

Campaign Suppression, Electoral Paranoia and the Poetics of Elections in Nigeria After June 12, 1993

by

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Abstract

This paper attempts a summative catalogue of election studies in Nigeria since the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election. Further, it works to break new ground by engaging with two challenges hitherto unexplored in Nigeria's democratization, namely: campaigns' suppression by incumbent leaders and the electoral paranoia of the electorate and of the political class.

Keywords: campaigns' suppression, electoral paranoia, democracy, Nigeria, democratization, Africa

Introduction

Across the world, the literature on electoral studies is vast and varied. Academic interest in elections, electoral campaigns, electoral strategies via a myriad of media, and indeed in electoral audiences (electorates) is thick and rampant. This interest, by the way, is rarely subject to geographical locations nor is it a respecter of the economic fortunes of nations. Throughout the first world all the way across the global south, academe has ensured a non-discriminatory affinity for the study of the engine of democracy – elections. Therefore, this paper has elected to take a somewhat nuanced approach in its contribution to the already dense body of knowledge in election studies. Rather than merely make a contribution, the paper sets out to reposition the modes of comprehension for democracy as practised today in Nigeria specifically. It will do so by taking a historical and literary gaze as an entry point towards a sustained theory on the location of Nigeria's democracy.

In an analysis of Nigeria's Fourth Republic elections, Omotola [2010] points to the weak institutionalization of the primary agencies of electoral administration in Nigeria, namely the political party system and the electoral commission whose nomenclature purports its independence but is merely an organ of the state. This paper conceives of the weak institutionalization identified by Omotola as the result of the road not taken, no thanks to the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election and the eventual demise of the declared winner, MKO Abiola in state prison. Nwosu [2017] offers the perspective of the electoral commission's chairman during the June 12, 1993 presidential election. Whereas many a critic is bound to find Nwosu's book irritable, it is striking that the author christens the book thus: 'Laying the Foundation for Nigeria's Democracy: My Account of the June 12, 1993 Presidential Election and its Annulment'. It is against this nomenclatural backdrop rather than necessarily aspects of the book's contents that this paper adopts the June 12, 1993 presidential election as the foundational forebear of Nigeria's present-day democracy. The stillborn election has since produced its offspring through the Fourth Republic and has accordingly been conceptualized as a parent. It is an engagement with this literary conceptualization that forms the core of the paper.

Research on elections and electoral cultures appears to be proliferating precisely because of the 'self-renewing' nature of democracy as the world has come to know it. Electoral cycles ensure that depending on a nation's constitution, fresh elections are conducted after the duration of an existing tenure has lapsed. As such, most democratically governed nations of the world return to the polls at an average of every four or five years. This, to my mind, is the most cogent explanation for the very fertile literature that exists in the study of elections across the world. As with the global literature on election studies, there is a rich body of work on elections in Nigeria – particularly on the elections of the Fourth Republic. Mahmud [1993] provides a wailer's account of the coup d'état by General Sani Abacha which effectively killed off the Third Republic as initially conceived. Nwokedi [1994] offers an explanation of the annulled June 12, 1993 presidential election drawing from the military-civilian transition experience in Latin America and making projections of the Nigerian military government's concerns with self-preservation. Ian Campbell's [1994] charter is cut from the same cloth and isn't far off Nwokedi's in his submission that "the only free elections [in Nigeria before 1993] were those organized by the British in 1959, on the eve of independence, and by the military in 1979 before their temporary withdrawal" [Campbell, 1994: 179]. Both Nwokedi [1994] and Campbell [1994] were produced and circulated in the space of one year after the annulment, suggesting that neither engaged in the necessary sobriety/rigour for cutting-edge and long-lasting research. It is this un-aristocratic disposition to scholarship which is a bane to election studies generally, owing to the frequency of election cycles that the present paper eschews in its well thought out selection. Such was the preponderance of these impromptu research publications that the only difference between the preceding duo and Lewis [1994] is the gloomy and doomsday forecast of the latter. Even bleaker was Rotimi and Ihonvbere [1994] wherein the authors declare a remilitarisation in Nigeria, and bleaker still was Suberu [1994] whose headline read "democratic recession in Nigeria"!

Perhaps a less anxious and more thought out publication on the subject emerged some three years later in the form of a volume edited by Diamond *et al* [1997]. Further studies since emerged [e.g., Lewis, 1999; Ihonvbere, 1999] following the transition program and eventual elections of 1999 which ushered in the Fourth Republic.

