

Opinion

History, optimism and rededication

By Edwin Madunagu

I PASSED through Thursday, December 15, 2011 with mixed feelings. The first of those feelings was that of sadness. I was sad because the day was the fifth anniversary of the death of Ayodele Curtis Joseph in Lagos at the age of 86. Of course, the sadness was not over his death as such. Living to be 86 is quite an achievement in contemporary Nigeria. And for a consistent revolutionary and radical patriot it is a feat to live up to 86 years. I was sad because, for some reasons beyond my control, I had not been able to seriously embark on the discharge of one of his key expectations: editing and publishing some of his numerous manuscripts on history, politics, religion and philosophy. The pain was harder to bear because the sad state of the nation at the time of his death had worsened considerably. I shall return to this subject in the coming weeks and months.

From the sadness over Ayodele Curtis Joseph my mood swung to that of happiness, satisfaction and, indeed, pride, over an event which took place on the same day, December 15, 2011, in Abuja, namely, the public presentation of the book: *Time to reclaim Nigeria* written by Chido Onumah, a 45 year old Nigerian man. The book is a collection of Onumah's essays, 65 of them, written and published in various national and international media (print and online) between 2001 and 2011. Printed in red on its front cover is a proposition which I shall, in due course, examine more closely: *Nigeria lies prostrate today because of the actions, and sometimes inaction, of Nigerians*. I was happy over the public appearance of the book - a draft of which I had seen before publication - because the book is lucid and accessible, appropriate in time, patriotic, radical and revolutionary as attested to, in the book itself, by Biodun Jeyifo, Harry Garuba, Biko Agozino, Odi Ofeimem, Okey Ndibe, Femi Falana, Kunle Ajibade, and others, whose views I respect very much.

So, I was happy over the appearance of *Time to reclaim Nigeria*. What of the preface and

still feel? My pride issues from the fact that the author, Chido Onumah, is one of those young men I claim as "my boys", a subset of "my young persons". I have known Onumah since he was about half his present age. I shall have to discuss the circumstances of my knowing and meeting him and the context and status of our relationship ever since because both are integral parts of what I foresee as an *extended appreciation* of the book before me. I decided on an extended appreciation, an appreciation that goes beyond the book, because of the special task that history has now put on the shoulders of Nigerians of the author's generation, intellectual orientation and political choice.

The 65 essays which make up the bulk of the 312-page book are divided into eight chapters: The trouble with Nigeria (eight essays); In praise of dictatorship (11 essays); When democracy insults (17 essays); Nigeria: Corruption incorporated (two essays); Globalisation and its victims (19 essays); Dreams deferred (five essays); Beholders of a new dawn (eight essays); and *Time to reclaim Nigeria* (five essays). The book ends with three Appendixes: As Jonathan plays the oil subsidy game and imperils the nation (a joint article by 20 former leaders of the National Association of Nigeria Students (NANS), including Onumah, published in November 2011; Golden Jubilee Stanzas by Chiedu Ezeanah; and Chronology (1960 - 2011), a brief introduction to Nigeria with key national events between October 1, 1960 and November 11, 2011.

Before the essays there are seven introductory pieces which I consider very important: *About the author*, the author's abridged biodata; *Foreword*, by Harry Garuba, Associate Professor of English; *Preface*, by Biko Agozino, Professor of Sociology; *Introduction* by Kovesi Pratt (Jin), Managing Editor, The Justist newspaper, Accra, Ghana; excerpts from "Reviews and Acclaim" of the book; *Author's Note*, a description of the book by the author; and *Acknowledgements*. The acknowledgements are divided into three distinct parts, but I am not quite sure of the basis for this division. Each chapter takes the title of one of the essays

under it. Thus, the second chapter, *In praise of dictatorship*, has, under it, an essay of that title. The date of first publication of each essay is given, but not the medium of publication. Most of the essays appeared in 2006, followed by 2011, 2008 and 2001.

In *Author's Note*, Chido Onumah says that, as a young man, he took "very active interest in Nigeria's political evolution" and that this interest "would find expression in my active participation in the student movement under the auspices of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS), and after graduation in journalism". And, in the *Preface*, Biko Agozino recalls the "intellectual influences", on himself and Onumah, of a student movement called the Movement for a Progressive Nigeria (MPN). My choice of *extended appreciation* dictates that I say some words on the two organisations - MPN and NANS.

