

## Muhammadu Buhari: Change's Lone Wolf?<sup>1</sup>

"When eras are the decline, all tendencies are subjective, but...  
when matters are ripening for a new epoch, all tendencies  
are objective"- Goethe

Goethe's view reflected the mood in Nigeria following the triumph of the All Progressives Congress (APC) over the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the March 28 2015 presidential election. The party was supposedly voted into office on the platform of 'change'. APC's trump up card was Muhammadu Buhari, Nigeria's vanquished tribe of opposition parties and the large swathe of disaffected members of the now defeated People's Democratic Party (PDP). Beyond the personal triumph of Muhammadu Buhari to which he admitted to Al Jazeera's Yvonne Ndege and perhaps the clan of disaffected former opposition and ruling party members, nothing else matter. Not even the Nigerians who supposedly ushered in the new era. Or so it seem.

The rash of defections from the defeated PDP to the APC demonstrated the reality of this 'change' on the one hand and on the other hand the ideals and motivations of Muhammadu Buhari and those of the individuals he teamed up with to effect the first of the change - wresting power from the ruling party. The defections pointed to the endangered species that is opposition politics in Nigeria. These collectively represented the pull and push factor that will shape the shape of the not-so-clear change Nigerians ushered in with the 'new' 'team'.

The use of team was cautious since Muhammadu Buhari carried the lone wolf toga among the team he paired himself with. Buhari was Nigeria's anti corruption leader of the mid 1980s who was unceremoniously removed from office by the yearnings of those he was purportedly trying to rescue from the throes of corruption. By the way, the definition of corruption that resonates in Nigeria is the misuse of funds. Corruption goes beyond the misuse of funds to include all acts that voids public trust for private gain. To this extent, our view of corruption chimes with Transparency International's definition.

Transparency International also categorises corruption into three namely grand, political and petty corruptions. Grand corruption consists of acts committed at a high level of government that distort policies or the central functioning of the state, enabling leaders

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<sup>1</sup> This article was first written on 02/05/2015, 27 days prior to President Muhammadu Buhari assuming office as president and commander-in-chief of Nigeria. Over three years down his presidency, the view expressed here has not changed. I edited the article for clarity and for the site <http://adoyionoja.org>. It is to serve as a sequel to the piece "Realignment Post Mr Lawal Daura's Phase of the Factionalised State in Nigeria"

to benefit at the expense of the public good; political corruption is a manipulation of policies, institutions and rules of procedure in the allocation of resources and financing by political decision makers, who abuse their position to sustain their power, status and wealth; petty corruption refers to everyday abuse of entrusted power by low- and mid-level public officials in their interactions with ordinary citizens, who often are trying to access basic goods or services in places like hospitals, schools, police departments and other agencies. When situated in the Nigerian reality, all of these manifest making *poor governance* the driving force for corruption. Thus the biggest antidote against corruption is the reinvention of governance at all levels.

We define governance as the effective and efficient utilisation of human and material for the benefit of most people. When considered in the Nigerian context, governance has never delivered basic needs to most Nigerians let alone all Nigerians. In 1989, the World Bank underscored the significance of governance when it identified poor governance as responsible for the litany of crisis including corruption in developing countries. Over two decades later this position has not change. This is certainly the case in Nigeria. Nigeria is today the world's poverty capital!

Muhammadu Buhari, change's number one advocate, has a clear job description. It is to reinvent governance as the first step to fighting corruption. Reinventing governance means reinstating the contract between people and government. It is important that governance deliver basic needs to most people on a short, medium and long term basis. Governance can only work when institutions begin to function. At the moment, institutions in Nigeria are weak and rely on strong personality to make them work. When Barack Obama visited the continent, he admonished its leaders to build institutions and not strong individuals. This is because institutions outlived strong individuals. Muhammadu Buhari's emergence owe to this archaic process that needs to change. Buhari needs to change in order to begin to rebuild and reinvent institutions to make them deliver on their mandate. This is *sine qua non* to fighting corruption.

Buhari's credential in fighting corruption may have been enhanced by what transpired in governance since he was removed in August of 1985. What happened since he was ousted from power significantly hardened the terrain for his style of leadership of the 1980s. In the first place, he relied on the ballot box and not the bullet to get his mandate to implement his programme. The process reveals the personality, politics and policies of Buhari. It is no longer the military fiat of the past.

Getting vital legislations passed takes negotiation, compromise, arm twisting and bargain.

The last sixteen days demonstrates the slow process that this entails and its effect on governance. The process of legislation takes time. The era of proclamation is over. Buhari did not succeed as a military officer with all the powers that accompanied this. Domestic opposition built around the few non state actors of the period and a dissatisfied if favourable international community was responsible for his ouster in the mid 1980s. What is the indication that he will succeed in the days, weeks, months and years to come followings his inauguration? The institutions scrutinizing his every conduct have widened. We have non-state actors locally and internationally. Even if the national assembly has APC majority, what on earth says that his vision will be shared by other members of his party? Buhari's first impediment is the lack of shared vision between him and his team. One way out of this is to shop for capable men and women outside the cycle and blend them with the team to pursue his vision for Nigeria.

In the second place, Muhammadu Buhari's view on issues is not different from the bulk of politicians in Nigeria where canvassing votes is not on policies but on sentiments. It is difficult to lay hand on his pronouncement on policy areas such as the economy, corruption, power of the centre, insecurities, military, infrastructures, job creation, diversification, states, local governments and dwindling revenue from oil and security. It would seem everything that will provide clue to his policy direction has been deferred to when they will unfold themselves on the job. The refusal of his party to field him for the presidential debate did not mask this reality to Nigerians.