Nigeria's experience of the transition to democracy has received more attention than that of any other country in the continent [Shettima, 1995: 61]

The extract highlights an obvious fact as deducible from the foregoing abridged review of existing literature on elections in Nigeria before the Fourth Republic. The Fourth Republic did not stall the trend of electoral research in Nigeria; instead, the proliferation grew with a broader range of electoral interrogation by academe [e.g. Oshodi, 2005 engaged with the role of foreign observers in Nigeria's elections; the duo of Agbaje and Adejumobi, 2006 is engaged with the actuality of vote counts at elections; Suberu, 2007 concerned also with Nigeria's muddled elections; Oboh, 2016 is preoccupied with prescribing how the media could enhance electoral conduct; whilst Osiebe, 2017 focused on the popular culture dynamic at elections and the electorates' reception of these]. Others have been preoccupied with specific elections since 1999 and/or with commentary on the sustained legacy of the military's many failings through Nigeria's post-independence years [e.g., Dare, 2001; Olaniyan, 2006; Basedau *et al*, 2007; Rawlence and Albin-Lackey, 2007; Adesokan, 2009; Omodia, 2009; Abati, 2010; Akhaine, 2011; Egya, 2012; etc.]. Whereas most of these studies on elections in Nigeria have been worthwhile, each contributing something unique to the corpus of electoral literature in Nigeria, there is a sense in which the frequency of elections makes the electoral scholar come across as mere chronicler. To quote the Nigerian Nobel Laureate, "When the writer in his own society can no longer function as conscience, he must recognize that his choice lies between denying himself totally or withdrawing to the position of chronicler and postmortem surgeon" [Soyinka, 1967: 20]. There is recognition of the critical component in much of the studies on elections through Nigeria's postcolonial history. As such, invoking Soyinka's aforementioned submission is not intended to label. To the contrary, it is intended to guide this intervention, indeed, to bolster the paper's charter to interrogate Nigerian elections through the work of one of the country's finest poets.

Electoral Paranoia and Campaigns' Suppression in Nigeria

Electoral paranoia constitutes a bane in Nigeria. Whereas it is evident throughout the electorate, it is perhaps most visible through art works which tend to grow political as elections draw nigh. In order to properly situate and illustrate this, an example of the manifestation of electoral paranoia in Nigeria is drawn from an episode that starred two politicians, a musician (posthumously) and the media. The legendary Fela Anikulapo Kuti did make his mark on Nigeria's political and electoral culture. In 'Army Arrangement' [1982], Fela sang:

...Election story nko? [How about the story of the election?]
Obasanjo plan am very well [General Obasanjo planned it very well]
Him take old politicians, wey rule Nigeria before [He took old politicians who ruled Nigeria before]

The same old politicians, wey spoil Nigeria before [The same old politicians that spoil Nigeria]
Obasanjo kari all of dem [General Obasanjo hoisted all of them]
Na all of dem dey there nowⁱ [All of them are in charge now]ⁱⁱ

In order to contextualize Fela's electoral diatribe satisfactorily, a brief account of Nigeria's political history would suffice: Gaining her independence from Britain in 1960, Nigeria only became a Republic in 1963. By 1966, the First Republic was truncated following a military coup d'état led by a collection of young leftists under Major Emmanuel Ifeajuna and Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu. Soon afterwards, still in 1966, a counter-coup engineered by northern military officers succeeded in ousting the regime of General John Aguiyi-Ironsi [Falola and Heaton, 2008]. The then Lieutenant Colonel Yakubu Gowon of northern extraction headed the federal government through the Nigerian civil war (1967–70) up until yet another coup d'état in 1975 which paved the way for General Murtala Mohammed. The latter was killed a year later, and his deputy Olusegun Obasanjo assumed the reins. It was General Obasanjo who oversaw the transition from military governance into the Second Republic, which lasted between 1979 and 1983 under Alhaji Shehu Shagari's electoral mandate. As if to heed Fela's criticism of Obasanjo's successors (referenced above), a coup ensued and on December 31, 1983, Nigeria had a new head of state in the person of Major General Muhammadu Buhari. He was soon overthrown by General Ibrahim Babangida whose supervision of the Third Republic led to the infamous annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election. Popular protest ensured that he left office, even if this meant an interim national government under Chief Ernest Shonekan was inaugurated. Shonekan soon bowed to the Defence Minister General Babangida left him, and General Sani Abacha materialised as Nigeria's leader on November 17, 1993. On June 8, 1998, Abacha passed on, paving the way for General Abdulsalami Abubakar's transition programme into the Fourth Republic which resumed on May 29, 1999 with the swearing in of the now elected Olusegun Obasanjo [Falola and Heaton, 2008].

