

**“ON THE CONCEPT OF A NEW
NIGERIANNA”**

BY

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PROTOCOLS

I am in deed gratified to be given an opportunity to appear in this citadel of ancient civilization to share some provocative thoughts with this distinguished but highly discerning audience. Our distinguished Vice Chancellor is an old young colleague of many years, a dedicated and committed scholar who epitomises scholarship in the classical and Greek sense of ideas and disputation of ideas designed to ensure the betterment of society. Right now, once again, we are collaborating as members of the Presidential Electoral Reform Committee, an enterprise engaged in the search for the ways and means to make sure that the sanctity of the vote and the dignity of the voter are enshrined in our political culture.

Right from the beginning, let me make it clear that I stand before you, today, not as a member of the Presidential Electoral Committee, not as a former Hon. Minister of External Affairs, but as Professor A. Bolaji Akinyemi, a social and political analyst.

I thank the Vice Chancellor and the University Governing Council for this invitation. Mr. Vice Chancellor, I know that it could not have been easy securing an invitation for me to come and deliver this Convocation lecture. After all, I am not regarded as a Comrade and this is a university where to be called a comrade is a badge of intellectual honour. I suppose you will accept me as an acting Comrade.

My wife thinks my accepting this invitation is a case of a lamb being sent among lions. I have reminded her that I have read somewhere something about lions and lambs lying side by side and she has retorted by hoping that both the lions and the lamb are not only reading from the same book but reading the same chapter and verse.

Firstly, for the sake of the younger generation in our audience, let me by way of a profile of myself, profile the Nigerian Heads of States and Presidents whom I have served under. I have served four Heads of State/Presidents. I have come across those who had a public persona of fierceness and a volcanic temper and yet in private were charming and pleasant with a diplomatic disposition. Even when dealing with officers junior to them, whom they could easily overrule, I found them on occasions being tactful. Some of them were so straight forward that their words were their words and in their dealings with me, they never went back on their words.

Then there were those who took great delight in humiliating publicly those who worked for them. They had the great gift of shutting down yesterday as if yesterday never existed. It was not a case of different personalities surfacing at different times but a case of different persona being used and discarded as if life were a continuous case of tabula rasa.

Then there were those who were very civilized, gentle and immensely polite. They were good listeners, men of few words, they possessed a great insight into issues which they kept to themselves most of the times. They showed enormous respect for scholarship and scholars. If Nigeria were a monarchy, they would have been great and wise kings.

Then there were those who were so complex that they are not easy to categorise. The words that come flooding through my mind were those that William Shakespeare put in the mouth of Marcus

Anthonious (known in English as Mark Anthony) in his famous tribute to Brutus “the elements so mixed in him that nature might stand up and say to all the world, “This was a man”. Let our philosophers deconstruct that.

Of course, I have lived under two colonial Governors-General, One Nigerian Governor-General, one Nigerian Prime Minister and four other Heads of State/Presidents. But those I have character-analysed were those that I served under and who for good or evil moulded my own perception of what it is to serve, and moulded my perception on what the Nigerian project is all about.

A convocation lecture by definition is not a university lecture or a university inaugural lecture but a special interface between the university community and the larger society (what at Oxford University would be called town and town) where great issues of societal concern would be painted on that great canvass of intellectual curiosity in such a way as to stimulate concern, provoke thought and perhaps launch visions towards propelling society towards greater heights. On such a mission am I embarked today. Anyone who regards the university mind, whether collectively or individually, as a tabula rasa, does so at his own peril. The university mind is an inquisitive one, always seeking, always philosophizing, always dreaming, always moulding and always creating. It is this amalgam of creativity on the university intellectual mind that a convocation lecture seeks not so much as to capture but on which to plant a seed or two in the hope of a great social harvest.

In this lecture, I intend to draw attention to data which will lead to another perspective on the debate about the Nigerian project. It should be conceded from the beginning that the debate about the Nigerian project is on the front burner and it will not be resolved by one Convocation lecture.

Let me state the parameters of the debate on the Nigerian project as I understand it:

1. Nigerian is an artificial creation.
2. Nigeria was created by a foreign power without consultation with the constituent elements making up Nigeria.
3. The operation of the Nigerian project has been characterised by mala fides (bad faith).

