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THE GOLDEN JUBILEE (1960-2010) OF NIGERIA'S INDEPENDENCE: AN
ANALYSIS OF POLITICAL LEADERS AND FOLLOWERS.

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Obasanjo and the verdict of history:

an assessment of Obasanjo's administration in Nigeria. 1999-2007

The history of modern Nigeria cannot be complete without a mention of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. This is certainly because of the roles he had played in the leadership of Nigeria. He ruled Nigeria as a military Head of State from 1976 to 1979 and as a civilian president from 1999-2007, a feat no other Nigerian had accomplished. The essence of this paper is to ascertain the verdict of history on Obasanjo as a military Head of State and more especially as a civilian president from 1999-2007. His term as a civilian president was a major litmus test for the future of Nigeria's fledgling democracy. Set as a critical conjecture characterized by high popular expectation and international goodwill on the one hand, and weak institutions and deep seated social cleavages exacerbated by years of military rule on the other, his administration was expected to quickly deliver the dividends of democracy. How far did he go and how positively or negatively had he impacted on Nigerians and the Nigerian nation?

Assessment, Democracy, Administration.

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INTRODUCTION

Among the Igbos of Nigeria, it is often said that talking about the dead is a risky venture because if one speaks bad of the dead, it will be regarded among them as sacrilegious essentially because their custom and tradition forbid the living from speaking bad about the dead; and if one pours lavish eulogies on the dead, the Igbos would accuse him of having an ulterior motive to partake of the deceased estate. In subjecting His Excellency Chief Olusegun Obasanjo, the former President of Nigeria to the verdict of history, I found myself in the same kind of dilemma, but as our people say, we cannot because of the threat of war allow strangers to appropriate our bequeathal and inheritance.

No matter how anyone sees it, the history of modern Nigeria cannot be complete without a generous mention of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. As Ahmadu Ali(2006) puts it “ ...when the history of this great country is written, the chapter on Nigeria’s grand transformation will begin and end with the immeasurable and invaluable contributions of President Olusegun Obasanjo and the People’s Democratic Party”. The reason is simple. Olusegun Obasanjo is the only Nigeria who had ruled Nigeria for two consecutive times. This is not a mean feat, for one of Nigeria’s most notable statesman, Chief Obafemi Awolowo of the blessed memory, earnestly desired to be Nigeria’s President for just a day, but never achieved it. Obasanjo ruled Nigeria as a military Head of State from 1976-1979 and also as a civilian president from 1999-2007. Within these periods, Obasanjo expectedly achieved a lot of things for Nigeria and may have also failed to achieve certain things.

Having been a military Head of State and a civilian president and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Nigeria, on two different terms, what would be the response of Obasanjo if faced with J.F Kennedy’s words; “when at some future date the high court of history sits in judgment on each one of us... recording whether in our brief span of service we fulfilled our responsibilities to the state-our success or failure in whatever office we may hold will be measured by the answers to four questions; were we truly men of courage? Were we truly men of judgment? Were we truly men of integrity? Were we truly men of dedication?”

Accordingly, this paper is saddled with the task of ascertaining the verdict of history on Obasanjo with regard to his term as the civilian president of Nigeria from 1999-2007. To undertake this task, the paper is divided into three sections. Section one examines Obasanjo’s tenure as a military Head of State of Nigeria. Section two

examines his leadership as the civilian president of Nigeria on two different terms while the last section concludes with the verdict of history on Obasanjo.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This work is anchored on the systems analysis. The basic thrust of this analytical framework is that a system, particularly political system, is a set of elements in constant interaction; where the homeostasis of the system is maintained by a balance in the input and output variables of the system. (David Easton, 1953, 1965). In this context, the input variables are the policies of the leadership while the output components are the response or reactions of the people towards the policies so made by the leader. Nigeria as a political system under Olusegun Obasanjo experienced this input-output matrix of the systems analysis. Obasanjo's reform policies, removal of oil subsidies, sour relationship with the legislature and exclusive nature of the political space under his tenure were but some of the inputs of his tenure and policies into the Nigerian Political system. The response by Nigerians was sharp and uncomplimentary, leading to several disagreements, overheating of the polity and industrial disharmony. To that extent, Nigeria's political system remained entropic and tension-laden.

