

Opinion

Struggling for seats in a sinking boat

By Edwin Madunagu

WE have been on this subject for quite some time. I think I should, at this point, recap and reformulate the central question before proceeding. The subject to which I refer and which now appears in the singular was originally three. The first was the *location and movement of Nigeria's presidency*; the second was the *geopolitical restructuring of the country*; and the third was what I may now call *popular-democratic reform of the politics and political economy of Nigeria*. The need to combine, or rather, integrate, the three subjects into what I have tentatively called *Restructuring under popular democracy* occurred to me at the end of last year.

The four articles that have so far appeared in this column this year, taken together, may be seen as a contribution to current efforts to rescue the Nigerian nation, which I have now likened to a "sinking boat". My proposition in the four articles can be summarised as follows: The geopolitical restructuring of the country into eight regions; the retention of the 36 states and the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) as they are presently constituted; the retention of the 774 Local Government Areas as they are presently constituted; and the constitution of Local Council Wards as Neighbourhood Organisations; at least one Neighbourhood Organisation in a council ward.

The administrations of the Federal, State and Local Council levels will be "governments" as presently understood, but those at the Regional and Neighbourhood levels will not be "governments" as such: there will be Secretariats and Governors Forums at the Regional level and only Secretariats at the Neighbourhood level. Their functions were listed and described in the preceding articles. The key feature of the Federal Government is the eight-member *Collective Presidency with rotational Chair* and Deputy Chair. The Chair doubles as "ceremonial" Head of State.

That is the general picture showing the main features of the restructured federation, which will be *republican, secular and democratic*. Of the other features, the most significant is the overall redeployment of the nation's resources in favour of the masses – the most significant means of doing this being the radical reduction of the appropriations of political office

holders, radical war on corruption, and the canceling of some taxes and levies, which the masses now pay. This is what strikes you immediately you view the proposed structure. Others include the reduction of the fraction of the nation's resources that goes to the Federal Government. What is removed from the centre is shared between the States and the Local Government Councils. The states then finance the Regional Secretariats while the Local Governments finance the programmes and coordination of the Neighbourhoods. *The restructuring as a whole derives its "popular" description mainly from what happens at the Neighbourhood level, that is, at the grassroots.*

This fifth level of the proposed structure – with the federal, region, state, and local council as first, second, third and fourth – levels respectively – should not be seen as an appendix, an abstract or theoretical exercise, which can be excised from the structure. Not the Neighbourhood or Grassroots level is the level that holds the promise of *mutually ameliorating* the current pathetic material conditions of the masses and simultaneously reducing the level of their political alienation and marginalisation; and, I may add, *poison the masses' class anger*. The other "novelty" in the proposed structure, the *Collective Presidency with Rotational Chair and Deputy Chair*, is essentially designed to prevent the present crop of rulers from seeing the country on fire through their struggle for the presidency. We don't want them to linkup with *Boko Haram!*

Having summarised what we have said so far, we may now move ahead. We begin by asking: Why is every major national political crisis in Nigeria reflected more clearly in the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) than in any other political party, and why does every major political crisis in the country always threaten to become a national political crisis? To appreciate this composite question more concretely you may take, as illustration, the question of location and movement of the Presidency and, more generally, the difficult question of "distribution of power" (otherwise known as "zoning") between the various segments of the ruling classes and power blocs, which is played out more clearly in the PDP.

This question may be reformulated as a statement: Since the ruling Peoples Democratic Party is the *dominant* and the most *national* po-

litical formation of Nigeria's ruling classes and power blocs, every major political crisis in the party quickly transforms into a problem of the ruling classes and power blocs as a whole. Furthermore, because of the current political and ideological *dominance* and near-*hegemony* of the ruling classes and power blocs in the country, every major political crisis (such as the "zoning" crisis) quickly draws in the other classes and social forces, thereby threatening to expand into a national political crisis.

It can also be proposed that the seriousness of a general political crisis in the country – whatever the origin – can be measured by its impact on the ruling classes and power blocs and, then, more concretely, on the PDP – for the same reason of *dominance and national coverage*. These questions and propositions will help explain many things, including why in this question of "struggling for seats in a sinking boat" I may seem to dwell more on the crises *within* the PDP than the struggles *between* PDP and other parties; and why I may sometimes make generalisations from analysis of the situation in PDP.