The Movement for a Progressive Nigeria (MPN) was established in the University of Calabar as a student organisation in September 1977. That was about three months after I located to the city to join my spouse who had moved there a year earlier and a month after I was officially employed to teach mathematics in the institution and I employed myself to do "other things". I did both with equal zeal. The name, MPN, was chosen, first, because it expressed, in broad historical terms, what the organisation stood for and, secondly, because it was considered a "safe" name for a group that was to be a registered organisation in a young institution under a military dictatorship (Obasanjo), and, thirdly, because it was considered strategic to adopt a name that was already in existence in some other tertiary institutions in Nigeria.

Rarely seven months after the formation of MPN, the organisation had its "baptism of fire": completely embedded in the official students union, with its members in strategic positions in that union, the MPN played a critical role in the formulation of the April 1978 resolution of the National Union of Nigerian Students (NUNS) to embark on a nationwide protest over the worsening conditions in tertiary institutions and in the country. The protest be-

came known as "Ali Must Go". NUNS was banned, but resurfaced less than two years later as National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS). MPN survived and played another critical role in the formation of NANS. And in December 1981, Chris Mammah, a member of MPN, became NANS President.

In its first six years of existence (1977-1983), the MPN was very active and effective in the collaboration between the academic staff of the University of Calabar organised under ASUU-UCB, the non-academic staff organised under NASU, and the students organised under the Students' Union. The organisational form of this collaboration was known as the Staff-Student Consultative Committee or SSCC, whose student wing was coordinated in 1982 by Kayode Komolafe, one of the most successful and audacious presidents of MPN. Chido Onumah assumed the leadership of MPN in late 1980s and was, during the same period, the Vice President of NANS. It was in that historical context that I met the author.

I end this introductory segment of my extended appreciation of the book *Time to reclaim Nigeria* with excerpts from Biko Agozino's, Biodun Jeyifo's and Manjunath Pendakur's reviews of the book: "The clarity of the writing will make the book accessible to the masses of the people. The courage of the author in challenging dictatorship, corruption, and incompetence, in our resource-rich country, would give hope to the youth that better days are coming"; "Without oversimplifying or idealizing things, Chido Onumah always writes with a vision of a better, more just and more humane Nigeria as the bedrock of his faith and optimism. He is an impassioned and urgent voice that we would do well to listen to"; "His goal for this book, as suggested in its title, is worthy and deserves attention by those who care to create a humane and just society in every part of the world". These excerpts summarise my own general assessment of the book. I am therefore free to go to particulars.

• To be continued next Thursday.

Opinion

History, optimism and rededication (2)

By Edwin Madunagu

LAST Thursday, in the first segment of this series, I introduced the book, *Time to reclaim Nigeria*, a collection of 65 essays authored by Chido Onumah, a 45-year old Nigerian. The essays were written over a 10-year period, 2001–2011, and presented to the public in Abuja, Nigerian capital, on Thursday, December 15, 2011. I also introduced the author by means of the historical circumstances in which I met him. The segment ended with my general assessment of the book, describing it as “lucid and accessible, appropriate in time, patriotic, radical and revolutionary”. His ideological and political platform is unambiguously and uniformly progressive and democratic. Other people’s reviews, which I endorsed, praised the book in terms of clarity, courage, hope, passion, faith and optimism. We shall, beginning with this segment, look at the book in more detail.

The first chapter bears the title *The trouble with Nigeria* and consists of eight essays: *Why Nigeria is a basket case* (June 5, 2006); *Nigeria at 48: Rethinking Nigeria* (September 30, 2008); *Rebranding our leaders* (April 1, 2009); *The trouble with Nigeria* (October 1, 2009); *A country of low expectations* (August 2, 2011); *Who is afraid of homosexuals* (March 13, 2006); *Homosexuality and its enemies* (March 21, 2006); and *In solidarity with a forgotten people* (October 10, 2006). From what I have said so far about the book as a whole, and about the author, and from the reviews that have appeared – some of which I quoted last week – it is possible to guess the author’s positions on each of the eight essays. Your speculations will even become less difficult if you are not encountering the author through his writings for the first time. I shall therefore focus just on three of the eight essays: the essay bearing the title of the chapter and the two essays on homosexuality.