Following Obasanjo's botched third term plan, he mobilized support for his preferred successor and got his wish when Alhaji Umaru Musa Yar'Adua not only emerged as the ruling PDPⁱⁱⁱ candidate, but went on to win the presidential election of April 2007. Yar'Adua was the product of a vendetta which had existed between Obasanjo and his vice Atiku Abubakar. Obasanjo had in fact sworn that Abubakar would never be president.

At the twilight of Obasanjo's first-term of office (1999-2003), Abubakar expressed interest in his boss's office and wanted Obasanjo to adopt the Mandela option: that is, spend one term in office, so he Abubakar, could take over as president. As leader of the People's Democratic Movement (PDM), a machinery inherited from his godfather and mentor: the late General Shehu Musa Yar'Adua, Abubakar was a powerful force within the PDP.

The PDM had many incumbent PDP Governors as members such that Abubakar almost scuttled Obasanjo's re-election bid. Obasanjo had to practically plead with Abubakar and his supporters to eventually emerge as the PDP's presidential flag-bearer at the 2003 elections. And so the unforgiving Obasanjo went on to win the election and immediately embarked on a revenge mission against Abubakar for daring to outshine the boss.

In the run-up to the April 2011 presidential elections in Nigeria, meanwhile, the sitting President Goodluck Jonathan announced his candidature to run for the office on the banner of the ruling PDP. This did not go down well with a section of senior members of the party, particularly those of northern Nigeria extraction, who insisted that the office of President had been zoned to the north for the period of 2007 to 2015. In what was popularly referred to as the *PDP's gentleman agreement*, the claim was that party bigwigs had reached such an understanding as a logical sequel to President Obasanjo's eight-year tenure between 1999 and 2007 following the return to civil rule. After all, went the reasoning, if Yar'Adua, Obasanjo's successor, had not passed away, he would have gotten the party's nod for a second term in most likelihood. This way, power would have remained in the north. It was on this score, therefore, that party stalwarts from northern Nigeria opted to produce a consensus candidate from the quartet of northern aspirants in order to wrestle Jonathan from a common front. From a list parading former Head of State, General Ibrahim Babangida; ex Vice President, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar; the then outgoing Kwara State Governor, Dr Bukola Saraki and National Security Adviser in the Obasanjo administration, General Aliyu Gusau, members of the Northern Political Leaders Forum (NPLF) tasked themselves with selecting a candidate from the pool based on a schedule of criteria. At the end of the proceedings, the NPLF reached a decision and anointed Obasanjo's erstwhile deputy and arch-rival Atiku Abubakar as the consensus candidate. Abubakar had thereby emerged the northern alternative to Jonathan (then Obasanjo's political-godson) winning the party's ticket. As expected, Obasanjo's reaction to this was swift and profound. With the media eager to have the ex-president's thoughts on the development, Obasanjo told his interviewer: "I dey laugh o!" [Thisday, 2010] For the student of Nigerian history, *Obasanjo did a Fela on Abubakar* with that singular remark.

Look and Laugh [1986] is an incredibly sarcastic song by Fela. He had made the record at a time he was living a life of a recluse. The otherwise extrovert who loved to be in public places and clubs was always found sleeping or playing with his saxophone at home in the company of women, or performing at the Afrika Shrine he built. His old attitude of keeping abreast of events and giving lectures at universities and institutions of higher learning stopped.