Nigeria is currently like a sinking boat, as I have said. *Boko Haram*, corruption and political economy of class and state robbery, state delinquency (that is rapidly acquiring features of a failed state); mass poverty and dispossession; armed robbery and kidnapping; gross social inequality; unpatriotic ruling classes; marginalisation and anomie; violence, mass insecurity and kindred social maladies – are, in their combined effect, literally sinking the country. Then an inevitable national resistance – open and covert, organised and unorganised – sets in to increase the speed of sinking. In the midst of all this, the rulers are fighting for the next presidency. This is what I have likened to "fighting for seats in a sinking boat".

We are all observing and living through the national "social maladies" – of course from different locations and with different degrees of concern. We are also seeing the effect: the "sinking" of the nation. This article is, however, not about the "social maladies". I shall only touch upon them tangentially – after all, the maladies, their descriptions and mobilisation against them can be taken as the main concern of this column since its inception. I have returned to the subject again and again. The aim of the present article is rather to describe aspects of the current fighting for seats in a "sinking boat" – to

see how and how far the proposed five-tier popular democratic structure can contribute to national rescue operation.

President Goodluck Jonathan's campaigners opened the "salvo", as the saying goes. *The Nation* newspaper carried the front page story captioned "Outrage as Jonathan's 2015 posters flood Abuja streets" in its January 3, 2013 edition. The story is that "Federal Capital Territory (FCT) residents resumed from the New Year's holiday to see the streets flooded with posters campaigning for a second term for President Jonathan. The glossy posters with a bold picture of the President carries the inscription '2015: No vacancy in Aso Rock. Let's do more'. Also inscribed on it is 'one good term deserves another' support Dr. Goodluck Azikiwe Jonathan for 2015 presidency".

The Presidency and the president's party, the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), according to the newspaper report, immediately "disowned" the posters, saying that the president had stated that "he will talk about the Presidency from 2014" and that "those doing this do not have the consent of the president". The opposition parties and, of course, the public, did not believe this claim of ignorance, innocence or "distance". One opposition party remarked: "there is nothing wrong in President Goodluck Jonathan displaying his posters for 2015... But Nigerians won't be fooled the second time", thus ignoring the Presidency's plea of non-involvement and reminding Nigerians of the country's culture of *official falsehood* that predates Jonathan's presidency.

No undue significance should be attached to the appearance of President Jonathan's "glossy" campaign posters in the nation's capital on the first working day of the year; nor is the response of the opposition to be taken as anything other than 2015 election campaign. The Presidency and the opposition are playing the same game: politics of "hide-and-seek", official falsehood, messianism and mechanical conception of social transformation. What is of significance is the silent statement made by the president's January 3 posters, namely that the campaign for *Presidency 2015*, which we observed as soon as Jonathan was confirmed as president in 2011 has indeed started and that he will fight hard to win PDP's presidential nomination and also fight hard to win the main election.

• To be continued next Thursday

Opinion

Struggling for seats in a sinking boat (2)

By Edwin Madunagu

ONE feature of Nigeria's electoral politics, also predating Jonathan's presidency, is that pre-election struggles *within* parties to select candidates (called primaries) are, at least as fierce as main electoral contests *between* parties. The struggles within the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) are the fiercest for several reasons, including the fact that the party, just like the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) of the Second Republic (1979-1983), is essentially a conscious and deliberate coalition of several regional, religious, ethnic and "economic-interest" groupings - with various levels of bourgeois consciousness. The PDP remains, as it was at birth, a party of "strange bedfellows", simply providing the largest platform for sharing the "national cake".

Every crisis within the party either ultimately reduces to the problem of sharing the "national cake" or is in origin a problem of sharing the "national cake". Other ruling class political parties in existence including those which are mere caricatures of PDP have their own sets of features. Of these other parties the more prominent are, of course: the Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), Congress for Progressive Change (CPC), All Nigeria Peoples Party (ANPP), All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA) and Labour Party (LP). But we are remaining with the PDP for the moment - for that is where this national malady ("struggling for seats in a sinking boat") is now concentrated.

As soon as President Goodluck Jonathan campaign posters appeared on January 2, 2013, the "bubble" burst in his ruling PDP. The fundamental struggle, as we see it now, is between those who want the president to stand for re-election on the party's platform (call them Group A) and those who do not (call them Group B). The second group exists in subgroups that cannot - at least for now - called factions. There is, however, one clear subgroup in the anti-Jonathan camp: the subgroup that wants "power" to return to the North. Another subgroup, those that want "power" to shift to the Igbo ethnic nationality (in the Southeast), is weak since the majority of the campaigners for "Igbo presidency" are, for now, with

Jonathan. The battle, again for now, is not fought over this strategic question, that is, Jonathan's re-election, but over concrete tactical issues.

