

Opinion

Reviewing a predators' republic

By Edwin Madunagu

I SHALL, under this title, conduct a general review of Nigeria's current "democratic dispensation." By "current" in this context I mean since General Olusegun Obasanjo was inaugurated president on May 29, 1999. The objective of this article, as always, is to help chart the "way forward." And this "way forward" will entail a radical resolution of each of the contradictions defining the predators' republic. My method of approach will be *thematic* rather than chronological. For the avoidance of doubt, my title for this review means exactly what it says: a predator is one that lives by preying, plundering and looting.

The themes and sub-themes I shall be reviewing would include: May 29, 1999: Obasanjo's administration as a "transitional" regime; Sovereign National Conference; Geopolitical and ethnic alliances; Goodluck Jonathan and the prospects and limits of "free, fair and credible" elections; the Anti-Babangida Alliance; "Progressives" in Nigerian history and contemporary politics; Back to 2003: the bitter fruits of defending Obasanjo in the name of "democracy"; "Political engineering" and the politics of the 1999 Constitution and the 2010 Electoral Act; Democracy and the distribution and rotation of political power; the Niger Delta insurgency; Democracy, incumbency, and state power (the Ivory Coast "model"); the National Assembly; Imperialism and national independence; The Human conditions in Nigeria; The State, the Government, and the People; What is to be done?

May 29, 1999: *Obasanjo's administration as a "transitional" regime.* It was hoped, when Obasanjo's accession to the presidency became a *fait accompli* early in the year 1999, that the administration he was to head would be a transitional one. This "hope" was a "climb-down" by the Opposition which had, between 1993 and 1998, demanded the installation of Chief Moshood Abiola, the jailed winner of the June 12, 1993 presidential election. When Abiola died in July 1998, the Opposition had then demanded the setting up of an interim gov-

ernment whose only agenda would be the convocation of a Sovereign National Conference (SNC). A *footnote* is necessary here: By the Opposition, at that time, I mean the aggregate of the following political forces: that section of mainstream politicians organised mainly in the National Democratic Coalition (NADECO), the labour movement, radical civil society organisations and fractions of the Nigerian Left. The last group actually supplied the "engine" in each of the other groups.

Why was it hoped, or rather, why did I share the "hope," that Obasanjo's regime would be a transitional one? To answer this question I have to go back to my article that appeared in this column on August 12, 1999, that is, less than three months after Obasanjo's inauguration on May 29, 1999. The article was titled *Obasanjo's transition.* In that piece I defined a *transitional regime* as a "government that operates, more or less, on *ad-hoc* basis, a regime that is preparing either consciously (and therefore deliberately) or unconsciously (but logically in any case), for the emergence of a successor-regime that would operate on a more permanent basis, a basis that usually includes a constitution, key political institutions and some ideological pretensions."

My characterisation of Obasanjo's regime as transitional was based on two main grounds, namely: "the way he (Obasanjo) came into office and the Constitution handed over to him for the administration of the country." We may elaborate. We recall that Obasanjo was chosen as the presidential candidate of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) within six months of General Abacha's death, within five months of Abiola's death and indeed within four months of Obasanjo himself being released from prison. By the end of February 1999, that is, barely six months after he was released from prison, General Obasanjo had become the first president-elect of Nigeria's Fourth Republic. General Abdulsalam Abubakar who succeeded General Sani Abacha on June 8, 1998 was in office for barely 11 months (June 8, 1998 - May 29, 1999). In the context of our post-Civil War political history, Abubakar's transition was very

short. The transition was understandably rushed, and the structures erected for it were also understandably *ad hoc*.

The 1979 Constitution was overthrown by the military *coup d'état* of December 1983. Thereafter, the 1989 draft Constitution was produced under the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida. That Constitution was never promulgated - in full - as the country's basic law. The next attempt was the 1995 draft Constitution produced under the regime of General Abacha. That draft was also never promulgated. To produce a Constitution for his own transition, General Abubakar went back, not to 1989, not to 1995, but to 1979. To minimise controversy, and also to save time, Abubakar authorised and endorsed the amendment of the 1979 Constitution. The result was the 1999 Constitution. The production was a *hurried* job. To give little or no room for objections a clean copy of the 1999 Constitution was either not ready, or not made public, until after President Obasanjo's inauguration on May 29, 1999.

