



**THE  
NIGERIAN  
CRUCIBLE**

**Politics and Governance  
in a Conglomerate Nation, 1977-2017**

**RICHARD JOSEPH**

## Acknowledgements

This volume marks the start of an archival project that will bring a large number of documents, published and unpublished, to a wide readership. The important contributions of the following individuals in compiling, organizing, and helping edit these documents are acknowledged. Shiv Balbahadur was my research assistant at the University of Ibadan in 1978-79. He started the organizing of archival materials on Nigeria. This work was continued by Jennifer Joseph who produced a large number of files on my writings over several decades. Jeremy Gaines and Samuel Learner took up the effort as research assistants at Northwestern University by identifying and editing documents intended for the *Nigerian Crucible* volume. Samuel Hall and Drew D'Alelio, also undergraduate students, carried this work forward. Finally, Alison Brockman and Alexander Smith, the first a recent Northwestern graduate and the second a current student, worked with me in 2017 to prepare these texts for publication on Arch Library.

An additional fifty essays and commentaries are being prepared for publication, so other names will be added to these acknowledgements. Special thanks for financial and other support are given to The Rockefeller Foundation, The MacArthur Foundation and the Institute of International Education, Northwestern University's Undergraduate Research Awards, Farrell Fellowships (Department of Political Science), Weinberg College of Arts and Sciences, and the Transportation Center. I have benefited over the years from exchanges with many Nigerian colleagues and Nigeria scholars. Among them I acknowledge on this occasion Hafsat Abiola, Wale Adebani, Abimbola Agboluaje, John Campbell, Larry Diamond, Kayode Fayemi, Attahiru Jega, Kole Shettima, Ebenezer Obadare, Odia Ofeimun, Jerome Okolo, 'Tunji Olaopa, Dele Olojede, Sam Olorunfoba, Ayo Olukotun, Ebere Onwudiwe, Eghosa Osaghae, and Rotimi Suberu.

## Preface

I first arrived in Nigeria at the end of February 1976 to take up a lectureship in political science at the University of Ibadan. The country was then in the midst of great turmoil. On February 13, the military Head of State - General Murtala Muhammed, who had come to power in a July 1975 palace coup - was killed during an attempted coup. Quickly rounded up, the plotters were summarily tried by military tribunals and publicly executed by firing squad. Gory pictures of their corpses, still shackled to posts, were displayed in the newspapers.

Almost four decades have elapsed since my introduction to the Nigerian Crucible, understood as the attempts to forge one nation, under one state, from a complex of ethnic, linguistic, religious, and cultural communities. During this period, I have visited Nigeria often and written frequently on its travails and intermittent triumphs. The time has arrived to make many of these documents widely available, especially to younger generations of Nigerians.

I have had the privilege of engaging openly and vigorously with many Nigerians on the politics, economics, and governance of their country. This engagement has included teaching at the University of Ibadan, 1976-79; commenting frequently for Nigerian newspapers, and participating in media interviews. Other engagements include working as a Ford Foundation Program Officer with responsibilities for grant-making in Nigeria (1986-88); delivering public speeches that were subsequently widely reported; writing scholarly articles on Nigeria and a book whose key ideas have featured prominently in local political debates<sup>1</sup>; and directing a major research project that involved extensive collaboration with Nigerian researchers and students.<sup>2</sup>

While some of the materials provided in this volume have been published, many have not. They will complement intellectual resources available to Nigerians and others as the paths taken, and not, in this country's evolution are debated. Although these texts are accessible to a global readership, every effort will be taken to make them available to Nigerians. Whatever I give back through my teaching, writing, and public commentaries reflects the honor and privilege of participating in the search for a harmonious, democratic, and prosperous nation.

As this volume is being brought to completion, Nigerians have embarked on yet another uncertain phase in their political history, this time following national elections in March and April 2015. It is also inspired by the book, *Nigerian Perspectives: An Historical Anthology*,

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<sup>1</sup> *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* (Cambridge University Press, 1987; Spectrum Books, 1991). This book was reissued by Cambridge University Press in 2013. An interview conducted in February 2016 on its continued pertinence is included in the prefatory texts.

