical left programme for a new Nigeria. These are ideas I had earlier described as "flashes of beauty" and "deep thought," and if I may adapt a formulation in Andre Gorz's *Socialism and Revolution*, I would call the ideas "humanist constants." These relate to elements that a national programme of whatever general ideolog-

ical orientation must embody to deserve consideration at all. These include education, health, empowerment of human hands to work and create (not to be stretched in supplication to other humans for survival), fundamental human rights, political democracy as well as equitocracy. The last is a concept of democracy, which goes beyond "one person, one vote". Collegiality, zoning and rotation - currently being bastardised in Nigeria - are all elements of equitocracy.

What I wish to do in the space that is left for me is to repeat one particular clarification, and then pull out some key propositions in *Democracy in Nigeria* for readers to reflect on. These I would take away as I close the book and place it back on the shelf. First, the clarification. *Democracy in Nigeria* had proposed in several of its constituent essays that there are no serious or substantive ideological differences in contemporary Nigerian politics. This proposition I had already refuted. But I had also proceeded to propose that two or more political groups with ideological differences can combine to pursue a specific political objective or a small number of specific political objectives. If the objective of the combination is general, rather than specific, then the combination is essentially a merger and Akinola would be right - in that particular instance - that there were no serious ideological differences separating the groups in the first place.

Now, to the propositions. In the essay *Beyond mere grumbling under The monster of corruption* (Part 6), Akinola had said: "If we are genuinely concerned about our plights and rights, may be it is time we organize ourselves into a non-partisan group, subscribed to by patriotic Nigerians across the various divides. The trouble with Nigeria is significantly that of a followership that would rather grumble than act collectively in pursuit of desired objectives" (emphasis mine) (page 152). He quotes his friend, the late Tajudeen Abdul - Raheem: "Organize, not agonise". (page 152). This is an explicit "call to action", arguably the most explicit in the book. The "various divides" mentioned in the "call" are obviously "ethnic" and "religious" and the unstated common platform for action is the popular-democratic platform, or the "humanist constants".

In the fourth essay titled *Presidency is the*

issue, the author says: "The argument that a potential president should be intelligent, competent and patriotic cannot, in any way, be faulted. However, those with such qualities can be found in all the geo-political zones of the Nigerian federation. The time will come, and it may not be long, when we see conventional wisdom in a remodeled presidency that is made up of an elected leader from each of the geo-political zones. The position of President who combines the functions of Head of State with that of the Chairmanship of the Collegiate can be based on rotation" (page 35). To this proposition, as I said in an earlier segment of this appreciation, I give a hundred percent "yes" vote. My only footnote is to the effect that the proposal should take effect now, for tomorrow may be too late.

In the second paragraph of the 5th essay, *Democracy and structures of governance*, Akinola says: "I begin my comment by summarizing democracy as an idea which, among other things, is about respect for the rule of law, free and fair elections and the freedom of the individual within the confines of the law. A nation may choose to put in place political structures which accord with its realities. What makes such a nation democratic or not is the extent to which the principles of democracy are upheld in the society. Structures of political governance differ and vary in western countries. What we lack, and must seek to learn, is the primacy they accord to the principles of their chosen political systems" (page 37). My vote is "yes."

In the 6th essay, *Ethnicity as a permanent phenomenon*, he says: "Ethnicity is one phenomenon we are not going to be able to wish away, no matter how much we try. Accepting ethnicity as a reality to be confronted is the way forward to achieving a stable, democratic nation. The magnitude of the problem posed by ethnicity in our society emanates from its centralized nature. While it is perhaps inconceivable that a nation like the United States of America would disintegrate because of its ethnic components, the same can hardly be said about Nigeria. *The ethnic population in America is dispersed, and that explains the major difference between that nation and ours*" (page 41). My vote is again "yes" except that I would change "the major difference" to "one major difference."

The following proposition is in the 33rd essay, *The iniquity of greed*: "The Nigerian politician

wins regular lottery in corrupt practices or shady deals. The saving grace for democracy of today, if one must be honest, has been the distrust Nigerians have for the military. The experiences of governance between 1985 and 1998 do not recommend further military involvement in politics" (page 139). Historically true, although it can happen again without "recommendation."

In the synopsis to Part 8, *Religion and religiosity*, the author says: "Nigeria is one nation where a supposedly well-educated person could blame the breakdown of their vehicle on the evil machinations of witches, believing there would be need for prayers. The pastor or imam or priest feeds on this type of irrationality for their own economic advantages. However, the stability of Nigeria is hardly troubled by eccentric or excessive religiosity of the majority but by the determination of a very tiny minority to impose its values on the rest of society. Nigeria has suffered from all sorts of religious extremism in the past and is currently engaged in the battle with an extremist group whose sophistication in unleashing savagery has been unprecedented" (page 161). True, except that I would change "Nigeria.....is currently engaged in..." to "The Nigerian state is currently engaged in...."

In the 54th essay, *Still on rotational presidency*, Akinola says: "We do not do not have a "rotational presidency" yet, what we do have is "zoning" by individual political parties. Once there is a rotational presidency, the rules guiding the principle will be elegantly stated in the national constitution with all political parties mandated to follow them." (page 212). This is closely followed by: "Rotational presidency, if included in the constitution as contemporary realities suggest it should, it may not be a permanent feature no matter how lofty an idea we think it is. It is customary practice in democratic nations with written constitutions to periodically review and possibly amend any provision of the constitution only when it may be deemed to have served its purpose. The idea of a rotational presidency cannot be an exemption. There is no doubt that a future generation will have its say in all of this, ridicule us if they so desire, but the duty we owe that future is to save the present" (page 215).

This is an elegant application of dialectics, and my vote is an unqualified "Yes".

• Concluded