In effect, the Fourth Republic came into being without a publicly known Constitution. When the 1999 Constitution was eventually published months after Obasanjo came to power it was discovered to harbour at least 300 errors of omission, evasion and contradiction. But these were the *technical* errors. There were numerous errors of *democratic import*, or, if you like, errors arising from *poverty of democratic spirit*.

I concluded my August 12, 1999 article, *Obasanjo's transition*, with this prediction: "If the Constitution (that is, the 1999 Constitution) remains the way it is, then President Obasanjo will continue to interpret the provisions as he moves on and the courts will not be able to match his pace. This course of action will, with time, generate a state of crisis which will continue until something happens, one way or another, to end the crisis or shift the theatre of struggle from politics to something else. That will be the end of the transition."

I wrote this more than 11 years ago. The current Constitution, even with the amendments (and amendments of amendments) decreed

by the National Assembly is basically the Constitution handed to General Obasanjo on May 29, 1999. I leave readers to evaluate my 11-year old analysis and prediction in light of what has happened since they were written. But will I be pre-empting or jeopardising an objective evaluation by asking if we are now nearing the end of Obasanjo's transition. In the meantime, we move on.

Sovereign National Conference (SNC). I take late 1989, more or less arbitrarily, as the beginning of the current phase of the campaign for a Sovereign National Conference (SNC). Some fractions of the ruling classes and blocs - those who regard themselves as "progressives" - saw the SNC as having one main task: restructuring the country, minimally to achieve genuine federalism and maximally to enthrone ethnic autonomy, or both. Fractions of the Nigerian Left and radical democrats who supported the very idea of a Sovereign National Conference (SNC) argued that the historical task of the SNC was to lay the structural basis of a popular-democratic state in all its ramifications.

The two ideas were not initially antagonistic, and that was why they could co-exist and, at times, act together. But now I can no longer make the same affirmation: the "progressives," though still disaffected, are no longer political "underdogs." Hence, - and this is really tragic - they are no longer as insistent and as coherent as they used to be. A centralised and powerful presidency appears to be irresistibly attractive even to our self-proclaimed federalists. Most of the fractions of the Nigerian Left and radical democrats who initially supported the idea of SNC and vigorously campaigned for it are now either disillusioned or have shifted their focus, or immediate concern, to "free, fair and credible elections" essentially under the same constitution and state structure that were handed over to General Obasanjo more than 11 years ago.

Only in the Niger Delta do we, from time to time, hear Sovereign National Conference, or SNC. But the voice is now a far cry from the advocacy of martyred Ken Saro-Wiwa.

• To be continued next Thursday.

Opinion

Reviewing a predators' republic (2)

By Edwin Madunagu

THIS is the continuation of our thematic review of what has now come to be known as Nigeria's Fourth Republic (born May 29, 1999). In the first part of this exercise, which appeared last Thursday, we revisited the excessively optimistic, but nonetheless reasonable, conception of General Obasanjo presidency as a *transitional* regime. That transition, together with its two extensions, is now in its 12th year! After the "transition discussion" I raked up the once-popular, but now almost forgotten, campaign for Sovereign National Conference (SNC). I will start this second part with the conclusion of the discussion on SNC. And I will do this with the re-presentation of three propositions I advanced on the subject in a series of articles in this column between 1999 and 2000.

Propositions on the SNC (1999-2000): One: "A Sovereign National Conference, or SNC, is conceived as a conference of the Nigerian people, as Nigerians, not as representatives of ethnic groups, for Nigeria is far from being a union of ethnic groups, and has never been so." *Two:* "A conference is sovereign if, from the moment it is constituted, it becomes independent in its operations, deliberations and decisions. The manner of its constitution does not enter into this definition." *Three:* "A Sovereign National Conference is, of course, not the only route to the future; but I see it as a viable and safe one. Since the struggle of the oppressed and dispossessed must be a permanent one, the agenda must be adaptable to a wide range of historical situations and platforms, including a national conference." There is nothing that requires any revisions in these three propositions. I re-endorse them as propositions that can only be transcended, but not ignored. That is, if Nigeria is to survive.