<sup>2</sup> The Research Alliance to Combat HIV/AIDS (REACH), a collaborative program funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2005 – 2011.

written by my teacher and mentor, Thomas Lionel Hodgkin.<sup>3</sup> I have been personally acquainted with several scholars devoted many years to the study of Nigerian politics and society. Several of them can be acknowledged here: Billy J. Dudley, who welcomed me into the Department of Political Science of the University of Ibadan in 1976 and supported my field research; Richard L. Sklar, one of my teachers at the University of California, Los Angeles, 1969-70, and who has influenced generations of scholars; C. Sylvester Whitaker and John N. Paden who wrote influential studies of northern Nigerian politics; and Larry Diamond, a leading contemporary scholar of global democracy who shares my abiding commitment to democratic governance and development in Nigeria and other African countries.<sup>4</sup>

I write these words at the same university which published John P. Mackintosh's seminal study, *Nigerian Government and Politics: Prelude to the Revolution*.<sup>5</sup> Mackintosh referred to the overthrow of the Nigerian First Republic in January 1966 as a revolution, and so it must have seemed at the time.. That military coup terminated the constitutional government left behind by British colonial authorities in 1960. Since then, Nigerians have returned again and again to the first principles – democracy, constitutionalism, and federalism - of their nation's founding. As will be seen in the following pages, these principles have guided Nigerian political and civic leaders, including during moments when the path to constructing a harmonious and just political order was obscured. This volume, in retracing the political and economic pathways pursued by Nigerians, reflects also the intellectual odyssey of a scholar who shared in four decades of that journey.

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<sup>3</sup> It was first published by Oxford University Press in 1960 to coincide with Nigeria's independence from colonial rule.

<sup>4</sup> An important collection of Diamond's articles has been published: *In Search of Democracy* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

<sup>5</sup> Northwestern University Press, 1966.

## Past & Present

### The Federal Question and Conglomerate Governance

Within a decade of the fall of the Berlin wall, the post-Cold War wave of pro-democratic upheavals began losing its force in Africa and elsewhere.<sup>6</sup> Two decades later, this force is nearly spent. Whether countries have democratic, autocratic, or hybrid governments depends on the mix of political personalities, political parties, social organizations, and economic structures. At the funeral ceremonies in June 2017 for Quett Kesumile Masire, Botswana's president, 1980-1998, Amy Poteete wrote that it felt like the passing of an era.<sup>7</sup> This volume covers the lead-up to that era, 1977-1987, and the decades that followed.

In a context of heightening global insecurity and uncertainty, the challenge of strengthening Nigeria's federal democracy has assumed increased importance. There is little agreement on how this goal can be accomplished. Nigeria has a very presidential system, and the authority and power of its central government tower over those of the thirty-six states. At the time of writing this prefatory text (July 2017), President Muhammadu Buhari, elected in 2015, and with less than two years remaining in his term of office, is gravely ill. His vice-president and acting president, Yemi Osinbajo, is widely admired. Osinbajo is a youthful 60 years, a southerner, Yoruba, Christian, senior lawyer, and university professor. These attributes and experiences distinguish him from the 74-year old Buhari, a Muslim from the emirate North, and a former military officer and military head-of-state.

As Nigerians prepare for national elections in 2019, there is an urgent need to re-examine the roads travelled. Knowledge of the detours and setbacks should be refreshed and the sense of a common journey and a national purpose rekindled. Nigerian poet, journalist, and social critic, Odia Ofeimun, describes this process as the search for a collective cultural expression, the building of trust among the country's geo-cultural groups and social classes, and the pursuit of a common citizenship.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> R. Joseph, "Democratization in Africa after 1989: Comparative and Theoretical Perspectives," *Comparative Politics* (April 1997); "Africa, 1990-1997: Abertura to Closure," *Journal of Democracy* (April, 1998).

<sup>7</sup> Personal correspondence. Prof. Poteete, scholar of Botswana Politics, as a student at Emory University was a member of the Carter Center's *Africa Demos* team in the early 1990s. On Botswana, see <https://africaplus.wordpress.com/2014/10/20/democracy-derailed-botswanas-fading-halo/>; <https://africaplus.wordpress.com/2014/11/03/botswana-democracy-on-course-or-derailing/>. Under Masire's leadership, Botswana had emerged as a role model for democratic and prudential governance in Africa.

<sup>8</sup> Foreword to Tunji Olaopa, *The Labour of our Heroes: Thematic Narratives on the Nigerian National Project* (Ibadan, Nigeria: Bookcraft, 2016). Ofeimun often draws on his vast knowledge of the life and thought of the Nigerian political leader, Chief Obafemi Awolowo (1909-1987), whom he served as personal secretary, for several years.

