



# Birthday Blues



**Tunji Lardner and friends, no birthday blues here**

**Getting older simply provides more memories to fudge and distort.**

Sunday Guardian October 13, 2013

The thing about birthdays both personal and national is that they are twice commemorative and celebratory. As I grow older, it seems as if the sheen of birthdays has faded into a dull patina of wry acceptance of my own mortality. I remember as child the giddy anticipation of my birthday, expectant with the promises of gift; that favoured toy or book, and even more the prospects of a birthday party.

Growing up in your average dysfunctional family, I did not have too many birthday parties. I still recall my 7th birthday with some clarity on account of some faded photographs taken on that day, and what a glorious day it was, at least from the perspective of a seven year old. Getting older simply provides more memories to fudge and distort.

Then there was my 21st, a small gathering of friends over for lunch and my 30th which was celebrated in grand style in Palo



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**IN PRAISE OF MEDIOCRITY**

Alto in California with my American family, indeed it was a co-celebration with Peggy, the matriarch who also turned 50, and it was titled 'the beautiful people's party. I recall this elegant gathering in the navel of Silicon valley, a really sophisticated bunch drawn mostly from the university. Beyond this point my memory is wilfully blurred because from then on I had crested the undulating hills of youth and with increasing unsteady footing sliding steeply into the valley of obsolescence quickly approaching terminal velocity, with the key word here being 'terminal.' In the decade or two when another landmark birthday rolled by, with a wonderful surprise party



**Tunji Lardner Jr at his 7th birthday in the company of friends**

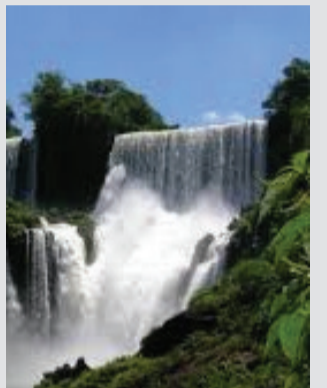
masterminded by my dear niece and a conspiratorial cohort of friends, it was clear to me that I was now truly in the valley, taking in my surroundings and trying to adjust to this strange landscape. In the clarifying desert into the valley of wisdom and understanding, surprisingly I could still see far flung vistas that I did not see when I was still strutting on the crested hills of my youth. Someone once cynically said that 'youthfulness is wasted on the young,' and I fully agree.

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**THROUGH THE GLASS DARKLY**

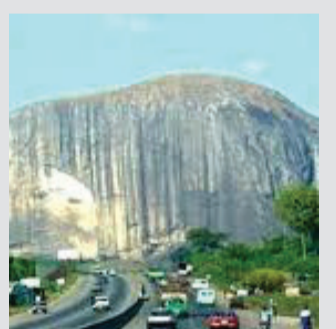
**I see a wonderful land, lush and verdant**

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**Opinion****SANKOFA****Editorial Team****B&T ENTERPRISES**

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**Life Re-imagined****Love is the greatest organizing principle in the universe****Blow this candle and let's eat cake**

In Nigeria, at sixty you have technically gone past your 'sell by' date. According to WHO data, the average Nigerian man in 2018 is expected to live for 53.7 years. As I mulled over this sorry statistic, I realized that in spite of my ornery self and with the (coughs), gentle persuasion of my wife Bola, that I indeed do have cause for celebration.

I will spare you the clichéd assumptions of life's ruminations at sixty usually freighted with worldly wisdom and the haughty pontifications about material successes and concrete legacies, yes, I literally mean concrete; considering that Nigerians in the main suffer from the edifice complex.

No sagacious pretensions here, instead, I will offer with sincerity the bookends of Life Re-imagined and SANKOFA as the twin pillars of my reflections at sixty.

The former is paean to my new life bristling with magical possibilities, you see my friends I got married almost exactly a year ago to a wonderful woman named Bola. See... another cause for celebration!

The latter is SANKOFA an Asante Adinkra symbol from Ghana represented by a stylized bird with its head turned backwards and with its feet facing forward and carrying an egg in its beak. In its native Twi language this translates to 'Go back and get it.' Taken in tandem the semiotics for me represents Introspection, Retro

spection and Prescience. I think that at sixty this is exactly where I need to be in my ongoing life's journey.

In looking back at SANKOFA and looking forward towards a life re-imagined, I have come to one singular truth that defines my personhood, my work and indeed my life this past sixty years, and that truth to which I am fully subscribed is that quite simply LOVE IS THE GREATEST ORGANIZING PRINCIPLE IN THE UNIVERSE.

I don't have the time or energy to unbuckle this right here, but I have grown to understand and live through various iterations of love, from the heart-pumping, can't sleep or eat, Eros love, which turns out to be 'Self-seeking love' to the more evolved 'Agape love,' which means self-giving love which for me is the gold standard of love.

The other thing people know about me is my child-like sense of wonderment and an insatiable curiosity about things-anything thing really. I must have been a philosopher in a past life, with significant overflows leaching off into this present incarnation.

As my dear sister Rosa Vera Cruz remarked recently, 'Tunji you know that someone can be brilliant and still not have any common sense.' Knowing my sister well, I know it was yet another dig at her favorite brother, laughing, I remarked that 'you know, you are right, I can relate to that.' Sigh... the agonies of having a

cosmic mind and yet by a cruel karmic twist of fate stuck in a country like Nigeria where thinking is a cardinal sin. I always wonder aloud sometimes, what did I do wrong in my past life be incarcerated 'for life' without the possibility of a parole in this Kafkaesque country called Nigeria.

Karma or not, all things considered, it has been a good life. I have remained true to my innermost moral self, remaining gyroscopically stable as I weathered life's unending storms. I have lived, loved, laughed, lost, found, lost, found again and through it all giving of myself in the simple belief that 'service is the rent you pay for your time here on earth.' In the spirit of love, I have come to realize that I actually do love myself-warts and all-and therefore developed the capacity to love others too. It is true that you can't give what you don't have.

So now today October 5, 2018, I want to share some of my ideas through some of my writings from a selection of hundreds spanning close to four decades, my faded pictures of family, friends, expressing love and laughter. I have done a few interesting things in my life, a perilous life as a young activist journalist writing under the military in Nigeria, another stint writing about our beloved continent Africa in the US, globe trotting assignments for the United Nations, UNDP, USAID, and the World Bank including a memorable assignment given to me by the recently late Kofi Annan to help organize South Africa's first elections in 1994. I have also garnered awards and fellowships to study at Stanford, Columbia and just this year the University of Indianapolis, as well as being a TED FELLOW for over a decade and being on the organizing board for last year's TED AFRICA Conference. Along the way founding one of Africa's first Civic Technology Hub, WANGONeT in 2000 and mentoring scores of young people as well as being everyone's favorite loving uncle and surrogate dad, including deep love for my own daughter Atinuke. It is this familial understanding that we are truly one cosmic and global family that shapes my engagement with everyone. So please enjoy this sparse and imperfect offering as my own expression of gratitude and love for taking time to come celebrate with me today. Remember...Love Always.

**Letters to the Editor****Only My Dad!**

Only my dad would ask me to write a 300 word essay due in the "next two hours" on a Saturday morning. Only for my dad would I actually do it. Unfortunately, I seem to have inherited my father's looks. I suppose it's not quite as unfortunate that along with his beaming smile I have inherited his wit and vibrant spirit of inquiry. I can vividly recall my dad entertaining and attempting to respond to even the most ridiculous of my childlike queries. Even at a very young age, my father engaged me as a complete person with valid opinions, worries, and aspirations. I never felt patronized as he attempted to make sense of the life that lay before me. To this day he is

always the person I call when I am itching to debate a contentious topic, or when I'm troubled by this increasingly troubling world.

I have countless fond memories with my dad. When I was a child, relegated to the back seat of our minivan, he would sometimes pretend to not know who I was. "Who's there?" he would ask, feigning shock and incredulity when I would inevitably indignantly respond "YOUR DAUGHTER"! I must confess that I've adopted this routine into my own comedic repertoire, much to the chagrin of my friends and cousins. As a tradition, the two of us used to go to Panera Bread regularly, always ordering the same

thing. One particular time, the cashier gifted my dad a larger lemonade than he had paid for. In response to my inquiry about why this had happened, my dad smugly replied, "he liked my face". Though I doubt that that was the server's true motive, I like to think that he saw in my dad the kind spirit that I know to be his.

I have countless other humorous memories with my dad, too many to list in the word limit he's awarded me. He has brought and continues to bring laughter, wonder and love into my life, and I look forward to making more memories in his sixth (WOW) decade of life.

**Atinuke Lardner**  
Swarthmore College  
Pennsylvania USA

# Life After Life

Death as a corollary to life has always held a morbid fascination for me and I guess a great many others.

**ThisWeek: June 1, 1987**

Death as a corollary to life has always held a morbid fascination for me and I guess a great many others. From the very first time at about age five, when I encountered the first of many corpses to come the body of a middle aged man lying in a gutter, frothing in the nose – I have had to constantly revise and update my understanding of this dark phenomenon.

I remember the blind panic and bewilderment that engulfed me as I fled with my playmates, away from the strange man lying in the gutter that we had just discovered. Quickly, we were whisked indoors, whilst a group of adults attracted by our panic soon converged around the unmoving recumbent form. Then I wasn't sure what to think, the encounter had totally overwhelmed my infantile sensibilities. But intuitively, I knew something was wrong with the man, terribly wrong; the man was dead-whatever that meant. But these days, death is no stranger, having been introduced to him a couple of times myself, and seen many accompany him down that dark mysterious passage never to return. What is beyond those high formidable gates, that intuitively terrifies? Is it a dark, dank netherworld, shrouded by malevolent shadowy nonentities, lurking behind every tombstone waiting to wrought evil to those who venture beyond those gates? Or it is a blissful escape from this grotesquely mutilated world with warped values, reeking of evil and evil men, into an enchanted rose tinted world, devoid of pain, suffering and populated by those we love?

Whichever scenario we choose is highly subjective because of the dearth of clinical empirical fact. But both owe their validity to the established premise that a reality exists, beyond what we now experience. Certainly, on this side of the fence, there is no great mystery about what we physically experience. Our cognitive appraisal of the world is real, sometimes brutally so. We touch, we smell, we see, and we feel sensations which have physical mass, and which are bound by space and time.

For most people, these are the parameters that circumscribe their lives in this dimension. And it is what guides their conduct in this existentialist jungle we call humanity. We elbow, jostle, gauge, reap, and scheme so that we can get a better and higher foothold on the craggy mountain side of life. But to what end? Inevitably, when our private conquests seem certain, a greater force quite literally moves the mountain, sweeping us and the reality we thought was immutable into a swirling void.