Let us now submit each leg of this debate to analysis ad seriatim. When I was teaching abroad, where anything and everything foreign was regarded with esoteric fascination, I adopted an analytical approach which I called a comparative interpretative analysis which was simply to compare the facts of what is accepted as ordinary to the facts of what is regarded as unique and extraordinary. For example, my foreign students used to parrot the fact that African boundaries were artificial as being the cause of African political instability. I would let them exhaust themselves and then calmly point out to them that apart from island nations such as Australia, New Zealand and Madagascar, all the boundaries in the world were artificial, having being brought about by wars and peace treaties and negotiations. Believe me, that injection from me usually brought them quickly back to earth from regarding the African political landscape as a zoo with exotic species. I do intend to adopt the same approach in this lecture.

The first issue is that Nigeria is an artificial creation. In other words that before 1915, there was nothing called Nigeria. And that Nigeria was formed from a collection of different nationalities. I concede the veracity of these statements. But my point of departure is this: Is the Nigerian situation unique? The history of the world is the history of the rise and fall of city-states, nation-states, kingdoms, federations and empires. Very very few states are uni-cultural or uni-nationality. After Africa, Europe is the next oldest continent and yet, how many of us realize that the European countries which we take for granted are in fact an amalgam of

nationalities that were at one time or the other independent. And I am not referring to the more obvious cases like Yugoslavia and Chekoslovakia which were formed after WWI and WWII. I am referring to the more established states like Spain, Portugal, France, England and Italy. 2000 years ago, all these states were diversified atomistic units. If I could use England as an example: As late as the 7th century, England was made up of the independent states of Cornwall, Kent, Wessex, Essex, Sussex, Mercia, Northumbria and East Anglia. Further amalgamations and split-ups proceeded apace before we got to a situation where we had a British nation. France and Spain are troubled and bedeviled by the Basque factor, while Italy of today is not the Italy of 2000 years ago.

To that extent, Nigeria is not the only nation-state to be bedeviled by the artificiality of its creation. It is a characteristic which it shares with probably over ninety (90%) percent of the nation-states of the world.

The second leg of the argument over the Nigerian project was that Nigeria was brought into existence by the British authorities without consultation with pre-colonial nations that were living in what is now called Nigeria. If we were to go back to the era of the Holy Roman Empire, we can trace the roots of the modern states of Europe to the Roman Army as it marched from Rome, all across Europe to what is now the United Kingdom. In North and South America, the roots of all the states could be traced to the colonial activities of France, Spain, Portugal and the United Kingdom. Asia is no exception to the foundation of the modern states being traceable to the activities of the colonial authorities of initially Asia and later Europe. To complete the circle, of course, we also have to accept that Africa, from Egypt to the Cape, had been shaped by external imperial and colonial forces.

Once again, the question arises, if what had happened to Nigeria is part of a world wide trend, a global phenomenon, should that factor be turned into a cause celebre of the debate on the Nigerian project? Does that not amount to King Canute trying to hold back the waves with his bare hands? That Nigeria was created by the British without consultation with Nigerians is not unique. Going back to Biblical times and the times of the Koran, a comparison of the map, then and now, and a study of the forces responsible for the changes will reinforce my point that the creation of Nigeria was not a case of exceptionalism but a case of ordinariness in the global scheme of things.

I also accept that on every continent in the world, there are failed or near-failed states arising from a mixture of reasons but primarily from a defect in the structural foundations of these states. Such states that immediately come to mind are pre-partition India, pre-Bangladesh Pakistan, Sri-Lanka, Pre-partition Ethiopia, Somalia, pre-partition Czechoslovakia, pre-partition Yugoslavia and perhaps a dozen or so of other states.