## *Personal Prism*

In this volume, Nigeria's modern history is seen through the prism of my academic studies, in-country experiences, and personal background. Before my first arrival in Nigeria in 1976, I had closely studied French colonial rule in Africa and a nationalist movement, the *Union des Populations du Cameroun*, in neighboring Cameroon.<sup>9</sup> I had also taught at the University of Khartoum in Sudan, 1974-75, during the early years of the military government of Gaafar Nimeiry. In contrast to these countries, military rule in Nigeria permitted substantial freedom of expression and of the press. Also enjoyed by Nigerian citizens was a certain degree of judicial constraint on the exercise of power.

After the death of General Murtala Muhammed on February 13, 1976, his successors did not diverge from the agenda he had set in motion and especially the construction of a constitutional republic. While studying this transition, I enjoyed wide access to the country's political leaders, senior civil servants, and media executives. Still unanswered is the question raised in the second chapter of *Democracy and Prebendal Politics: A democracy that works.*<sup>10</sup> The same can be said for the phenomena discussed in the book's fourth chapter: "Politics in a multi-ethnic society." Those dilemmas overlap: How can democracy work in a country where prebendal attitudes to the use of government offices prevail, and where sectional divisions of ethnicity, religion, language, and region shape the political space?

## *The Federal Imperative*

In May 1976, a major conference on federalism was convened at the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA) by its Director-General, Professor A. Bolaji Akinyemi. In the keynote address, Shridath S. Ramphal, then Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, discussed a disappointing experience of his professional career: the short life of the West Indian Federation, 1958 -1962. The start of my political awareness coincided with the struggle for independence and federation in my native Trinidad-and-Tobago. When I migrated with my family to the United States at age 13, the Federation had recently been inaugurated. It collapsed when the Prime Minister of Jamaica, Norman Manley, allowed a referendum on the Federation to be held in September 1961. It was a political move that backfired as the "leave" votes prevailed.<sup>11</sup> With Jamaica's withdrawal, Dr. Eric Williams, Prime Minister of the Federation's second largest territory, Trinidad and Tobago, followed suit. With the loss of these countries, the Federation unraveled.

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<sup>9</sup> See R. Joseph, *Radical Nationalism in Cameroun: Social Origins of the UPC Rebellion* (Oxford University Press, 1977); and, ed., *Gaullist Africa: Cameroon under Ahmadu Ahidjo* (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1978).

<sup>10</sup> See also Wale Adebawo and Ebenezer Obadare, eds. *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria: Critical Interpretations* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

<sup>11</sup> Not dissimilar in this regard from the Brexit referendum in Britain in 2016.

The federal idea drew on similar motivations throughout the post-imperial world. The key conviction was that disparate peoples and territories would enjoy greater power and economic potential as unified nations. In the case of Nigeria, the crafting of a federal system has involved many detours and reversals. After a series of post-World War II constitutions, the 1954 Lyttleton Constitution ushered in the federal era with responsibilities and tax powers delineated between a central government and three regions.<sup>12</sup> This system persisted, with adjustments, until the overthrow of the First Republic by a military coup on January 15, 1966.<sup>13</sup>

During a multi-phase crisis lasting sixteen months, January 1966 to May 1967, Nigeria underwent a rapid set of governmental changes. After the dismantling of the quasi-federation of the First Republic, a unitary system of government was declared by Major-General Aguiyi-Ironsi on May 24, 1966. He was overthrown and died two months later in a “revenge coup.” As ties frayed between the country’s regions, peace talks were held in Aburi, Ghana in January 1967 to avert the secession of the Eastern Region. If the Aburi Accord had been implemented, Nigeria would have become a confederation with extensive powers granted to the Regions. However, on May 27, just days before the declaration of Biafran independence, a “federal military” system was declared by Head-of-State Yakubu Gowon. In place of four Regions, the country was divided into twelve states. This system persisted throughout the 30-month civil war (June 1967 - January 1970) and for almost another decade, until the inauguration of the Third Republic on October 1, 1979.

After the elected government of President Shehu Shagari succumbed to another military coup on December 31, 1983, the country was brought under military rule that lasted even longer than the nine-year Gowon government. A draconian regime led by Head-of-State Muhammadu Buhari and his deputy, ‘Tunde Idiagbon, was terminated after twenty months in a palace coup led by General Ibrahim Babangida. The Babangida regime appeared in many respects to be a resumption of the Mohammed-Obasanjo military government of 1975-1979. However, it lasted twice as long and, unlike the latter, failed to complete the promised transition to civilian rule.<sup>14</sup>

Nigeria technically remained a federation during the entire second period of military rule, 1984 - 1999. It continued to refer to itself as a Federal Military Government.<sup>15</sup> A centralized and hierarchical organization, the Nigerian Armed Forces, administered a governmental system in

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<sup>12</sup> Named after the British Colonial Secretary Oliver Lyttelton.