"Progressives" in Nigerian history and contemporary politics: There is a current claim and, perhaps, genuine belief, by fractions of contemporary Nigerian professional politicians that "progressive politics" and "progressive governance: are on the rise, once

again, in Nigeria. The claim and belief are supported, even if cautiously, by fractions of the media. The concrete basis and manifestation of this idea are said to include the re-capture of stolen electoral mandates in Edo, Ondo, Ekiti and Osun States, and, partly as a result of this, the noticeable expansion, in membership and morale currently being experienced by some anti-PDP political parties. If the 2011 elections are "free, fair and credible," so claim the optimists, this rise in "political progressivism" will be positively confirmed.

Rather than embark on an immediate interrogation of this optimism, I think it would be more useful to begin with a theoretical review of progressive politics. My references in this exercise include: The proceedings of a 1982 seminar on *Towards a Progressive Nigeria*; Eskor Toyo's description of *Lumpen capitalism* in his September 20, 2010, Calabar lecture, *Project Nigeria: the journey so far*; and Biodun Jeyifo's essay, *Welfareism in a rentier state: Fayemi's real and symbolic challenges* (Talakawa Liberation Courier, *The Guardian*, November 7, 2010). What I intend to do is to take an inventory of key ideas on "human progress" and "progressive politics" that I share, and with these interrogate current claims.

I begin with the proceedings of the national seminar, *Towards a Progressive Nigeria*, held at the Bagauda Lake Hotel, Kano, between Wednesday December 15, and Sunday December 19, 1982. And from the proceedings I select the contribution made by a participant, Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe, and the communiqué issued at the end of the seminar. But first, the background.

Nigeria's Second Republic (1979-1983) was inaugurated on October 1, 1979 with Alhaji Shehu Shagari as president. He had been elected on the platform of the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) a month or so earlier. Four other political parties - the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Nigerian People's Party (NPP), the People's Redemption Party (PRP) and the Great Nigerian People's Party (GNPP) - had competed with the NPN for power in the country's 19 constituent states and at the centre. The NPN won federal power and the

largest number of states - followed, in electoral strength, by the UPN, NPP, PRP and GNPP, in that order. After some initial uncertainty, the four opposition parties, or rather, the state governments they controlled, formed an alliance which they called the Progressive Parties Alliance (PPA). It was essentially an anti-NPN alliance.

Altogether the PPA controlled the governments of 12 of the states. It also had a good national spread. Within this Alliance, and in the country as a whole, the PRP (or its radical faction), which controlled the governments of two states (Kaduna and Kano), could be said to be the most radical of the registered political parties. I underline the qualifier "registered" because, more than at the present time, there were, during the Second Republic, large segments of the Left that were outside electoral politics. It was against the background and context sketched above that the PRP government of Kano State under Abubakar Rimi, called the *Towards a Progressive Nigeria* seminar. The seminar was attended by Left-leaning professional and non-professional politicians, socialist intellectuals, leaders and activists of the workers' and students' movements across the country.

Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe's paper, presented at the seminar, was titled *Nigeria now on "progressive": Notes for observation*. The task of the paper, according to the author, was to examine "what a progressives orientation in politics is, and then illustrate what it means in Nigeria today," so that "Progressive Nigeria" did not become "the establishment of a non-NPN government" or acquire a "tautological variant: I am a Progressive because I want a Progressive Nigeria." Ekwe-Ekwe, an activist Nigerian scholar, was writing in December 1982, that is 28 years ago. But replace NPN with PDP, and he will be addressing us today.

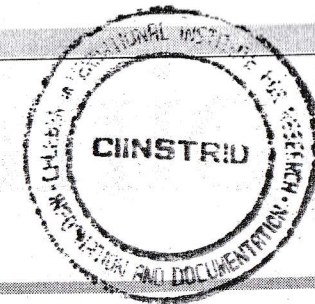
Making references to Alan Bullock's *The Fontana Dictionary of Modern Thought* (1977) Perry Anderson's *Passages from Antiquity to Feudalism* (1978) and Balarabe Musa's *The Need for a New Social Order In Nigeria* (1982), Ekwe-Ekwe provided a three step definition of "progressive." "Generally, those who believe in the possibility and the desir-

ability of progress, identified here as the socio-economic and moral improvement of the human condition, which predicates on a high optimism about the human nature, could be regarded as *progressives*"; and then: "In class societies, *progressive* politics is geared towards the amelioration of class contradictions in favour of the dominated and other strata, or in fact the abolition or the overthrow of the *class character* of the oppressor state by the dominated," and then: "*Progressive politics in the historical conjuncture of capitalism becomes the attempts, plans and efforts to establish a socialist state.*"

