KWARA STATE UNIVERSITY

THE SECOND (2nd) INAUGURAL LECTURE

DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA AT THE CROSSROADS: THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY

By

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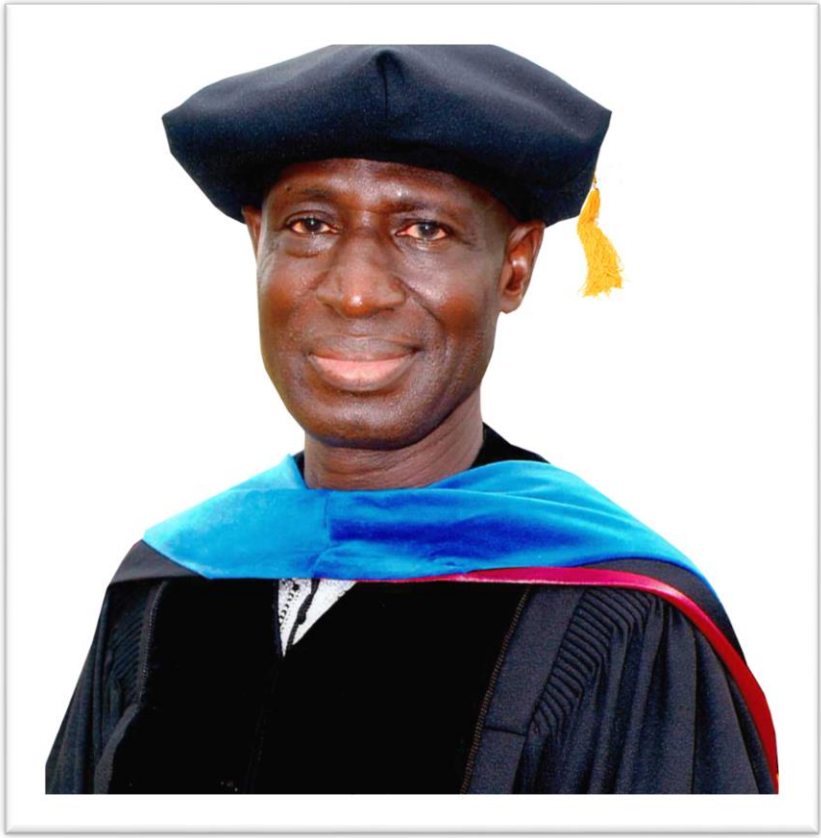
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Dedication

This lecture is dedicated to the memory of my late wife, partner and friend, Mrs. Mero Mariam Mahmud who was alive when I embarked on this project and who supported my work with devotion. I had the strength to continue despite the loss because this is what she would have been happy to witness and she would have been present here today. I miss her. May the Almighty Allah grant her eternal peace in Jannat al-Firdaws.



Late Mero Mariam Mahmud
(February 6, 1977 – August 24, 2017)

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Ladies and Gentlemen

Preamble:

It is my pleasure to be here this afternoon to deliver the second (2^{nd}) Inaugural Lecture of the Kwara State University which is the first from the College of Humanities, Management and Social Sciences. I am humbled by your presence.

In general terms an Inaugural Lecture is a way of letting the public know the academic activities of a Professor including his/her future research interests and contributions to knowledge in the field. Some universities also recommend that an Inaugural Lecture is presented in a simplified format so that individuals who do not belong to the same field with the lecturer will understand what he has come to say. I heed this advice especially since the audience includes interested members of the public. Public understanding of politics is important for the development

of democracy. Democracy -- a form of government in which the supreme power is vested in the people and exercised directly by them or by their elected agents under a free electoral system – is what I consider the most important political invention in the history of mankind. Although no political system is perfect, it's democracy that comes closest to addressing the complex issues of the human condition if *practiced correctly*. However, because democracy is not perfect it continues to be a human project. It has been sought and fought for since the ancient times for its intrinsic and normative value. It has been experimented within various settings with different results. Much of the experimentation has been in the western world where contemporary human development is attributed to the practice and attainment of democracy.

The prospect for democracy in the non-western world, especially in Africa, has fascinated me and has become a focus of my career as a political scientist with a specialisation in comparative politics of development. I have therefore studied the theories and practice of democracy and human rights – two interrelated topics that have a symbiotic relationship. In "The state and human rights in Africa," I argued that human rights "can only be possible through democratisation" and went on to examine how democracy enhances human rights: "by providing a forum for discussing public issues; providing checks and balances between those in and those out of power, and by encouraging public debates on issues of rights" (Mahmud, 1993a, pp 495-496). These observations are still topical in African politics. In another contribution to the debate over the desirability of democracy in Africa and the resistance to it by some African leaders in the early 1990s, I posed the

question: who is afraid of democracy in Africa? I concluded that "popular reactions to multiparty elections in Africa show that the populations (citizens) favour properly functioning democratic governments" and advised that foreign agencies (who wished to promote democracy) can serve as facilitators only "when the initiative for democratisation has local roots" (Mahmud, 1994, pp. 151-153). The advice was necessitated with the conviction that democracy can succeed only where it has local support. The demonstrations and rallies for democracy in Nigeria against the military dictatorships were therefore actions in the right direction. I had indeed condemned the coup d'état that cancelled the 1992 elections which were widely considered free and fair (Mahmud, 1993b).

I did not lose hope for democracy when the establishment of Sharia Law in twelve states of northern Nigeria caused violent riots in some of the states. I wrote that such violence in the early years of our transition to democracy served as "a test for the young democracy, (and) hoped that the test "will strengthen rather than weaken democracy" (Mahmud, 2004, p. 92). The above commentaries are testimonies to my commitment to and hope for the democracy project in Africa predating the democratic transition in Nigeria in 1999. It will not be an exaggeration therefore to say that thus far, Nigeria has underachieved in its experimentation with democracy as will be made clear in the lecture.

At this point, I want to divert your attention to my background in political science and my views on politics and democratisation. My introduction to political science and politics started in the Department of Government at Ahmadu Bello University, Samaru, Zaria in the early to

mid-1970s as an undergraduate in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Among those who influenced my thinking were Professors Yusuf Bala Usman and Patrick Wilmot. Bala Usman was in the Department of History but I followed his public lectures which included commentaries on Nigerian history and politics. He was perhaps one of the most progressive intellectuals of his time. I took courses in Political Sociology from Patrick Wilmot who was also a progressive scholar. The earliest political influence on me however, occurred during and after attending a public lecture by the late Mallam Aminu Kano on the campus sometimes around 1973-74. I cannot remember the title of the lecture but it was on socialism in African countries with a focus on the Republic of Guinea under Sekou Toure.

For those who are unfamiliar with colonial politics in Africa, Guinea, under Sekou Toure was the only African country to defy General Charles de Gaulle and gained her unconditional independence from France in 1958. Sekou Toure had to struggle to achieve development by mobilising his people to be self-reliant. Although later in his life he turned to be a dictator, his earlier politics of mobilising the citizens was the focus of Mallam Aminu's lecture. He had a positive story to tell about Guinea where he felt that citizens were the focus of politics. From that point on I began to follow the writings and public pronouncements of the Mallam. I actually went on to support the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), the party he founded during the Second Republic. Since those formative years, I became fascinated with Marxist writings, socialism and communism. And as a young research fellow at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) Victoria Island, Lagos, I focused on politics in the Soviet Union and

my first "academic" writing as an aspiring scholar was a contribution to the *Nigerian Forum* titled "The Soviet Union after Andropov" (Mahmud, 1983). My knowledge of Marxist theory however was still rudimentary. But as fate would have it, and without knowing, I applied for post-graduate studies and was accepted to the Graduate School of International Studies (GSIS), University of Denver where I met one of the greatest scholars of Marxism, Professor Alan Gilbert who went on to become a friend, mentor and Chairman of my Ph.D. Dissertation Committee. At the school I took courses in "Comparative Revolutions", "Marx and Marxism", "Political Economy of China," etc. I also attended rallies in opposition to oppressive policies of the United States including travelling to northern California to participate in demonstrations by farm workers in Delano.