I accept that the failed state syndrome is a difficult analytical tool because it is periodic and time bound. There is no state in the world that at one time or another would not have been regarded as a failed state. For example, the states of the Biblical or Prophet Mohammed era are not the same states that one has now. Another example is that the states of the Holy Roman Empire in Europe are not fully replicated in modern day Europe. At one time, during the war of the Roses, England would have been regarded as a failed state. Following the revolution in France in 1789 and the disintegration of royal authority, France would have been regarded as a failed state, especially during the Jacobin Republic of 1792-94. I am also sure that if the 1861-1865 civil war in the United States had taken place now, the United States would have been regarded as a failed state as long as the war lasted. In using the concept of failed states as an analytical tool, it is essential to bear it

in mind that some of yesterday failed states are today's successful states.

There are 53 states in Africa, out of which only one (Somalia) can of now be classified as a failed state. At an average of three boundary-frontiers per state, Africa has 159 potential boundary-frontier wars and yet Africa has witnessed less than 10 boundary wars. Out of fifty-three potential civil wars in Africa, Africa has actually witnessed 17 civil wars with Congo (Zaire) alone contributing about four. (I admit that these figures are not exact because there is no agreement among analysts as to whether to categorise insurrections and low intensity civil strife as civil wars. For example, there is a study that claims that Africa has had 40 civil wars, while I would only go as far 17. To illustrate the complexity, I will not classify what happened in Chad four weeks ago as a civil war, yet I have seen references to it as a civil war.)

The point I am seeking to make is clear, and it is not obviated by the complexity of the classification. Within the global system, states with artificial boundaries, and which are cobbled together by external factors and agents are the reality not the exception while the failed state syndrome is the exception and not the fact on the ground.

Before moving on to the third leg of the debate, there is a sub-plot that needs to be explored. Having conceded that Nigeria was an artificial creation cobbled together by the British authorities, a fate she shares with the majority of states in the world, what was the response from Nigerians when they had a chance to respond in a structured way. We know that different groups in Nigeria resisted the imposition of colonial rule. There were Emirs and Sultans in the North who died in battles fighting British forces. There were Obas and Traditional Rulers in the South who were deposed and exiled for resisting the imposition of British colonial rule. But, after the successful imposition of the rule, one index which we

could use to measure the acceptability or otherwise of the new contraption is the voting pattern of Nigerians in terms of the role of ethnicity in the choice of candidates and the fate of those candidates in elections.

The first set of elections held after the imposition of colonial rule was in 1923, and it was to the Legislative Council based in Lagos. Among its elected members, representing Lagos was Mr. Ernest Ikoli, an Ijaw from what we would now call the South-South. When later, under the Richards Constitution, a Central Legislature was set up in 1947, one of its members representing Lagos was Mr. (as he was then) Nnamdi Azikiwe from what we would now call the South-East zone.

A political crisis in Lagos in the 1930s is even more illustrative of the case that I am making. You would recall in the early 1930s that there was a crisis within the Nigerian Youth Movement over which candidate to sponsor for the election into the Legislative Council. One candidate was Mr. Ernest Ikoli, an Ijaw from the South-South and he was supported by Obafemi Awolowo from the South-West, while Samuel Akinsanya, from the South-West, the other candidate, was supported by Nnamdi Azikiwe from the South-East. Even though I have used modern political geographical terminology, the point cannot be lost on anyone that I am referring to an election where sponsorship and political support were not ethnic sensitive and ethnic determined. One would have expected Awolowo to have supported Akinsanya as both of them were not only from the same ethnic stock but were also both Ijebu. Equally, one would have expected Azikiwe from the East to have supported Ikoli also from the East, using the pre-zone political terminology. But the alliances were not ethnic disposed and Ikoli went ahead to defeat Akinsanya in Lagos. It just sounds like a millennium ago.

Another illustration of the ethnic-blind political behaviour was the election of Alhaji Umaru Altine in 1956 as the Mayor of Enugu, and he was reelected in 1958.

What both of these episodes – the Ikoli and Altine episodes illustrate is that in spite of the fact Nigeria was set up by the British colonial authority without consultation with the constituent elements, subsequent electoral behaviour by Nigerians legitimized the exercise.