That was Ekwe-Ekwe. We now go to the communiqué. This document dealt essentially with six issues on which there were either consensus or majority decisions. The issues, in the words of the communiqué, titled the *Bagauda Declaration*, were: the meaning of "progressive"; the question of political alliance; the question of ideology for the Progressive Alliance; the Nigerian economy; Nigeria's foreign policy; and the present "political atmosphere." Even today, one can exhaustively discuss the question of progressive politics in Nigeria under the 1982 headings. I am pulling out, and reproducing in full, what the document said on the first and third issues.

One the "meaning of progressive" the communiqué said: "It is the consensus of the seminar that a progressive movement in the country today can only be anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist and anti-feudalist. It must carry on the struggle for the emancipation of our people from these oppressive forces." And on the "ideology of the progressives" the Communiqué said: "The seminar sees the need for the progressive movement to articulate an ideology consistent with, and expressing the meaning of "progressive" stated above and also defining the tasks of the movement. In this respect the seminar notes the existence of more than one ideological current in the movement. For the movement to consolidate, grow and achieve its goals, the seminar feels that the radical wing of the movement must strive to promote the socialist ideology to a leading position."

• To be continued next Thursday.



Opinion

Reviewing a predators' republic (3)

By Edwin Madunagu

WE have been trying to construct a universal, liberal and inclusive definition (or hierarchy of definitions) of "progressive" and "progressive politics," first for its own sake, and secondly, for the purpose of confronting, at a latter date, the claim that the progressives are on the march, once again, in Nigerian politics. And our method has been to proceed concretely and historically by revisiting the national seminar on *Towards a progressive Nigeria* organised and hosted by the PRP government of Kano State in December 1982. Last week I presented the introductory part of the contribution made at the conference by Dr. Herbert Ekwe-Ekwe and part of the communiqué issued at the end of the seminar.

We shall, this week, be proceeding with this effort of seeking the most appropriate (that is, contemporary and historically determined) definition by "visiting" some other personages, including Biodun Jeyifo and Eskor Toyo. This is essentially the taking of inventory of ideas, on "progressive," "progressive politics," and indeed, "human progress." I should however state clearly at this point that in this particular exercise I am taking inventory, not of all ideas, but ideas that more or less express my own thoughts and beliefs differently, and perhaps more clearly. Thereafter, the next logical step would be to attempt to "tie up" the ideas to produce a draft profile of "progressive politics" and "progressive governance" in a neoliberal capitalist economy, in general, and its "rentier," "lumpen" and "predatory" variant in particular.

A couple of months ago, Dr. Kayode Fayemi won, via the court, the long, bitter and costly battle to reclaim the electoral victory that was stolen from him and his party, the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), in the April 2007 gubernatorial election in Ekiti State. He was thus inaugurated governor barely eight months to the end of a four-year period he was elected to serve. In his assessment of the prospects of the new governor's administration, Professor Biodun Jeyifo acknowledged Fayemi as a "man of ideas, a

genuine scholar and a progressive intellectual" who obtained a "massive electoral mandate in Ekiti State." Furthermore, Comrade Jeyifo testified, "Fayemi also happens to be a man who cares passionately about the lot of ordinary men and women in a skewed, unjust social order." (*Welfarism in a rentier state: Fayemi's real and symbolic challenges*, *The Guardian*, November 7, 2010).

Those were the *credentials* of Governor Kayode Fayemi of Ekiti State, articulated and provided by Biodun Jeyifo, as the former assumed office late in 2010. From credentials we move to *expectations*, also provided by Jeyifo in the same article: "It is almost certain that the people of Ekiti State will fare considerably better under his administration than they have under previous administrations and probably under any other state government in the federation." The areas where the people of Ekiti State are expected to "fare considerably better" under Fayemi, according to Jeyifo and as the Governor himself said or hinted at his inauguration, include education, health care delivery, old age pension and social safety network. He is also expected to "put an end to corruption and trim down the size of the inherited governmental apparatus and the recurrent expenditure needed to sustain its bloated scale of remuneration and pecks."