The implication of this is that when there is an imbalance on the political input-output relationship in any system, that system is bound to experience disorder or chaos. Under Obasanjo's 8 years of civilian Presidency, the Nigeria political systems remained turbo-charged and acrimonies as a result of his actions and policies. Herein lays the relevance of the systems analysis as the anchor of this paper.

OBASANJO AS A MILITARY HEAD OF NIGERIAN STATE 1976-1979

Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation that evolved from British imperialism and domination. She gained her independence from Britain on October 1st 1960. Out of her 50 years of existence as a sovereign geo-political State, she had witnessed 29 years of military dictatorship and 21 years of civilian administration. The largest Black Country in Africa, she has reaped enormously from the failures of civilian administration; the arbitrariness of military dictatorship as well as the disintegrative stigma of a fratricidal civil war which lasted for three years, 1967-1970. In 50 years of political independence, Nigeria has had a running battle with a gamut of contradictory social-political forces chief of which have been ethnic and religious politics-factors, which were the precursors of the Nigeria Civil war.

The incursion of the military into Nigerian politics was occasioned by these factors, which played themselves out on a large scale in the western regional election of 1965. This crisis which climaxed other smoldering social-political crises in the country and which signaled doom for the new country led to the sudden usurpation of civilian power by the military on 15th January 1966. This singular historical fact could be said to have prepared the ground for the emergence of Olusegun Obasanjo as a military Head of State, himself being a major player in the Nigerian military and also in the Nigeria –Biafran Civil War. We wish to recall that it was to Olusegun Obasanjo as a representative of the Nigerian Army, that the seccionist state of Biafra surrendered to in 1970. His strategic placing in the Nigerian Army was never in doubt. He was one of the key prosecutors of the civil war. So it was not accidental that he was made the second –in-command to the late Gen. Ramat Murtala Mohammed following the 1975 bloodless coup that swept Gen. Yakubu Gowon out of power.

Obasanjo's emergency as Nigerian's military Head of State followed the brutal assassination of Gen. Murtala Mohammed on Feb. 13 1976 Col. B.S Dimka.

As a military Head of State Olusegun Obasanjo made some landmark achievements. His administration endorsed the famous 1976 Local Government Reform which recognized the Local Government as a third tier of government. This reform has served as a foundation for grassroots development in Nigeria.

It will be recalled that part of the reasons for removing Gen. Gowon from power was his reluctance to initiate a transition to civil rule programme. According to Nwankwo Arthur .A. (1999), firm foundation for the 1979 constitution has been laid by Ramat Mohammed before his death and it was in his speech to the Constitution Drafting Committee that he made his preference for an American-type constitution, rooted in a multi party system known. It is to Obasanjo's credit that he ensured that the transition programme outlined and initiated by his predecessor was carried out to the letter. It is also to Obasanjo's credit that during his tenure as military Head of State, his regime ensured the implementation of the 3rd National Development Plan which was designed to launch Nigeria into the orbit of development. Obasanjo's military administration was also deeply concerned with national food security. He was worried about rapidly changing values which subjugated agriculture; he was disturbed with the scale of food importation. His government's response was to stimulate agricultural production and it was for this reason that his government introduced the Operation Feed the National (**OFN**) programme designed to galvanize Nigerians to massive food production. Apart from the OFN, Obasanjo's military regime also made tremendous strides in education with the introduction of Universal Primary Education with the vision of providing basic education to Nigerian children especially in the primary school,

irrespective of social status, tribe, religion or class standing. Obasanjo's military government would also be credited with Africa's cultural heritage and the revival which was demonstrated in the hosting of Africa's largest cultural and arts festival known as Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC) in 1978. During his tenure as a military Head of State, Nigeria also experienced reasonable infrastructural development and building of national icons like the imposing National Theater, Iganmu-Lagos. Obasanjo's tenure as military head of state is not without its critics. He has been accused of not getting the priorities of the state right at that time; doing little to combat corruption especially in the civil service. These criticisms notwithstanding, Obasanjo's tenure as Nigeria's military Head of State could be said to be peaceful and that era has been known as military era with the best record of respect of human right in Nigeria's 29 years military rule.