This act of legitimization is further strengthened by further analysis of electoral behaviour in several elections both during the pre and post independence periods. In the Western Region, the NCNC identified with the Ibo-dominated Eastern Nigeria won the 1954 Federal elections winning 23 out of 42 seats. Even in the 1956 Western Regional elections, the NCNC won 45.3% of the votes cast, while the Action Group, the party associated with the West won by 48.3%. These figures are hardly a ringing endorsement of the view that Nigerian politics were always ethnically dominated.

The 1959 Federal elections, the last conducted by the British colonial authority before departing the country produced very interesting results, once one went beyond the first past the post results. Ken Post, after his analysis had concluded that “from 1951 onwards...nearly all Ibos supported the NCNC, most Yorubas backed Action Group, all but a small minority of the Hausa and Fulani were associated, if indirectly, with the NPC” (p.135). This conclusion was absolutely untrue. In a 1976 study which I conducted, I was able to show that in about one third of the constituencies in the Northern region, between 25% to 50% of the electorate voted against the NPC, while in about 20% of the constituencies, the NPC lost outright. In essence, 39% of the electorate in the North voted against the NPC. In the West, the Action Group could only command majority support in 55% of the

constituencies. In the Eastern Region, the NCNC won only 64.6% of the votes cast. You are invited to come to the conclusion that at the peak of the period that analysts regarded as the era of ethnic politics, we still had close to 30% of the voters at the worst of times, turning against ethnic jingoism.

In my own opinion, the only two post independence elections were free, fair and credible and these were the 1979 and 1993 elections. In the 1979 Presidential elections, we had results that still defied a neat ethnic box. While Alhaji Shehu Sagari from Sokoto showed a national spread, winning in Rivers, Cross River, Benue, in addition to his natural base, Chief Awolowo's UPN spread outside the core Yoruba base to win in Bendel, while Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe won in Plateau, outside his natural base. That Kano, Kaduna, Borno and Gongola States voted against the NPN further demystified the concept of a monolithic ethnic driven political machine.

The 1990-1993 transition which culminated in the June 12, 1993 Presidential elections will in my view come to be regarded as the golden age of post-independence nationalistic-oriented politics. Lest you have forgotten, there were only two political parties, the National Republican Convention (the NRC) which was supposed to be a reincarnation of the Northern Peoples Congress and the Social Democratic Party which was supposed to be the reincarnation of the Action Group/NCNC. The performance of these two parties showed support that cut across the country. The NRC, regarded as a Northern party lost key states such as Kano, Kaduna, Borno, Jigawa and Taraba but won key states in the South such as Rivers, Enugu, Abia and Imo while the SDP regarded as a Southern party lost key states in the South such as Rivers, Enugu, Abia and Imo but won such key states in the North such as Kano, Kaduna, Borno, Jigawa and Taraba.

I know that the June 1993 Presidential elections result became mired in controversy and instead of becoming a unifier to be

celebrated, it became a divider to be deplored. My analysis is not based on the result of the Presidential elections alone. It is based on the results of all the elections held during that long transition. For example, the 1991 Gubernatorial elections had the NRC winning in Abia, Akwa-Ibom, Cross River, Enugu, Imo and Rivers – all outside its expected catchment area while the SDP won in Borno, Jigawa, Taraba and Yobe –all outside its own catchment area. Another illustration is the pattern of the results into the Senate in 1992. The SDP won in Jigawa, Kano, Katsina, Benue, Borno, Kwara, Plateau, Taraba and Yobe, while the NRC won in the Southern states of Abia, Enugu, Imo, Akwa Ibom, Cross Rivers and Rivers.

You will note that there was a consistency to these election results. None of it could be regarded as a fluke. The point which I am making has nothing to do with who won what. My point is to show the breakdown of ethnic jingoism and its replacement by a nationalistic fervour. Secondly, these election results did not constitute a flash in the pan. If you have followed the trend of this lecture from the Lagos elections of the 1930s to the elections of the 1990s, you will perceive the trend from a determined sizable minority immune to ethnic politics transforming in the 1990s to a majority transforming the political landscape into a celebration of unity.

If you do not regard these facts as conclusive of my submission that Nigerians have accepted the Nigerian project, then I am not sure of what facts will persuade you. But of one thing I am sure that the voting behaviour of Nigerians in the 1990-1993 transition programme show a rejection of ethno-politics and an embrace of nationalistic politics. It was nothing short of a revolution.