The enduring lesson through the ages has been that in this temporal world buffeted by the vagaries of time and space, nothing lasts for ever. But why then do men cling so tenaciously to the wreckage? Ignorance... probably.

But in spite of our materialistic selves, we often catch glimpse of life's more subliminal aspects, fleetingly opening windows into a metaphysical world which we are unwittingly a part of. The dualist nature of man mind and matter- has been proven beyond scientific doubt, but not so the immortality of the soul. What is the soul, precisely the human? Is it that essence which is subtracted from our being when we die, or just a biological force that dies with us?

It is this immortal essence that is the thread that runs through the belief in reincarnation and life in the hereafter. And even before then, life in the here before; effectively a continuum spanning life



**Little Tunji Jr before he out grew big Tunji Snr**

“ *As human beings atop the evolutionary ladder, we do have enormous freedom to act at our discretion.* ”

before life, life during life, life after death or, better still, life after life. Death in this instance would be contradictory except when restricted in meaning to represent only biological death. The immortality of the soul is another major canon of many religions. Punishment or rewards for deeds done in the here and now, dispensed in the hereafter, is the basis for retributive justice. But a closer look at the affairs of men-indeed the world quickly reveals some teleology: purposefulness in creation. Nothing is as arbitrary as it might at first seem. Nothing really happens

by accidents, true. As human beings atop the evolutionary ladder, we do have enormous freedom to act at our discretion, but we are, in turn, bounded over by certain immutable laws of creation. The argument is not whether they exist or not (they do) but rather why it is lost on a great many people. And even at a physical level, we find mirror images of some of these laws; for example the physical law of action and reaction-the basis for jet propulsion being opposites, easily translate into the laws of retribution. And in the arcane world of quantum physics dealing with

interaction of sub-atomic particles, time and space as we experience it at a much more physical level does not exist. This is exactly the reality in metaphysical realms where beyond matter, physical imperatives do not operate. However, the dilemma of the modern man is whether to forswear all these (non) realities and uphold the physical world as the absolute world. Suppose there really is no life after life, or life before life, and death is just precisely what it means: DEATH? Well, the corpus of human wisdom would be very thin indeed.

No doubt Obafemi Awolowo, a man of considerable wisdom, must have at one time agonized over such a dilemma. And he evidently must have found a suitable resolution when, on his birthday March 6, he said: “What I am celebrating actually is the immortality of my transition to eternal life. The fact that I am happy to celebrate it means that the great beyond must be a happy place. I have a strong conviction in life after death and the possibility of my union” address bristling with political registers, such arcane talk must have come as a rude shock. But Papa, as always, knew what he meant and a few others understood him perfectly. In the twilight of his years, he was a man fortunate enough to know what his life was all about: to conquer death (as we are all capable of), to live on forever.

## Letters to the Editor

### The Power of Great Friendship

I met Tunji Lardner on a day in January 1970, although we had a fairly violent beginning to our almost 50 year relationship (it involved broken glass and a complete set of Louvered windows playing with a small tennis ball in a hallway at St Gregory's) the friendship I have shared with Mr. Lardner has been unbreakable. Tunji is one of a kind. He is the only the person that I know who will make you happy when he is in pain. Tunji has been by me in both my triumphs and at my most painful moments. His has been an unwavering belief in me as a person and the power of a great friendship. In these times as we as we careen through this epoch of contradictions, where nothing is assured and the belief we have in

the fundamental goodness of ourselves as human beings is constantly tested, Tunji has been that singular icon, that lighthouse of steadiness in truly uncertain times. Quite simply he is a good man. My hope is that the whole world knows and sees this. That, as he enters his sixty first year on this crazy planet, that the fifty years that I have known him and the goodness he has brought to my life is shared by everybody because quite simply as I know him he is my brother. Again, quite simply, he is a good man.

**Christopher Coker**  
Virginia USA



## Discussion Topic

# In Praise Of Mediocrity

**Precisely, how Nigeria a country so rich in human capital can be so, so poor in its management of itself, lead in the main by a cabal of self-important and mediocre carpetbaggers?**

**Guardian: September 15, 2013**



**TED Curator Chris Anderson and Tunji discussing God knows what**

I have been fortunate to have done quite a bit of overseas travel compacted over the summer months and coincident with the long holiday break in the school calendar. As I look back, exhausted and trying to catch my breath inside the salt mines of Lagos, I realize that all the trips I took were somehow related to a venture quest of sorts in search of knowledge. It seemed as if the Universe had pleasantly conspired to temporarily take me out of the stridently anti-intellectual maw that is Nigeria, intent on giving me some fresh perspectives to appraise this glorious country hell bent on self destruction.

Not to want to further antagonize the teeming Nigerian philistines out there, I will only say that I variously attended an executive course in Southern California at the home of the Trojans, and then a month thereafter, I attended my reunion at The Farm in Palo Alto. However, the icing on the cake was my recent 'Sea to Sky' trip to Whistler in Vancouver to attend a TED Fellows Retreat. It is really difficult to convey the experience of spending five glorious days of fun, games and serious stuff (yes serious stuff) interacting with 200 of some of the smartest, creative and over achieving people on this planet with the common denominator and currency being only ideas; precisely 'ideas worth spread.' (See ted.com for more serious stuff) At one point in swank down town restaurant over some robust red wine and canapés, I found myself blissfully trapped in a clutch of physicists discussing the 'nature of reality' which I was told consisted of particles and force fields, which somehow elegantly all comes together in the quantum field theory. Since then I have not contemplated my big toe or looked at my hand in quite the same way.

In another appropriately vertiginous moment swaying in a ski-lift gondola precariously wending its way up the Whistler Mountain was another interesting encounter with a space-bound biologist. He had just returned from leading a four-month NASA mission cloistered in a mock Martian terrestrial base station, totally cut off from humanity and situated

at the craggy and inhospitable mouth of a volcano in Hawaii, all the better to simulate living on the red planet. Another more down to earth presentation was one on new and cheap waste human management technologies being deployed in parts of East Africa, with presenter gleefully and with mischievous twinkle in his eyes describing his erudite scatology as 'talking shit.' In the African discussion forum, some of the discussion centred on the absurdities of Pan African integration, specifically on why it is so difficult for Africans to visit each other in their respective countries partially because of visa restrictions that in some countries are entirely waived for western countries.

For the handful of Nigerians who managed to overcome the Canadian visa 'wahala' to make it to the event, we would periodically huddle to discuss, (in between the many interesting work and recreation activities) well, what else, Nigeria. The consensus was that the Nollywood and increasingly Afrobeats and Naija Hip Hop music were the only global products that Nigeria currently produces. True, but what about our human and intellectual capital residing mostly in our far flung Diaspora? In the United States for example, year on year, Nigerians emerge as the immigrant group with the highest educational attainment. Loosely translated, it means that Nigerians in the US are among the most highly educated people living and working in that country and the same can be said for Nigerians in other parts of the western world. We have everybody from that urban legend, the Nigerian PhD driving a cab in Boston, to yes, actual rocket scientists, respectively eking out a living and contributing to putting man on Mars. And in my own experience, some of the smartest people I have encountered in my life have been Nigerians. Since my return back to earth from the rarefied parallel universe that is the TED Ecosystem, I have been pondering this paradox. Precisely, how such a country so rich in human capital can be so, so poor in its management of itself

, lead in the main by a cabal of self-important and mediocre carpetbaggers? How, and equally important, why? After a long head scratching session I have come up with some ideas, and with your kind permission, I will share some of them.

*As any international traveller will readily attest to, the moment you cross the airport threshold into Nigeria, you are immediately transported into a refracted, reality-bending universe, in which some of the known laws of Newtonian physics do not apply.*

Welcome, you have just entered the Nigerian Reality Distortion Field (RDF) in which aforementioned particles and fields are arranged in a counter-intuitive and illogical matrix that constantly defies plain common sense or science. In this pre-rational, and pre-scientific chaotic world, the rule of thumb is to understand that a straight line is NOT the shortest distance between two points as previously thought, well, so much for Euclidean geometry. To understand this world is to have a native and intuitive grasp of quantum physics, and I hasten to add, 'Nigerian' quantum physics. Since

Aha! My Eureka moment! So what we have in Nigeria today are organisms (read Nigerians) that have fully adapted to this environment and they are breeding and creating more of their kind to the detriment of other organisms that are eliminated or if lucky escape to more hospitable climes. In my books this explains why there are so many smart and capable Nigerians living abroad. Now for the rest of you stubborn, hardy and thinking organisms that remain in Nigeria constantly befuddled by life in the reality distortion field there are a few things you need to know.

*Lesson one. Please understand that presently Nigeria is trapped in the full crushing grip of a venal, capricious culture of mediocrity that eschews ideas, enlightenment or reason.*

This seems to be the key genetic characteristic that is being transmitted to the present and succeeding generations. The present Nigerian political system is actually a 'Mediocracy,' which is a government of the mediocre, by the mediocre and for the mediocre. Lesson two. Nigeria's 'Mediocracy' is part of an evolutionary political process that started some one hundred years ago in 1914 and matured at independence.



**TED stars high on ideas**

**Nigerians seem to have wilfully created their own version of reality, separate and apart from the rest of the rational world, anyone who enters this reality distortion field must understand that Nigerians do not really believe that the laws of physics apply to them.**

As I pondered deeper as to why and how we got to this stage of our underdevelopment, it occurred to me that beneath all the chaos, bluster, and our hidebound ignorance about our true state of being, we were actually a product of the Darwinian logic of natural selection. Let me explain. According to a handy definition, natural selection is the process in nature by which, according to Darwin's theory of evolution, only the organisms best adapted to their environment tend to survive and transmit their genetic characteristics in increasing numbers to succeeding generations while those less adapted tend to be eliminated.

It is the transitional bridge between the familiar 'Kleptocracy,' which is a government of thieves and its ultimate evolutionary destination which is a 'Kakistocracy,' sadly a government by the worst elements of society.

In cold harsh light of this reality, what is a self professed thinking man to do? Well, now that I have a better understanding of Nigeria's 'Mediocracy,' I have decided to renounce any pretensions to being a man of ideas. Henceforth, there will be no lofty transformational ideas, no intellectual thoughts or discussions, and certainly no writing about stellar ideas worth sharing-at least not when in Nigeria.