Studying Marxism opened up my knowledge of radical politics and a better understanding of what was going on comparatively in different political systems including the then Soviet Union and other socialist countries. Especially illuminating was the fact that all the totalitarian systems and dictatorships that were attributed to the ideas and philosophy of Karl Marx were actually misappropriation of Marxist theories. Where Marx theorised popular revolutions to free the oppressed, those regimes used the theory for mobilisation of the masses and to gain their support. The societies that were supposed to become classless were taken over by the "new class" of oppressors in the "Vanguard Party." The main lesson from all these experiences was that for people to remain relevant in politics, they must be at alert and engaged all the time. They must also be critical of those in power and demand their rights. Otherwise, the political project will be hijacked and monopolised by the

ruling elite (the few) at the expense of the citizens (the many). In other words, as an observer stated, "Democracy is something you have to work on every day" (Blajan, 2000-2001, p. 44). Are we ready to work on our democracy every day in Nigeria? Before I go any further, I will like to define a few political concepts and terms to guide the rest of this lecture. Afterwards, I will move on to the topic of the lecture: to examine and evaluate Nigeria's democratic experience in the last eighteen years (1999-2017).

Politics, Democracy and Citizens

Politics and Power

What do we mean by the term politics? Simply put, politics refers to a process by which groups make collective decisions that are binding on members. Although politics is not always about conflict, but it is often about how conflicts are resolved within groups. Politics is a way of organising society for the common good – for all members of the group (the state, the nation or the nation-state).

In discussing politics, political philosophers such as Aristotle (1995), Hobbes (1991), Locke (1993), and Marx (1968) (to name a few), all posed important questions that guide politics and our understanding of human needs and desires. What is human nature? Is human nature good or bad? Should people be left in the state of nature? The philosophers arrived at answers that if people are left in the state of nature, collective life could be brutal, unequal and chaotic. The solution was to set up an institution that can monitor and regulate the actions of all members of the group. That institution is called the *state.* And in what became known as the "social contract" (Hobbes, Locke),

the citizens willingly gave the state powers to rule in return for protecting the welfare of all its members. Furthermore, the philosophers had to debate what characterises the best kind of state for achieving the above mandate. While some advocate a very strong state (authoritarian), others recommended limited powers for the state where citizens monitor and determine the extent of the powers of the state (a form of democracy). Power then becomes "the capacity of a government to draw on the commitments of its citizens so as to achieve collective goals—such as law and order, protection from attack and economic growth" (Parsons, 1967).

Democracy and Citizens

As mentioned earlier, the philosophers who debated politics, also debated the idea of the best form of state (or government generally) with most of them suggesting that the best form of government is the one in which citizens participate in the process of governance either directly or indirectly (through their representatives). Democracy is therefore defined as a type of political system (or polity) in which collective decision making (politics) is the expression of the preferences and interests of the citizens. This idea informed the American President, Abraham Lincoln's now famous definition of democracy as "the government of the people, by the people, and for the people."

In a democracy therefore, citizens have both rights and responsibilities which must be balanced for the success of governance. Their rights include freedom of association and speech, movement, and religion; right to property, to advocate and demand accountability from the government, right to information and right to equality before the law.

Their responsibilities include being aware of political and social issues, engaging in public debates, promoting collective action, treating others with equal respect, and fostering tolerance and respect for human rights of others. It is the balance between rights and responsibilities that makes democracy work for the common good.

From the foregoing discussion, I now proceed to evaluate how far we have come to meet this ideal in our national politics after eighteen years (1999 – 2017) of uninterrupted practice of democracy. The Nigerian experience could also be used to reflect on the African experience in democratization in what scholars refer to as the "second liberation" or the "second wind of change," (the first being the attainment of political independence in the 1960s). Many hoped that this time around, the change carried a promise "of freeing African peoples from the tyranny, oppression, corruption and gross mis-governance that have characterised the political experience of most African states since decolonisation in the 1960s" (cited in Lewis, 1998, p. 263). The promise has not been kept.

Nigerian Democracy at the Crossroads: A General Assessment

On May 29, 1999, Nigeria made history by inaugurating the Fourth Republic with the swearing-in of retired army General Olusegun Obasanjo as the transition President. As the largest country in Africa, Nigeria's transition from military dictatorship to a republican government was regarded as a bright sign for democratisation not only in Nigeria but also in Africa. One week after his inauguration, the new president was featured on the cover of TIME magazine (1999, June 7) signifying the importance of the

moment in world affairs. The magazine also published an interview and an article on the transition (Robinson, 1999, pp. 21-27). On that faithful day President Obasanjo like his predecessors echoed a promise by stating that:

> Nigeria is wonderfully endowed by the Almighty with human and other resources. It does no credit either to us or the entire black race if we fail in managing our resources for *quick improvement* (my emphasis) in the quality of life of our people (Obasanjo (May 29, 1999), Inaugural Speech, Abuja).

The President went on to list the eighteen (18) issues his administration will deal with "even in these times of near economic collapse." These include what can be referred to as political and civil rights and economic rights as dividends of democracy. However, almost two decades and four administrations in an unbroken democratic dispensation, how have Nigerians fared? Hardly can many Nigerians say that they are better off today than they were eighteen years ago. What went wrong? I examine the records from comparative and international perspectives. Nigeria is a well-equipped political laboratory that we can use to find explanations and make useful suggestions to teach younger generations in the discipline. The sub-title of the lecture – the *Good, the Bad and the Ugly* – is borrowed from the title of a movie almost fifty years ago and used figuratively to capture the mixed results of Nigeria's democratic experience.

The Good: Democratic Transition and Consolidation

Nigeria had a successful transition to democracy in 1999. A democratic transition simply refers to a situation whereby a republican regime has replaced an authoritarian one through free and fair elections. Nigeria has since had stable democratic institutions entrenched in a democratic constitution. Although they have not always functioned as expected, there is no denying the fact that if allowed to improve through peoples' participation, that the institutions in a Federal system of an Executive, an independent Judiciary, a Legislature (the National Assembly), functioning political parties, a free press, separation of powers between levels of government (Federal, State and Local), would eventually take their rightful place in the development of a stable democracy in Nigeria. That these institutions still endure is one good thing about our nascent democracy.

Furthermore, Nigeria attained democratic consolidation with the election of President Mohammadu Buhari of the All Progressive Congress (APC) in 2015. The implication of this is that a different political party was able to defeat a sitting president in a free and fair election (Mahmud, 2015). This was the first time such has happened in Nigerian history. Although often ignored, Nigeria has also been blessed with a few die-hard democrats who remain vocal over national issues in defence of the democratic ideal. Examples of such citizens who stand out are Mr. Femi Falana, (SAN) and Professor Itse Sagay, (SAN). Although one may not agree with them all the time, these two individuals exemplify the term "public intellectual" that always stand up to be counted when democratic ideals are threatened. Their activisms contribute to political

socialisation and awareness required for the promotion of strong democracy. Nigerian democracy will have a bright future if more people can join them in the struggle. In addition, the media as well as the social media have come of age. Although the social media can be abused from time to time, there are mechanisms in a democracy for overcoming the negative aspect of the social media through the rule of law. As for the "conventional" media, the one missing link is the lack of "investigative journalism" as practised by the online *Sahara Reporters* and *Premium Times*. Their efforts to get to the roots of the matter contribute to citizen education and awareness as a necessary condition for democracy.