The critical question is: who are the godfathers of this revolution? The simple answer is you, the voters. When the elections were not rigged; when ballot boxes were not hijacked; when voters were not

killed; when thugs and their godfathers were not the kings of the polling booth; when politics was not a do or die affair, Nigerians showed that Nigeria was more than a sum of its atomistic components.

My next question to you then is why did you allow this revolution to be hijacked? Why did you allow it to be rubbished? Why did you, the creator of this revolution, allow an election which sought to bury ethnicism, to be buried in the name of ethnicism?

Speaking only a few days ago, in Enugu, the Sultan of Sokoto and the President-General of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs, Alhaji Mohammed Sa'ad Abubakar III "accused Nigerian politicians of employing ethnicity and religion to divide the country...(and that) it was disheartening for politicians to try to divide the country just for selfish purposes." He concluded "Testimony shows that those who don't wish Nigeria well, politicians who don't wish Nigeria well,...are the ones that divide this country using our people and using religion".(THISDAY, February 17, 2008)

If you who were the creators of this new nationalism had fought to preserve and protect that which you created, the politics of Nigeria might have not taken a turn for the worse. It is a lesson worth learning.

Have you ever wondered why elections are rigged in Nigeria? Politicians in campaigns resort to the usual low tactics of tribalism and exploitation of religious differences to further their own political fortunes. If they thought that their fake and disruptive messages would deliver the goods, then why would they resort to rigging the elections? The logical conclusion to be drawn is that the voters are basically impervious to these disruptive messages

and therefore could not be trusted to have their votes ethnically and religiously determined. Hence the recourse to election rigging and other malpractices. This time, the fault is not in the ordinary Nigerians, it is in the political elite.

The final argument put forward by those calling the Nigeria project into question, is that our history since the independence in 1960 has been driven by bad faith. I will not go into any great details except to draw your attention to the following facts: 1963, one of the three pillars of independence was jailed; in January 1966, there was the military coup detat which claimed among its victims another pillar of independence; in July 1966, another military coup, followed by a civil war that lasted until January 1970; in 1975, there was another military coup; in 1983, there was another military coup; in 1985, there was another military coup; and in 1993, there was another military coup.

It is very instructive that every single nationality that turned up before the Oputa panel, be it Arewa Consultative Forum, the Afenifere, the Ohaneze, the Middle Belt Forum, the Ogoni, the South-South delegation—all complained of marginalization. The rise of ethnic militias all over the country attests to the fact that all is not well, and to use that hackneyed phrase “things are falling apart”. Nigeria even has the dubious distinction of having a book written about it by Karl Maier titled “**This House has fallen : Midnight in Nigeria**”.

If I were to go into details of each of these episodes, this would no longer be a lecture, it would be a book. Those who are interested in the details should read the report of the Oputa panel.

Today, I am issuing a challenge to you. The choice is yours. It is still not too late to seek to recapture the essence of the 1990s electoral revolution. The roadmap to embrace is as follows:

THE WAY FORWARD

- **There must be a return to the Ernest Ikoli- Umaru Altine electoral era that culminated in the 1990s electoral revolution. This calls for a de-ethnicisation of Nigerian politics. Immediate administrative steps should include but not be limited to each state reserving 10% of its appointed political offices to non-indigenes. This is less than the 30% reservation quota which the women of Nigeria are asking for. I recognize and applaud the tentative steps taken by some Governors in the past dispensation who appointed some non-indigenes as Special Assistants and Special Advisers. Eventually, a constitutional amendment should be considered to reserve 10% of the membership of each state House of Assembly for non-indigenes.**
- **Arising from the advocacy for a de-ethnicisation of Nigerian politics, there is a need for a constitutional amendment to allow for a two-party system. As I pointed out in the part of this lecture dealing with the 1990-1993 elections, it should be regarded as a national legacy that we, as Nigerians, for the first time had a party system that insulated us from the tendency to opt for primordial allegiances. In the debate that took place in NADECO circles during the years of exile, I found myself in a minority arguing for a two-party system. I am not sure to what extent even now this view is acceptable. But I am comforted by the fact that former prominent office holders are increasingly speaking out calling for a two-party system. Admittedly, their own concerns are focused on the need to avoid Nigeria becoming a one-party state, while my own concern is the need to abolish ethnic centred politics. A situation like the present when we can use coded language to identify which party is**

identified with which ethnic group should not be acceptable.