The tactical issues (which everyone knows are tied to the strategic question) include, at this point in time, whether the party executive in Adamawa State should remain in office or be dissolved - in short, which group (A or B) controls the party "machinery" in the state - and who to anoint as the Chair of the party's Board of Trustees (BOT). A third "front" is the fight over the implications of the court nullification of the election of the party's National Secretary. Group A has, in its leadership, the president himself, the National Chair of the party and a faction of the party's National Working Committee (NWC) while Group B is led by PDP state governors, an ex-president and the other faction of the NWC.

The proposition on the ferocity of pre-election, intra-party struggles (primaries) and the proposition that these internal struggles are fiercest in the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) and has to do with the question of whether President Jonathan should contest again or not may be illustrated with the "tactical" issues mentioned above. On Sunday, January 13, 2013, a few days after the party secretary was removed from office, some party elders from Adamawa State, led by Umar Ardo, addressed a press conference in Nigeria's capital city, Abuja. In that conference, Ardo affirmed that the crisis in the party was triggered by calculations and projections on the 2015 presidential election. "It is all about 2015; anybody that tells you anything contrary is not sincere", he said. Referring to the intervention of the PDP state governors, Ardo said "they (that is, the governors) want to impose one of them as the presidential candidate of the party in 2015 and that is why they are defying what the people and president want".

As Ardo was speaking, another group that goes by the name *Nigerian Renewal Group* and describing itself as "consisting of young professional men and women members of the PDP", came out with a stronger statement, but along the same line as that of the elders. Their verdict: "it is an open secret that the crisis in the PDP has been contrived by the governors

in the attempt to control the NWC (National Working Committee) and dictate to the National Chairman. Their intention is to position themselves for office as president, vice president or senators after completing their tenure. But why can't they pursue these legitimate ambitions without employing crude, strong-arm tactics?" They then added this Nigerian "flavour": "When Bamanga (PDP Chair) became governor of Gongola in 1983, most of the present governors were toddlers or in primary schools. The old man deserves some respect".

Continuing its indictment of the PDP state governors, this pressure group, led by Mansur Usman, said: "In their various states, the governors hold the political and economic aces. They install local government chairmen, hand-pick members of the state legislature, influence the election of members to the National Assembly and cajole the president to pick their cronies as ministers. Not done with the enormous influence and financial resources they control in their states, our governors are also jostling to remote control the party at the national level". The group warned that one of the consequences of not "clipping the wings of these governors" would be the "disintegration of our great party". The Governors' Forum, they are convinced, "has become a vehicle for confusion" and a threat to "good governance and democracy". The group intends to approach the courts to declare the Forum illegal.

This is a narrative in the "struggle for seats in a sinking boat". The indictment of the PDP state governors by the *Nigerian Renewal Group*, a group within the PDP, is a very strong one. None of the elements of this indictment would be strange or unfounded to any observer of contemporary Nigerian politics. But, then, the governors and other "internal" opponents of President Jonathan - and there are many of them - have their own equally strong and plausible indictment of the party faction headed by the President and party chair. What do you make of a situation where each of the two opposing sides in a party struggle has an equally plausible indictment of its opponent?

The fact is that they are both operating outside the framework sketched in: their party constitution. I would not say "in violation of the

spirit of their constitution" because the PDP constitution does not have a single "spirit". Each faction of the "founding fathers", "elders" and "board of directors" of the party reads its own "spirit" into the document. More concretely and directly, every active faction of the leadership of PDP knows that it cannot advance its cause by sticking to the party constitution or - indeed - the constitution of the country. And this is one defining feature of incipient *fascism* or *anarchy*: inability to obey one's own rules.