<sup>13</sup> It is often viewed as quasi-federal, so much were power and authority tipped to the Regions. One of these, the North, was much larger in territory and population than the next two (and three from 1963).

<sup>14</sup> The Nigerian political leader and prolific author, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, referred to the prolonged military rule of the 1970s as a dismal tunnel. This depiction was especially confirmed during the 1984-99 military era.

<sup>15</sup> For the six-month period of unitary government in 1966 under Major-General Ironsi, the term “National Military Government” was used.

which the major sub-units, states of the Federation, were led by military governors.<sup>16</sup> Much of the institutional structure of these entities persisted from the civilian era, in accordance with the unsuspended provisions of the constitution. High government earnings from petroleum revenues, the personalist style of leadership of the military rulers Buhari (1984-85), Babangida (1985-93), and Sani Abacha (1993 -1998), and the assumption by the Supreme Military Council of the authority to reorganize the country's basic institutions and state structure meant that the Nigerian federation - when civilian government resumed in 1999 - was as lopsided towards the center as it had been towards the Regions during the First Republic (1960 -1966).

### *Federalism and Conglomerate Governance*

An important feature of Nigerian federalism has been ably described by Rotimi Suberu: "the Nigerian federal system operates almost exclusively as a mechanism for the intergovernmental distribution and ethno-political appropriation of centrally collected oil revenues."<sup>17</sup> Governors of the states - which had been expanded by military regimes in stages to thirty-six between 1967 and 1996 - avidly compete for these revenues. Suberu refers to both "intergovernmental distribution and ethno-political appropriation." They are not the same thing. "Intergovernmental" refers to established units of government, especially states. "Ethno-political," however, is a broad term that covers an array of associational forms. One of the persistent dimensions of Nigerian political life is the influence of sectional identities. They can be thought of as tectonic plates, sometimes visible in topographical features, but often not, until they move.

Many scholars have grappled with these phenomena. Kenneth Post and Michael Vickers in *Structure and Conflict in Nigeria, 1960-1966* made a bold attempt to conceptualize them.<sup>18</sup> The book's theoretical framework, grounded on the anthropological notion of "plural societies," depicted Nigeria as a conglomeration of cultural sections, or a conglomerate society." The constituent units of this national entity are less hermetical than those of a plural society. In my 1987 study, I referred to these phenomena as constituting a multi-ethnic system with its peculiar logic and dynamics. Such a system has persisted, sometimes overtly but often implicitly, despite the proscription by the 1979 constitution of political parties based on ethnicity and religion.

One of my articles following the 1979 elections was entitled "The Ethnic Trap."<sup>19</sup> In that essay, I inquired whether Nigeria had made "a notable step forward in transcending or diluting

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<sup>16</sup> Their title was changed from state governors to "administrators" in August 1991 when the Babangida regime created nine more states and seemed to be transiting to the Third Republic.

<sup>17</sup> "Prebendal Politics and Federal Governance in Nigeria" in W. Adebawo and E. Obadare, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

<sup>18</sup> London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1973.

<sup>19</sup> "The Ethnic Trap: Notes on the Nigerian Campaign and Elections, 1978-79," *Issue: A Journal of Opinion* (spring-summer, 1981).



the political significance of its ethnic scissions” during the campaign and elections. What I learned was that, even when political aspirants conducted their campaigns and sought supporters on a national basis, they were trapped by the perceptions of the latter. The grid of perceptions consisted of ethnic, regional, and religious identities. Immanent, but not fully articulated, in my writings on Nigeria is a notion I now call “conglomerate governance.” In a conglomerate society, a national government, with universal pretensions, seeks to acquire legitimate authority. In doing so, it must navigate a minefield of “inter-governmental” and “ethno-political” considerations.

Much political discourse and disputations over the “structure” of the country and its federation are about how much its “conglomerate society” is or is not reflected in “who gets what, where, and how” in the distribution of desired goods and services. A significant number of Nigerian elites seek to break out of the conglomerate society/governance trap. Yet the currents of the latter ebb and flow but never dissipate.

Nigerians, as they did when I first sought to understand their society and politics, wrestle with unresolved tensions in the public realm. On the one hand are rules and regulations calling for the honest and transparent fulfillment of governmental responsibilities. On the other, public offices, from high to low, are viewed as opportunities to be exploited for the benefit of self and identity groups. Aspirations to universality and neutrality compete, therefore, with the pull of self- and sectional interests.