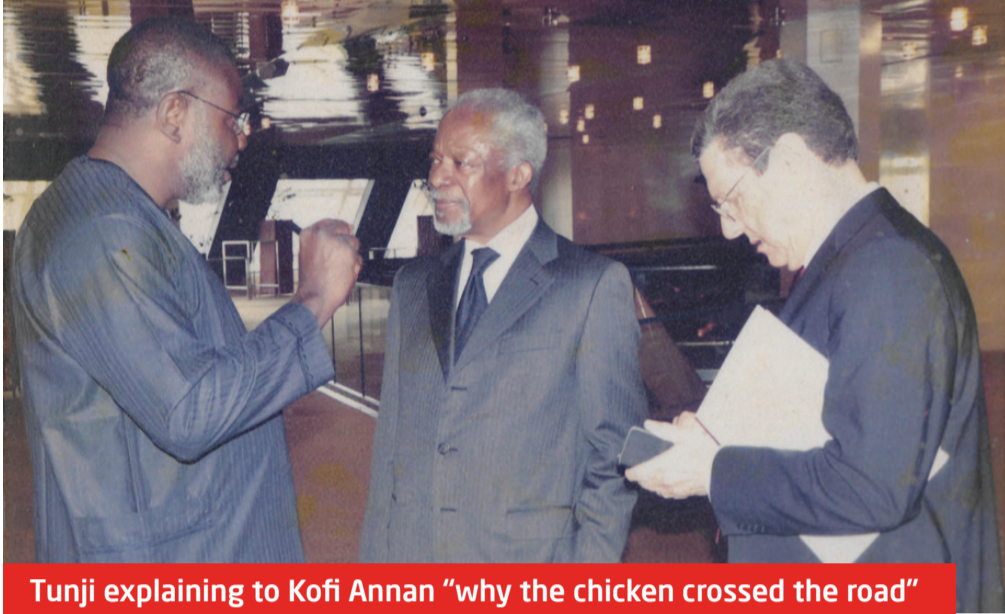
To complete my apostasy, I want to join the rousing chorus of tens of millions of Nigerians in the fulsome praise of meritocracy, sorry, mediocrity.

**Discussion Topic**

# In Praise Of Meritocracy

I wrote about the Nigerian Reality Distortion Field that warps our minds, morals and methods,

**Guardian: September 22, 2013**



**Tunji explaining to Kofi Annan "why the chicken crossed the road"**

It is a gentleman's prerogative to change his mind. Last week I wrote a sardonic piece in praise of mediocrity that summed up my frustrations about the lack of standards, organizational competencies and on a personal level the pursuit of excellence and knowledge in most Nigerians. I wrote about the Nigerian Reality Distortion Field that warps our minds, morals and methods, by creating the grand delusions of normality, occasionally punctuated by the mass hysteria of theatrical and sanctimonious outrage at the very anomalies we nurture and condone.

**I also wrote about the Darwinian case for the natural selection process that has bred multiple generations of venal, capricious, greedy and mediocre Nigerians whose ascendancy to positional authority is by feral ruthlessness, reptilian greed and a corrupt manipulation of an unjust and failing system to get to the top of a pile of rotting garbage.**

In a word Nigeria's 'mediocracy,' and in the mind bending and truth defying Reality Distortion Field, all this might seem like normal business as usual; and it is for many tens of millions of Nigerians caught in the seemingly inescapable undertow of

lies, misdirection and hypocrisy that maintain the current system.

However for some of us, like this self described 'thinking man' who actually see through the smoke and mirrors of the grand lie that is Nigeria, what are we to do? I tried a mock capitulation last week, but the handful of really thoughtful readers who wrote to me advised me not to surrender to mediocrity, even in jest.

So I therefore renounce my earlier decision to join most Nigerians in the praise of mediocrity and choose instead to sing in praise of meritocracy.

This is no doubt is going to be a difficult challenge given the thoroughly transactional and delusional nature of life in Nigeria. I am faced with a personal conundrum. As a self professed seeker of true light and a lover of wisdom as in Philos-lover and Sophia-knowledge (Philosophy for short), is it possible for me to be IN the maw of mediocrity and yet not be OF it. Put another way, can I exist in this sea of mediocrity whilst managing to stay afloat bobbing around and hoping to make landfall on an island of meritocracy? Or will my life raft of principles, values and morality be eventually overwhelmed and sunk by the churning, turbulent waves of dubious conformity, with the only life line being the total

renunciation of my values, ideals and morals? Adapt to mediocrity or die!

Every day I am confronted with the ruthless logic of natural selection, knowing that my own genus is facing extinction and no amount of knowledge and enlightenment is going to save some of us. I am sure that I am not alone in feeling this way, but others seem to have found a way to cope with the psychedelic experience of life in the reality distortion field. Most have become amoral spectators in the tragic-comedy of their own lives, jettisoning any belief in a higher set of transformational values, preferring to take the low road of expediency in order to survive.

I understand that position, even as I declare my own susceptibility to the same survivalist mindset that Nigeria engenders.

What annoys me is that this sentient class of Nigerians, no doubt a minority, prefer to bitch, moan and complain ceaselessly about the depredations of the ruling political class and the monumental disaster that lies ahead, but are too cowardly or vapid to do anything serious about it. To them I say put up or shut up...or do something about it.

I take cold comfort that knowing that eventually this cycle will play itself out and that eventually the reality distortion field will dissipate, revealing the buck naked truth to Nigerians, and then again perhaps not. At the back of my tiny mind I always have this niggling doubt that perhaps, just perhaps there really is no reality distortion field in Nigeria, and what I experience is simply the smug projections of my feeble mind unable to cope with the glorious reality that is Nigeria. wilfully created their own version of reality, separate and apart from the rest of the rational world, anyone who enters this reality distortion field must understand that Nigerians do not really believe that the laws of physics apply to them.

As I pondered deeper as to why and how we got to this stage of our underdevelopment, it occurred to me that beneath all the chaos, bluster, and our hidebound ignorance about our true state of being, we were actually a product of the Darwinian logic of natural selection.

Let me explain. According to a handy definition, natural selection is the process in nature by which, according to Darwin's theory of evolution, only the organisms best adapted to their environment tend to survive and transmit their genetic characteristics in increasing numbers to succeeding generations while those less adapted tend to be eliminated.

Having earlier dealt with mediocrity, let me offer a handy working definition of meritocracy which implies in the best of the meaning of the word 'elite,' leadership by able and talented people. The immediate question that comes to mind is to ask ourselves, truly and honestly if Nigeria at anytime has been governed by 'able, honest and talented people?' I imagine that there might be some historical revisionists that might try to justify the



tenure of one military ruler or the other, one civilian ruler or the other, or even our current 'transformational' President.

Truth to tell, even the President's ardent supporters in rare moments of lucidity and privacy will concede the fact that we have a pretty middling and uninspiring head of state whose means of ascent was not based on any meritocracy. Instead the existing mediocre political system necessarily will throw up mediocre candidates for the highest offices of the land, just as it was designed to do, again echoes of natural selection at work.

**The net result is the 'mediocracy' that we practice, in the deluded belief that we actually have a working and functional democracy. We might have the practice of civil rule as opposed to full blown Military rule, but good democratic governance is most certainly not the present political system.**

Placed side by side, meritocracy and 'mediocracy' share a nice alliterative resonance, but that is where the similarities end. While I cannot argue that a meritocracy is strictly the opposite of a 'mediocracy,' since we have never experienced the former, I can readily argue that what we universally describe as the 'Nigerian factor' prevalent in almost every facet of our personal and national lives is the central corollary of our 'mediocracy.' And at the very deep mendacious heart of the matter is the big lie that is the Nigerian state. There are clearly issues of trust, legitimacy and competence that pervade all institutions and processes of state. The deep irony especially for Nigeria is not a lack of able, talented and competent people to run things, but the fact that over the last fifty years or so the very elite that should have established a system based on merit, faltered and retreated into a delusional private utopia that only existed in their minds. In the meantime we saw the rise of the Barbarians who have since demolished the gates and made their way into the boudoir, raping the national ethos and pillaging the commonwealth as they seek to fully establish themselves as lords of the realm.

In my mind, the jury is out on which side wins over the long haul, 'mediocracy' or meritocracy? My own bet is on the latter, but it will probably not happen in my own lifetime, and so in the meantime, all I can so is join the small chorus of enlightened Nigerians who are still determined to sing in praise of meritocracy.



**One more thing, no actually two things**

## News &amp; Views

## THE NEW IMMORALITY

The ubiquitous IMF (debate) is holding the nations attention-span hostage.

**Nigerian Tribune: November 5, 1985**

The ubiquitous IMF (debate) is holding the nations attention-span hostage. It has seized the center stage of public discourse. And like some immovable colossus, it bestrides the press, providing good copy of newspapers, and easy prattle for the electronic media.

It as also provided, perhaps unwittingly, a distraction from the structural problem and political subterfuges that precipitated the need of an external loan, such as the type being debated. Continued on Page 14

## REUNION AT THE SHRINE

After a temporary parting of ways Femi and Beko unite to keep Fela's music going.

**NewsWatch: January 27, 1986**

After a temporary parting of ways Femi and Beko unite to keep Fela's music going.

It is Sunday close to 5:30 p.m. a sparse gathering of the faithful has already assembled at Fela Anikulapo-Kuti's African shrine at Ikeja. Femi Anikulapo-Kuti wearing off-white trousers, and a mottled light blue shirt, with his alto-saxophone nestling comfortably around his neck, is on stage at the shrine for the first time in six weeks. Around him is the acoustic tangle of wires, instruments and the rest of Fela's Egypt '80 band comprising a percussion section of a set of trap-drums, three congas, Shekere and clefts, a formidable wind section of a three trumpets, one French horn, two tenor saxophone, and a rhythm section of a bass guitar, two rhythm guitars, one organ and a piano.

The performance was to be the reunification concert announced earlier at a press conference jointly addressed by the two belligerents, Beko Ransome-Kuti (Fela's brother) and Femi Anikulapo-Kuti. Newswatch gathered that ever since Fela was sent to jail last year for currency offences and the logical emergence of his son to fill the musical vacuum, the question of the leadership of the Egypt '80 organisation has been controversial. While Femi danced and entertained on stage, the piper playing the tunes was Beko, because he controlled the purse-strings of the organization. Coupled with this was the resentment of the older members of Fela's community against Femi who was considered too autocratic and arrogant. And so after many bitter months of squabbling, the climax was reached, when Beko suspended the salary of Femi's sister, and a key member of the band for indeterminate reasons. Femi walked out in protest, leaving the musical direction in the hands of Lekan Animashaun, the longest serving member of Fela's band. And though the band gamely struggled to perform regularly in spite of Femi's absence, the ever dwindling audience inevitably forced the rapprochement that was initiated by Fela, during a meeting he held with Femi at the Maiduguri prisons, early last month.