The Bad: Governance Deficit

A major function of government in a democratic society is the enactment of laws by the legislature that are citizen-friendly, and for the executive to implement or translate the laws into action for the benefit of the people. The judiciary mediates whenever there is either a problem of interpretation of laws or when the law is broken in the process. The process is referred to as governance which according to *The Social Science Encyclopedia* is "the process of political management which embraces the normative basis of political authority, and the style in which public affairs are conducted" (Robinson, 1996, p. 595). Other concepts which the Encyclopedia associates with governance include "accountability," by which the governed exercises influence over their governors; "legitimacy," which refers to the right of the state to exercise power over the citizens, and transparency, which is founded on the existence of mechanisms for ensuring public access to decision making.

These ingredients of governance have been missing in Nigerian democracy. Instead of involving the citizens in governance, the process has been dominated by the struggle for power either between the branches of the same government or between and amongst "prominent politicians," as in either between current and former governor, between individual members of the legislature, or in the executive. Citizens are hardly involved or requested to take part in the process. The result of these struggles among and between institutions and personalities has been that the citizens are the losers – the ugly part of our democracy. As the African proverb says, "When two elephants fight, it's the grass that gets hurt." In Nigerian democracy we have more than two elephants fighting all the time resulting not only is the grass getting hurt, but the land also being destroyed.

Watching the political scene, major players also appear confused about their roles in the process. The recent debates concerning Legislative-Executive relations; the budget crisis; corruption charges and counter-charges and the confirmation of President's nominees are cases in point. Without resolving these seemingly easy political processes, the system cannot yield results. Even where the process is so simple, operators seem clueless and confused. Take for example the relationship between the Executive, the Legislature and the ruling party (APC) at the onset of the Buhari Administration. Observing the events, one would not think that the ruling party – the All Progressive Congress (APC) has a majority in the National Assembly (especially the Senate). How could the two arms be at each other to the extent of almost shutting down the government over budget and confirmation of nominees of the President?

These conflicts were interpreted in terms of "party supremacy" or "independence of legislators."

A basic understanding of the process would have saved time needed for governance. Those who claimed the position of "party supremacy" used the wrong term that was suited to politics in the former Soviet Union and Socialist and Communist parties which were supreme and were equivalent to the government. Instead what the proponents would have used was "party loyalty," which the members owe to their party which sponsored them for elections in the first place. Still party loyalty cannot be imposed in a presidential system, but it is expected. Party discipline is more appropriate for the Parliamentary system than in a Presidential system. For those who took the position of absolute freedom of legislators they also missed the point. Politics in a democracy is also referred to as Party Politics for various reasons. Candidates are groomed and sponsored by parties. And since there is no independent candidacy in Nigeria, it means that one could not have been elected unless they belong to a party. For this reason, the party is owed some respect and loyalty. Usually, the party of the President and its members in the Legislature are major stakeholders in the performance of the executive. If the president fails it will be on record that the party failed and these include its members in the legislature. The APC members in the Senate were doing the job of the opposition party to the detriment of their party's success. So the delay caused by the ramblings over the confirmation process by members of the President's party (APC) is unprecedented in a Presidential system. Compare what happened in this case in the United States of America (USA) where even those members of the Congress who opposed President Trump

actually came to support his programs knowing very well that his failure would affect their records also. In the case of Nigeria, such divisions did not exist before the elections so it was unusual that events took that turn. Such oppositional postures are still echoed in the proceedings of the Senate. The Party Leaders in both Houses of the National Assembly should serve as the go-between the Party, the executive and the legislature and are expected to calm the waters before sensitive decisions are taken. The Party Leaders were either ignorant of their roles or were simply ineffective. So at best our practice of democracy puts us in the category of "illiberal democracy" (Zakaria, F. 2003).

The Ugly: Missing Dividends of Democracy

As a result of the poor political practice and governance analysed above, Nigerian citizens have become the victims. They have been denied the "dividends of democracy" which would have emerged from the policy process that was either delayed or ignored and lost in the process. The failure to deliver the dividends of democracy to the vast majority of Nigerians since the inception of the Fourth Republic has been clear. In 1999, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) in its annual Human Development Index (HDI) which measures the level of welfare of citizens in different countries ranked Nigeria 151 out of 174 at the time. That means that citizens in one hundred and fifty countries are better off than citizens of Nigeria. The UNDP also categorises countries into High, Medium and Low Development Index. Nigeria at number 151 falls into the Low Index. At the time a few African countries such as Ghana, Botswana, South Africa and Namibia were placed in the Middle Human Development

Index. Almost two decades later (with the 2016 data currently being the latest available) and after three different administrations and a fourth in mid-term, Nigeria actually moved down further one spot to number 152. The ranking was the subject of an editorial, "Still Poor" of a national daily, *The Nation,* 2017, which analysed the contents of the HDI ranking as follows:

> Out-of-school kids put at 10.5 million; Nigeria among ten countries accounting for the majority of children deprived of access to education; Nigerians have an average of 54.5 years of life expectancy (and even by African standards is one of the lowest); on infant and maternal health Nigeria loses about 2,300 children under five and 145 women of childbearing age, making Nigeria the second largest contribution to this category; still more shocking, preventable or treatable infectious diseases account for more than 70 percent of the estimated one million under-five deaths in Nigeria. The nation's infrastructure is equally pathetic despite being the second "largest economy" in Africa. Roads and railways are at best shambolic, and the power sector can barely generate 5, 000 MW compared with South Africa with low population producing 44, 175 MW (Editorial, 2017, April 24).

Six months later, the same newspaper highlighted a similar report by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) that 65 million Nigerians are illiterate, a figure which according to the paper was actually corrected by the Minister of Education,

Mallam Adamu at between 65 and 75 million ("70m illiterates in Nigeria" (Editorial, 2017, October, 4).

These reports along with the daily outcry of Nigerians for improved services and amenities cannot be brushed aside as propaganda. A similar remark by the wife of the President Aisha Buhari that the State House Clinic was ill-equipped shocked the nation since it was revealed that "in the 2016 budget, the National Assembly allocated 2.8 billion naira out of the 3.8 billion naira proposal sent to it" for medical equipment (Editorial, 2017, October 13).

Finally, and as if to remove all doubt concerning the poor level of delivery of dividends of democracy, the President of the Republic expressed his opinion in an address to some Governors over the non-payment of salaries even after the Federal Government's subvention to the states to solve the problem. He addressed them by asking "How can anyone go to bed and sleep soundly when workers have not been paid their salaries for months? I actually wonder how the workers feed their families, pay their rents and even pay school fees for their children (NAN, 2017). And in another statement, the President remarked openly that "Nigerians are impatient for dividend of democracy" **(**Ogugbuaja & Coffie-Gyamfi, 2017).