As this volume is being readied for publication, dissatisfaction with the federal system is again widely expressed. Because of the conglomerate template, the failings of the federal system are often attributed to how particular “ethno-political” groupings perceive their relative disadvantages. Some Nigerians agitate to leave the federation altogether, as seen in the resurrection of “Biafra.” Fewer advocate for a more unified polity. The greater majority would like to see a federal system that somehow functioned more effectively and productively. There is little unanimity regarding what such a system should look like or what path should be taken to realize it. We will return at the end of the volume to the perplexing questions of group identity, federal structure, and politics.

## **Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria**

*In a score of interviews over three decades, I have been queried by Nigerian reporters - in print, radio, and television - about the concept of prebendalism. Included here are two samples of such interviews, the first conducted in March 1988 and the second in February 2016, following the inaugural conference of the Ibadan School of Government and Public Policy (ISGPP). Embedded in these interviews are intimations of what I now call "conglomerate governance." Aspirations to universality in national affairs compete with the pull of sectional cultures and interests.*

### ***Prebendalism: The Bane of Democracy in Nigeria - Richard Joseph (1988)***

**By Krees Imodibie**

**THE GUARDIAN (Lagos) - March 8, 1988**

Critics of Nigerian polity, ever so used to analysing the nation's political dilemmas from the standpoint of the interplay of primordial forces, may have a lot to learn from the research of a Black American as to why the growth of democracy has been stunted on Nigerian soil.

For Richard Joseph, a professor of government at Dartmouth College, New Hampshire in the United States, the concept of *prebendalism* explains the centrality in the Nigerian polity of the intensive and persistent struggle to control and exploit the offices of the state. He argues that state power is usually viewed by Nigerians as arrays of prebends, the appropriation of which provides access to the state treasury and to control over the issuing of remunerative licences and contracts. Yet, he posits, the abiding desire for a democratic political system is frustrated by the deepening of ethnic, linguistic, and regional identities.

Joseph's life experience has involved the struggle of Africans and Blacks the world over to overcome the centuries of slavery, imperialism, colonialism, neo-colonialism and racism. Born in Trinidad and Tobago, he experienced the anti-colonial movement as a child. In the United States to which his family emigrated in 1958, he was involved in the civil rights movement in the 1960s. As a postgraduate student at Oxford University, he began the study of African politics, majoring in nationalist movements in Africa, especially in areas collectively known as French colonial Africa.

He arrived in Nigeria in February 1976 in the middle of the transitional programme of the Murtala Obasanjo administration to teach politics at the University of Ibadan. Joseph has written a 273-page book titled *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria*. In the book, he argues that the "realisation that the conduct of Nigerian politics could be conceived as a general system of social and political behaviours, which was not fully accounted for in the available literature, led to the formulation of the concept of prebendalism."

The term “prebend” is historically associated with the offices of certain feudal states which could be obtained through services rendered to a lord or monarch, or through outright purchases by supplicants, and then administered to generate income for their possessors. When he came on a one-week visit to Nigeria ten days ago, he naturally had to defend the concept of prebendalism. Prebendalism, according to Joseph, is used in the Nigerian context to refer to “patterns of political behaviour which rest on the justifying principle that such offices should be competed for and then utilised for the personal benefit of office holders, as well as of their reference or support group. The official public purpose of the office becomes a secondary concern, however much that purpose might have been originally cited in its creation or during the periodic competition to fill it.”

Does he believe that the only way to end this prebendal system is a form of authoritarian regime? If one takes a look at the regimes we have had outside civilian democracies, they have been authoritarian and prebendal. Is it then a choice between a democratic prebendalism or an authoritarian one, whether military or democratic? Here is Joseph’s response: “From my analysis, prebendalism involves civilian and military systems. It comes from certain practices within society. Under the civilian system, prebendalism takes over very, very quickly. Civilians are unable to establish barriers between the state and a civil society. The state is absorbed by prebendal practices within society. The military has a certain advantage. But military rule only lasts for a certain period. Because of the corporate nature of the military, because of their command structure, they are able to minimize some of the detrimental consequences of prebendalism. They can provide the state a certain degree of temporary coherence. The civilian governments we have known have no defences against prebendal practices.”