Perhaps, Obasajo's greatest achievement as a military Head of State was his handing over of power to a democratically elected government in October 1st 1979 to Alhaji Aliyu Shehu Shagari. This was a landmark achievement given the fact that he was the first African Military Head of State to have handed over power promptly to an elected civilian administration. It is worthy to note that this singular act gained Obasanjo international recognition as well as good will and local respect.

OBASANJO AS A CIVILIAN PRESIDENT OF NIGERIA 1999-2007

The complex and complicated interplay of social-political force that led to the emergency of Obasanjo as Nigeria's civilian President in 1999 is fortuitous and beyond the scope of this work but the truth is that Obasanjo became the democratically elected president of Nigeria on May 29, 1999 after 16 years of military dictatorship in Nigeria; becoming for the 2nd time in his life and career the President and Commander-in-Chief of Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria for a period of 8 years, from 1999-2007. During these years, he did quite a number of things. Accordingly, it has been documented that "on assumption of office in May, 1999, the Obasanjo administration immediately took decisive steps to put in place an enabling environment for democracy to thrive; for Nigeria to regain international respectability and credibility and for the economy to be on the path of sustainable growth and development. The specific measures taken included;

- a. Presenting an Anti-Corruption Bill to the National Assembly.
- b. Reviewing and suspending contracts whose award lacked merit;
- c. Curtailing excessive and extra-budgetary spending by government,

- d. Adopting measures to achieve fiscal prudence, transparency, minimal deficits and efficient resources use,
 - e. Introducing the Universal Basic Education scheme to wipe out illiteracy and ignorance,
 - f. Addressing the energy crisis,
 - g. Reviewing development in the various critical sectors of the economy and outlines measures to move the nation forward.
 - h. Presenting the Niger Delta Bill to the National Assembly;
 - l. Establishing a poverty Alleviation Programme;
 - j. Putting in place measures to establish a nation minimum wage,
 - k. Rehabilitation of run-down structures,
 - l. Assisting the Private sector to increase utilization of installed capacity and
 - m. Establishing prudence and stability in macro-economic management.
- (Office of the Honorable Minister, Economic Affairs (2000))

The first term of the Obasanjo's civilian administration was essentially used to ensure political stability and providing the platform on which economic challenges could be tackled. During his second term in office as a civilian president, Obasanjo settled down to address the economic challenges of the nation through the various reforms he introduced.

Assessing Obasanjo's era as a civilian president of Nigeria, Mbanefo (2008) notes: "The inception of a democratic government in Nigeria in 1999 came as a big relief to Nigerians after many years of military dictatorship. Most Nigerians welcomed the election of Olusegun Obasanjo as the new democratically elected Head of State with high expectations.

Since the inception of the First term of the Obasanjo's administration in 1999 to date, Nigerians have witnessed some developments of far reaching importance in the political, economic and socio- cultural life of the country: increase in salaries of workers as well as increase in price of petroleum; prolonged conflicts between the legislature and executive arms of government during the first term of the regime with each arm blaming the other; the impeachment of two Senate Presidents and removal of the Speaker House of Representatives, all during the first term; controversy over resource control; resurgence of ethnic nationalism as well as intra-ethnic conflicts; introduction of economic reforms; the establishment of anti-corruption laws; introduction of poverty alleviation Programme; increase in the number of political parties; conduct of election with all the controversies surrounding them; increase in crime and assassination of politicians; efforts to reforms the Local Government systems at cetera." During the second term in office, Obasanjo was not lacking in actions. He carried out many

reforms in several sectors of the country. Recounting his achievement, Ahmadu Ali (2006) writes: "Indeed never in the political history of Nigeria has an administration so tenaciously and vigorously pursued a focused agenda of reform that is borne out and reflective of the ideological leanings and direction of the party that formed that government. What's more, these reforms have yielded profound dividends that even the most ardent critics of President Obasanjo and the PDP cannot but recognize and appreciate".