The honest remarks by the President cannot be ignored. He seems to be speaking for the millions of Nigerians who have become frustrated with the lack of basic amenities which the governments (federal, state and local) have promised but failed to provide. It should be added that this is not a judgment on the current administration. Provision of amenities like infrastructure, water supply, educational facilities, etc. takes more than couple of years to accomplish. Instead, this is an assessment of eighteen years

of continuous democratisation during which the same promises have been made to Nigerians without ever fulfilling them. As Pippa Norris (1999) observed in her seminal work, citizens worldwide shared widespread aspirations to the ideals of democratic government but there remained a marked gap between evaluations of the ideal and the practice of democracy. This gap remains a reality in Nigeria. The question though is why? Some answers are attempted below along with some suggestions of what can be done to make democracy serve the public interest. Continuing disregard for benefits of democracy can lead to voter apathy and loss of legitimacy for the government both of which are injurious to the democratic project.

Nigerian Democracy in Practice: A Focus on Some Critical Issues and the National Question

There is no better political system than democracy if practiced properly to solve national issues. Dictatorships may appear easier doing so by forcing compliance but the solutions are usually temporary just as the colonial and military regimes forced certain structures that Nigerians are questioning today. By accommodating diverse interests and representation however, resolutions reached become durable even if the process is slow and sometimes uncomfortable. I examine below some issues which Nigerian policy makers have dodged over the years and still refuse to confront through democratic governance.

National Unity

Although the question of national unity has remained with Nigeria since independence, different administrations continue to doge it. Yet, there is abundant evidence that the

citizens *want* national unity. While policy makers call on Nigerians during every religious holidays to pray for unity they have failed to take any decisive legislative action to provide for legal support to promote national unity.

Nigerians in many walks of life seek opportunities outside their traditional homes. We find this in commerce and businesses when we visit the markets in cities and villages. In education, we find students attending universities far away from their homes and doing well. I recently found a student in my class from Kano state (Tanimu) and I was happy to talk to him to find out how he ended up here. From my experiences, multi-culturalism has many advantages. I know that a diverse student body enhances our teaching just as it could promote national unity. I was also pleasantly surprised when during the 2017 Convocation at the Afe Babalola University (ABUAD) Ado Ekiti I opened a page in the program to find that the three top graduating students in Computer Science comprised two from Gombe State and the other from Kwara State. I know this happens in many other universities, but the point is: after graduating, should these and similar students choose to stay in the states where they attended universities and seek employment in the civil service or to seek political offices they would not be allowed to do so because of the requirement of "State of Origin" that is often demanded in employment applications all over the country.

So to begin with and for the purpose of national unity, why can't states and federal agencies scrap the "State of Origin" requirement and replace it with "Place of Residence?" The students who study in a university for four or five years can add those years into the residency requirement if they eventually choose to stay and work

there among the friends they might have met in the university. The same thing goes for business men and women who stay in one part of Nigeria for the required residency law and whose children were probably born in their towns of businesses.

Legislation on how we relate as members of different ethnic, religious or regional groups should be a focus of law makers if they truly want national unity. Nigerians do not refuse to travel to other places unless they fear insecurity and threats to their lives; no Nigerian refuses to get to the market and buy and sell to other Nigerians different from their ethnic groups; Nigerian students do not refuse to seek admission to a university based on ethnic basis. So where is disunity coming from? It is basically a problem of the elite who use it for divide-and-rule tactics and a cover up for the absence of ideological and intellectual bases of politics. If true national unity is desired legislation can be made to accept every Nigerian to stay, work, seek political office and do other things in any part of the country regardless of their ethnic, religious, or regional differences.

Imagine what we can have if a Nigerian born to Hausa parents in Port Harcourt and who has lived there for a certain number of years (as may be stipulated by law) attend the University there, and compete for elections in the State Assembly and wins and represents a constituency there. Or would not it promote unity if an Igbo young man in Zamfara state, or a Yoruba man or woman in Borno State, or a Kanuri in Ogun state represent those areas in the House of Representatives or in the Senate? Imagine how lively the National Assembly sessions will be. Requirements for participation could include number of years of residence in the area and the payment of taxes as a

citizen. Who then is afraid of national unity this way and why? After all, the Nigerian Constitution stipulates Nigerian citizenship and not state or local government citizenship so why cannot the political leaders back it up with "Residence" rather than "State of Origin" requirement? Let Nigeria try this for five or ten years and see if we will have national unity or not. Comparatively, there are members of the Kenyan parliament with British ancestry, and many British parliamentarians with Nigerian ancestry. If that can work why cannot we do so for Nigerians from all parts of the country to work and live and vie for political office anywhere they chose in accordance with the Constitution and new electoral laws? The problem with "disunity" is not about the citizens but the leaders who aspire to be "kingmakers" and godfathers over their protected domains. Nigerian democracy will not progress unless there are changes that shift the process and focus of politics towards citizens.

Issues of national unity as presented can be resolved by a national debate and not only by a selected few who have only self-interest in politics. Unfortunately, many current and past Nigerian leaders have shied away from allowing such debates. When President Obasanjo set up the National Political Reform Conference (NPRC) in 2005, he advised the body to stay away from the so-called "no-go-areas" which include the following:

> The oneness of Nigeria, federalism and federal system of government, presidentialism, multi-religiosity, federal character, popular participation, the fundamental objectives and directive principles of state policy and separation of powers. [However], the conference is free to

> strengthen, update and refine these in their recommendations, nothing should be done to undermine our national integrity and sovereignty or weaken our national collision. These areas constitute the bedrock of our unity, identity and political praxis (Awofeso, 2014, p. 283).

At the inauguration of the Conference, the president stated that, "history has presented us with the opportunity to reassess, refocus, redefine and redesign our political landscape in a direction that would strengthen the structures and bounds of unity, enhance the process of democratic consolidation . . ." (Awofeso, 2014, p. 283), but how could the Conference "reassess" the issues without discussions and deliberations? Past military regimes have done the same but a democratic system should not have made the same mistake. The undemocratic process is now haunting the country in the current agitations for "restructuring", "true federalism", "confederacy," "resource control or allocation, etc. Bob Marley was right when he sang that

> *'Tis he who fight and run away,*
> *Live to fight another day*
> (Bob Marley, Lyrics *the Heathen*)

Shying away from critical issues that we consider unpleasant and likely to be disruptive only reveals our lack of confidence in the system. But we will never be confident unless we test our resolve to be democratic and have citizens express the ideas they have. Ideas do not die but they can be tempered only through expression. Ideas could be dangerous when they are hidden, but when exposed through open and free debate they are less potent since all stakeholders are informed. This is the beauty of democracy.

Restructuring or True Federalism

Federalism is the structure in which there are both division and separation of powers and function between the different arms of government (executive, legislature and the judiciary) and between the levels of government (federal, state and local). These are very clear in the current (1999) Nigerian Constitution. But a constitution is only as good as its operators make it. So who is not making federalism work? It is the same people who complain that there is no "true federalism" (whatever that means) that fail to make federalism operate as it should.

It is shocking to read in newspapers that some state governments donate fleet of buses to Federal agencies (usually hospitals, universities, or even the Nigerian Police and Army) when those same states are struggling to pay the salaries of secondary school teachers or equip rural clinics and hospitals which are functions under their constitutional responsibilities. Recently at a convocation ceremony in a Federal University, I heard the Vice-Chancellor proudly praise the state government for donating acres of land for free, including building a dam for the University. What is this supposed to mean? Is the state richer than the federal government? Why cannot the state save such funds for its obligations under the constitution? Why cannot the state sell the land to the Federal Government which wants to build a university and use the proceeds from the sale to fund state projects? So who is violating the federal principles especially in a democracy? Funding of federal institutions and agencies such as the army and police should be left to the federal government. This is one way of

operating the federal system. The Nigerian federation does not have to be "restructured;" it only has to be operated properly as embodied in our constitution.