He rarely gave press conferences or press releases like he used to. *Look and Laugh* was written to explain what was going on with him [Fela.net, 2014]. He was barely observing events in the country and laughing, asking rhetorically if the things happening in the country weren't sufficient for one to look and laugh. In verse two, Fela described the shambolic second republic for which he placed blame squarely on Obasanjo who, in 1979, handed power over to Shagari who himself proclaimed that 'the economy of the country is collapsing' [Fela, 1986]. Of this scenario, Fela retorted:

...Shey that one no reach to laff? [Is that not sufficient to laugh?]
[*Look and Laugh*, 1986]

The illustration of Obasanjo's electoral paranoia is easily transferable to the media and all sectors of cultural production in Nigeria. Even *Nollywood* tends to offer politically scripted portrayals during electoral seasons. The schedule of the average cultural worker, indeed, of the average citizen during electoral seasons is markedly different from the schedule at non-electoral seasons. Political party defections by politicians – particularly incumbent politicians – are typically left until elections are at hand before these moves are made. There is a way of life in electoral Nigeria as distinct from the way of life in non-electoral Nigeria.

In terms of the suppression of campaigns of politicians and political parties in Nigeria, it should be stated preliminarily that there is no single electoral Act in Nigeria. Nearly every election has its own Act. Or rather, the Act is amended during every general election. Such an amendment process is presently under way in Nigeria's bicameral federal legislative body for the 2019 election. It is common knowledge that most democratic systems constantly amend their electoral legislation in order to improve the integrity or efficiency of the system. Many also draw up new or redraw existing constituencies to reflect demographic changes of voters and so on. But the practice of having a new electoral law for every election is probably distinctly Nigerian, more so because administrators in Nigeria tend to do so for current political reasons. The Nigerian Electoral Act as amended presently enables a law wherein electoral campaign activities are forbidden outside of the specified timeframe for electoral campaigns! However, truth be told, the campaign schedule of a political office holder is daily, i.e., 24-7/365.

For an incumbent president or state governor, for example, every action and every policy decision is campaign by proxy and constitutes a campaign item for either the president's/governor's re-election or for the president's/governor's party. In a recent move considered rather bizarre and as campaign strategy, on June 6, 2018, the incumbent President Muhammadu Buhari pronounced June 12 as Democracy Day while Chief MKO Abiola was posthumously awarded the highest honour of the land, Grand Commander of the Order of the Federal Republic (GCFR).

However, considering that June 12 had its silver jubilee anniversary in 2018, it is somewhat difficult to be certain the president was simply pandering for electoral gains. It is noteworthy that following a change of guard at the March 2015 elections wherein the sitting PDP President (the PDP being the prime beneficiary of Nigeria's re-democratization having held power at the centre since 1999) lost to the opposition All Progressive Congress (APC), Nigerians expected an administration that would strive to fulfill democratic ideals in the country. An electoral cycle later, Nigerians are groaning about the sameness of the change they voted into office. Nonetheless, President Muhammadu Buhari has declared that he would be seeking re-election in 2019. How did Nigeria and her democracy get here, and what role has the June 12 at 25 masterstroke of the Buhari administration played as electoral campaign for the president's 2019 bid and as a suppressant of the opposition and associated campaigns? Further than these, at least two opposition parties have emerged across the states and at the national level since Nigeria's re-democratization in 1999, yet there hasn't been any bold move to do away with the authoritarian status quo of restricted campaigns of the opposition by the incumbent is undoubtedly a 21st century wonder.

June 12 at 25: an invitation to reflection on Niyi Osundare's 'June 12 and Its Children'

MKO Abiola (1937-1998) passed on 7 July, yet, beyond his kith, he is hardly remembered on this day. In Nigeria's popular imagination and civil society, Abiola is the patriarch of June 12 and by extension Nigeria's democracy. The introduction to this paper could easily inform a title bearing the following: 'The June 12, 1993 Presidential Election: Stillbirth of Nigeria's Third Republic and Parent of the Fourth (Present)'. Indeed, June 12 is both the stillbirth and parent of Nigeria's present democracy. Here, another novelty proffered by this contribution becomes apparent. It lies in the fact that, for once, a study on elections opts to consider electoral poetry and deviates from the obsession with electoral prose. This decision has been reached advisedly. Although Osundare's 'June 12 and Its Children' is inspired by electoral discourse, its production and propagation seemed to outdo the penchant for electoral paranoia which is an obsession with electoral material as instigated by electoral seasons. 'June 12 and Its Children' was published in 2004 – a non-electoral season being a year after the 2003 elections in Nigeria. The point being made is that whereas the bulk of electoral addressing material in Nigeria are produced in the heat of electoral seasons, this electorally salient piece of Osundare's sets a mark as a work apart. Below is an analysis of select excerpts from the poem 'June 12 and Its Children' [2004] by Niyi Osundare who is easily Nigeria's most recognizable poet. Perhaps because 'June 12 and Its Children' was written for mass consumption and published in Nigeria's *The Guardian* newspaper, there is curiously no reference to it across the myriad of academic inquiries into Osundare's works. Indeed, several studies have focused on the works of a poet whose "commitment is not exclusively to one race or to one nation but rather to an ecological vision of an ideal harmony between Man and Nature" [Brown, 2003: 105].