"From the historical debt relief which freed Nigeria from the suffocating shackles of huge and reckless external borrowings accumulated in the past; the privatization and liberalization policies which has energized the organized private sector and refocused government concentration on the provision of public infrastructure and enabling policy incentive; the consolidation of the banking sector and injection of sanity in the financial firmament; the grand road map to revitalize the railways; restoration of the Abuja master plan; the reformation of the hitherto rudderless and bloated public sector; the exciting transformation of the moribund communication sector into one of the fastest growing sectors in the world to the world –wide acclaimed anti-corruption war which is yielding fruit and gradually returning honesty, integrity and patriotism to our public service national character and attitudes the achievements are indeed legion and heartwarming.

According to Ahmadu Ali (2006) "Today, Nigerians are beginning to feel the impacts of these reforms at all levels and sectors of the polity. I am not however, unaware of pockets of criticisms of these reforms from a few quarters. But that is exactly the nature of every reform effort. Nowhere in the world has history recorded a reformist government that is determined to clean the Aegean's stable and change the systems for better that is not treated to serious opposition as has been evident in the, sometimes, hysterical postulations of impatient and myopic naysayers who crave the joy of a new born but detest the birth pangs of labor that normally precedes every bundle of joy". However, Ahmadu Alis perception of Obasanjo's track records falls outside the poor rating by a cross-section of Nigerians.

For instance, we can use Koformata's (2006) assessment model to assess Obasanjo's successes and failures in his 8 years tenure as Nigeria's Civilian President. Koformata's table as shown below compares Nigeria's pre-1999 conditions against the 1999-2007 period of Obasanjo's presidency on a nominal scoring scale from, very poor (1pt) poor (2pts), good (3pts) very good (4pts) and excellent (5pts).

S/N	Policy/issue area	Pre-1999	1999-2007
1	Foreign debts/Debts service management	Very poor (1pt)	Excellent (5pts)
2	Power sector	Very poor (1pt)	Very poor (1pt)
3	Telecommunications sector	Very poor (1pt)	Good (3pts)
4	Education sector	Very poor (1pt)	Very poor (1pt)
5	Health sector	Very poor (1pt)	Very poor (1pt)
6	Roads and Road transport sector	Very poor (1pt)	Very poor (1pt)
7	Aviation sector	Very poor (1pt)	Very poor (1pt)
8	Rail transport sector	Very poor (1pt)	Very poor (1pt)
9	Marine transport and ports	Very poor (1pt)	Very poor (1pt)
10	Postal services	Very poor (1pt)	Good (3pts)
11	Personal Security and safety	Good (3pts)	Very poor (1pt)
12	Agricultural/Rural sector	poor (2pts)	Very poor (1pt)
13	Water sector	Very poor (1pt)	Very poor (1pt)
14	Management of Niger Delta Restiveness	Poor (2pts)	Very poor (1pt)
15	Oil and gas sector development	Poor (1pt)	Poor (1pt)
16	oil and gas revenue management: Transparency and accountability	Very poor (1pt)	Very poor (1pt)
17	Labour and industrial relations	Very poor (1pt)	Very poor (1pt)
18	Prisons reform	Very poor (1pt)	Very poor (1pt)
19	Police reform	Very poor (1pt)	Very poor (1pt)
20	Armed forces and internal security	Good (3pts)	Good (3pts)
21	Housing and Urban sector	Very poor (1pt)	Very poor (1pt)
22	Banking and finance sector	Good (3pts)	Very good (4pts)
23	Manufacturing sector	poor (2pts)	Very poor (1pt)
24	Foreign investment & rating/Trade & commerce	poor (2pts)	Good (3pts))
25	Solid minerals sector	poor (2pts)	poor (2pts)
26	Tourism sector	poor (2pts)	poor (2pts)
27	Sports	poor (2pts)	poor (2pts)
28	Drugs control/NAFDAC	Very poor (1pt)	Excellent (5pts)
29	Drugs Control/NDLEA	Good (2pts)	Good (3pts)
30	Human & Child trafficking	Very poor (1pt)	poor (2pts)
31	Good governance and Corruption	Very poor (1pt)	Poor (2pts)