Continued on page 7



Tunji legging it all the way



Nanny Jane wasn't forced to take this picture



Testing 1, 2, 3

## OGA PRESIDENT

Oga President, if I tell you say we happy, na lie we dey lie.

**The Punch: 1983**

I dey write you dis letter because, as today be Independence day, I tink say na di right time for all of us wey dey suffer for tell you di tin wey dey our mind.

I don dey dis country since de day my mama born me, and I don dey look dis country, since the time when "Oyinbo" peoples still dey.

When "Zik of Africa" dem take big big grammar drive Oyibo peoples dem go, I tink say better don come be dat. "But to my surprise", na from dat time nahin tori begin wowo. Continued on Page 13

**WANGONET**  
WEST AFRICAN INFO NETWORK

## Making Rigging History

How not to rig an election is a [project](#) designed to create an early warning system for identifying, interrogating and arresting election malpractice before they happen, especially in this election cycle.

It is a forensic look at the 2007 elections, to enable us look forward towards the 2011 election.



Elections in Nigeria have for the last six or so decades followed a fairly predictable path of 'rigging'. Even so, the 2007 elections by most accounts were the worst elections in living memory

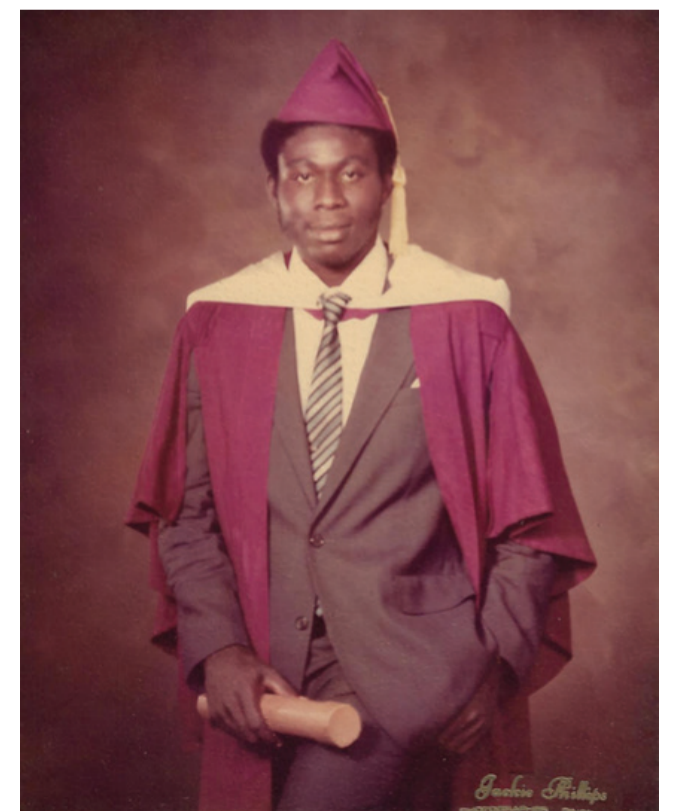
This Project, inspired by Tunji Lardner from Wangonet, gathered a team of 120 people in Lagos on 2 March 2011 to examine 'the who,' 'the what,' 'the when,' 'the how,' and 'the why,' of the 2007 elections and to build a 'Nigerian Electoral System V 2.0 Blueprint':

## The Making Rigging History Framework



In Tunji's words...

"The inception of the idea was about two years ago when at yet another conference on Nigeria, the issue of rigging the 2011 elections was again raised.



(Reunion at the Shrine continued from page 6)

After that meeting, Femi stated that he had no regrets over his father's predicament because "he is defending an ideology which he believes will save the blackman from the shackles of deprivation, and stimulate fundamental human rights in Africa."

It was no doubt, in the spirit of such lofty idealism, that the reunited Egypt '80 band started their performance before a rapidly thickening audience of Afro-beat audiophiles. Fela's jazzy big-band instrumental Dog Eat Dog being the opening number seemed an apt choice. By melodiously denouncing canine cannibalism, it, by inference, signaled the end of months of fraternal feuding between uncle and nephew. When asked why he defected with 14 members of the '80, Femi told Newswatch that the central problem was one of a "generation gap" between him the de jure leader of the Egypt '80 organisation, and his uncle Beko who by trusteeship was the de facto manager of the enterprise. He complained that his father's wives were all against him, and that there were parallels between certain problems within the organization, and the African struggle for freedom from oppression, which his father has so heroically championed.

"You must first remove the mote in your eye before you can tell somebody else to remove the one in his eye," he alluded. Femi also told Newswatch that during his discussion with his father in Maiduguri prisons, he argued for less interference with the band from without, and "freedom to run the organization with my discretion. And about his father's fate, he expressed optimism that with President Babangida's commitment to human rights, and an impending "review of his case" his father, Fela, "will soon come out."

Why black man dey suffer Fela's musical critique of the slave trade, was the second number, and while generating fond nostalgia among the ever increasing audience, it opened up a flood of vitage; Fela's masterpieces – Open and Close, Palava and the classical Water no get enemy, in which Rastafarian Ogene Kolagbo's searing lead guitar solo was a pleasant addition.

Throughout the spirit of Fela, though many times removed, was palpably evoked at the Africa Shrine, from the bevy of his singing "queens" to the gyrating Afro beat dancers. Femi's masterful presentation of jarring sax solos, energetic and lewd dance steps, bawdy humour, and above all gutsy singing, was eerily reminiscent of his father's unique showmanship. The heir-apparent of Afro-beat visibly impressed the motley crowd of young professionals, musicians, students and businessmen who had gathered in a new-order shrine, unbecubed by aromatic smoke and other such hallucinogens.

O.P.- Opposite People, a musical statement on mentally colonized and negative people, and Pansa-Pansa, a frenetic afro-beat number ended the band's first installment repertoire of Fela's music. At about ten past seven, Femi opened up with music from his own arsenal, So-so talk no action, a pulsating upbeat song with a vocal line of profound urgency ended giving way to Madness Unlimited, another energetic number.

Veteran musician Bala Miller, leader of the Pyramyds of Africa, when initially pressed to comment on the quality of Femi's music, simply gave "a thumb-up" sing and resumed his finger-snapping and rhythmic sway to the beat. He later told Newswatch that as far as he was concerned, the Femi-Beko rift was inconsequential and what was important was that "the music (Fela's) must survive."

He also told Newswatch that the Pyramyds would hold a solidarity benefit concert at the Shrine, later on this month, and proceeds would go to the upkeep of Fela's "queens." The full complement of the band re-entered with Alkabulan (which according to Femi is "Africa's original name") and went on to do the controversial Unknown Soldier Fela's famous song defiance. While the fragile reconciliation holds, pending Fela's release, music lovers are guaranteed continuity in the musical doctrine of Afrobeat at the shrine, and even more so with Femi's assurance that Fela's music no fit stop because na African music.

## News & Views

### When Pigs Fly

**It is obvious now that Nigerians derive a sado-masochistic pleasure in revelling in chaos and disorder.**

**The Punch: 1984**

Although the weekend had been unusually eventful (the instance of a beach picnic had made it so) the intangible feeling of anxiety persisted. The presentiments dragged on to Monday morning, and had by then assumed quite ominous dimensions. By Tuesday it was quite palpable, but I still couldn't put my finger on it, until a "learned" friend's remark during an informal gathering homed in on the feeling.



**Yeah Mon, everything ire!!!**

Shortly after joining our little group, the lawyer remarked with a feeling of obvious bewilderment, that he didn't know "what was happening", at that point neither did we. But he went on and unraveled the mystery, which turned out to be an anti-climax of sorts. "N.E.P.A. has not taken light in my house for over a week now" I was tempted to reply "so what's unusual about that" but was overwhelmed by a sudden flush of catharsis. The anxiety had dissolved from that point looking back at the "week-end", the genesis of my anxiety became clearer. I remembered watching television late at night with a subconscious feeling inside me building up to needle-point anxiety;

I was anxiously anticipating N.E.P.A's calling card. After a couple of hours of waiting, my conscious involvement with the drama unfolding on the screen over-rode my subconscious request that N.E.P.A. visits. Disappointed but not beaten, my masochistic subconsciousness recoiled in anger and settled down in the pit of my stomach brooding, and waiting. And if that chance revelation had not dispelled it, no doubt sooner or later N.E.P.A. would.

The bathetic crash and absurdities inherent in my anecdote, (quite understandably) must seem strange to some readers who haven't been formally introduced to N.E.P.A. (National Electric Power Authority).

But legions of other readers would easily identify (and quite strongly too) with the inane feeling of anxiety described, and quite readily also with the traumas of a possible anti-climax.

Nigerians; although sometimes quite excitable, are generally stoical people. Some people argue that it is the sheer weight of hardship that deadens their responses. Possibly true; but I think that Nigerians save their excitement and surprise for the really unusual, like when N.E.P.A. provides continuous uninterrupted supply of electricity for any 24hrs stretch of time. The shock (no puns intended) which N.E.P.A. has generated amongst its users lately is typical of the surprise Nigerians express when confronted with the unusual. And I might add that if N.E.P.A. continues this way, some consumers will have to be treated for genuine shock.