The author, Chido Onumah, aligns himself with one of the theses in Chinua Achebe’s 1983 classic, *The trouble with Nigeria*. In this small book, Achebe said: “There is nothing ba-

sically wrong with the Nigerian land or climate or water or air or anything else. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example which are the hallmarks of true leadership”. The trouble with Nigeria is therefore “simply and squarely a failure of leadership”, Chinua Achebe said in 1983, and Chido Onumah agreed in 2009 and endorses in the book under appreciation. While accepting Chinua Achebe’s (and Chido Onumah’s) proposition, I shall interpret or reduce “leadership” in Chido Onumah’s essay to the Nigerian state and the various governments constituted under it.

With this reading, I can then make the following comments. There is an old saying – which is sometimes read cynically – to the effect that a people deserves the government it gets. We know that this is historically and politically untrue. And its inbuilt fallacy is not completely removed if we add the qualifier “sometimes”, so that the statement becomes “A people sometimes deserves the government it gets”. But it can be transformed into a strong proposition if it is reformulated as a statement of *right and imperative*, namely, that a people have the right and the duty to change the government it does not deserve. If for some reasons a people (temporarily) finds it difficult to change the government it does not deserve, no blame can be put on it. But, if, for some reasons, or for no reason at all, a people renounces its right, or duty, or both, then the blame is squarely on such people.

The debate on homosexuality and same-sex marriage is still raging in the country. At the time of writing, the Senate had passed a bill criminalizing homosexual practices and same-sex marriages and imposing stiff penalties on those found guilty of committing or facilitating the acts. The House of Representatives, the other chamber of the National Assembly, is yet to decide on the bill. If it passes it, then it will be transmitted to the president for assent. So, there are still two hurdles on the road of the bill becoming a law. The de-

bate is not new as demonstrated by the two essays which Onumah wrote almost six years ago – on March 13, 2006 (*Who is afraid of homosexuals?*) and on March 21, 2006 (*Homosexuality and its enemies*).

I do not intend to review the current debate or revisit earlier ones, beyond the observation that the scientific proof that homosexuality is largely biologically determined has not been falsified. I limit myself here to presenting some of the pronouncements Onumah made on this question in the essays mentioned. In *Who is afraid of homosexuals*, I select three of these pronouncements: *One*: “What is human nature? Human nature is no more than the agglomeration of social, cultural, historical and economic factors that shape the lives and attitudes of a particular group of people. Human nature is not static. In some societies in Nigeria, many things, including cannibalism and killing of twins, that we thought to be “natural” in time past are no longer acceptable”. I may also add that “left-handedness” which was once taught to be “evil” and had led to the murder of “left-handed” children is no longer so believed – or not widely so believed. The reason is that, like homosexuality, “lefthandedness” has been proved to be largely biologically determined.

The second statement is more “provocative”: “Nigeria was not cobbled together on the basis of the Bible or Koran. Nigeria is a secular state, or so the Constitution says. It is worrisome when the government abandons its responsibility to citizens and becomes the handmaiden of religion. The civilized world has moved away from the period in history when religious laws and doctrines formed the basis of social interaction between citizens in a state”. The third statement is a statement of humanism and constitutionality. “Gays and lesbians (that is, male and female homosexuals respectively) are not harming anybody. They are not aliens from some distant planet. They are our fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, uncles, aunts, in-laws, friends, neighbours, etc. They deserve to be accorded all rights guaranteed to every

Nigerian is our constitution”.

Onumah’s second essay on homosexuality is a response to public reactions to the first. Like I did in regard to the first, I shall select some statements from the second essay, *Homosexuality and its enemies*, and offer some comments. *First statement*: “From the onset, let me say I am not gay – not that I need to justify this to homophobes out there. I am stating this to help change the tone of this debate, and perhaps, shift the focus.” *Second statement*: “We are told that homosexuality is a ‘White-man’s problem’; that it is foreign, or for those who prefer fancy term, ‘un-African’... We deny the fact that homosexuality and homosexuals have been with us from time immemorial.”

The *third* statement is a rhetorical challenge: “How many Nigerians out there who went to an ‘all-girls’ or ‘all-boys’ school can come out and say boldly that they didn’t hear of homosexual encounters in their school?” Speaking for myself, I would say that I briefly attended an “all-boys” secondary school where I was a boarder but would now not be able to enter the denial which Onumah challenges us to do. I can also not enter a denial in regard to my experience later in the university. And like Onumah, I am not gay. By the way, I was in secondary school in the first half of the 1960s and in university in the second half. So I am talking of between 40 and 50 years ago. You can therefore see how old the phenomenon is in Nigeria.