	rating		
32	Human Rights record	Very poor (1pt)	Very poor (1pt)
33	Petroleum products supply	Very poor (1pt)	Poor (2pts)
34	Pensions	Good (3pts)	Poor (2pts)
35	Foreign Affairs	Poor (2pts)	Good (3pts)
36	Employment/Jobs	Poor (2pts)	Very poor (1pt)
37	Inflation level	Poor (2pts)	Poor (2pts)
38	Poverty	Poor (2pts)	Very poor (1pt)
39	Ethnic and Religious harmony	Good (3pts)	Very poor (1pt)
40	Domestic debts payments	Poor (2pts)	Good (3pts)

Tabela 1- showing Obasanjo's performance in some policy/issue Areas

Source: Koformata (2006)

According to Koformata (2007), it can be seen from the above table that former President Obasanjo reformed very poorly in about 80 percent of the selected policy or issue areas during the 8 years of his administration and leadership. This is a fact of reality. The table is very simple and not based on any sophisticated statistical analysis but it provides an honest assessment that captures the feelings of the ordinary Nigerian, be they urban or rural dwellers, rich or poor, elites or ordinary, blue and/or white collar workers. If you ask most grown up Nigerians to rate President Obasanjo's administration based on the above 40 selected policy and /or issue areas using the simple scoring systems adopted here, you are likely to obtain a similar pattern of result produced in the table above; within a very small margin of errors and/or deviation. I subscribe to what Kofarmata said.

The question that needs to be asked is: How come that Obasanjo's performed so poorly given the expectations that greeted his election?

As a civilian president, Obasanjo was "all-knowing" and he was as well too overbearing. He wanted to be the only cock crowing in Nigeria and for that reason, he dealt deadly blows on all those he felt were on his way to achieving his inordinate and self-seeking ambition. As Steve Dada (2006) notes: At the inauguration his administration in 1999, Obasanjo declared that he would step on many toes and many people misconstrued the statement to mean, he intends to deal with criminals and miscreants in an attempt to fight criminality to a stand still. But it soon dawned on Nigerians that he meant far more than they imagined. The president made good his promise as no segment was spared. First to experience the stepping on toes was the G34- the original owners of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP). He hit and dislodged them.... Having dealt with the group, Mr. President soon pocketed the party. The

president then shifted focus to the National Assembly and the judiciary, the second and third organs of government respectively. He started behaving like somebody with poor democratic candour who does not believe in the principles of separation of powers. When matters got to a head, the law makers reacted sharply. They tried to wield the big stick as provided for in the constitution so as to arrest and checkmate the excesses of Mr. President. They started the impeachment process, which the president in his usual manner dismissed as “a joke taken too far”. The intervention of former leaders like General Yakubu Gowon and Alhaji Shehu Shegari helped to pacify the lawmakers and that saved the situation... For the judiciary, the independent arbiter in the system, it has had its own share of Mr. President’s toe stepping experience. Obasanjo’s administration on several occasions refused to carry out court orders, over which the (outgone) Chief Justice (of the federation) Mohammed Uwais had to cry out and slammed the administration over disobedience of court orders...