To understand in any sense at all, the peculiarity of the Nigerian response to events around him requires an understanding of his expectations of people, institutions and indeed his country. Continued on page 10



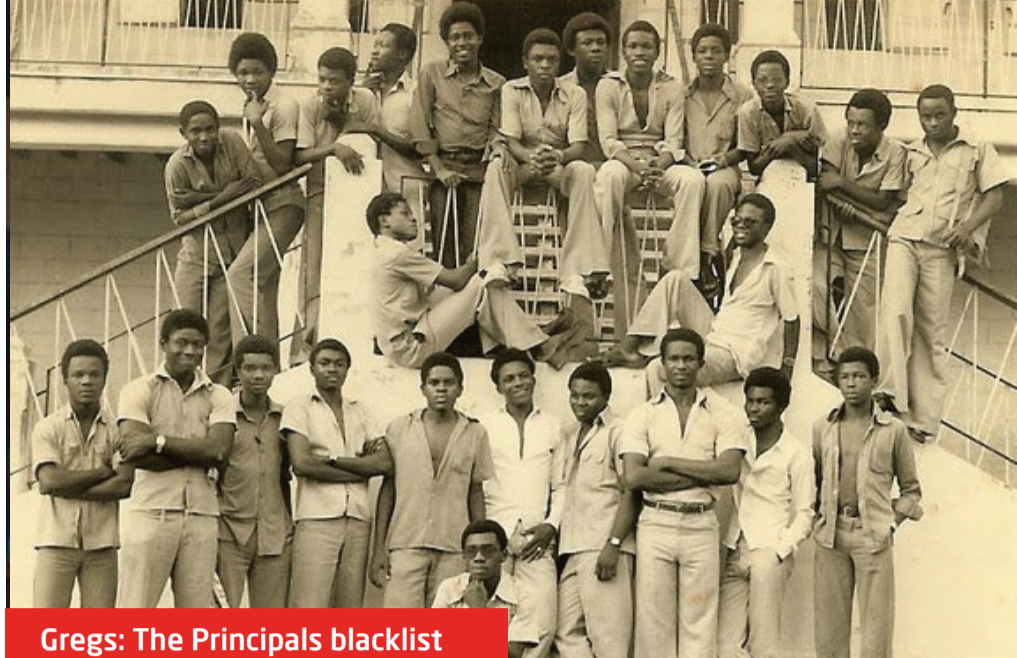
**Pigs do fly**



**Indiana Jones lost in transit**



All the Kings Men



Gregs: The Principals blacklist



The 220lbs Goalie



Chin up Mr Sphinx



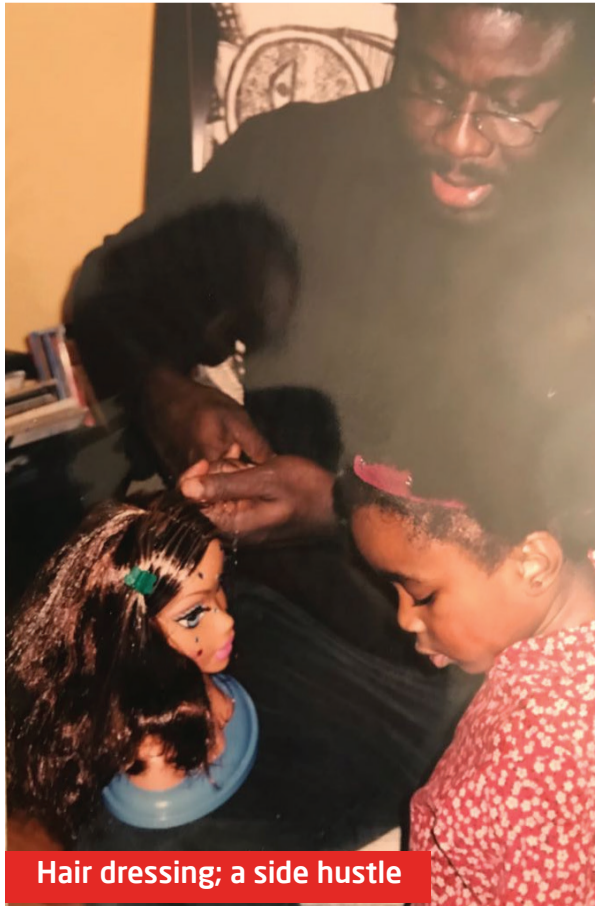
Memo: Under New Management



Love laughter and family



Stanford University JJC



Hair dressing; a side hustle



Tunji's Angels



Tunji's secret identity



Tunji re-imagined as a girl



Bayo loses at arm wrestling again



Old family, new friends



Tunji you again!!



Ajadi and Lardner: who fine pass?



Mum is the word



The Lardners in black and white



It's called a selfie dad!



Two Angels



Mum's twin joys Tunji and Helen



He's got the whole world in his hands

(When pigs fly continued from page 7)

The reason why he is more familiar with the exceptions to the rule is that the rule itself is the exception. The sense in this oxymoron is simple, Nigerians know that things can operate smoothly, but do not in Nigeria. It is permissible for other countries to operate smoothly, but certainly not in here!

It is obvious now that Nigerians derive a sado-masochistic pleasure in revelling in chaos and disorder.

The habit I imagine must have been formed at the infantile stages of early post-independence Nigeria, during the first republic. The trauma of the civil war was (arguably) a strong contributing factor, but after it, at the onset of puberty, the incontinence of the oil-boom in the early to mid-Seventies certainly compounded it. The adolescent stages of late military rule, and early second republic did nothing to curb the habit. And how after the fiasco of the second republic, and at a mature twenty four years, we still prefer to venture forth, in pursuit of mediocrity, the exception. Some people strongly argue that the amalgamation of the then Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914 by the British was the exception(al) circumstance that gave birth to our perversion of always preferring the unusual.

Perhaps so; but irrespective of origins, there must be unanimity in the opinion that we seem to prefer aberrations, and at best compromises, but never the best possible. And we are all too ready to suffer under the yolk of bungling incompetence and injustice, since to us that is the rule. The antithetical example of smooth efficiency and egalitarian justice is to a certain degree welcomed, but then that would be an exception, wouldn't it? As would a Government with a benevolent and truly nationalistic outlook founded on a solid and morally unimpeachable foundation would be. Or as the case may be, a Nigeria beclouded by ethnic paranoia or a quietly efficient Government whose physical absence in the day-to-day life of its citizens is a testimony to its behind-the-scene efficiency. Necessities such as clean water, good food, good housing, and good education for all are adequately provided, as is the uninterrupted supply of electricity.

All these though improbable are quite possible. And occasionally the pig does fly, but few people take notice, because its flight is usually very brief indeed. And the few that notice blink disbelievingly because the urge not to believe the usual (in this country) is too strong.

Those flashes of competence leave a great many of us befuddled, and anxiously waiting for the anticlimax (which usually is punctual).

But ultimately we hope that Nigeria will develop to a level where everything works, and pigs are kept in perpetual flight.



## News & Views

# THROUGH THE GLASS DARKLY

**I see a wonderful land, lush and verdant, like an idyllic savannah, with wonderful and happy people**

**Sunday Guardian April 7, 2013**



**Professor Gambari and his body guard**

I dejectedly make my way up the stairs and back to the window, take a furtive peek at the window and there it was again, that marvelous green-white-green vision of a country in which everything worked in consonance and concert for the greater good. This is Nigeria, or more realistically this is what Nigeria could be. I especially look sharply downwards to my own garden and again and I am tempted to again rush downstairs, but I restrain myself. I know what lies in my garden, Nigeria today.

I wonder aloud about these two different realities. The one the utopian vision of a country that has been endowed with everything it needs to be a successful global leader, and the other, the dystopian reality it has created and seems determined to sustain. In trying to reconcile the illusions of greatness and the reality of mediocrity, I take a step back and actually looked at the window itself. Suddenly it struck me as I respectively trained my sight to look intently at the squares from the top right quadrant right through to the bottom left quadrant. It was the people. It is the people that can make the difference.

To fully share this vision, I want you to look in your mind's eye and imagine that you are looking at the window and there are four contiguous squares that make up that framework of the window and each square that you see is a quadrant. You see them? Good. Now imagine with me as I seek to populate the quadrants with the type of people I saw in the vision.

### The top left quadrant

These are the ruling elite comprising mostly of the beneficiaries of the Military-Political Complex that capture the state in 1966, and have since then been rapaciously plundering the common wealth and deliberately impoverishing their own people to maintain this dysfunctional and unsustainable status quo.

This band of thieves is composed of the direct inheritors of Nigeria's political independence whose predation started almost immediately after the Union Jack was lowered on the 1st of October, 1960. This group comprises of three main classes, the military-having fought to 'keep Nigeria one' regard the wealth of the nation as war booty to be shared according to their whims, the civil servants and other apparatchiks of the state for whom the workings of government is simply a toll gate to extract bribes and rent for every transaction or contract that they care to implement, ostensibly for the good of the commonwealth, and the politicians comprising professional political operators and other assignees from the two previous groups that collectively sustain the graft and patronage machine, much to the detriment of the common good. These kleptocrats know that the jig is up but can't stop stealing because it is too easy and it is without consequences. The group numbering no more than 5% (five percent) of the population have access to over 80% (eighty percent) of its wealth and are fully replicated at both the federal, state, and local governments of this country.

### The top right quadrant

This group is roughly the traditional middle class of Nigerians whose membership in the fluid and uncertain dynamics of Nigerian class formation is constantly changing with each regime. They owe their class ascendancy by virtue of their kinship and proximity to the ruling elite in the aforementioned top left quadrant. They are the educated professionals in the main, but depend on the patronage machine to successfully ply their trade. When called upon, they migrate seamlessly and sideways into the left quadrant, and once there, fight doggedly to remain in that space. For the rest of them, they wait with anxious anticipation for 'their

Lately I have been having this recurring vision that it is at once intriguing as it is disturbing. In the vision I am on the second floor a house, peering through a square and clear glass window framed into a quadrant of four neat squares. It is invariably dawn with the Sun rising and steadily brightening the vistas I see as I peer in wonderment through the glass brightly.

I see a wonderful land, lush and verdant, like an idyllic savannah, with wonderful and happy people purposefully tilling the land, growing things, making things, building things and all harmoniously working together to build something in which the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. This green paradise stretching far into the horizon and capped at the furthest point by bright luminous white clouds, with just a hint of azure skies in the background, immediately conjures up something familiar in my altered state of consciousness. Even as I look again in bold arcs of looking, taking in the view and tracing it right back, it seems, to my door steps, suggesting that it is within reach, literally at my own doorsteps.

I immediately race down the stairs and in two bounds I am on the ground floor facing the door. I yank it open to be confronted by something not all together unexpected, familiar even. What lay before me was a dank, grim and dysfunctional nightmare. I saw people suffering and shackled by their own fears, greed, violence, cowardice and deceptions, sloshing through the excrement of their own making, howling for someone, anyone, to save them, even though they could save themselves, if only they chose to. I quickly shut the door on this self-inflicted nightmarish hell on earth that I strangely feel was co-created by my own complicity and the willful complicity of tens of millions of others.