Segun [1999] and Olaoluwa [2016] are two of such – the first an interview with the poet before the turn of the millennium, and the second steeped in academic rigour. Of the lot of scholarly probes into Osundare’s works, it is the collection on emerging perspectives on Niyi Osundare [Na’Allah, 2003] that comes across as the most comprehensive and insightful. The man at the centre has himself been preoccupied with an interrogation of the relationship between poetry and politics in Nigeria [e.g., Osundare, 2001; Osundare, 2012; etc.].

To be fair, Osundare did, strikingly, explore the ‘bard of the tabloid platform in Nigeria’ even before the Fourth Republic [Osundare, 1998]. As such, ‘June 12 and Its Children’, a 1500-plus word poem published in a Nigerian daily was no misnomer. Reading through the piece, one gets a sense as to how “[Osundare] says a lot in his work in a very artistic way” [Ojaide, 2003: 25] and why “no English poet could use the English language in the way Osundare does” [Brown, 2003: 109]. Yet, as the grandchildren of June 12 continue to grapple with life in Nigeria and set forth to head to the campaign trail and elections in a matter of weeks, the reflexive invocation of the piece ‘June 12 and Its Children’ is an appropriate tribute to a 25 year-old.

Stanzas I, VI and VII of the poem ‘June 12 and Its Children’ are tributes to Abiola’s wife, Kudirat the martyr, to Abiola, and to others (e.g., Alfred Rewane) slain in the course of the struggle for democratic rule in Nigeria. Whereas these individuals are of immense importance to Nigeria’s electoral history, the four stanzas (II, III, IV, and V) of the poem engaged forthwith are reflective of particular characters that have played very significant roles in shaping electoral culture through Nigeria’s political history. Indeed, apart from the first of four who is deceased, the others continue to have an influence on Nigeria’s electoral dynamic to date.

‘Goon Man’ references General Sani Abacha as is evident from Osundare’s descriptive of Abacha’s trademark appearances in dark goggles thus:

A goggled goon called the shots
From the hollow of an ancient rock,
Sprawled out on a throne of skulls

The poet isn’t sparing of General Abacha’s record of human rights violations in the latter’s bid to suppress opposition and force the citizens to toe his dictates:

Bantam-brained, stone-hearted,
He swam each morning in a pool of blood
An infant nation was his favourite breakfast

Nor does Osundare spare the general's accomplices who aided and abetted his dastardly reign, and of course his standout assault on the otherwise dismal electoral history of Nigeria. Abacha had superintended over the registration of five political parties, all of which anointed him as their sole presidential candidate. Of these political parties resulted the famous tag of 'the five fingers of a leper' by the late Chief Bola Ige:

Dull though he was and utterly dreadful/Pundits ran his errands/Licked his (bloody) boots
Schemed him into a "consensus candidate":
"Rule us for ever!", their chorus,
Prostrate like hapless lizards

Their eyes on juicy cabinet designations
And the assorted stack of cash
Standing imperiously behind the palace door

Vulture-politicians who carrioned the state/And sent hope on a lengthy exile

Ultimately, however, there is a hint of comical triumphalism in the text of the poet as he paints the end of a road that never quite transpired in spite of the committed preparation by mortals:

But Death caught the despot
Between the silky laps of imported whores
And the seething serpent of forbidden apples

'The Second Coming' served a note of warning on the impending return as democratically elected president of General Ibrahim Babangida. It is noteworthy that the poem was produced in 2004. In spite of these, Babangida made attempts to run for the presidency at both the 2007 and 2011 elections! Yet, Osundare appeared to have seen tomorrow as he goes about his call to action in an archetypal town crier mode:

People of our land,
Have you heard the news?