Why does Joseph think prebendalism is more descriptive of the Nigerian situation than, say, primordial politics? What he has tried to do in developing the notion of prebendalism is to provide a more far-reaching, sophisticated, and broader framework of analysis than, for example, primordialism. “Discussions of ethnic conflict in terms of primordial sentiments are insufficient. We have a better understanding of how these conflicts emerge. We know that people do not usually start struggling against one another because of a primordial sense of attachment and primordial opposition to others. The situation is far more complex.

What I have tried to do in developing the concept of prebendalism is to link together elements of Nigeria’s political sociology that other scholars might consider separately, and to show their interconnection: to show that it is not enough to talk about the corruption of individuals in office. We have to include the expectations of people who support them, and who expect them to pass on some of the benefits of office. You have to talk about both sets of attitudes. It is not enough to talk about political domination and abuse of office. You have to include patterns of clientelism in which individuals in office are linked by clientelistic ties to people who support them. Usually, this takes us to the notion of ethnicity-- the ways in which the

creation of a support base, the creation of a clientelistic network spurs the ethnicisation of Nigerian society.”

Prebendalism, Joseph notes, does not apply only to Nigeria only; it permeates much of postcolonial Africa. He has done much work on African politics. His first book is *Radical Nationalism in Cameroun: Social Origins of the UPC Rebellion*. His second book, *Gaullist Africa: Cameroon Under Ahmadu Ahidjo*, is a study of the Cameroon political system under its longtime ruler, Ahidjo. He dissects the role of the French in the continued domination of African countries formerly under French rule. He highlights the role France is playing in maintaining the political and economic systems of these countries.

The central idea of prebendalism describes a situation in which a group of people turn the state into a limited liability company so as to generate profits for themselves. If that is the case, couldn't the Nigerian situation have derived from the country's asymmetrical relationship with the industrialized world? Joseph says nations of the world cater for their own interests. What has to be done is that, in their relations with other countries, nations have to strive to reduce their dependency. “Overcoming domination has to take place internally, in terms of the kind of structures set in place.” According to Joseph, a prebendal system has elements of a limited liability company, “but a limited liability company is superior to the kind of governments we have here.” The difference is that, according to him, the shareholders of a limited liability company can be gathered together and told what they should do in the interests of the company.

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### *A Conversation with Edmund Obilo (2016)*<sup>20</sup>

**Edmund Obilo:** Professor Joseph, when you wrote the book, *Democracy and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria: The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic* over three decades ago, what did you have in mind?

**Joseph:** I had been studying the return to civilian rule after arriving in February 1976 to join the Faculty of the Social Sciences at the University of Ibadan. I intended writing a book on the making of the Second Republic. However, during the course of my research, I became concerned about the ways in which political aspirants viewed political offices. The more I studied developments, and the more I understood elements of Nigeria's political economy - the oil boom,

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<sup>20</sup> <https://m.soundcloud.com/edmund-obilo/prof-richard-joseph-democracy-and-prebendal-politics-in-nigeria><sup>3</sup> This interview was conducted following the inaugural conference of the Ibadan School of Government and Public Policy (ISGPP), February 1-2, 2016. [https://arch.library.northwestern.edu/concern/generic\\_works/vm40xr62q?locale=en](https://arch.library.northwestern.edu/concern/generic_works/vm40xr62q?locale=en)

large inflows of money, the neglect of other productive activities - is the more concerned I became about the democratic transition.

Elections could take place, but persons acquiring those offices would carry certain attitudes into government. They would primarily seek to extract resources for themselves, for their political cronies, and for members of their sectional groups: regional, ethnic, and clanie. So the book began with a theoretical discussion of Nigerian society, economy, and politics and how certain practices posed a risk to creating a stable and developmental government.

**Obilo:** When you noticed the soft development philosophy of our politicians, did you see how the future would be distorted by their politics?

**Joseph:** Definitely. I used to say that I hoped to complete and publish my book before the Republic fell. In 1983, I published an article that set forward the basic theoretical argument, entitled *Class, State, and Prebendal Politics in Nigeria*.<sup>21</sup> The book did not appear for another four years because academic book publishing was a slow process in those days. After the analytical chapters, the rest of the book took up what had occurred in different regions of Nigeria, based on my knowledge of politicians, political parties, phases of the transition, and so on.

**Obilo:** Since you published your work in 1980, Nigeria has briefly seen a Third Republic and now we are in the Fourth Republic. Have you noticed any difference from what you observed in the Second Republic?