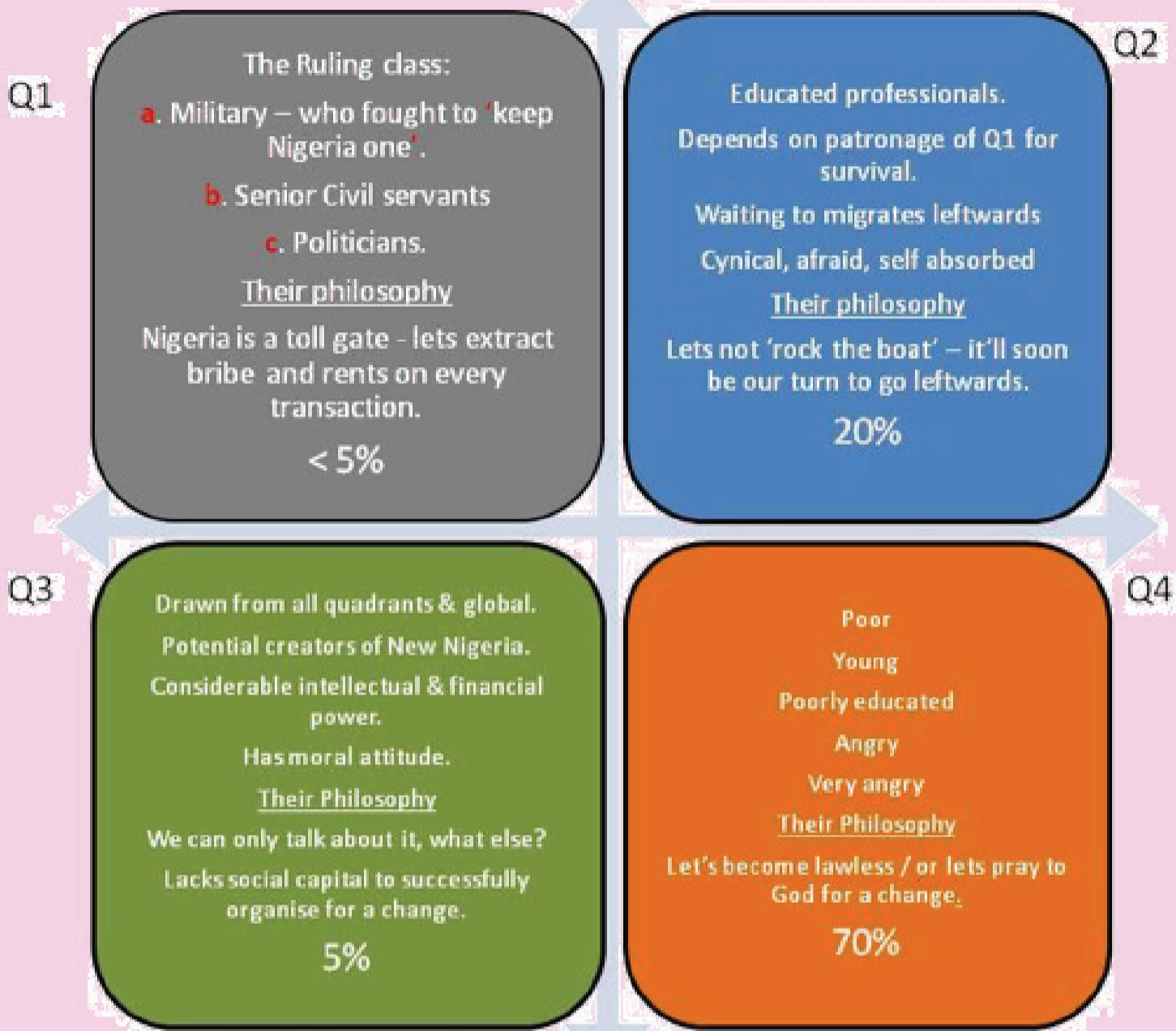
turn' to feed at the trough. For this middling class, their constant complaint about the system without any real resolve to make the necessary sacrifices for real transformational change had come to define the nation's character. This group has created a country where its potential leaders are too cynical, afraid and self-absorbed to fully understand the dynamics of its own extinction. For them salvation lies mostly in the 'divine intervention' that hopefully will nudge them sideways into the state subsidized creature comforts of life in the top left quadrant. Even though they keep abreast with global trends, their deluded sense of 'Nigeria's exceptionalism,' and their inherent laziness and habituated value system of expecting reward and benefits without any real or meaningful effort or production, means that they are unable to mount a sustained campaign to truly transform their country. They constitute perhaps 20% (twenty percent) of the population and are fully represented at all levels of the body politic.

### The bottom left quadrants

These groups are the potential creators of a new Nigeria. They are drawn from all quadrants and exist globally. And with the return of the Diaspora, there exists the prospects of the formation of a new middle class with considerable intellectual and financial capital to deploy in a last ditched attempt to salvage Nigeria before it collapses. What they lack is the social capital to successfully organize to occupy the top left quadrant. This group is the brain trust of the nation and it is staffed by creative and innovative Nigerians who have the technical skills as well as the right moral attitude to bring the much needed change in the country. However, they are viewed with suspicion by the people in the top right quadrant who don't want anyone to 'rock the boat' because any potential change of the system could possibly dislodge them from their positions in line for

News

Which Nigerian class do you belong?



**(Through the glass darkly Continued from page 10)**

feeding at the trough. The sentiments from the top right quadrant is even more sinister, they do not want these potential change agents anywhere near their quadrant, so they invariably deploy their strategy of the three 'Cs:' conscription, cooption and finally coercion to neutralize them. They constitute perhaps less than 5% (five percent) of the population.

**The bottom right quadrant**

The actions of this group over the next decade will determine if Nigeria survives as a nation. This is the largest demographic unit and comprises the over 70% (seventy percent) of Nigerians who are under the age of 30 (thirty) and not so coincidentally, the 70% (seventy percent) of Nigerians who are living below the poverty line. If 70% (seventy percent) of your population is at once young and poor, living on the marginalized edge of destitution, disease, ignorance and hopelessness, then by extension, your country Nigeria, is a rich country full of poor people.

This group does not really care about the preservation of this system or political order, because the system historically has not cared for them. Even so, they are acutely aware of their privations and ceaseless hardships against a backdrop of the relative comforts and affluence of the other three quadrants and they are angry, very angry. We must recognize that we are all sitting on an oil drum of explosives and that this group will have no hesitation whatsoever to one day in fit of blind rage light the fuse. As you read this, consider that you also might be collateral damage if this scenario ever plays out fully.

**So, which quadrant or quadrants do you belong to?**



Love conquers all



Wonky Rasta yoga with Niyi



Tunji's Dora Milaje

# The Age Of Consequence

**Nigeria is a confused country and Nigerians even more so. Every day as I try to filter and process the farrago of people, events, action and consequences, I am very often at a loss to find meaning and purpose in this ever increasing complex and dystopian jumble of confusion**



*"They go on in strange paradox, decided only to be undecided, resolved to be irresolute, adamant for drift, solid for fluidity, all-powerful to be impotent." Owing to past neglect, in the face of the plainest warnings, we have entered upon a period of danger. The era of procrastination, of half measures, of soothing and baffling expedience of delays, is coming to its close. In its place we are entering a period of consequences". We cannot avoid this period, we are in it now"*

**Winston Churchill, November 12, 1936**

The inimitable Winston Churchill made these remarks when speaking to journalists about the impending war in Europe. Against the ominous backdrop of Hitler's sabre rattling, he was issuing a dire warning about the inevitability of the Second World War amidst the dithering, ill prepared, fractious, frightened and collective impotence of what was to evolve to become the Allied Forces in the European theatre. His powerful words, expressing the 'strange paradox' of a wilful decision to be indecisive, irresolute, unmoored, liquefied and impotent; this might very well describe the collective state of the Nigerian psyche today. Since last year's fuel subsidy 'wahala,' there is a growing consensus among the chattering class that Nigeria is a very fragile state heading in absolutely the wrong direction. While the reasons adduced for this dangerous trajectory are as varied and as vapid as the respective commentator, it is clear that 'something is rotten in the state of Nigeria.'

The prevailing zeitgeist is one of a limited national horizon as a viable and stable political entity and a severely circumscribed future for the tens of millions of young people under the age of thirty, by some estimates perhaps 110 million out of a population now adjusted upwards to 170 million frustrated citizens. Nigeria has run out of excuses for its failures, and 'the era of procrastination, of half measures, of soothing and baffling expedience of delays' is truly over we are fully in it, we are in the ruthless grip of historical causalities, we are all, regardless of culpabilities in the age of consequences.

If we consider the past as prologue-meaning that our history has determined where we are today, we all must bear graduated responsibilities over the last five decades for taking what was once a promising nation and turning it into a failed state. While, I must concede that most of the damage to Nigeria was wrought by the 'Military-Political Complex,' still well and alive today, thank you very much, a substantial amount of blame must lie with succeeding generations whose collective apathy and inertia, all but guarantees that their future is permanently held hostage by the past. A past they can reasonably argue, they had no hand in shaping. However, that's exactly my point, this IS the age of consequences, and our collective complaisance in maintaining this present status quo means that we are all guilty as charged, in varying degrees. Presently in a wry and ironic twist of history, we are engulfed in that strange paradox of cascading failures of the state, undermined by maximum complexities and complications being confronted with a sorry counterpoint of minimum competence in leadership and governance. At federal and state levels, on the average, our political leaders are both incompetent as well as corrupt, and yet our citizens still look to them for salvation. Nigeria's problems have outstripped the abilities and will of her leaders to solve them. Then again there is the paradox of expecting salvation from the very class of people who caused the problems in the first place, a clear case of doing the same things over and over again and then expecting different results-this by the way is an acceptable definition of madness. It is as if Nigerians have all collectively decided that they are not subject to

the laws of physics, and that the laws of causality do not apply and that we are not bound to the simple logical equation of  $A+B=C$ ; in a word, cause and effect cease to apply in the Nigerian dimension of reality. However, the 'reality' of reality is that while the time and historical distance of a causal factor might have happened a long time ago, and not within the immediate purview of the observer, the effects will still happen, and continue to happen until its trajectory is changed. This is what young Nigerians have to fully understand; the fact that you did not 'cause' the problem does not mean that you will not suffer its consequences.

We are presently confronted by many existential threats, not only to Nigeria as a country but also to Nigerians as people. Up North, we have a raging civil and widening war, underscored by wide spread destitution and deftly disguised as a religious conflict, and deep down south, we are held hostage by war lords periodically threatening to destroy Nigeria's oily life blood. Caught in between these violent pincers, the looting of the commonwealth goes on abated and unchallenged, our health and wellness indicators keep us abysmally in the lowest global ranking, our educational systems has virtually collapsed, we live literally in the dark ages and nearly 70% of our citizens are poor, creating again that strange paradox of a rich country full of poor people.