Some issues that are tied to restructuring, such as revenue allocation formula and marginalisation can be discussed in the National Assembly and do not require restructuring of the federation. The claim of "marginalisation" is also related to the federal structure of government and party politics. In a federal system, characterised by party politics, any groups' chances of being represented is directly proportional to its membership in the political party. Political parties that win elections usually have a larger proportion of its representation in the Executive branch and the members of groups who are in the opposition parties must wait their turn. But the good thing about a federal structure is that almost every group is represented in the Legislative branch of the national government as well as in the politics of their state executive and assemblies over which the federal government has no control. So when claims of marginalisation are made, it is either out of ignorance of the way the system works, or it is selective misunderstanding of the process. Rational thinking is required at the time of deciding what and where to belong in party politics. Party politics is a risky business and groups should not put all their eggs in one basket. Nigerians who want to eat their cake and still have it must think again next time they venture into party politics.

Constituency Projects and Salaries for Legislators

Another contending issue that should be easy to address in a democracy concerns the "Constituency Projects" being demanded and executed by members of the National

Assembly. In the separation of powers and functions, the legislators make laws and the executive executes projects for citizens. There is nothing simpler about the federal system than this, but the legislators, in Nigeria, sometimes pretend that the provisions are complex. An editorial in a national newspaper recently captured the picture succinctly by stating that as in the United States of America whose constitution we claim to imitate,

> Lawmakers only lobby government agencies to include projects they want for their constituencies in the federal budget. They do not take over the work of the Executive or become emergency contractors to corner budget funds. Nigeria, therefore, should end this brazen fiscal legislative abuse now (Editorial, *The Punch*. September 29, 2017, p. 22).

In addition to usurping the functions of the executive, the implementation of projects by legislators (where they are done at all), often lacks transparency and accountability. There are no oversight mechanisms to know which projects are actually executed and which are not. Part of the explanation is given by the preference for "personal politics" whereby instead of the projects being labelled government projects, they are publicised as personal "gifts" from the legislator. However, legislators do not have to make personal gifts which can easily lead to corruption, but make laws that address the interests and needs of people in their constituencies. Another problem with the constituency projects is that it's the legislator who decides where and how the projects are executed. Whereas the legislator can monitor the executive when the latter executes projects, there is no monitoring when the Legislator "executes" his

or her projects. The choice of where the projects are located is entirely left to the legislator and the projects can be used as a reward for support and punishment for the opponent even though the funds for such projects are public. There can be no fairness and justice in the constituency projects and must be opposed in a democracy.

Alongside the issue of Constituency Projects is the issue of legislators' salaries often labelled as "jumbo salaries." Since the issue was raised in a lecture by Professor Itse Sagay (2010, 2011) and followed up by the then Governor of the Central Bank, Mallam Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, the public has been fascinated with it. The issue is still unresolved but the main question is the refusal of the Legislators to publicly declare their salaries. Even after the press provoked the Freedom of Information (FoI) Act, the figures have not been released. The conclusion one can reach is that the legislators have something to hide. In democracies all over the world such information is open to citizens except in Nigeria. In a democratic dispensation, citizens have the right to know how much those who represent them earn because they are paid from public funds. Legislators like any other public officials are subjected to the principles of accountability and transparency as required by good governance which is a necessary condition for democracy. There should be open and public debate not only to make charges against the legislators, but also to offer them a chance to defend their salaries. If offered the chance and they fail to defend the salaries, they should be forced to forfeit the excess and to receive only what the citizens believe is fair pay for their representatives. It is therefore undemocratic that for over five years, the legislators have dodged the question.

In a recent attempt to get the facts straight a civil society organisation, the Socioeconomic Rights and Accountability Project (SERAP) was frustrated by the Senate which referred the group to get the facts from the National Assembly budget on their website. After doing so, however, SERAP reported that, "The Senate budget on its website is incomplete. The absence of specific details on salaries and allowances of each Senator not only make analysis difficult, it also points to underlying weaknesses in monitoring and transparency mechanisms" (Adewale, 2017). If our democracy is working the way it should, the Judiciary can force the foreclosure of the details as requested by the citizens.

The Fight against Corruption

The discourse on issues that we have been unable to resolve in our democracy will not be complete without mentioning the fight against corruption precisely because democracy is expected to promote good governance through the principles of transparency and accountability. When applied, these principles are expected to check excesses of public office holders. Unfortunately, every administration since the first of the Fourth Republic has failed to control corruption and the fears of the international community since then has held up that Nigeria is a stubborn case to deal with. The TIME magazine reporter who covered the 1999 inauguration of president Obasanjo was almost prophetic when he stated that "A democratic transition gives Nigerians hope for renewal, but *the habits of corruption may prove hard to break*" (my emphasis) (Robinson, 1999, p. 22).

So what makes the "habits of corruption" difficult to break even after eighteen years of democracy? It will take a full research paper to provide answers which is beyond the scope of this lecture. I can only provide a few answers at this juncture. First and from the submission(s) above, the failure is a clear sign that our democracy is not functioning well. Governance deficit and its attendant corruption has continued to haunt Nigeria since independence (Mahmud, 1996). The public is cut off from information and participation in governance. Citizens are denied basic information for something as basic as what legislators earn and, where and who executes constituency projects, and the legislators refuse to volunteer such information. Second, the arms of government are not on the same level in the fight against corruption. Anti-corruption agencies of the Executive are being challenged by the Legislature, and corruption cases are stalled in the courts. All these constitute governance deficit in the system. Third, the Judiciary that should spearhead the fight against corruption is itself alleged to appear nonchalant if not a direct perpetrator. Mr. Femi Falana very recently made the remark that

> If the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA) is committed to the eradication of judicial corruption, it has the capacity to do so. With 120 branches spread across the country, the NBA can police judges, lawyers, and court officials with a view to stamping out corrupt practices (Falana, 2017).

Fourth, there is the personal rule syndrome and cultural baggage explanation whereby a prominent leader's corrupt

practices are ignored if he or she can spend the proceeds on his or her people even if they know that the funds are stolen. And culturally, anyway, the elected official assumes the role of a traditional ruler or personal ruler who cannot be challenged. And, passive citizens take the easy way out by keeping quiet. In the end, as Malcolm X stated, "if you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem." Many individuals, agencies and institutions fail to act as part of the solution to fighting corruption so they are part of the problem. Democracy presents Nigerians the opportunities to fight corruption but we refuse to take the chance.