**Joseph:** In fundamental ways, no. I will mention here another pertinent early article. It was entitled, *Affluence and Underdevelopment: The Nigerian Experience*, and published in 1978, while I was still teaching at the University of Ibadan.<sup>22</sup> At that time, there was a sense that manna was falling onto Nigeria from heaven. Funds were being spent with abandon. I argued in that article that, although Nigeria was earning a lot from petroleum export, this monetary wealth was not contributing to the country's development.

**Obilo:** Considering the reality of the Nigerian state, and the character of the political players, what would you say are the reasons for the failures?

**Joseph:** Political culture must be considered. It is important but not immutable.<sup>23</sup> If you examined the Nordic countries, they would look similar in the middle of the 19th century to what

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<sup>21</sup> This article is the seventh document of this collection.

<sup>22</sup> This article is the second document of this collection.

<sup>23</sup> "Industrial policies and contemporary Africa: the transition from prebendal to developmental governance," in J. E. Stiglitz et. al (eds.), *The Industrial Policy Revolution II: Africa in the 21st Century* (New York: Palgrave, 2013), pp. 293-318.

is observed in many African countries today. However, they underwent fundamental transformations in the last half of the century. It is possible to bring about changes in political culture and political practices.. President Buhari has taken on corruption.. But one person cannot do it. One political team based in Abuja cannot do it. What is needed is a transformative movement in Nigeria.

**Obilo:** How do we get that transformative movement?

**Joseph:** At the end of my book, I wrote that perhaps the travails in Nigeria would be followed by triumphs. I am afraid we have since had far more travails than triumphs.. I did believe at the time of writing my book that matters worse get worse before they improved.

**Obilo:** Can the triumph require revolution?

**Joseph:** No. Not revolution. Revolutions, as the saying goes, tend to “devour their children.” I do not advocate revolution in the sense of armed struggle. There are political leaders in Nigeria who have strongly advocated for government with a social development purpose, such as Aminu Kano and Obafemi Awolowo.

**Obilo:** You have taken us to our past. These leaders are gone. What about the present generation?

**Joseph:** For the past few years, I have been working with research assistants on my papers covering four decades of commentaries and analyses regarding Nigeria. It is very important to understand the struggles of the past and why they were not successful. At his inauguration as a civilian Head-of-State in 1999, President Obasanjo spoke at length about corruption. I was present at the event. We heard him do the same thing at the ISGPP inaugural conference. It is very easy to speak about corruption, and there are so many examples to cite. What is important is knowing how do you move forward. How do you change prebendal mentalities and the repetitive erosion of institutions?

**Obilo:** Who, in other words, will propel the new paradigm?

**Joseph:** A conference on prebendalism was held in Lagos in November 2011. Dr. Kayode Fayemi, the former governor of Ekiti State, was a key sponsor.<sup>24</sup> Two Nigerian colleagues, Professors Wale Adebani and Ebenezer Obadare, organized this international meeting. The resulting book, *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria: Critical Interpretations*, was published

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<sup>24</sup> After playing a major role in the creation of the All Progressive Alliance (APC), which won the 2015 elections, he was appointed Federal Minister of Solid Minerals.

in 2013.<sup>25</sup> It is important to convene such meetings and issue such analyses. What is still needed, however, are practical and implementable approaches. If I were asked: “What solutions do you recommend to combat prebendalism?” I would reply that there is a lot of work being done globally to tackle this issue.<sup>26</sup>

From this information, it can then be identified what should be tried in Nigeria. Of course, there have also been many Nigerian experiments, in federal and state institutions, that can be distilled. The key questions are: How do you get truly effective government? How do you build institutions that actually serve the people rather than the persons occupying their offices?<sup>27</sup> It was astonishing hearing former President Olusegun Obasanjo speak about prebendalism in his address to the ISGPP conference. Bear in mind that when these ideas were formulated in 1978-79, I was a lecturer at the University of Ibadan and Obasanjo was the head of the military government.

**Obilo:** He had the opportunity to fix the problem. He did not fix it. When you hear Nigerian former leaders talk, you respond: Easier said than done. Chief Emeka Anyaoku, the former Commonwealth Secretary General, suggested going back to the regional structure, a system of governing Nigeria on the basis of six geopolitical zones. Do you believe that is the way the federation should be restructured?