As often times as I scratch my head in bemusement and wonder aloud about if at all it is possible to right and repair this country, if at all this Nigerian experiment is in fact doomed,

**I am always amazed at the astonishing ignorance and incuriosity of Nigerians about the true state of Nigeria,** and even more so, the breath taking arrogance and impunity of the people who rule them. In Nigeria, about 2% of the population have access to and control 80% of its resources. The ruling elite have demonstrated over the last fifty years or so, that they really do not care about the welfare of Nigerians, and even when they do, their egos, arrogance and incompetence prevents them from creating a fully realized and sustainable process of lifting their compatriots out of poverty.

So the question, is the past as prologue, are we doomed? The answer is yes if we continue to encourage and maintain the bad habits of the past, and no, if we decide to change the present trajectory and chart a new course. On a positive note, remember that the Allied Forces did eventually win the Second World War, but not without considerable 'blood, toil, tears and sweat.' Are up to the task?



**Nigeria has run out of excuses for its failures, and 'the era of procrastination, of half measures, of soothing and baffling expedience of delays' is truly over we are fully in it, we are in the ruthless grip of historical causalities, we are all, regardless of culpabilities in the age of consequences.**



**Discussing weighty state affairs**

Letters To The Editor



220lbs of twisted steel and sex appeal

I know well this man, who is known in restricted circles as 220lbs

Sir, I know I should not be responding to a rumor, but in this case, I will make an exception. I learn that your respected newspaper is planning to celebrate the 60th birthday anniversary of one Tunji Lardner, Jnr.

I know well this man, who is known in restricted circles as 220lbs, and I hasten to inform you that this information is wrong. “220lbs” because he calls himself “220lbs of twisted steel and sex appeal.”

This man is actually about 24 years old. We became friends a few years ago, and have participated in a few shenanigans together. But none quite as big as pretending to be a 60-year old man!

I mean: once upon a time for instance, at Iya Sikira Buka in Agege...wait...Once upon a time, at ThisWeek Magazine in Surulere...Come to think of it, that was...those were in 1983...1986...

I am not sure where the years (or the twisted steel) went, Tunji. Wishing you lots of luck in the second half, brother. Welcome to the Sweet Sixties!

Sonala Olumhense  
New York USA

Our pioneer civic tech leader

Wandering into the world of activism in the age of technology, social media and its narcissism can leave one with an exaggerated feeling of exceptionalism, especially with the deafening bells of the citizens, donors and stakeholders who appreciate the ding one makes to the Nigerian question. However, to really understand our current ideas are merely a recombination of the existing factors, one must accept in humility that these roads are not newly paved and a patriot left a giant trail for us follow.

Mr Tunji Lardner is a forerunner of civic technology, a critical role that we might falsely rapidly forget. His work in leading WANGONET, a regional organization with a bouquet of outstanding technology work in elections, governance, anti-corruption and other social themes cannot be forgotten. Beyond his legendary status as a fighter of democracy in the dark days of military government, Mr Lardner immersed himself, applying ideas that transform how we intersect the interest of citizens and institutions for a functional society.

Mr Tunji Lardner carries an amiable personality that blends joviality with deep scholarship, a rare experience that leaves one with expanding thoughts at every opportunity. He calls us to reach beyond our grasp, to knit our intersection of the “youngins” and most importantly, craft an alternative Nigeria - hacking the Nigerian OS. It is difficult to believe that he has reached the diamond age, - a passage to the seniors- as a great man who held the civictech torch for us to pass on to others. Mr Tunji Lardner, a reputable member of BudgIT Advisory Board in the last four years is a rare stock in the Nigeria firmament and I have often made a serious claim, which he counts as a joke, that if I had a chance to commit my life to a lifelong internship, it will be to sit at his feet, drunk from his fountain of wisdom.

Sir, we celebrate you and wish you many more years in sound health and strength. May the Lord who saw you through the phases of Nigeria - of rising hope, of dark alleys - keep you steady to experience a Nigeria that your ideals and dreams fully represent. God bless you and your family.

Oluseun Onigbinde  
Co-Founder/Director, BudgIT

TLJ Is Sixty!!

TLJ still the delicate net that attracts the brilliant and the beautiful

Dear Editor,  
TLJ is sixty!!  
What a hefty number,  
a man who can dance rumba  
and hits the drums like a lumber jack?  
TLJ is sixty?  
The two hundred pounds of twisted steel  
and sex appeal no court can appeal  
TLJ is Sixty  
let the festivity spread like butter on bread  
He is a man who butter won't melt in his mouth  
but in his hands ideas flow like Lagos Lagoon  
Not even the goons of state could make him  
languish as he journeyed from Tribune to  
Punch from Mid-Week to WANGONET  
TLJ still the delicate net that attracts  
the brilliant and the beautiful  
Tee El Jay  
is sixty!

Oluwatoyin Ade-Odutola  
Florida USA



(Oga President continued from page 6)

The first politicians dem, jus come chop, like say na only dem alone God give mouth. “Little wonder” when soja boys dem just come drive dem commot patapata.

True-out the war, when hunger wan finish man pickin...we dey. After the war now, Gowon im ‘Oil Boom’ time come reach; true true man pickin enjoy small o. but na only small, because the chop wen army and some civilians chop for Gowon time....na uncountable!

Small time, Muritala vex, he come drive dem comot come proble dem all. Dat time I happy well well. Dat time all those thief thief big men piss for body.... Fever catch all of dem.

Dem come kill Muritala when dem see say the man too toff. Obasanjo and Yara duwa dem com take over gofment, like all the other gofments, dem too siddon chop them own bellyful.

1979 come reach, we do elections, me sef I follow dem vote well well. After dem settle the 122/3 palava for court, dem declare your excellency president. That time una promise us say chop go boku yafun yafun, say man pickin no go sleep under bridge again. Una tell us say we be one Nation one destiny, say we all be brothers and sisters.

But the tin wey una promise us no be de tin wey una come do. Small time now una begin take we small people take play football.

No do, ... no do, una say money finish for country, say we must tight belt for Austerity. Man picking never recover from Obasanjo im own “low profile” when una bring una own austerity katakata.

House wey una promise man, man no see, the one wey come pain person pass na chop. All de green revolution wey una say una spend plenty money on top, ... rice na N100 a bag! Dat na if you see am buy sef. Hungry wire person, but Umaro Dikko say because him never see person dey find chop yet for dustbin, hungry no dey catch person. Dat man sef; one day go be one day!

But una peoples dem just dey fat everyday una dey pull rosy cheeks when poor man dey suffer. Una dey buy private jets up and down like say money be sand sand. Dey travel overseas like say na una backyard una de go. Small time una go come tell us say we must be honest and we must love our country, because we be one Nation One Destiny. Small time una go talk about Etika revolushun....because person keep quiet no mean say man picking be moo-moo. Dis country na real “monkey dey work

baboon dey chop”. Una tink say person stupid. When una see say elections de come, and man pickin don vex for una, una come promise say una go “flood the country” with chop and provisions. The only flood way me I see na de ones wey cover the Jakande gutter for the front of my batcher! And na blood full am!

Elections come come now, na another story be dat. All the politicians dem come begin dem mago mago. But since “cunny man die, cunny man bury am” I no surprise at all, when dem say una don win again. Because I no say una own wuru-wuru na “one in town”.

Oga President, if I tell you say we happy, na lie we dey lie. No work for town, no money for man pocket, and the small chop we dey town, if you yourself hear the price, you go wan faint. Common milk na fifty kobo, one cup gari na 25k, ordinary rice na 50k a cup.

Everywhere katakata, for road “kill and go” no let man pass. For house moskitos no go let man sleep, hungry no go let man rest. And na dis same Nigeria nahin we all day. Na all of us get dis country. All dis una yanga self; una no dey fear God? Anyway God dey ... dis na poor man prayer.

But make I tell una say God no dey sleep, and no condishun is parmanent. I go write you again soon.

Yours in austerity,  
Citizen Joe Sufferhead

## News

**(Birthday Blues continued from page 1)**

With my body having fully rediscovered the force of gravity and with every physical aspect drooping southwards (gentlemen you know what I am talking about) I have finally come to terms with my fading, no, make that faded youth. While in truth, I can gratefully say that while the shine and sheen of youth might faded somewhat, there is still the sturdy and durable build of an aging fighter, with just enough of the residual hint of menace, not to be trifled with. And so this birthday stealthily announces itself, and in deep reflection see my evolved self as wise silverback, constantly surveying life in the valley, with just enough paranoia to stay out of trouble, wondering why and if I would celebrate this birthday.

I remember as a young boy when the proximity of my birthday to our independence day was a much anticipated double treat. In schools all over the country, you were guaranteed some extra food and confectionary and little National flags to wave during the numerous parades that were held in celebration of a young but potentially great Nation. As the years rolled by, I found that I had increasingly lost my celebratory zeal for independence day, and by the time I made it into young adulthood as a young journalist, now better appraised of the true character of our leaders and the benign ignorance and indifference of our compatriots I had totally lost my appetite for any independence day celebration. I ask myself truly and deeply what do we really have to celebrate beyond this constantly unravelling and chaotic union? Yes, the fact that as the trope goes 'against all odds, Nigeria has remained one country,' is not in my books sufficient for breaking into song and dance.

**(The New immorality continued from page 6)**

The a posteriori reasoning, based on the evidently devastating effects of the economy, is that Nigeria and Nigerians have over borrowed from western financial institutions, now they want there money back. We can't pay because we are not generating enough foreign money to pay them. So in retaliation they are holding back further credits until we see the IMF doctor to tidy up our house for us, admittedly, a rather simplistic summation of our debt problem, but than that has been the Nigerian approach to analysis. We always prefer a naïve ahistorical path of least resistance, preferring always to flail with both arms at the effect – blissfully ignoring the causes. Or, perhaps, this odd business of Hegalian dialectics has no place in uniquely Nigerian scheme of things. While with the benefit of hindsight, we can with some justification plead myopia for some of the shortsighted lapses of the past, we cannot at any turn plead ignorance, as being the reason why we are in the morass we are today.

Grand complicity will be the charge facing most there was to be an inquisition. Yes, complicity and conspiracy, both hallmarks of Nigeria's culture-ethic.

Between 1958, when serious exploitation of oil began and 1983, when Shagari's thieving second republic was terminated Nigeria earned over N85 billion in foreign exchange. And between 1979 and 1983 alone, the nation earned N4.3 billion. A good question to ask, in spite of the IMF-inspired cacophony, is, where has all the money gone? It certainly did not vaporize. Or vanish as is usually speculated. Neither can anyone veraciously argue that it all went into 'nation building' which nation, which building?