Explaining the Dismal Record of Achievement in Nigerian Democracy

Cult of Personality

The Merriam Webster dictionary defines a "cult of personality" as "a situation in which a public figure (such as political leader) is deliberately presented to the people of a country as a great person who should be admired and loved" (http://www.merriam-webster.com). In political science the concept is referred to as "personal rule" which according to Jackson and Rosberg "is a distinctive type of political system in which the rivalries and struggles of powerful and wilful men, rather than impersonal institutions, ideologies . . . are fundamental in shaping political life" (1998, p. 17). Among the features of personal rule are uncertainty, suspicion, conspiracy, dependency, rewards and threat, factional politics, clientelism, corruption and succession manoeuvres (pp. 17, 28). Critical observers of the Nigerian political science are constantly

reminded of these traits in our political process. The problem however, is that in relation to democracy, personal rule is "the converse of institutional government since institutions in the great majority of sub-Saharan countries *are present formally as abstract rules* (my emphasis) but not substantively as effective restraints on political behavior" (Jackson & Rosberg, 1998, p. 35). The authors posed a fundamental question then almost twenty years ago that is still relevant in Africa as to why "personal rule and arbitrary rule (have) not been widely condemned *as political misconduct* (my emphasis) in sub-Saharan Africa?" (p. 35). This remains a major challenge to political scientists in Africa and especially in Nigeria where we tend to accept such political misconduct especially in a democracy. This is a fundamental challenge to our profession and its intellectuals. This is the challenge that has been taken up by the likes of Prof. Itse Sagay, (SAN) and Femi Falana, SAN. But are we ready to stand up and be counted?

This analysis of the cult of personality or "personal politics" is illustrated by the banner below posted by the people of Ikole Local Government in Ekiti state in praise of President Goodluck Jonathan and the state Governor, and the then Governor, Mr. Fayemi for the establishment of a Federal University in their area.

The Message on the banner reads:

> *The entire people of Ekiti under the leadership of the People's Governor, Dr. KAYODE FAYEMI hereby express our gratitude to the president, and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Dr. GOODLUCK EBELE JONATHAN, for*

establishing a FEDERAL UNIVERSITY at Ikole Ekiti. We are particularly grateful for allowing our Governor to make the choice of location. We wish the president well as he steers the ship of the nation. IKOLE LOCAL GOVERNMENT.



(Photograph of Banner taken by the author)

The point in this message is the focus on the personalities of the President and the Governor. The fact that the location of the University was a government policy receives no mention. As far as the people of the locality are concerned the university is a personal "gift" from the president through the intervention of the Governor. This is the idea that the politicians want to promote. This is also the thinking behind the controversial "Constituency Projects" which the legislators have hijacked from the Executive branch of the government as discussed earlier.

The process has a long history beginning in the colonial period when the administration had to seek representatives from "prominent families" in their autocratic rule. From then on Nigerian politics has been weighed down by either the "men of timber and calibre," or the "heavy-weights," or the "political godfathers." In this thinking there is no room for "merit." Rather, as Nigerians have come to live with, life and one's chances in life is determined by "Who you know, and NOT what you know." This unprogressive thinking has become a cornerstone of our system. Many people and groups have been disenfranchised which is adverse to democracy.

Part of the problem with cult of personality is tied to our cultural heritage. But cultures are always mixed bags combining the good and the bad. No culture is hundred percent good or hundred percent bad. But human progress has always involved learning and adaptation at which time the bad in cultures are discarded for new and more progressive aspects and relevant borrowings. This thinking is often missing in African approach to politics and socio-economic progress. The attitude can be attributed to intellectual laziness. Traditionally, in many of our cultures, we do mot question the leader (or the chief) because politics is personal. When a policy is questioned, it is regarded as questioning the person from whom the policy emanates. So there is a culture of silence in politics. The Big Man (*oga*) is always right (even when he is wrong). What progressive societies do is for enlightened leadership to initiate a conversation about which cultural patterns to promote and which to discard in the face of learning and progress. Many non-western societies in Asia, Middle East and Latin America, societies have had to re-evaluate their cultures in

comparison to outside influences. Popular discussions are then encouraged and new paths taken where necessary or some old patterns are retained and even strengthened if found to be relevant to new ideas and progress. Without doing so, societies can find themselves confused as we face today in many Nigerian societies. Politically some elected members of government consider themselves as traditional rulers which they are not. They must realise the difference and act as elected representatives in a democracy where their powers are held by the voters to whom they owe accountability in their actions. It is the failure to differentiate these roles that has led to the *moral decadence* witnessed in the body politic.

Little Knowledge of Political Philosophy and Political Theory

Plato in recommending what he referred to as "the philosopher as king," pointed out that the best of rulers must "train for the life of philosophy which will be a major part of a ruler's life" (Grube, 1992, p. 208). Many practitioners of our democracy are ignorant philosophically and theoretically. Politics in a democracy cannot be practised adequately without good a philosophical background. The feud identified earlier between the branches of the federal government at the onset of the current administration was also witnessed in past administrations. The cost of the feud is borne by the citizens as it took away valuable time that could have been used debating democracy and its dividends for citizens. But the overall benefit of learning about politics is to provide overall knowledge about the essence of politics and of democracy in the first place. The founders of American

democracy were mostly intellectuals in the sense that they debated and wrote extensively about politics from their study of earlier political philosophers. The knowledge gained is then employed to answer critical questions concerning the roles of the representatives (elected or selected and nominated), and the expectations of the voters. Answers to the questions help clarify issues such as to why and how certain policies are made. It is evident from the confusion in the branches of government that most practitioners lack such background as a guide to the political process.

Philosophical knowledge is also important because it helps develop ideas and ideologies among practitioners. Being exposed to different political perspectives and theories, allows, practitioners to pounder on different approaches to public policy, and different ideologies as a guide to political alternatives. With this knowledge politicians develop ideologies and when political parties are formed by individuals who share similar ideas then parties will be organised along different ideologies. Debates in the legislature become more ideological than personal attacks. Also members of political parties support their parties knowing that they have a common ideological fight to wage and a common interest to defend. When that is done, the political process becomes more meaningful. Another advantage of academic knowledge of political philosophy that is related to the role of ideologies is that it makes changing political parties more difficult and therefore the political parties are more stable. All of these benefits of political learning are missing in the Nigerian democratic dispensation leading to confusion not only among the practitioners but also among the citizens who do not know

where their representatives stand on issues and ideas. What most voters rely on in the absence of these qualities of democracy are the personalities who as discussed earlier only contribute to the undemocratic approach to politics.

Furthermore, lack of knowledge of philosophy and political theory contributes to the poor state of the opposition in the system. But democracies cannot be sustained without strong opposition. Yet, oppositions are hardly credible when not based on any ideology. Since all politicians of different political parties say the same things and make the same promises the opposition where it exists is only against personalities since the opposition has no ideas different from the incumbent. The opposition cannot also serve the role of checks and balances without ideas. In the end democracy as a system stagnates. And finally, the above lapses in the political process adversely affect citizen participation in politics. Enlightened debates by legislators' increase citizen knowledge of the political process and encourage participation. Also, when political parties are ideologically oriented, debates can serve as political education for citizens who in turn develop more interest in the political process. The absence of these qualities leads to passive citizens and voter apathy and erosion of legitimacy for the political system. All of the above are qualities of democratic process that we ignore in Nigeria and which affect the achievement of democracy.

God, the Politician and Nigerian Democracy

As a political scientist, what I have found to be a major drawback to the practice of democracy in Nigeria is the attitude of the political elite to give religious explanations for the political process and outcome. From the perspective

of political science, all the references to God are untenable as explanations. Political science relies on facts that can be proven by evidence – an approach we refer to as *empiricism*. This is how we test propositions, critique theories and seek to advance knowledge in the field. Because of the prevalence of this attitude I am compelled to focus on the issue and offer some clarifications. I am doing so at the risk of being labelled un-religious, but I know that I am religious.