- **There should be a conscious effort at bridge-building by critical and credible holders of sensitive positions. For the avoidance of doubt, I am not referring to such dubious exercises as meaningless chieftaincy titles and honorary degrees conferred on political office holders. Without meaning to personalize the issue, I should draw attention to the positive activities of the present Sultan of Sokoto, His Eminence, Alhaj Mohammed Saad Abubakar III. In the public advertisement congratulating the Sultan on the conferment of a honorary degree on him, Oba Aremu Akiolu, the Oba of Lagos, wrote” this award is a golden handshake across the Niger, a gesture to build and celebrate the co-existence of our peoples” (The Nation, February 8, 2008). His Eminence has spoken out forcefully on critical issues both at home and abroad. His visit to Bauchi in the company of eminent Christian leaders to douse the tension after religious riots is an effort worthy of commendation and emulation. At the end of his speech at the United States Institute of Peace in Washington D. C. on November 13, 2007, His Eminence said “I wish to avail myself of this opportunity to assure you all of the determination of the religious leadership in Nigeria to make Muslim-Christian conflicts a thing of the past. There are of course great challenges ahead but there is also hope; the hope of greater understanding and co-operation, and the promise of establishing a healthy foundation for Muslim-Christian relations in Nigeria.” I must also make positive reference to the pronouncements of the new Chairman of the Arewa Consultative Forum, Major-General I. B. M. Haruna (rtd), a very refined officer and a learned gentleman. Unlike in the past when it was the pastime to make**

derogatory remarks about Afenifere, Ohaneze and others, General Haruna had expressed a willingness to dialogue with these organizations. Of course, I am not surprised about the refined broadmindedness of the new Arewa Chairman. He was my Chairman as the Chairman of the Governing Council of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs when I was the Director-General there. I hope that he will get a positive response from the leadership of these other organizations. The point which I am making is that there are leaders and institutions already in place who and which should face the grave issues of the day, and who should be honoured for their activities.

- Nigeria being a Federation is a recognition that there is a diversity but that that diversity could still be accommodated within a political entity. There is no disagreement now that our founding fathers, the late Sardauna of Sokoto, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Mallam Aminu Kano, The Rt. Hon. Gentleman, the only Prime Minister Nigeria has ever had, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and several others were men of vision, dedicated to their peoples and motivated by the higher ideals of service to the public good. After several years and rounds of negotiations, they bequeathed to us, Nigerians, a well balanced and carefully crafted constitution that enshrined not the best federalism possible, but the best negotiated federalism they could agree upon at that time. Again, there is no dispute about the fact that there is a ranging debate in the country about the state of our Federalism. There are some administrative measures that could be taken which though purely symbolic could go a long way in taking out some of the heat from the debate. Some of these measures include but are not limited to the following:

- 1. Each state should be allowed to fly own its own flag just as there are organizations like the armed forces, NNPC, Customs, Immigration etc which have their own flags.**
- 2. Each state should be allowed to have its own logo or coat of arms, just as even governmental parastatals have their own individual logos.**
- 3. Each state should be allowed to have its own rousing song or anthem in addition to the national anthem. Right now, if you attend a purely Egba public function, they would sing the Egba national anthem. They have been doing so for decades and the heavens have not fallen.**
- 4. The Federal Government should adopt the following cities and develop them into megacities: Kaduna, Ibadan, Enugu, Benin City, Lagos, Jos and Port Harcourt. The first four were regional capitals during the First Republic and the fifth was the original capital of Nigeria. All of them developed infrastructures that are now beyond the capabilities of the present states to sustain; while the remaining two have been cosmopolitan cities from colonial times. This proposal has several advantages. Firstly, it will rescue these cities from the urban decay that is a national disgrace. Secondly, since as urban magnets, they have attracted and continue to attract thousands of unemployed, the development that will result from this proposal will also serve as an anti-unemployment antidote. Thirdly, a structured federal presence would reinforce and reassure the multi-ethnicity of these cities. Anything that would reinforce our Nigerian-ness deserves consideration.**

All of these measures do not need constitutional amendments. I am not even sure that they need any changes in our laws. But to be on the safe side, I will urge the President to take a memorandum to the Council of State for approval.