In its Saturday, January 5, 2013 edition, *The Guardian* carried a front page report entitled "North ready to chase Jonathan out of power in 2015, says Arewa patriots." The body of the report was that a group called "Concerned Arewa Patriots" (CAP), and led by Mallam Maiyaki Idris, said in Kaduna the previous day that since President Jonathan had "flagged off" his 2015 campaign, his group would mobilise northerners to beat him at the presidential polls in 2015. Idris argued: "North ought to hold political power, but the North now is nothing in Nigeria. The economic power is the West, whether you like it or not. Take the statistics of the banks in this country, the financial houses, the corporate organisations; tell me who manages and who owns them. The commercial activities in this country are in the East. In my own village, we have energetic boys, but even if it is anything it is from the Igboman that I get it. We northerners have come to a stage where we should sit down and reason and work as one, irrespective of religion and tribe."

Maiyaki Idris therefore throws us back to pre-1963 Nigeria when the country operated essentially as a tripod: North, West and East - with North further reduced to Hausa - Fulani, West reduced to Yoruba, and East reduced to Igbo, as the author implicitly states here. Gone is the long process of geopolitical restructuring that started in 1963, with the creation of the Midwest Region, and continued up to the 1999 unofficial re-division of the country into the current 36 states and six geopolitical zones. Political power for the North (Hausa - Fulani), economic power for the West (Yoruba) and commercial power for the East (Igbo)! So, where are the South-south peoples? Where are North-central peoples? Satellites? Internal colonies?

• To be continued next Thursday.

THE GUARDIAN, Thursday, February 14, 2013.

Opinion

Struggling for seats in a sinking boat (3)

By Edwin Madunagu

As if in direct response to Maiyaki Idris (see last Thursday's column), Alhaji Usman Farouk who is a retired Commissioner of Police and former governor of pre-1975 Northwestern state, urged his Northern compatriots to engage the pacification of the North, including ending of the *Boko Haram* insurgency, before turning to the struggle for the country's presidency. He was reported by *The Guardian* of January 8, 2013, to have said this in a press conference in Kaduna. His exact words: "I don't share the view of these people (Northern politicians) converging to discuss the 2015 election and politics. *Where is the country they want to govern? Is it the one bedeviled with insecurity? Where is the country that you are going to lead as president? We have to save the country first before you talk of running for the presidency.*" (emphasis mine).

It was this statement, in particular the rhetorical questions, that inspired my present piece and the title it carries. Usman Farouk announced, in the press conference, that his organisation, the Northern Development Focus Initiative (NDFI) planned to call a meeting of elders and statesmen (and women) of Northern extraction - including former heads of state, Generals Yakubu Gowon, Muhammadu Buhari and Ibrahim Babangida - "to draw up recommendations for the Federal Government on how to end the current security menace in the North". For, in Farouk's view, if the *Boko Haram* insurgency continues there will be no country by 2015.

Farouk alleged that government activities had ceased in some Northern states for fear of *Boko Haram*; that some northern governors were

The struggle by the Igbo segment of Nigeria's ruling classes for "Igbo presidency" - which, if not exclusive to, is at least strongest in, the ruling PDP - makes sense to me only in the context of the tripod: Hausa - Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. But, then, that tripod perished in the civil war (July 1967 - January 1970).

holding their executive council meetings outside their states; that, "they don't meet in Maduiguri or Yobe". What type of government do they think they are running? He asked: "How do you call yourself a governor if the executive council meetings are no longer held within your state, when governors even no longer slept in their states? The governor will show up in the morning and stay at work till 12:00 noon. But in the night he will relocate to 10 different places before the day breaks".

The day after the Maiyaki story appeared, *The Nation* newspaper carried the story, 2015: *Babangida, Buhari, others begin consultations* (Sunday, January 6, 2013). The story had the same thrust although the language of the January 6 story was not as sharp as the one preceding it. That essence was that political and community leaders of the North had started "coming together" to fight for Nigeria's presidency in the next presidential election. The story mentions Generals Babangida and Buhari and a "respected former Minister of Defence" as among the "arrow-heads" of this new effort.

Five reasons were uncovered by the reporter for the renewed "push" for the presidency by Northern politicians: "alleged alienation of the North by the presidency in appointment and policy matters"; "unprecedented polarization (and division) of the region along religious and ethnic lines"; "the worsening security situation in the region"; "alleged under-development of the North and the yawning gap between the North and the South", and "the manner in which the South-south has allegedly divided the nation and what is seen in the North as its desperate plot to retain the presidency in 2015".