One recent instance of invoking the name of God in a national debate was attributed to the Vice President of the federation Professor Osinbajo who in a speech during the end of the Muslim festival *Eid-ul-Adha* claimed that "Nigeria is ordained by God" (speech, 26th August, 2017). Portions of this speech are still aired in television adverts and pronouncements. The intension one can guess is to quell the then agitations for restructuring (or breakup of the country by some agitators). The idea is that if the claim is accepted then any religious persons should not oppose what God has ordained. But is this the way to promote our democracy? I do not think so. The President opposed the agitation to break up Nigeria as a matter of being rational. No sane political leader has ever accepted the balkanisation of his empire, kingdom or republic and we cannot expect our president to do so. In addition, there are several reasons to oppose the call for a breakup of the country. It will very likely lead to another civil war. For those who remember the 1967-1970 civil war like this author, it is not something one can support. I had a brother (Sime) lost in the war and still Missing in Action (MIA), another brother (Lafiya) came home in 1968 with one arm and I had to accompany him to a native doctor for treatment for several weeks.

There are perhaps many more Nigerians my age who have similar stories to tell.

Apart from these personal experiences, there are factual advantages to be derived by Nigerians as we are if we can get the system working properly. There is the huge market and the diverse vegetation in which to grow varieties of crops for agricultural sustainability. The advantages are many compared to the self-interest of a few in the agitation for breaking up the federation. These issues and positions can be debated without the involvement of the almighty God which makes it difficult to analyse by a political scientist who has the empirical facts on the creation of Nigeria as a political entity. The facts are that it is the British who created Nigeria. The reasons are known and the process of the creation is clear. God will not be offended if we speak the truth.

The British came with an intention to exploit the natural resources and they were able to do so through superior arms and war tactics. In the process of creating Nigeria, a Caliph (Attahiru, who can be referred to as a man of God) was murdered by the British as he fled Sokoto heading towards Bauchi. In the end, the Caliphate was spilt between the British and the French with the British making sure it retained enough as a counter balance to political forces in the Southern protectorate of Nigeria. Similarly, an indigenous entrepreneur (Jaja of Opobo) was sent into exile for insisting on doing his business, and a king of Lagos (Kosoko), was dethroned and exiled whatever reasons. In addition, Empires like Borgu (this author's traditional home) was split between the British and the French so as to weaken it for easy colonisation. And what remained of the Empire for the British was further balkanised and sub-

divided between Sokoto (now part of Zamfara State), merged with Kontagora and then again with Ilorin (now Kwara State). Many other people suffered similar fates in the hands of the British. God knows these facts. Of course one would think that the Vice President was referring to the universal God and not the gods and priests of Amadiora, Bori and Shango that did not even have a concept of Nigeria and were fast asleep from overdose when the British arrived and killed them.

Nigerian leaders and politicians have all adopted this posture on national issues simply to exploit the populations' religiosity. It has become common during holidays (of which there are too many threatening national productivity), to hear politicians calling on Nigerians to pray for everything, including economic development, national unity, security, etc. These are political issues whose explanations should be left to students of history and political science. The implication of the calls for prayer for political and social processes is to think that God is the answer and not the people we put in positions and pay for by public funds. What we are doing is making excuses for the elite and the citizens are often caught unawares in a trap which Karl Marx referred to as the "opium of the people." But more precisely, how does one pray for Nigeria? If one prays for Nigeria does that include praying for the corrupt politician, the expert kidnapper, the armed robber, the 419ner, etc.? Or, does one start doing the mathematics of whom to include or subtract from the "prayer for Nigeria?" This is the one reason I do not pray for Nigeria. But since I have the individual freedom of religion I can pray for individuals if I know them to be good people. I can pray for President Buhari for example to have better health and for

God to give him the wisdom to lead the country since I personally believe that he is sincere. I can include others as well but only selectively.

The point is that in politics we should approach issues separately from religion in order to advance knowledge in the field and of the political system. This does not stop us from praying individually for the elites so God can make them more honest in the discharge of their duties if we believe that will work. Democratic practice is effective where people's religiosity is a private issue and a human right. But the moment we mix the political and the religious we are inviting problems (Mahmud, 2013).

What must be done?

Social Revolution or Revolution from Above

Looking at where we are as a democracy after eighteen years I would (as a young Marxist scholar) have advocated for a social revolution as a solution to our condition whereby our democracy seems to be disabled. I could have made the case also that both the subjective and objective conditions are ripe for a revolution. But with age and further scholarship I know better. In graduate school I was fascinated with Marxist theory and I took all the courses taught by my mentor, Professor Alan Gilbert including "Marx and Marxism" and "Comparative Revolutions." In addition to the core texts of three volumes of *Capital*, *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Napoleon Bonaparte*, Alan Gilbert's *Marx's Politics* (1981), and his seminal work, *Democratic Individuality*, Theda Skocpol's *States and Social Revolutions* (1979); and Barrington Moore's *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant*

in the Making of the Modern World (1966). In those courses, I learned both the pains and gains of revolutions, especially the moral cost of lives and properties in the process, and the human rights implications of collateral damage that can be caused. Revolutions should be avoided.

However, social revolutions are not the only type the world has witnessed. The other is referred to as "Revolution from Above" (Trimberger, 1978). These are revolutions led by factions of those who hold power and control state apparatus. Among the ideas for revolution from above include the commitment of "class suicide" advocated by the African (Guinea Bissau) revolutionary, Amical Cabral. He advocated that the ruling elite forgo their luxuries in sacrifice for the nation. But are our own leaders ready to do so? From the record that is doubtful. But in the non-feasibility of any of the above types of revolutions what should be done? Here are a few suggestions.

Progressive policies for citizen welfare

As an alternative to any version of revolution, the government can address citizens' dissatisfaction by enacting citizen-friendly policies. So many lives are lost daily because of the absence of progressive policies focused on the welfare of the citizens. Take the picture below for example. The pieces of metal welded together and called a vehicle is a death trap that is allowed to ply the public roads. It could easily swerve off the road and kill bystanders. Yet it is allowed to move freely passing roadblocks mounted by the Federal Road Service Corps (FRSC), and members of the Vehicle Inspection Office (VIO). It is on record that most of the preventable deaths in Nigeria occur through road accidents. Imagine the number

of lives that can be saved if there are laws preventing "vehicles" like this one (picture overleaf) off the roads and enforced by the executive through the provision of well-equipped police.



Junk car on a major road In Nigeria
(Source: Picture taken by the author)

Other similar policies that can save lives include those on fake and expired drugs, unqualified (or quack) doctors administering drugs on unsuspecting citizens, (that caused the death of a Senator, Adeleke, Osun State), insurance coverage for citizens, building codes and their enforcement, and industrialisation – which if successful can serve as sources of employment alleviating governments at all levels as the main sources of employment.

In addition the governments should concentrate on few key policy areas and implement them. The most important are infrastructure, security and education. These are major

functions of all types of governments.

Since governments cannot provide everything to all citizens, the minimum they can do is to provide the above goods that will enable citizens to take care of themselves. Infrastructure includes the provision of roads, communication, water and electricity. Security refers to security of the person and property. Both go a long way to promoting individual and group welfare. The right to education is upheld by all governments. Both regular and adult education has been found to be a key component of people's welfare. Being literate helps in other ways, like being able to read instructions on a bottle of fertilizer by farmers, or a nursing mother to read and understand how to use medication, etc. provision of water as an essential human need also enhances welfare as well as provision of electricity which is beneficial to small, medium and large entrepreneurs. The benefits of each of the above policies are symbiotic and collectively contribute to human welfare. Democracies are expected to facilitate such policies if the political will is there. And in a country where everyone agrees that there is an abundance of human, material and natural resources, we can only stop ourselves from achieving the full benefits of democracy.