In any case the debate was insignificant to the outcome of previous elections. Without a clear cut policy direction other than the change mantra, what is Muhammadu Buhari going to change? Assuming he identifies the areas, how is he going to do this? Supposing it is corruption, his trade mark, what is his view on corruption? How would he tackle corruption in this new enabling environment? Considering the federal status of Nigeria, Buhari's commitment is to the federal component first. Elected officials in the states and local governments will steer their areas differently. The legislature, judiciary, media and non state actors are closely watching and monitoring developments. Making the federal component work is a herculean task let alone influencing the rest of the component parts.

In the third place, Muhammadu Buhari does not have the advantage of age not to talk about the fullness of health. There is a connection between age and health. When Buhari began to wrestle corruption before corruption wrestled him down in his first outing, he was in his 40s and full of health and energy. Nigeria is now a cesspit of problem so overwhelming it requires age and health to stand the rigour of addressing them.

Muhammadu Buhari has not the age and health advantage. To this end, he is going to rely on aides whose intentions he does not know and who judging from their antecedents are in it for reasons different from his own. It takes a healthy and energetic person to coordinate characters of this nature.

Buhari's relationship with his aides even prior to inauguration can be described as a triple entendre. It is their (Buhari and the aides or party co-travelers) ability to leave two impressions on the ground while retaining a third inside them. It is, to say the least, dishonest. The relationship will remain this way even after inauguration. Governed by distrust, it will set the stage for heating the polity and the eventual rancour it will characterise. Governance will take a backseat as each side manifest the third aspects of triple entendre. Nigerians desire for 'change' will suffer. It will create the momentum for the next big unwieldy coalition that will wrestle power from the ruling party. A vicious cycle would have been born then.

Nigerians mandate is to Muhammadu Buhari and for some Nigerians, barring religion, ethnicity, regionalism and other sentiments that were crucial to his winning the election, the vote is for change. When Buhari fails to make the impact, the hammer will descend on him much as it did on Goodluck Ebele Jonathan. The expectation on him is no less high. And indeed Nigerians have been wrongly oriented to expect so much from the federal government, a legacy of military rule's appropriation of powers, making states and local governments mere appendages. It is one slice of corruption foisted on Nigeria by military rule that needs to change.

Nigerians should be made to know that the states and local governments must work in order to complement the effort of the federal government. It is part of what needs to change among Nigerians. This is not happening now hence the argument about governance. Unless this happens, Buhari's federal government alone cannot rescue Nigeria. The vote against Jonathan and the PDP that brought Buhari and the APC should represent the demand for accountability. The same should also be the case in states and local governments. In other words, Nigerians in states and local governments should demand and hold their elected representative to account. The vote for 'change' did not appear to represent this type of clamour judging from casual and unscientific analysis of the votes.

One can therefore discern three angles to the process that brought APC's 'change' to Nigeria. The first is Muhammadu Buhari, the second is the motley crowd that joined the power platform called the APC and the third is the varied intentions of Nigerians who

voted in the new 'team'. In all these, triple entendre is at work.

Buhari's card for Nigeria is the glimpse of him that few Nigerians had in the 1980s. It is also the glimpse of him that most Nigerians read or were told as he canvasses for their support beginning in 2003 when he joined partisan politics. The glimpse in question was his no nonsense stance on corruption and the war against indiscipline. Nigeria and Buhari have since metamorphosed. The extent that this glimpse of Buhari holds in the new environment for the next four years in satisfying the clamour of the few Nigerians interested in change remains to be seen. For Muhammadu Buhari, barring his true intention in vying for the office, the odds seemed stalked against him.

For the motley crowd that formed the coalition call the APC, their antecedents tells Nigerians where they truly belong in the clamour to sweep the past of Nigeria away. Indeed if their intention is to sweep the dirt from Nigeria, we have not been told how they intend to do this and where they will bury the dirt. Is their clamour representing policies, personality or both? Are they in the 'change team' to change the fortunes of most Nigerians for the better or to change their own personal fortunes? Will they support Muhammadu Buhari to do the sweeping and installation of change? Or will they battle and deter him if their visions of change differ? In the event of the latter happening which seems likely considering their antecedents, where will Nigeria be?

This brings us to the third angle, the varied intentions of Nigerians. The March 28 vote for Muhammadu Buhari represents different intentions. To truly discern the vote as reflective of change in governance for the better is to claim to have insight into the minds of all the voters. To say it did not reflect a clamour for change is to insult the sensibility of Nigerians who saw in Buhari a chance to reinvent governance. This condition applies to those who voted for religious, ethnic, regional, peace, 'security' and other factors. To these groups of persons, the clamour for change should not necessarily be material. It should also be emotional and psychological. Therefore regardless of what transpire at the end of the four years contract, the expectation of the varied Nigerians may or may not have been satisfied.

For the record, Nigerians will agree or disagree about what the future holds for them in terms of qualitative and quantitative change. This is directly linked to the type of change they individually wanted and how soon they wanted this. Muhammadu Buhari is becoming a realist as is typical of most politicians when he warned Nigerians not to expect miracle. Nigerians living have booked "an amazing front seat to history", to use CNN's Hala Gorani's word, as they witnessed first the demystification of the People's Democratic

Party that once boasted that it will rule for the next one hundred years and second the beginning of the process that will demystify Muhammadu Buhari and the 'change' pack in the next four years. One thing they should agree on is that Muhammadu Buhari is the lone wolf in the elected pack purportedly voted to 'change' Nigeria.

Time will tell.