Onumah’s *fourth* and last statement in my selection relates to the fundamental right of the people to say *No* to bad laws: “Of course, it is the duty of governments to make laws. But when governments make stupid laws, people have a responsibility to oppose such laws”. The “anti-gay movement” is fighting to have the “anti-gay” bill become law and people like Onumah are opposing them with scientific, historical and humanist, and even constitutional, arguments. But, if, in spite of the latter’s efforts the bill becomes law, its opponents will continue their opposition by all means necessary and possible. The right and duty to oppose bad laws have no “statute of limitation”.
• To be continued next Thursday.

Opinion

History, optimism and rededication (3)

By Edwin Madunagu

IN *praise of dictatorship*, the second chapter of Chido Onumah's book, *How to reclaim Nigeria*, consists of 11 essays: *Understanding Fani-Kayode* (January 19, 2006); *2007: Obasanjo vs OBJ* (March 28, 2006); *Why Obasanjo wants a third term* (March 7, 2006); *OBJ fiddles while Nigeria burns* (February 27, 2006); *Third term agenda: Matters arising (1)* (May 1, 2006); *Third term agenda: Matters arising (2)* (May 8, 2006); *Third term agenda: Matters arising (3)* (May 24, 2006); *Babangida: Setting the record straight* (April 3, 2006); *Atiku is riding a tiger* (April 17, 2006); *An Ungodly act* (April 24, 2006); and *In praise of dictatorship* (June 10, 2006). The last essay shares title with the Chapter.

A number of preliminary observations can be made about this chapter. First, all the 11 essays were written in 2006 - in fact, in the first half of 2006. Second, the chapter essentially deals with two issues, namely: the abortive attempt made by General Olusegun Obasanjo, president for two terms, 1999-2007, to engineer the amendment of the Constitution to allow him run for a third term; and the attempts made to "rehabilitate" former military president, General Ibrahim Babangida, as part of the preparation for his planned participation, as a candidate, in the 2007 presidential election. We shall quickly dispose of the first subject - in just one statement - and then proceed to the second which is my main interest here, but not necessarily that of the author.

Obasanjo's "third term" agenda, according to my reading of the author's narrative, was defeated by an unstructured coalition of political forces that had nothing in common except that they were all Nigerian and wished, for different reasons - ranging from patriotism and democratic spirit to self-interest and opportunism - to see Obasanjo leave office on May 29, 2007. I agree.

We may now focus on the author's account and critique of Babangida's attempted rehabilitation. His essays on this issue and the *Preface* to the book by Biko Agozino reminded me of two particular books I cherished in my political self-

education in late 1970s and early 1980s: *The Marxist* by C. Wright Mills and *Armies and Politics* by Jack Woddis. Mills, a brilliant and prominent left-of-liberal American sociologist, died rather young-before 50 - but not before the publication of his two or three sociological classics. *The Marxists* was, however, published posthumously, in 1962. The book, which I still have with me, is a historical and political study - critical study - of Marxism and Marxists by a non-Marxist who was however, not anti-Marxist. The section of the 450-page book that I particularly recall here is Chapter Five which is just nine pages long. The chapter is titled *Rules for critics*.

In the *Rules for critics*, C. Wright Mills set out rules which would guide his work and which he recommended for other critics. Among other things he said: "I am not going to argue over definitions as such, especially definitions of emotive terms, but will break them up into distinct and empirically answerable questions, using neutral terms having clear and unambiguous meanings". And yet another rule: "Understand and use consistently the principle of *historical specificity*" (emphasis mine). Mills recalled that Marx himself practised this second rule and I recall that Lenin explicitly admonished Rosa Luxemburg to adhere to the rule in his debate with her on the *national question*.

By "historical specificity" Lenin meant, in short, the consideration of a question within a definite historical period and definite geopolitical boundaries. To these two rules, which I endorse, I shall be adding my own rule: *Do not re-write history*, by which I mean that critics should not, consciously or unconsciously, explicitly or implicitly, alter facts of history or omit important facts of history - even when it is convenient to do so.