The most powerful toes Obasanjo stepped on were those of the masses. It will be recalled that Abacha’s reign of terror caused anarchy and trepidation; it caused uncertainty and palpable fear among Nigerians. The future was bleak and gloomy, many people became hopeless but he died. When the news of his death filtered into town, people were over-joyed. There was jubilation in the land; it was a divine intervention to restore hope to Nigerians... Nigerians looked forward to what democracy would offer them. People looked forward to democratic rule with high hope and expectation; they looked forward to a president that would reduce their hardship and difficulties after the days of the locust. But when Obasanjo came, he did not feel the pulse of the nation, nor did he understand the mood of the people, and if he did, he simply ignored it. He created more hardship for Nigerians in the name of economic reforms. He made prices of petroleum product skyrocket. (Steve Dada, 2006).

Yes, after eight years of democratic rule under Obasanjo, Amucheazu & Ibeanu (2008) writes: “These expectations would not appear to have been realized. Economic hardship, inflation, mass unemployment, insecurity, social dislocations among other ills are plaguing the society. In addition, people are disenfranchised and political participation is curtailed through various manipulations and maneuvers. Many Nigerians now feel disappointed, apathetic and alienated and protests are becoming louder and more persistent”.

“Obasanjo failed to meet the expectations of Nigerians in many ways. There are records of unprecedented serial policy failures across all sectors of the national political economy. Koformata (2007) records some of these areas”. For example, the problem of electricity supply is one of his greatest failures. Trillions of naira were injected into the power sector during Obasanjo’s 8 years as civilian President but regrettably the

sector has remained worse than he met it. Chief Olusegun Obasanjo will be sourly remembered in this sector as a complete failure. He failed to break the legendary curse and jinx of “never expect power always” that characterize the sector. Another major debt side of the ledger of Obasanjo’s legacy is the awful failure of his over-hyped economic and social reforms to produce tangible dividends to the majority of Nigerians. Instead, the benefits of the reforms are largely concentrated in a few sectors of the national space economy and captured by a tiny class of business tycoons, those with the access to the corridors of power and those in strategic positions in the bureaucracy. As a result of this, the levels and intensity of hunger, poverty and unemployment and crimes have increased tremendously; with overwhelming majority of Nigerians living on less than one US Dollar a day according to statistics produced by the Statistical Authority of Nigeria, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the United Nations Agencies, among others.

Koformata (2007) also noted that one of the major flagships of Obasanjo’s economic reform agenda is, privatization of federal government owned enterprises across all sectors of the national economic space. However, the implementation of the privatization policy leaves much to be desired as all the choice companies, properties and businesses were auctioned-off at ridiculous prices to family members, friends and cronies of the presidency. Therefore, the man who said his administration will not be business as usual got himself mired in allegations of sleaze and accusations of abuse of office, nepotism and parochialism in his conduct of economic deregulation and liberalization policies. The Petroleum Trust Development Fund (PTDF) scandal, corruption in the Nigeria National Petroleum Corporation (NNPC), sales of Federal government owned residential houses and properties, Transcorp and presidential library debacles are just few examples of the scandals and controversies hanging on Obasanjo’s legacy.

One major area that Olusegun Obasano’s 8 years civilian presidency has serious question marks is in the area of election management. Even though the election that brought him to office was questionable, he was to supervise over two very controversial elections in 2003 and 2007. The high-point of Obasanjo’s poor election management record was the 2007 election which ushered in the present Federal government. That election was described by both local and foreign observers and monitors as falling below the standard of modern democratic election. Little wonder, the international community, particularly the West, are so concerned about electoral reforms in Nigeria in the run—in to the 2011 election. The climax of Obasanjo’s dubiety in office could be seen in his attempt to perpetuate himself in office through the 3rd term agenda. According to Odoziobodo (2005), “the constitution of the Federal Republic of

Nigeria provides that the president and the governors should stay in power for a period of 4 years, after which each has the right to vie for the same position again for a period of another 4 years after which no more no less. Now president Obasanjo and most of the governors have stayed in power from 1999-2003 and after that most of them secured another tenure of their second and final years as president and governors. But they felt they were not done yet. They wanted to have another tenure of office. This inordinate desire brought about the phenomenon of third term in the political lexicon of Nigeria. However, they cannot get this done unless the constitution is amended to give them the opportunity of staying for another tenure of four years. This has necessitated the hues and cries of constitution amendment...When the debate came up in the National Assembly, people were polarized. Some senators were for and many were against the said agenda. Most of the things said and done with regard to this debate is now history as the proposal was shot down on 16th May, 2006 when the Senate voted to reject the constitutional amendment”.