The poet was not going to miss an opportunity to remind all and sundry of Babangida's mortal sin against electoral democracy and the fabric of the Nigerian nation, namely the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election. He thus continues amid subtle warning:

Remember the gap-toothed Prince of Tricks
Grand Annuler, Prosciber of Prophets
Make way for his second coming

He who dribbled the country into dross
Granted Graft a cabinet post

Osundare does not mince words in addressing the ill-informed sycophants of Babangida when he writes that 'His trumpet-blowers are filling the streets/His mouth-pieces are threatening like crocodile jaws'. He is just as unequivocal in signposting the dangers that lay ahead should these chants be taken for granted:

He flayed us with whips the first time
He will skin us with scorpions the second time

And the implication of Babangida's re-ascendancy of the presidency on the actual character of the Nigerian people/electorate is blatantly spelt out:

Tail-less we are, a tribe of amnesic toads
Dry like a dinosaur's scars, headless like crabs

The poet, nonetheless, stays on message and cautions till fade:

The rain which beat us many seasons ago
Will drench us to death in a second deluge

He who killed the country in his first gallop
Is coming, horse-high, for the funereal finish

All hail the gap-toothed Tortoise
Mess-iah Monarch in a jungle of fools
Make way for his second coming

'The Fortunate Inheritor' spoke to the reality of the actual return of the supposedly 'born again democrat' General Olusegun Obasanjo and how his democratically mandated administration had performed woefully. Indeed, as of 2004 when the piece was written, Obasanjo had just begun the second leg of his two-term presidency as an elected Nigerian leader. How fortunate must this past military head of state be to have circumstances bestow on him the highest office in the re-democratized land after he left power twenty years earlier? Thoughts as these occupied Osundare as he bemoaned the lackluster administration that Obasanjo's second coming had bequeathed Nigeria and Nigerians. Yet, more than these, Osundare's choice of the framing of 'fortunate inheritor' stems from the reality of a nationwide appeasement to the Yoruba of southwest Nigeria (the homeland of MKO Abiola). It was not for nothing that the 1999 presidential election which ushered in the Fourth Republic was contested by two Yoruba candidates – the other being Olu Falae. Incidentally, both Abiola and Obasanjo are from Abeokuta in Ogun State.

Appropriately, Osundare begins by highlighting the ambiguity of Obasanjo's electoral victory:

Beneficiary of votes cast and votes un-cast

Osundare is quick to register his displeasure/disapproval of Obasanjo's ingratitude for Abiola's sacrifices:

Fortunate inheritor whose legator's name
Now burns his lip like a dreadful spell

The poet is barely impressed by Obasanjo's pretense of detachment from the circumstances that 'foisted' power on him and questions the sort of nation such a character could generate:

He says he was busy tending his farm
When they offered him the golden crown;
But unlike good old Cincinnatus, what kind
Of Re-public will this one bequeathe?

Again, Osundare proves to be the man who saw tomorrow, for Obasanjo would later pursue a third term. Yet, the poet had queried:

His own second term, too, and multiple terms

And warned that the military head of state was no different from the 'elected' version,

In his first coming he wielded an open sword
This time the sword hides under a flowing robe

To this extent, the poet emphasizes the characteristic in Obasanjo that informed his submission and proceeds to detail the infrastructural malaise, economic meltdown, spate of assassinations, high cost of living and palpable poverty in the land Obasanjo had governed for over a democratic term's cycle:

Talking, never listening, hectoring hardly hidden,
All-knowing, all-mighty, an oracle beyond restraint

His is the era of want and worry
Of lean shadows and swindled dreams

Chronically hard of seeing
The Emperor romps around in majestic indifference

His ward bursting with designer robes
His mocking foppery, an affront to the people's rags

Widows wail, orphans lament
The people cry from their lowly roosts

Stanza V of 'June 12 and Its Children' centers on 'The Right Honourables' which is essentially a lament of the disappointment that parliamentarians had come to epitomize since Nigeria's return to governance via the three arms. At the present time, it appears that the only Nigerians who are upbeat or indifferent about the legislative arm of government at the state and federal levels are the legislators themselves, their aides, and their families who derive some sort of benefit directly or indirectly. Outside these, the dissatisfaction of Nigerians with the legislative arm of government is utterly infectious. There have been calls for a democracy run on two arms without the legislature. A more gracious school has questioned the necessity of a bicameral legislature at the federal level.

Indeed, issues have been raised about the purpose of a 109-member senate while a 360-member strong federal house of representatives sits next door. It has been suggested that this duplication of roles has brought neither progress nor development to the country, in the real sense.