A Role for Political Science and Intellectuals

Political science and intellectuals can help promote democracy. I will briefly highlight a few areas where their contribution will be important. Academic disciplines must be dynamic. There is a need for new thinking on public affairs. Nigeria seems to be ripe as a political laboratory for the study of democracy in Africa. The late British historian Basil Davidson wrote to the effect that Africa has wisdom

in the past but it is not reflected in its modern practice of government. In his words,

> Africa can look again at its history and evaluate its positive as well as its negative record. They must examine its civic achievements. They must reject the sense of inferiority imposed by colonialists' dispossessions. This might not be easy but it has to be done (Davidson, 1994, p. 278).

This is a challenge to scholars in African history and politics. Although at Kwara State University (KWASU), we offer a course on African Political Thought we can narrow it down to concentrate on the thoughts of our founding fathers in Nigeria like the thought of Sheikh Uthman dan Fodio (which are written). Materials could be sought on the politics and values in Oyo Kingdom, Kanem Borno and in comparison to other ancient kingdoms of Africa such as Ghana, Mali and Songhai.

Closer home to Political Science and History Departments in Nigerian universities, Departments can propose courses such as *The Nigerian Civil* War to promote national unity. Although the Igbos suffered disproportionately, the civil war should be thought of as a Nigerian political experience. As mentioned earlier many other Nigerians also have emotional attachments to the war but making it the subject of academic concern will be beneficial for the future of Nigerian politics and democracy. It will make the war a national issue rather than an Igbo issue to always remember alone. Comparatively, the American Civil War (between the North and South) two hundred years ago is still been taught as a University course

in that country. If the American Civil War can still have new things to teach after two centuries, there must be things we can learn from the Nigerian civil war as a University course in the social sciences or humanities. There are still participants to consult and a lot of books and memoirs have been written that could be used as reading materials. Lessons from the course could be a catalyst for national unity among the future generations of Nigerians.

All political science departments should teach courses in political philosophy as provided for in the NUC Basic Minimum requirements. At KWASU this has been a major course (POL 308: Contemporary Political Philosophy). The course will be a major resource for future Nigerian politicians. The Department can also develop refresher courses on political philosophy for serving politicians and other policy makers.

Finally, the professional body representing political science, the Nigerian Political Science Association (NPSA) must be more visible in the Nigerian political scene. The Communiqué of every annual conference must be made available to the Nigerian public though publication in national dailies and on its website. Also, its elected officials should respond or make comments on major political issues developing in the country either through the media or on its website. The American Political Science Association (the oldest in this category) often ensure after every annual conference and the secretariat follows up with major positions on national issues on its website: http://www.apsanet.org. The site can be accessed for samples of public statements on national issues.

Conclusion: Evaluating Democracy in Nigeria

The assessment provided in this inaugural lecture is the Nigerian experiment with democracy. As a result, it is not the evaluation of a single administration but the four we have had since 1999 (Obasanjo, Yar'Adua, Jonathan and Buhari). It is also not about a single arm of the government, but the three major arms of the executive, legislature and the judiciary. Finally since I am examining the entire political system, the assessment is not only about the government performance but also includes the political environment (the attitudes and behaviours of people to politics). So the lecture takes a system's approach whereby all the component parts of the political system are the focus. But since the government is a core institution of the political system it gets a larger share of the discourse.

The major conclusion reached is that the citizens of Nigeria have held on to their support for a democratic system. Nigeria also continues to maintain its democratic institutions which we can be utilised to improve on the performance of our democracy. However, the ways we practice our brand of democracy leave much to be desired which explains the poor results in terms of benefits for the teaming populations. Democracy, if practiced properly, can help us solve a lot of problems but we tend to underachieve because of backward ideas. Citizens need to be considered as the prime movers and shakers of democracy. This calls for more citizen activism as well. Democracy is like a two-sided coin – the governors and the governed. Citizens have left too much to the governing elite and have not performed their part of responsibilities required in a democracy. As a result of the improper practice the results (democratic dividends) have been poor.

Various ways we can improve have been suggested, and these call for better attention by the government to the desires and needs of citizens. Nigerians need to work harder on democracy. Both leaders (politicians) and the led (citizens) have a lot of work to do. We must heed the advice from one of the most prominent scholars of democratisation, Professor Larry Diamond who stated that

> If democratic leaders govern well – with restraint, accommodation, accountability, respect for individual and group rights, and some real commitment to the public good – African politics will remain steadfast in their commitment to democracy" (cited in Lewis, p. 1998, p. 272).

The advice is attainable if there is the political will of the governing elite in Nigeria.

Furthermore, there is need to be realistic concerning our achievements and shortcomings as a nation. Nigerians are still in self-denial and full of self-praise as in the advert on this luxury bus which claims that Nigerians are Good People and that the country is a Great Nation. Nothing is close to those claims. If we do not accept that we have problems we will not be able to solve them. There are no great nations where millions of citizens continue to surfer for decades despite the abundance of resources as we experience in Nigeria in the last two decades of continuous democracy. We are not great yet, and we need to think again. There are many political problems that democracy can solve as examined in one of the sections of the lecture, but citizens are denied the opportunity to discuss them in attempts to find collective solutions that will be sustainable.



Finally as a teacher it will be inappropriate to end this lecture without assigning a grade to Nigeria's experience as a democracy in the last eighteen years. In doing so I found the narrative to the British university grading system as a useful guide. I am forced to move down from First, Second Upper and Lower degrees and to consider somewhere between the 3rd Class (45-49%) interpreted to mean that we (the students) should "start thinking about where … [we] went wrong. Not the worst mark, but perhaps some tutoring might help next time" (Riches, 2017), and Ordinary Degree (40-44%) which, when interpreted, means that the student is not where he/she wants to be; "extra help is almost essential to pass the course well. Or maybe cut down on the time spent in the pub..." (Riches, 2017). According to the grading system, this is a bad result, but still better than the last result which is Fail. The final grade from our democratic experiment so far is hanging between the 3rd class and the Ordinary pass degree.

You make the call. But let's Thank God that we have not failed. It is a close call but still better. If we failed, the military would have been back again or there would have been large scale breakdown of law and order, and I may not have been here expressing my opinion and academic freedom as I am doing now.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I hope that I have succeeded in convincing you that democracy in Nigeria as at a crossroads. The conclusion is aptly captured by the message in the cartoon below, C'MON, I THINK WE CAN DO BETTER GUYS."



(Source: Jibrin, 2017, October 2, p. 51)

Thank you for coming and for listening.

Acknowledgements

My dear Vice-Chancellor, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to first of all thank the Almighty Allah for giving me life and good health that has allowed me to complete this lecture and be able to deliver it this afternoon. So much has happened to me in the last few months which if not for the blessings of Allah I could not have completed

this assignment. As I dedicate this lecture to my late wife, Mrs. Mero Mariam Mahmud (died 24 August, 2017), it's only through the strength given to me by Allah that I am able to complete this lecture and other assignments in the period since then. I will be forever grateful to Allah for this.

I spend the major part of my adult life and academic profession in the United States of America (USA) and I therefore owe a lot of my academic career development to my professors in the Graduate school for developing my intellectual capacities. I am ever grateful to my mentor and friend, Professors Alan Gilbert Korbel School of International Studies, at the University of Denver. I learned to enjoy political activism as a civic responsibility to complement my theoretical training.

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