Tell Editorial (2005) had this to say of the attempt: “The campaign for third term for the Obasanjo’s administration raises the issue of double standard in moral or ethical terms. Obasanjo, throughout his odyssey in power including his years as a military dictator has always striven to be considered as a leader of great moral and ethical credentials. When General Yakubu Gowon, Nigeria’s military Head of State for nine years and of course, Obasanjo’s boss, sought to run for president under General Ibrahim Babangida’s controversial option A4 in the early 1990s, Obasanjo, it was who lampooned Gowon’s motive for seeking to return to power. He asked with much sarcasm what Gowon forgot at the state house that he then suddenly wanted to possess. When Babangida himself treated the nation to gobbledygook of promises of handover, Obasanjo was courageously on record, saying that the former general was quintessentially untrustworthy, that if he (Babangida) said that the time is 8.00am, his audience needed to go out to see if it was not night. Now can Obasanjo be trusted over his exit in 2007? Does he have a log in his eyes when he so self-righteously points to the peck in his neighbor’s eye”, the Editorial queried.

In the assessment of Osifo Whiskey (2006), “For (Obasanjo), the losses and pains are great, even as he puts up a brave face to this third term debacle, it is only too certain that he is now a man without a face. He has in other words, become the beautiful would be bride who lost her chastity. Locally and internationally, this squandering of goodwill renders his administration a moral lame duck. He may have 10 new corruption fighting EFCC’s that are better and even more effective. He may talk democracy with the heart of the pope and the conviction of one who exchanges GSM numbers with God. But when he calls on Nigerians, saying, “This is the way”, who will,

in all sincerity and trust, listen, let alone follow? This is the tragedy for self and for nation”.

However, Obasanjo has his positive legacies. He did so many things while in office. Nobody can accuse him of inaction while in office. He was everywhere and in everything. One of his positive legacies is that he effectively caged the military and dislodged them. We can say that the military cannot stage a coup in Nigeria again. Another of his best achievements is his ability to pay off Nigeria’s sovereign debts to the Paris and London Clubs of creditor nations. He was able to achieve this because of the strong political will he had and the assistance of his economic team led by Mrs. Ngozi Okonjo Iwuala, the World Bank Vice president who was Obasanjo’s Finance Minister and later Foreign Affairs Minister.

OBASANJO AND THE VERDICT OF HISTORY

According to Azumi Kofaimata (2007) former President Olusegun Obasanjo so far, has been the luckiest Nigerian (living or deed). For example, he is traditional Chief; a five General, a civil war veteran, a former federal commissioner (minister) and member of federal executive council under two military regimes; a former second-in-command under the military government headed by late Gen. Murtala Muhammad; a former Head of State, Commander in-Chief of the Armed Forces of Nigeria (1976-1979), after the assassination of Gen. Murtala Muhammad; a one time condemned political prisoner; a two term Nigerian civilian president, Commander-in-Chief, Armed Forces of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999-2007); a national and international statesman and a successful modern large-scale commercial chicken farmer and strategic investor etc. These in a nut shell, sums up the life history of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo”

However, “history will not be kind to him at all” says Sabella Ablidde (2007) “Oh No! History and posterity will remember him as a man who wasted his life and who also misspent opportunities he had to make positive difference in the lives of others. History and posterity will curse and spit on his name whenever and wherever he is mentioned. But until the verdict of history descend on him, he is likely to live the rest of his days in isolation, abandoned by friends and rejected by critics. The irony in all of these is this: he had the chance to be a national hero; he had the chance to engrave his good name in the hearts and minds of Nigerias, but he wasted it all. And so Obasanjo will never be thought of as being in the same class as Zik and Awo and Balewa and other shining stars of yester years; he is five stars below them.