A recommendation which will need constitutional amendment and which is bound to be controversial is this: as at the present, the three estates of government are located in Abuja, just as they were located in Lagos. Maybe we should borrow a leaf from Australia and South Africa and distribute these three estates nationwide. While keeping the Executive in Abuja, we can relocate the Supreme Court to another zone, and the National Assembly to another zone. Why should all Federal agencies and parastatals be located in Abuja? Why can they be scattered all over Nigeria? On one hand, it may sound anti-federalist to be advocating for federal presence under one guise or the other. On the other hand, it could be argued that a visible federal presence all over the federation could serve as a counterfoil to the enclave capital mentality that often equates a capital with the rest of the country.

- **Chapter II, entitled “FUNDAMENTAL OBJECTIVES AND DIRECTIVE PRINCIPLES OF STATE POLICY” of the 1999 Constitution declared in Article 14, (2)(b) that “the security and welfare of the people shall be the primary purpose of government”. This is reinforced by article 17(2)(g) which provides that “in furtherance of the social order—provision is made for public assistance in deserving cases or other conditions of need”. In addition, this is a nation, whose two principal religions, Christianity and Islam, are founded on social justice, caring for the poor and showing concern for children. Therefore, why are we so neglectful of the poor and the children – the very people who need government. The**

2007 United Nations Human Development Report listed Nigeria as 138 out of 177 states with a literacy rate of 66.8%, and an infant mortality rate of 109.5 out of 1000 births, and a mortality rate of 187.5 out of 1000 births for children under 5yrs old. It was to that extent that I read with consternation the news, two weeks ago that the Federal Government is planning to cancel the one-meal a day at school programme. A statement credited to the Executive Secretary of the Universal Basic Education Commission, Dr. Mohammed Modibo, offered two reasons for this change of heart. The first reason is that “the 12 pilot states who were given the initial funds(N1.2 billion) at the flag off of the programme could neither account for the monies released to them nor could they produce any progress reports to guide the implementation of the second phase of the programme. (Thisday, February 15, 2008). The second reason given by the same Dr. Modibo is that “the project would cost as much as N90 billion every year...This was much more than the N40 billion yearly budgetary provision for the Universal Basic Education Commission.” Yet, Dr. Modibo’s conclusion was “though (the school feeding) programme ran into hitches, it has to a large extent improved on school enrollment figures, as pupils looked forward to it.”(The Guardian, February 15). If one adds to this policy reversal, the cancellation of the building of the primary health centres on the grounds that the funds were deducted from the Local Government funds, I think we may be creating a dangerous situation where the young and the poor who are many are being sacrificed for the rich who are so few. We are already paying heavy prices for the neglect of the poor and the young as is evident from the army of area boys and girls and the aljimeris. If I look at the newly approved budget, I would find enough funds to finance double what the present

one-school meal a day costs. It will not be an act of wisdom to identify what projects should be cancelled but it should not be this food programme. In fact, I would go one step further and urge that the one-meal-a-day programme should be extended to cover the rural areas and be put under the traditional authority in that village in order to insulate it from politics. From the United Nations statistics that I quoted above, it is clear that if there is one thing that our health sector needs, it is probably the declaration of a state of emergency. Yet, a plan to build primary health centres has just been suspended. I have no problem with the position of the Federal Government that using Local Government funds was an act of illegality. But suspending the programme, with its attendant consequence of abandoned projects and a further setback in the primary health sector, amounts to throwing out the baby with the bath water. A better approach should have been for the Federal Government to refund the funds to the Local Governments and let the programme proceed. For the avoidance of doubt, I am not in favour of corruption and in cases where corruption is proved, those involved should face the full wrath of the law. I would therefore urge the Federal Government to revisit these two issues in furtherance of its constitutional responsibilities to its citizens.