**Joseph:** As I mentioned to Chief Anyaoku at the conference, he is advancing a particular position on this subject. We also have distinguished scholars such as Professor Rotimi Suberu who argue for a more incremental approach to revitalizing Nigeria’s federal system. Such an approach would not require putting aside the 36-state structure and adopting the geopolitical zones. One essential point is that whatever system you adopt, whether a fully centralized one, a system that Chief Anyaoku and others are calling ‘true federalism’, or some other version, you are still going to have persons competing for political office. Will the motivations for such posts, and their conduct in office, be different? There is a need for what I have called a “macro-institutional rupture.” A transformation must take place in how individuals actually regard these offices. I am aware of the Buhari government’s anti-corruption efforts. What is needed, however, are ways of mobilizing many organizations in Nigeria, professional, civic, faith-based, and others. You have to get into the schools and the education system. You treat this existential challenge the way you approach a major health threat, like Ebola.

Since we have a former head-of-state speaking about corruption, a former and current one having put it at the top of his administration’s agenda, and many adopting the notion of prebendalism,

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<sup>25</sup> Published by Palgrave Macmillan.

<sup>26</sup> For example, by the Quality of Government Institute, University of Gothenberg, Sweden, Institutions for Successful Societies, Princeton University, and the Natural Resource Governance Institute, New York.

<sup>27</sup> Under the direction of Dr. Tunji Olaopa, Deputy Executive Chairman of the Ibadan School of Government and Public Policy (ISGPP), there is increasing attention to this issue.

the question follows: Why not bring together all available talents, all pertinent experts, and tackle this fundamental issue in a strategic way? A starting point could be Wale Adebani and Ebenezer Obadare's edited book, *Democracy and Prebendalism in Nigeria: Critical Interpretations* (2013). A quarter-century after my 1987 book, a stellar group of scholars were brought together and their analyses published. It can now be asked: "Where do we go from here? How do we carry these analyses forward? How can they be applied to the current dilemmas? What forums are needed to be convened, where, and with what purpose?"

**Obilo:** Are you saying that the problem of political culture is more fundamental than the problem of political structure?

**Joseph:** They are equally important and mutually reinforcing, positively and negatively..When you say "political culture," you are dealing with perceptions, attitudes, norms, and expectations. These were already in evidence when I came along. I helped shape them into a theoretical framework.<sup>28</sup> I never expected that an academic study would command a large public readership.<sup>29</sup> Spectrum Books published an affordable Nigerian edition in 1991.<sup>30</sup> Some might say to me: "You must be feeling good that your book has had such an impact."<sup>31</sup> Sure, to some extent. But I've gotten over that "notoriety" a long time ago. It is an experience that is tempered by sadness. Let me suggest an analogy. It is as if geology is your field of study and you say: "Wait a second. People shouldn't be building houses there. That hill is susceptible to mudslides. If there's heavy rain. the houses can come down." Still, people keep building on the same hill. That's what I'm saying. You shouldn't keep building houses on prebendal hills. That's why the subtitle of my 1987 book is: "The Rise and Fall of the Second Republic."

**Obilo:** Finally, you mentioned social wealth in your ISGPP address.. How would that help Nigerians?

**Joseph:** The first time I was given a seat at the 'Design Table of Nigeria', I was asked to speak about Chapter II on "Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles" in the 1979 draft constitution.<sup>32</sup> Those provisions are still in the 1999 constitution. Unlike South Africa, where you have a similar constitutional commitment, namely, the responsibility of government to meet certain basic social needs commensurate with the resources to do so. South African citizens could go to the Constitutional Court and say: "We don't have schools, we don't have hospitals, and that is our right." The government could reply acknowledging such rights subject to

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<sup>28</sup> I mainly taught Political Theory at the University of Ibadan, including a popular course on "The Theory of the State."

<sup>29</sup> Prof. Pat Utomi was one of the first who called for such a readership.

<sup>30</sup> Cambridge University Press reissued it in a paperback edition in 2014.

<sup>31</sup> See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prebendalism>.

<sup>32</sup> An article analyzing this constitution, titled *National Objectives and Public Accountability - An Analysis of the Draft Constitution*, is the first document in Part 1 of this collection.



sufficient resources. Such a partial judicial remedy is not available in Nigeria. But this is also a global issues as we live in a time of great wealth and persistent poverty.

In my ISGPP talk I quoted a report by Oxfam that just 80 people possess as much wealth as half the world's population. There is a comparable situation in the United States. It is not sustainable. You cannot have a situation where people are deprived of basic necessities, where young people do not have access to a decent education, for example, and they witness so much affluence around them. They will not tolerate it. This is why *Democracy and Prebendal Politics* had such an impact. It portrays the functioning of a system that is the very opposite of what Nigerians have always extolled.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> See also Biodun Jeyifo, *Against the Predatory Republic: Cultural and Political Journalism*, 2007-2-13 (Carolina Academic Press, 2016).