Unsurprisingly, Osundare's focus in 'The Right Honourables' is the senate and federal house of representatives and their apparent charter to gorge the national till:

The Honourables think with their stomach
Their "sacred mission" is secreted

Constituency allowances vanish into personal projects
Voter interests are pummelled under the gavel

Meanwhile, here we go on our usual "study tours":

Legislative acts in Singapore
Kangaroo proceedings in down Canberra
Management of the Maradona malaise in Argentina

Our rulers are bound for the skies
The only bills they pass are those the people pay...

As re-democratization in 1999 made way for a number of loyalists to the despot leaders just preceding, parliament was peopled by men of means who had the financial clout to contest and win elections. Osundare, thus, had no faith in a class of legislators who had practically sold their souls to Babangida and Abacha a few years prior:

Emergency De-mock-rats, "new and improved",
(Former) minions of the Trickster-General
Proud mess-engers of his goggled successor

...sworn enemies to our nation's dreams;
We craved a cure, we got a curse

The gavel has become a gamble
The Mace is now a maze
Burn-again De-mock-rats have set our dreams ablaze
[First published in *The Guardian* 17 July, 2004]^{iv}

Conclusion: Towards a Lasting Democratic Ethos for the Grandchildren of June 12

Electoral paranoia in Nigeria is driven by a sense of mission. The electorate comprising the commoner, cultural workers/celebrities and politicians, too, go into elections with a sense of opportunity. However, this opportunity isn't one to make a difference or of service to nation as the saying goes. Politics and political office in Nigeria are perhaps the most lucrative avenues known to Nigerians. As such, electoral seasons come with heightened interests born of a survival instinct. The electoral paranoia of Nigerians is thus an expression of the stakes involved and the very thick line that exists between electoral victory and electoral defeat. It is a brutal case of *winner takes all* while the loser turns vulture's toast. The centrality of metaphors and myths to national identity is paramount here. Indeed, there is a sense in which the notion of the 'national cake' is the Nigerian nation's self-naming metaphor, just as the 'American dream' is the USA's and 'impossible isn't French' is France's. The Nigerian attitude to elections and the inherent electoral paranoia are ample proof. The depth travelled by this mindset of viewing political office in Nigeria from a perspective of the 'national cake' is demonstrated fittingly by a poem written by this author over a decade ago. The piece 'Can I come 'n' eat?' portrays the mind-set of a Nigerian youth whose social identity had been conditioned by the metaphor of the national cake:

Can I come 'n' eat?

My dear, I wish to serve you
An invitation I crave in desperation

To breakfast and dine on you
Still brunch and lunch, I'd chef with you

Venue-d at the Federal Capital Cafeteria
In Her-boo-jar's territory

The emphasis pinned-to-the-pin of conspicuous consumption
As dished by the geo-luxurious zones of your menu

Cuisine of a giant's foremost Fourth Republic
Favourite recipe of the central government

Only, this meal there'd be no dessert
Being my culinary style, a monarchy

Death alone could un-throne the appetite for its mandate
Politely therefore I ask:
Can I please come 'n' eat?

It is imperative that the grandchildren of June 12 overcome the 'national cake' approach to the paraphernalia of government in order that the malaise of electoral paranoia is quashed. The suppression of campaigns would naturally diminish once electoral paranoia dwindles. A sure way to achieve these is to stimulate wealth creation among the citizenry while stripping political offices of substantial perks as presently constituted. Indeed, 'Hope '93', MKO Abiola's 1993 presidential election campaign slogan of 'farewell to poverty', once again offers a framework towards a rethinking of the manner of democracy that is sought in Nigeria.

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ⁱ Fela sings of General Obasanjo's method in returning Nigeria to civil rule: by recycling old politicians who had contributed to the nation's decay in the past. By handing over power back to them, Fela alludes to Obasanjo's supervision of the cronyism that characterised the 'Army Arrangement' disguised as democracy.

ⁱⁱ The Copyright Society of Nigeria (COSON) has granted me permission to quote Nigerian popular music texts for research and learning purposes.

ⁱⁱⁱ People's Democratic Party

^{iv} The Distinguished Professor Oluwaniyi Osundare of the University of New Orleans has graciously granted permission to quote the poem 'June 12 and Its Children' for this piece commemorating the silver jubilee of the June 12, 1993 presidential election.