Jack Woddis was the Head of the International Department of the British Communist Party. In addition to *Armies and Politics* which was published in 1977, Jack Woddis wrote *Africa: the way ahead, Introduction to neo-colonialism and New theories of revolution*. The segment of *Armies and Politics* which interests me here is the first two sentences of Chapter 12 which is titled *An*

army won and lost: "On September 11, 1973, the Chilean army overthrew a democratic government and established a fascist type tyranny. On April 25, 1974, the Portuguese army overthrew a fascist government and opened up the way to the establishment of a democratic system". The two sentences which embody a historical contrast warn us to be dialectical in our political analysis and criticism.

We may now return to Chapter 2 of Chido Onumah's *Time to reclaim Nigeria* and specifically to the essay *In praise of dictatorship* (pages 77 - 80). Here the author recalls a story carried by one of our national newspapers in the last week of May 2006. The story was titled "Belgore defends military rule". Justice Belgore who was then the Chief Justice of Nigeria was reported to have "defended" military rule in a speech he delivered at the launch of a book in honour of his predecessor, Justice Uwais. The former military President, General Ibrahim Babangida, chaired the event.

Justice Belgore was reported to have said: "They say their (that is, the military) coming to power was illegal. Were they really dictators? They came to cure a malady in the national development; malady of ineptitude, corruption, and divisive tendencies and so many other things". According to the report, when, in the course of his remarks General Babangida referred to himself as a "former military dictator", Justice Belgore responded: "Our chairman called himself a military dictator. Well, every military regime must have some dictatorial tendencies because that is the only way it can be successful".

Chido Onumah's reaction to this report, as expected, was sharp and condemnatory. His words: "I don't know which country Justice Belgore was referring to, but there is nothing 'successful' about the role of the military in the Nigeria I know. From the intrigues of the military brass that led to an interregnum civil war (1967-1970); to the corruption and waste that attended the Gowon regime (1966-1975); to the anti-people regime of General Obasanjo (1976-1979); to the high-handedness of the Buhari/Idigbon regime (1983-1985); to the destruction of

the economy and the social fabric of the country under IBB (1985-1993); to the murderous regimes of Sani Abacha and Abdulsalami Abubakar (1993-1999), Nigerians have had to endure the inglorious actions of people whose calling is to defend the country and the constitution".

Many Nigerians, including myself, would share the anger of the author of *Time to reclaim Nigeria*. Many Nigerians, including myself, would agree that "if one wanted to know why former military dictators would have the nerve to assault the national psyche perpetually he or she should look no further than the comments of Justice Belgore", and that Justice Belgore's comments could not promote democracy - to say the very least. But having endorsed this patriotic indignation, we have to point out its shortcomings.

There are two vital omissions in the list of Nigeria's military dictatorships: the regime of General J.T.U. Aguiyi-Ironsi (January 16, 1966 - July 28, 1966), and the regime of General Murtala Mohammed (July 29, 1975 - February 13, 1976). The Ironsi regime was the first military dictatorship in the country. The military dictatorship of Murtala Mohammed succeeded the Gowon regime and was in turn, succeeded by the Obasanjo regime. But although Generals Ironsi and Murtala Mohammed were in power for relatively short periods (incidentally, each for about six months and a half), each of the regimes was, to put it mildly, as "eventful" as any of the military regimes listed by Onumah - except possibly that of Gowon. The phrase, "intrigues of the military brass that led to an interregnum war" is too vague to be taken as a description of the Ironsi regime or the pre-Civil War Gowon regime.

My questions are: Were Ironsi and Mohammed regimes omitted in error? Were they omitted because the author considered them exceptions? Were they omitted because it would be *politically incorrect* to include them? Were they omitted because it would be ideologically embarrassing to include them, or one of them? Were they omitted because they were considered irrelevant, inconsequential or outside the scope of the author's analysis? We are led back to the three rules for critics which I earlier listed.

• To be continued next Thursday.

Opinion

History, optimism and rededication (4)

By Edwin Madunagu

LAST Thursday, at the end of the third segment of this appreciation of Chido Onumah's *Time to reclaim Nigeria*, I realized that should I continue with my original plan of approach, that is, chapter-by-chapter exercise, I would end up with about seven more segments. As this would be unacceptable, I decided to approach the remaining appreciation *thematically*. But the new plan still gave me about the same number of segments. To solve my dilemma, I decided to stick to thematic appreciation, but to pick only four themes: Democracy and military governance, "June 12"; Political economy of corruption; and Time to reclaim Nigeria. In this fourth segment I shall look at the first two themes. The fifth and final segment, next Thursday, will be devoted to the last two themes. But this is a book to which I will continue to make reference for a long time.