On the same page 2 the newspaper carried another report, which, when combined with the first, could have raised the political temperature of the Jonathan camp. Titled *OB's Kaduna visit stirs Jonathan, Sambo tension*, the story speculated: "In what could become a replay of what transpired between former President Olusegun Obasanjo and his then deputy, Atiku Abubakar, between 2003 and 2007, culminating in a sharp division within the presidency, there are growing indications that the cordial relationship between President Goodluck Jonathan and Vice-President Namadi Sambo may have turned frosty". The speculation arose from the visit of former President General Olusegun Obasanjo, to Kaduna - a visit officially explained as a condolence visit to "commiserate with the people

and government of the state on the death of former governor Patrick Yakowa."

The newspaper, however, discovered, through the state security services, that "Obasanjo's sympathy visit was a decoy to achieve another objective", and that was "to mobilise influential traditional rulers in the state against the alleged second term ambition of the president and canvass support for the return of power to the North". The paper quoted "sources" as saying that what particularly "peevd" President Jonathan was the role his deputy was alleged to have played in facilitating the meeting between the former president and some (Northern) emirs. The Vice-President, as expected, immediately issued a statement strongly denying the report (*The Nation*, Monday, January 7, 2013). His words: "The visit of former President Olusegun Obasanjo was merely to commiserate and console with the Vice-President and the good people of Kaduna State. The visit with his entourage was witnessed by journalists". Since Northern traditional rulers were also meeting at the same venue, the Vice-President further explained, Obasanjo decided to go over and greet them - as a gesture of respect.

This explanation sounds plausible and should, in normal circumstances, be the end of the misinterpretation. But, then, this is Nigeria and we are dealing with a personage whose antecedents we all know: General Olusegun Obasanjo. I am inclined to believe the Vice-President, but I also believe that Obasanjo went to Kaduna to "drum up" support for his choice for 2015 - whatever belief the Vice-President held. However, my reading of Obasanjo's body-language at the moment is that he is committed to the agreement on North-South presidential rotation in the original PDP power-sharing formula (or zoning formula) and that simultaneously he believes President Jonathan is currently in his second, and therefore, final term in office; Or that the former president is as vindictive and unforgiving as he is reputed to be - this time against Jonathan; Or that he is more opportunistic than he is widely believed to be; Or that he believes he is the ultimate god-father and king-maker in the party.

An explanatory note: It will be recalled that General Obasanjo (from the South, specifically Southwest) was president for two terms (from 1999 to 2007) and handed over power to Umaru Yar'Adua (from the North, specifi-

cally Northwest) who unfortunately died in May 2010, about two-thirds into the first term of his presidency. Dr. Goodluck became president and completed Yar'Adua's first term in May 2011. He thereafter began a fresh term having won the 2011 presidential election. It is known that General Obasanjo has "fallen out" with President Goodluck whom he assisted to win the presidency.

The struggle by the Igbo segment of Nigeria's ruling classes for "Igbo presidency" - which, if not exclusive to, is at least strongest in, the ruling PDP - makes sense to me only in the context of the tripod: Hausa - Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo. But, then, that tripod perished in the civil war (July 1967 - January 1970). In its place we now have what I have called (for about 20 years now) Nigeria's *power blocs*. There are only two of them, as I have also insisted: *Northern power bloc* and *Western power bloc*. Beyond these two power blocs we have the geopolitical zones, the states, the local government areas and the more than 250 ethnic groups (or nationalities) that constitute this country.

My proposition on Igbo presidency is a re-statement of the central position of this column, and that is the adoption of *Collective presidency with rotational Chair and Deputy Chair*. This is a segment of the five-tier popular-democratic restructuring of the country. The specific political call here is that all those groups and individuals - be they social classes, social groups, ethnic nationalities or de-classed masses - who are, or feel oppressed, marginalised or dispossessed in this nation should adopt this structure in which is embedded a genuine social transformation, and struggle for it.

I would now like to bring these series of series of articles to an end. I have deliberately built the discussion around the question of geopolitical restructuring. The core of my proposal is *collective presidency and grassroots development with popular participation*. In the course of the series I have received a number of private responses, some written and others verbal. They have been helpful to me in several ways, but I have so far refrained from responding to them because I do not want to be defensive on this matter for one central reason: the entire exercise is exploratory, by which I mean that some of the suggestions would require further clarifications and amendments. This is obvious even to me. However, in considering my propositions, it is only fair to keep in mind the specific national problems (immediate and medium-term) that we wish to solve, and the fact that, as far as I know, my propositions are unique. I shall, in future, when reviewing these series, bring out the responses and comments I have received.

• Concluded.