Yes, Obasanjo will be judged differently by different people but majority of Nigerians will judge him in the negative. He loomed large but impacted negatively on the psyche and sensibilities of Nigerians. “For decades into the future, the state, and the people will continue to suffer from the pain, the willful miscalculations, and the unprofessional conducts he personifies. Decades into the future, the people will continue to suffer because of the systematic looting of public treasury; the mismanagement of public resources, the soiling of institutions, and the personalization of law and order. Obasanjo seemed to be in a class, all by himself: he raped the country, killed our collective spirit, vandalized our institutions, made a fool of all the men and women who fought for our independence, legitimized corruption, and then succeeded in imposing, the post May 2007 government on the people” (Sabella Abidde, 2007). “What do you say about a man who is reputed to have rigged elections at a such a monumental scale? A man whose government has been the most corrupt Africa has seen? A Man who glories in provoking his followers? A man who comes out of one of crisis and leaps willfully into the next crisis? A man who produce petrol but does not link price with cost of living? A man who glories in not taking advice; I believe if nothing else does, people’s will power will certainly put an end to the atrocity called Obasanjo. (Emeka Ojukwu, 2003).

Everything that could and should be said about former President Olusegun Obasanjo and his presidency has been said and written. And everything that has been said, and written about him can be summed up in one single sentence; he was incompetent and vengeful; he was a failure, a disappointment, a waste and a drag on our national interest and collective goal (Sabella Abadie, 2007).

Obasanjo’s place in Nigerian history may not tally with Ahmadu Ali’s opinion that “when the history of this great country (Nigeria) is written, the chapter on Nigeria’s grand transformation will begin and end with the immeasurable and invaluable contributions of (former) President Olusegun Obasanjo and the People Democratic Party”. For most Nigerians, when the history of Nigeria is finally written, Olusegun Obasanjo will be remembered in the form of a footnote, if he ever gets a chapter, it will be a chapter of failures.

CONCLUSION

It is doubtful if Obasanjo after 8 years as the President of Nigeria can beat his chest and say like St. Paul in the Bible:

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Hence forth, there is laid up for me, a crown of righteousness, which the lord, the righteous judge, shall give me that day”. (Tim. 4:7-8). This is because of the enormity of the odds against him as we have discussed in this paper. As to J.F Kennedy’s (1993) prescription for judging all public officers when he says: “When at some future date the high court of history sits in judgment on each one of us... recording whether in our brief span of service we fulfilled our responsibilities to the state – our success or failure in whatever office we may hold will be measured by the answers to four questions: Were we truly men of courage? Were we truly men of judgment? Were we truly men of integrity? Were we truly men of dedication?” We can say that Obasanjo was truly a man of courage. He courageously dislodged the military from further intervention in Nigerian politics; he courageously dealt with those who installed him in power, the G-34, the real founders of the People’s Democratic Party (PDP), the largest party in black Africa. He pushed them away and pocketed the party and made himself the Chairman of the Board of Trustees. He also courageously dealt with Nigerians by bringing much hardship on them and depriving them the right of choosing who should lead them. As to whether he was a man of judgment, we can say that he was a poor judge of history and events, otherwise, he would not have handled the opportunities he had the way he had handled them. He mismanaged and misappropriated them all. Was Obasanjo truly a man of integrity? Nigerians cannot trust him; he disappointed them woefully. Was he a man of dedication? He was truly a man of dedication. He never lacked in action but he was dedicated to achieving his inordinate self- seeking ambition.

Today, the verdict of history is not generous to Obasanjo who forgot what George Santayana said, that, “Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it”. But Nigerians, borrowing from J.F Kennedy (1993), must remind Obasanjo of one thing: “Whether he wishes us well or ill, we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, and oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of our nascent democracy”.

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