Democracy and military governance: Here I refer the reader to two of Onumah's essays: *In praise of dictatorship* (Pages 77-80; July 10, 2006); and *Will Rawlings be Africa's Pinochet?* (Pages 182-184; August 9, 2001). I lived through all the military regimes we have had so far in post-independence Nigeria; and I closely watched the early months of the regime produced by the December 31, 1981 military coup in Ghana. I was 19-advancing to 20-when the first military coup took place in Nigeria on January 15, 1966. I was then a junior teacher and resident assistant boarding house master in my *alma mater*, Obokun High School, Ilesha, in present Osun State. I remember that when the coup was announced I abandoned my boys and hit the streets with other citizens - jubilating and ransacking government offices in the city.

I was still at Ilesha when the coup of July 29, 1966 took place and can still remember the resulting despondency and apprehension. I was, however, to learn later that the coup was greeted with jubilation in some parts of the country. By the time the Civil War broke out a year later I was already at Ibadan.

I can remember that the military coup of July 29, 1975, which produced the regime headed by

General Murtala Mohammed, was popularly received across the country except in the areas where Mohammed, as field commander, operated during the war. The abortive coup of February 13, 1976 which claimed the life of General Mohammed was largely unpopular across the country except, again, in the areas where Mohammed commanded Nigerian troops during the war. The coup of December 30, 1983 which terminated the "democratic and constitutional government of President Shehu Shagari" and produced Generals Buhari and Idiagbon, was generally well received among the masses and segments of the constitutional opposition. There was mass indifference to the coup of August 27, 1985 which produced the military president, General Ibrahim Babangida; but there was jubilation in the community of politicians and media institutions, whose experiences under Buhari and Idiagbon were, to put it mildly, harsh.

There was mass indifference to the alleged attempted coup of December 1985. The Gideon Orka-led attempted coup of Sunday, April 22, 1990 was popularly received in some parts of the country and segments of the population. The coup of November 1993 that brought General Sani Abacha to power was generally unpopular except possibly in the circles of small groups of politicians who had hoped that the general would actualize the result of June 12, 1993 presidential election which gave victory to Moshood Abiola. The alleged attempted coups of 1995 and 1997 were greeted with mass disbelief and cynicism. The change of government resulting from the sudden death of Sani Abacha in June 1998 and the accession to power of General Abdulsalami Abubakar was received with relief across the country.

To complete this narrative I shall briefly elaborate on the "foreign coup" which I earlier mentioned. I was in Accra, Ghana, a couple of days after the December 31 1981 military *coup d'état* that removed the government of President Liman and installed the military regime of Air Flight-Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings. I testify that from what I saw and heard and read, the coup was very popular with the Ghanaian masses. I spent several

days in Ghana talking to several people across class and social boundaries. In particular, I spoke individually and collectively with several members of the ruling Provisional National Defence Council (PNDC).

I was deeply impressed by the discussions I had with Flight-Lieutenant Jerry Rawlings, Captain Kodjo Tsikata, Sergeant Akata-Pote and Chris Atim. Tsikata was the regime's security chief, Akata Pote was one of its ideologues and Chris Atim was the student leader representing the militant youths. I remember Sergeant Akata Pote telling me that their uprising should be compared to the French Revolution rather than the Russian Bolshevik Revolution. In response I told him that though I considered what had happened to be profoundly revolutionary, I would not compare the event either with the French Revolution or the Russian Revolution. On my return to Nigeria I took on a self-assigned task of mobilising Ghanaian "exiles" here to return to Ghana to take up appointments in schools, government departments and agencies. I was on my way to Ghana on my third trip when I was arrested at the airport. Gani Fawehinmi's threats led to my quiet release.

I have gone through these two narratives - one from Nigerian history, the other from Ghanaian history - in order to bring out the following propositions: *One:* That some military coups in Nigeria and the one of December 31, 1981 in Ghana were actually popularly received in all, or in substantial, segments of the country and, in particular, by many patriots, progressives, radicals and leftists. *Two:* That the initial jubilation and enthusiasm engendered by virtually all the popularly received military coups quickly died down, with some turning to disappointment, disillusionment and anger, on account of the policies and actions of the regimes. *Three:* That it is the duty of political historians, analysts, critics and commentators to explain generally and, then, case by case, the reasons for the initial jubilation and subsequent disillusionment.