This year's independence celebration in tandem with my own birthday five days after was especially poignant for me. On Independence day I sat patiently and perhaps even patriotically to watch the presidential parade beamed live on television from Aso Rock the seat of the Nigerian Presidency. The fact that it was being clumsily stage managed in what seems like the parking lot, was itself a telling narrative of just how small and diminished our national vision had become. I still remember with welling national pride the grand march past of our honourable men and women of our Armed forces, their colourful serried ranks marching in lockstep precision ahead of the deep mechanical rumble of our national war machines, all suddenly punctuated by the thunderous scream of the Nigerian Air Force flying in breathtaking precision overhead, to the delight and pride of all Nigerians.

This year was the sorry spectacle of the President's praetorian guards, marching in their puny ranks, with a handful of officers riding skittish horses, all to the seeming delight of a small group of the presidential and party cohorts. To this amateurish spectacle was the grandiloquent commentator whose rendering of the ceremony, was clearly at odds with the stark and dispiriting reality that I was watching. It was in a very insightful way the perfect metaphor to describe the Nigerian reality-illusion chasm, or my own admittedly personal creation, the Nigerian Distortion Reality Field. We collectively have grand ideas about what we can do, and believe that by loudly proclaiming, no shouting, that we are 'the giant of Africa,' therefore we are... 'we shout therefore we are.'

It was against this depressing backdrop that I decided that my own birthday was not worth celebrating in any special manner. I decided to leave town as it were, so that I would avoid the inevitable pressure of family and friends to rejoice with me on this day. Luckily, I was expected in Abuja to help facilitate a strategic planning session on the day after independence with the tempting offer to extend my stay to also help out with a youth convention in Nassarawa state, virtually next door to Abuja. My client was the eponymously named foundation set up by a prominent ex-military general, who bucked the trend by publicly declaring that Nigeria had been extremely kind to him and that he had more money than he would ever need, so he was going to give much of it back to society. As we say in these parts 'Wonderful... wonders will never cease!'

Chief Arthur Nzeribe, the London based Nigerian business man, tells us that there about E16 billion in Nigerian private account in Europe – and I imagine that he should know. I imagine also, that this figure is conservative, which means that a sizeable proportion of country's missing millions is literally stashed away somewhere with a tiny percentage of Nigerians holding the keys.

So the apriori, and therefore rational conclusion is that a large percentage of what this nation has earned in the past 27 years has been expropriated (a polite term for stolen) by a hand full of Nigerians. If so, why hasn't anybody done anything about it? Well, nobody 'knows' who they are. This is the enduring mystery of the ruling class and nouveau-riche.

Although ordinarily the conspicuous affluence of the rich should be good enough a signal flare to ask for a rendering to the impoverished and disposed majority, this has not been the case yet. Why? Majority of Nigerians normalized to the dynamics of the nation suspect, but do not know for sure that certain other Nigerians are trampling on their rights and stealing their own share of nature's bounty.

And the more ignorant, impoverished and uninformed the masses are the better for the ruling class. Nigeria has an adult literacy of 34%; life expectancy is still a low 50 years, only 28% of Nigerians have access to save drinking water and the average daily calorific intake is nine percentage point below the United Nations food and agricultural organization's (FAO) minimum required intake. These are the vital statistics of the average Nigerian.

So there I was on my birthday along with some three other speakers and facilitators with perhaps a hundred young people drawn from all over Nigeria and cloistered in a large complex belonging to a major Nigerian evangelical church. In presentations after presentations and in the smaller inter-personal exchanges with these really bright, industrious and visionary young people, I came away with the clear understanding that there are two 'Nigerias.' The Nigeria that most of us of a certain generation know only too well, populated by two generations of venal, cynical, corrupt and uninspired leadership and followership, and this new 'Naija' generation, which I dubbed the 'transformational generation,' who can and will transform Nigeria. For those of you in the old Nigeria generation, the best you can do is to either help them in an inter-generational effort, or as we say in the hood 'get the f\*ck outta their way!' Because of these young people, I have a renewed belief in Nigeria.

The fates rewarded me deciding to spend some time with these heroic young Nigerians, there was after all, a surprise birthday celebration complete with a huge multi-autographed card and a large cake to boot. It was, 'the bestest birthday ever!' The only crimp in the short festivities over lunch was when one young lady persistently asked how old I was? I tell you, these young people are fearless. After trying my best to ignore her question, she again pointedly asked me smack in the middle of my presentation if 'I was older than Nigeria?' Hmm... I had never quite thought of it that way. My response was that technically speaking, I was not older than Nigeria, because I was not born before 1914. That's my story and I am sticking to it.



But the rationale of other Nigerians lucky enough to escape the debilitating crunch of hunger, diseases and poverty is somewhat different. Broadly in this category are two types of Nigerian: those actively stealing, and those waiting their turn to steal. And so what exists is a grand conspiracy of thieves, effectively constituting the ruling class.

And since there exist honor even among thieves, the conspiratorial silence and visible reluctance to punish those who embezzle public funds (one way or the other) is glibly discountenanced as being part of the Nigerian ethos.

And even in the extremely unlikely effect of white-collar thieves brought to book, the punishment (if any) is usually less than a paternal (maternal) tap on the wrist. In the extreme, like during the Buhari administration when scores of ex-politicians were bundled into jail, the political polarization, the play to the ethnic gallery, the legalistic mumbo-jumbo, and out right blackmail soon made sure that a great many of the most dubious characters of the second republic were out again on the streets.

It is near impossible to push this business of moral inquisition, or crusade, to the hilt for the simple reason that most privileged Nigerians, one way or the other, are beneficiaries of the crime, graft and maneuverings that pushed Nigeria into the quagmire. The passivity the society shows towards the crimes and punishment of the rich and influential is not amoral; it is immoral, because the same is not true for the more violent and crude method of dispossession, armed robbery for a good example.

## Photo News Continued



Continued from page 14

The armed robber or petty thief is stigmatized and his more sophisticated crony – the so-called 'big man' – is magnanimously forgiven by the majority of latent thieves who see him as an impeccable role-model.

In celebrated cases of fraud, the white-collared culprit is usually only dismissed and never convicted. It seems

society is reluctant to set a 'dangerous' moral precedent by actually punishing Kleptocrats and others who steal from Nigeria.

The Nigerian society, at a later date, does not want to be hoisted by its own moral petard. It would rather feign amnesia in the face of open, clear cut rape of the state treasury by a few. It comes as no surprise that to date no major public officer, including all former head of state (perhaps with the exception of late general Muritala Muhammad), as ever disclosed their assets.

Clearly, most prominent Nigerians live well beyond their visible means. But then, who has the moral fortitude to ask them, let alone prosecute them? The status quo protects and perpetuates its own.

Still it would be interesting to know just how much top military officers, politicians, and top public officials are worth, and even more interesting, how they came to acquire such enormous wealth in a nation where thousands of people die of want and disease everyday.

Such revelation would be more beneficial to the moral edification of the society and even have wide economic benefits than all this hot air about IMF.





## Press Statement

### TUNJI @60 PRESS STATEMENT PROGRAM

A birthday party was held this Friday, October 5th in honor of Tunji Lardner. The dashing sexagenarian along with his vivacious wife, Bola, were the hosts to a select gathering, held at the Boardwalk event center in Victoria Island, Lagos for about one hundred friends and family joined by their common love of the celebrant and an uncommon stoicism to endure an evening of discussing ideas in the midst of revelry.

Reports reaching us from our usually unreliable sources, state that the celebrant had in the face of sound advice and indeed protests from his organizing cohorts, had insisted that his celebration should not be all about 'eating and drinking,' but rather should be a 'cerebration' of his life as a man of insatiable intellectual curiosity and a self-styled man of ideas.

Indeed, being the obdurate 'nutty professor' as some of his detractors call him, the celebrant remained unfazed by the collective eye rolls, the teeth sucking and the general opposition to the idea of ruining a great Friday evening of food, drink, and dancing by compelling the guests to essentially 'think for their supper.'

He is reported to have, with an imperious flick of his wrist, waved off the trope, that Lagosians only attend parties to be wined, dined and entertained and not be tasked with any mental effort beyond deciding what they want respectively for their aperitif and digestif with a sumptuous dinner sandwiched in between.

'Well, ' he reportedly said, 'I know that they have come here with thoughts of food, but I insist that we also present them with some food for thought.' So the evening proceeded as a 'cerebration' of food for the mind and the stomach.

Given his interest in technology and his global retinue of family and friends, the celebrant live-streamed the event so that his teeming fans from around the globe would be as he put it, 'digitally present.' This innovation he was warned by his organizing team, does have some unintended consequences.

It was suggested that some of his guests might be camera shy because they might have long standing international warrants of arrest that compel them to want to remain incognito, or in this instance, given the complexion of most of the guests, 'ingognegro.'

This challenge was solved by the adroit filming of the event, that guaranteed the anonymity of guests on furloughs, parole, on INTERPOL's most wanted lists or those evading child-support payments abroad. The celebration occurred with no known arrests of guests at the event. The chronology of events unfolded as follows:

GUESTS ARRIVAL-5pm

COCKTAILS AND CANAPES-5.45 PM

GUESTS SEATED- 6.30PM

WELCOMING OF GUESTS – 6.30-7PM

DINNER-7.30

INTERACTIVE DISCUSSIONS - 8-8.45PM

TRIBUTES FOR CELEBRANT 8.45-9-15

TOAST AND CUTTING THE CAKE- 9.15PM

CELEBRANT'S THANK YOU SPEECH-9-30

DANCE, DANCE, DANCE TILL LATE

## Stop The Presses

### 🍏 PROLOGUE (Canapes/Cocktails)

*Plantain with Groundnut, Kilishi Bites, Dambun Nama  
Zobo, Palm-wine, Afro-Brazilian drinks*

### 🍏 PALATE CLEANSERS (Appetizer) – Select One

- ☐ Goat Pepper Soup
- ☐ ABC Soup (Chicken & Vegetable Broth)

### 🍏 CENTRE SPREAD (Main Course) – Select One

- ☐ Amala, Gbegiri & Beef
- ☐ Jollof Rice, Plantain & Chicken
- ☐ Beans, Plantain & Fish

### 🍏 POST SCRIPT (Dessert)

*Puff-Puff, Ice-cream & Fruit*

### 🍏 EPILOGUE (After Dinner Nibbles)

*Medley of Your Favourite Nigerian Street Food*

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in good health and  
wealth...