- There is a need to fully democratize our political values and system. This will have to entail the jettisoning of such concepts as power shift, power rotation, zoning which are as antithetical to democracy as ethnic politics. None of them was in the political vocabulary of Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe or Mallam Aminu Kano. Even the 1993 Presidential elections between Are M.K.O. Abiola and Alhaji Bashir Tofa did not revolve around any of**

these concepts. These leaders and their parties had their political programme and manifestoes on which they sought for the peoples' support. None of them based his campaign on "it is our turn". I was high enough in NADECO to have taken part in the debates over our vision of post-military politics and at no time was there any talk about it being the turn of this region or that region to rule. All these concepts were smuggled into the Nigerian political vista by the military-politicians as their solution to the problems which they had caused in the first place. The civil political class rejected these concepts at the federal level which would explain why august politicians such as Abubakar Rimi, and Alex Ekwueme fought Obasanjo for the party ticket in 1999 and Atiku Abubakar was prepared to fight him for the party ticket in 2003 presidential elections. But the military establishment was ready to enforce its choice and it had its way. On another occasion, I had had cause to warn that these concepts which are political virus designed to address a peculiar problem would spread into other areas as we have the tendency in this country to turn even a noble idea into a base one. Little did I know that I was propounding a self fulfilling prophesy. Fantasy had turned into nightmare. A real life example occurred last year where in a state university that will remain nameless, a candidate for the post of the Vice-Chancellor was approved. Violent opposition to him came from within his own ethnic group who claimed that he was from the same local government of the previous Vice-Chancellor, and that it was the turn of another local government area of the same ethnic wing. Another real life example is even more pathetic. There was a vacancy in a Cathedral for a Provost. Two eminent candidates were from the same town. Yet the struggle revolved over the fact that the more experienced one was from the

urban area which had produced a few Provosts in the past, while the rural area felt it was its turn. In both cases, the enlightened elite resorted to the use of thugs to advance their cases. Please join me in the lamentation of Cassius in Julius Caesar by Shakespeare “O, Judgement thou are fled to Brutish beasts and men have lost their sense of reasoning”.

- **The National Youth Service Corps must not only be kept, it must be strengthened and reoriented. Lest we forget, the scheme was set up to reinforce the one-Nigeria syndrome. We need to ensure that it does not lapse into a routine stupor. Firstly, no purpose is served by posting corpers to urban areas, especially the federal and state capitals. Corpers should now be posted to rural areas to serve in the health, teaching and infrastructural sectors. Secondly, we should move from the rule that no one should serve in his or her state of origin to no one should serve in his or her zone of origin. The reason is obvious. The way and manner in which states have been created have made ineffective the objective of exposing corpers to other cultures unless they are posted outside their zones.**
- **On February 10, 2008, Cicero writing in THISDAY, wrote “ Akinyemi has tirelessly told anyone who cares to listen that for Nigeria to meet its continental obligations, she must upgrade her military. According to him, achievable foreign policy objectives must be matched by commensurate military power”. For as long as I can remember, I have argued for a military establishment that can impose a Pax Nigerianna in Africa. Our two competitors for leadership in Africa are Egypt and South Africa. The Nigerian armed forces must aim to match those of either of these two countries in quality and quantity. Nothing demoralizes a state than an army that gets defeated in a foreign engagement and it is a**

possibility that we must not contemplate. In the past, there have been two occasions when our foreign policy response had been dictated by the fact that we lacked the military capability to pursue our preferred options.

- An activist foreign policy is a sine qua non of the new Nigerianna. There must not be a relapse to the pre-Murtala foreign policy era. Public policy analysts agree that foreign policy issues can easily serve as a mobiliser of nationalism. People take pride in seeing their nations as players on the world stage.
- A Commission for National Unity to be co-chaired by two eminent Traditional Rulers should be set up. Its mission will be to serve as a watchdog against developments that seek to ethnicize our national developments and to serve as a promoter of those attributes to would enshrine our national rather than sectional identity.

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