Last Thursday, in the third segment, I recalled two facts of history brought out by Jack Woddis in his book, *Armies and Politics*: "On September

11, 1973, the Chilean army overthrew a democratic government and established a fascist-type tyranny. On April 25, 1974, the Portuguese army overthrew a fascist government and opened up the way to the establishment of a democratic system". My *fourth* proposition is that Jack Woddis' statement is not only factually true but also indicates two actual historical trends.

June 12, 1993 presidential election and the annulment of its result: Here, I refer readers to two of Onumah's essays: *June 12: 15 years after* (pages 99-102; June 12, 2008); and *On June 12 we stand* (pages 103-106; June 12, 2009). I read the two essays very closely to be able to put my finger on the author's understanding and interpretation of the import of "June 12". I can pick the following propositions (in his own words): "June 12 election was adjudged 'free and fair' for the simple reason that within the limitations placed by the military regime of General Babangida, Nigerians played by the rules. Compare that with what happened in 1999, 2003, and more recently, April 2007"; "One could rightly say that June 12 was a watershed in the nation's history. It was truly Nigeria's best opportunity at democratic reconstruction. It failed because of the inordinate ambition of a few individuals".

Furthermore: "On June 12, Nigerians of all walks of life made a fundamental political statement. On that day, the country's impoverished and forgotten masses were able to overcome the bogey of ethnicity and religious divisions by the ruling class, and showed these are weapons in the hands of this inglorious class to maintain its stranglehold on the country"; "No national honour would be too much for a man who won an election and was murdered for attempting to claim his mandate. He lost his business empire, and his wife was assassinated in the process". To these five propositions - which can be interrogated and expanded but which I endorse, in the main - I add my own proposition, namely, that the specific weight of radical and leftist forces in "Abiola's electoral entourage" was large enough to frighten segments of Nigeria's power blocs and the "international community". This fear tilted the "secret debate" is in favour of annulment.

Opinion

History, optimism and rededication (5)

By Edwin Madunagu

I SHALL begin this fifth and concluding segment of my appreciation of Chido Onumah's *Time to reclaim Nigeria* with a number of stories told or recalled by the author in Chapter 4 (Corruption Incorporated) and Chapter 8 (Time to reclaim Nigeria). This will be followed by propositions made by the author in these chapters. There will then be general comments and conclusions.

First Story: A couple of years ago, an Inspector General of Police (IGP) was found guilty of embezzling about N20 billion belonging to the security and law enforcement agency that he headed. N20 billion is, by the way, a billion naira in 20 places; a billion naira is a million naira in 1000 places; and a million naira is one thousand naira in 1000 places. So N20 billion is written as N20,000,000,000 or 2 followed by 10 zeros. Onumah wonders "what kind of system put an Inspector General of Police in a position to steal so much money" (pages 148 - 149). That is the fundamental question: *What kind of socioeconomic and political system makes this level of corruption possible?, or How does this kind of political economy make this level of corruption possible?*

Second story: Not too long after the story reported above, another Inspector General of Police (IGP) "allegedly admitted that he lodged N557 million arms and ammunition funds meant for the Nigeria police into his personal accounts with two different banks for four months". The money came from a state governor for the purpose of procuring arms and ammunition "to strengthen security in his state". The banked monies naturally yielded interests which at the time the accounts were closed amounted to N6.5 million. So, where did the interests go? They were used for "operational expenses by the police". End of story.

Third Story: Within the same period, some police officers were "caught" with N21 million cash which they claimed belong to their boss, the same Inspector General of Police. Onumah, again, asks a question he had asked before: "Each time I read these mind-boggling accounts of how our patrimony is siphoned by incurably corrupt

public officers and their collaborators, the same question keeps coming to my mind: what kind of system makes it possible for this level of graft and corruption to thrive in Nigeria?" (page 150).

Fourth Story: (This is taken from the author's essay, *Nigeria: Corruption Incorporated*, May 3, 2008). "Today, we watch the pitiable sight of an internationally acclaimed professor of medicine being paraded in court for embezzling N300 million unspent allocation belonging to the ministry of health in a country where the health system is comatose; a country with one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world" (page 150).