From *expectations* we move to *admonition*, still remaining with Biodun Jeyifo: Governor Fayemi "must demonstrate that ideas matter and matter a lot in the world of a 21st century global economy now in one of its worst crises everywhere in the world, especially as this global crisis has served to immensely complicate economic conditions for the vast majority of the people in our country and our continent." Let me put this admonition differently and more directly: One needs ideas to *confront* and simultaneously *negotiate* with the Nigerian state and the Nigerian ruling classes and blocs to be able to take even a single preliminary step in executing Fayemi's welfarist programme in Ekiti state, or even a couple of states. Put differently again, welfarism under neoliberal rentier capitalism inescapably and, indeed, imperatively, entails confrontation and simultane-

ous negotiation with objectively and subjectively entrenched interest. You have to expect head-on collisions with capitalism and its profit-seeking logic.

For the avoidance of doubt we should briefly define and put in context Jeyifo's operational concepts: *welfarism* and *rentier*. According to Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Tenth Edition, 1993, a *welfare state* is a "social system based on the assumption by a political state of primary responsibility for the individual and social welfare of its citizens; or a nation or state characterised by the operation of the welfare state system." And *welfarism* is "the complex of policies, attitudes, and beliefs associated with the welfare state." It is understood that the primary beneficiaries of welfarism are the "disadvantaged groups."

A *rentier* is a "person who lives on income from property or securities." And Jeyifo says that in a rentier state, such as Nigeria, "revenues for running public services come overwhelmingly from payments (rents) made by extractive industries for leases for prospecting, mining and extraction of mineral deposits or fossil fuels." Moreover, in a rentier state, "value-added economic activity is minimal and the tax-base either insignificant or virtually non-existent." Professor Eskor Toyo has also described this type of political economy, that is, the type now operating in Nigeria, as *lumpen capitalism*.

The terms "rentier," "lumpen," "dependent," "peripheral," "outpost," etc, are all alternative descriptions of Nigeria-type economy. But in each case we should leave no one in doubt that the economic system is capitalism and that lumpen, rentier, etc, are qualifiers, to describe the exact variant or form of capitalism. We insist on this clarity because it is possible to theoretically construct a rentier state or lumpen state that is not capitalist or is state-capitalist. We have seen several types of socio-economic monstrosities claiming to be socialist simply because they run counter to some logics of capitalism.

Lumpen is not a "socialist" word. Used as adjective, it is defined as "of, or relating to

dispossessed and uprooted individuals cut off from the economic and social class with which they might normally be identified." From here come specific sociological concepts: lumpen proletariat, lumpen intellectuals, lumpen capitalism, etc. What are you, but a lumpen, if you and what you are doing can disappear over night with a no trace and no impact on the economy? What are those hundreds of daily paid, non-unionised women and men employed to sweep the streets? What are the gigantic vehicle distribution enterprises, "service" enterprises in the oil sector, fast-food joints, all those banks with imposing buildings, and most of our churches? How do we describe a Nigerian capitalist that makes a profit of one billion dollars simply by buying and selling oil blocks? They are all sectors of *lumpen capitalism*.

Beyond acknowledging the new governor's admirable *credentials*, indicating popular expectations, and offering some advice, Jeyifo submitted a frank proposition which was, of course, not intended to discourage, but to help prepare him for the battle ahead. And the proposition is: "Even with the best intentions and the cleanest administration in the country or even the whole world, Governor Fayemi will never be able to run a working, productive welfarist dispensation in a rentier state of the kind that we have in Nigeria."

These are the reasons: *First*: the money will simply not be available-even if Governor Fayemi succeeds in stamping out corruption and state robbery or radically reducing them. The current political economy, as partly expressed in the budget, for instance, will not permit the huge allocation of resources needed for a welfare programme. *Second*: the governor will, before long, run into conflict with entrenched capitalist interests, including contractors and captains and apostles of "free market," "free trade," "privatisation," "commercialisation" and "deregulation." *Third*: he will come into conflict with the Nigerian capitalist state. *Fourth*: he will come into conflict with influential leaders of his own party and the other arms of his own government.

• *To be continued, but under different titles.*