Fifth Story: A few years ago, a piece of land belonging to a government agency and valued at N8 billion then, was sold by the Federal Government to a wealthy businessman for less than N1 billion. When a new government came into office, it bought back the same piece of land for N17.5 billion to build a "world class conference centre" (page 244). "All those involved in the transaction", the story ended, "benefited handsomely from the deal". Onumah's comment: "In a sane society, this scandal is enough to bring down the government. But this is Nigeria".

Sixth Story: Towards the end of last year, a federal minister "dashed" a group of journalists the sum of N500,000. But the journalist who received the money on behalf of his colleagues reported only N400,000. When these other journalists suspected foul play, the receiver claimed the giver had asked him to keep the balance of N100,000 for himself. Not satisfied, the group set up a three-member committee to investigate the matter. The committee found that their colleague fraudulently kept the N100,000. He was reprimanded and asked to refund the money, and he did. The group then decided that in future only an executive member could receive "donations" on their behalf and even in that case no deductions could be made "up front" without the permission of the group. The case was then rested (page 248).

Seventh Story: "Late last month (October 2011), the governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) rolled out figures about the parlous state of the

education sector in Nigeria. Speaking at an event in Kaduna to mark the 80th birthday of a former Vice-Chancellor of the University of Benin, he noted that 'although there are no complete data on the number of Nigerian students abroad, recent data have shown that there were about 71,000 Nigerian students in Ghana paying about N155 billion annually as tuition fees as against the annual budget of N121 billion for all federal universities'. This last story can only be linked to corruption indirectly. But it has a lot to do with Nigerian rulers' bankruptcy, philistinism and utter lack of patriotism, even self-pride.

In spite of this politically and ideologically heuristic documentation, the author ended the chapter on corruption without answering the question he had posed several times: *What type of political economy and what system of governance nourish this level of corruption - beyond just making it possible?* That is one significant omission I found in this powerful handbook of the rising youths of Nigeria.

Onumah's last essay is titled: *Time to reclaim Nigeria: What is to be done?* Published on November 16, 2011 it is also chronologically the last. In it the author suggests what the Nigerian people should do - and why they should do it - to reclaim their country. I have split the proposition into three parts. **One:** The first task will be to "aggregate the discontent of the suffering masses of Nigeria: The ones who die when a bomb explodes in a market square; those who subsist on less than one dollar a day; those who die from preventable diseases. We all must learn to overcome our differences and confront our common enemies. Hunger, poverty, and diseases transcend ethnic origins or religious affiliations".

The second part of *What is to be done* reads: "Nigerians should prepare themselves mentally and psychologically to occupy every public space, from the local government to the national level, as well as our embassies in Washington, Ottawa, Paris, London, and other major cities around the world when the time comes". **The third part is ideological:** "Governments are supposed to serve the people. But when they re-

nege on that task, the people have a responsibility to assert their citizenship rights. We have seen it happen before our very eyes in North Africa and the Middle East".

I endorse these broad statements, but would like to conclude with the following comments. In the *rules for critics* (which were suggested last Thursday), I opted not to quarrel over words and names if I have no quarrel with their contextual meanings. It is for this reason that I refrain from quarrelling with the concept of *reclaiming Nigeria*. To reclaim, as I understand it, is to *take back*. I am aware that this ideological slogan, together with *Occupy Nigeria*, is now popular with radical patriots, democrats and human rights activists in Nigeria. But I doubt if the Nigerian masses had, at any time since Nigeria was created in 1914 and especially since independence in 1960, *owned* Nigeria.

Having said this, I associate myself with the twin slogans for the reasons stated above and because I support their physical political expressions - protests, marches and occupations. Their power - as well as their limitations - have been strongly demonstrated in the "Arab Spring" and now in our country. What is now happening in each of the Arab-majority countries concerned - Egypt in particular - can either be taken as demonstration of the *theory of permanent revolution* or the *power - and - limitation of "reclamation" and "occupation"*, or both. However, I shall continue to understand *reclaim as liberate*.

Many of my comrades and compatriots, including the author of *Time to reclaim Nigeria*, were quite enthused by the essentially anti-capitalist mass movement which swept America in the second half of 2011. These comrades and compatriots had earlier reacted enthusiastically to the Arab Spring, but the "democratic" and non-violent character of *Occupy Movement* makes the American model more "appealing". It is however, imperative to find out to what extent each "model" was *deliberately* chosen by the people concerned and to what extent it was dictated by circumstances. It is also imperative to enquire if the model that played out in each case was a consensus or the case of the temporarily dominant tendency imposing itself.

• *Concluded.*