

Gbogbo àwọn gbajumò elé.gbè pro-democracy wa òwón wònyen dà lónií?*

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Four weeks ago, fueled by a “regula trademark” *àbùlù* of administrative insouciance, broken infrastructure, technical *snafus*, open-air monetary/alimentary bribery, violent vote suppression and statistical *jibiti*—in brief, by “government magic”—a national electoral exercise was conducted in Nigeria to name the successor to President Muhammadu Buhari of the APC party.² After three days and in the dead of night, the process gave forth the name of the party’s principal financier, who during presidential candidate selection in 2022 already crowned himself as *Èmì l’ò kàn*—Mister Inevitability—on top of *Àṣìwájú* the quasi-military title that’s welded—like the *Ọyó*-style cap permanently on his head—as the obligatory prefix of his legal name and that’s best glossed in Italian as *Il Duce*, given that he’s widely known as “godfather of Lagos” after two decades’ dominance of that prosperous city-state.³

Independent observers observed no transparency in the numbers unveiled after opaque delays (CDD 2023, CJID 2023).⁴ The official turnout is a smoking gun: 25 million of 93 million registered voters (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/2023_Nigerian_presidential_election) is a yield of 27%, i.e. 8% less than 2019’s previous record low set in a non-competitive, second-term cycle when imputations of public apathy were more believable than in the present *prīmā facie* ‘change election’—when federal policies had provoked mass anger and the national ballot unexpectedly included two viable, perceived outsiders below age 70, facing off against two of the most elderly, recycled *ògás* of the civilian duopoly imposed by the army in 1999, the so-called Fourth Republic.⁵ The announced plurality is a mere 36% of the mere 27% participation, and the claimed margin of under 2 million votes amounted to a rounding error in a statistics-impaired country ever-proud to brand itself “the giant of Africa” (Holmes 1985).⁶ So much for numerology.

Despite the triumph of noise over signal, aggrieved contestants now statutorily bear the forensic burden to prove that the incumbent party either caused or exploited grand electoral mayhem so as to frustrate popular preference. Depending on whether *Oòduà* or *Qbàtálá* eventually descends upon the head of newly installed Chief Justice Ariwoolá, as the Supreme Court performs “the final round of voting” (Ọ̀dinkálú 2023), sober anticipation is best captured in a proverb favored by late Prof. Ọ̀mọ́rúyí: *Money makes iron float*.⁷ In the default, at least one opposition candidate is expected to take the path of extrajudicial protest, following the tradition of Nigerian pro-democracy campaigns—most notably the “June 12th struggle” to restore the mandate grabbed at gunpoint in 1993 by the coupist “president” Gen. Ibrahim Babangida from president-elect Moshood Abiófá.⁸ The latter died in 1998 in custody of the army *junta* under extreme duress applied by Bill Clinton’s tag-team envoys Tom Pickering and Susan Rice in the presence of Gen. Sani Abacha’s successor Gen. Abdulsalami Abubakar—just one month after Abacha’s own dodgy death, ’round midnight somewhere the “Villa”—Nigeria’s army-constructed labyrinth of central power.⁹

* [Where are all those our treasured, famous/trendy pro-democracy supporters now?]. Last update 26 April 2024. Thanks to Alhaji Ọ̀sarúyí Muhammed Ịghílẹ̀ for sharing his political sagacity and commitment over the past 39 years. Shout-out to twitter.com/lokojaboy/status/1663144548200071173 for observing “that several of our darling ‘pro-democracy’ veterans lived in a lavish *chiropter* Potemkin village”—ringing a Linnaean adjective that connotes *vampiric* and/or *extinct*.

1. 1923-2010. Newspaper editor in Lagos (1944-53). Mover of the original self-government motion in the Western Region parliament in Ịbàdàn (1954). Midwest Region leader at the *ad-hoc* Lagos constitutional conference (1966). Chair, NADECO in exile, Washington DC (1993-1998).

2. Ọ̀ja lexicon—continues in subsequent footnotes:

“dem regula trademark”, “government magic” (Aníkúlá.pò-Kú.ti 1977, 1979 respectively).

àbùlù “fused liquids” (Abraham 1958, 117), in effect: *house blend*, a slurry mix of yesterday’s leftover batches of soup or palmwine.

jibiti “sharp practice” (Abraham 1958, 347) a.k.a. “defraudulument... forgerylization” (Aníkúlá.pò-Kú.ti 1980).

One example of said *jibiti*: www.premiumtimesng.com/news/593521-revealed-results-on-inec-portal-show-peter-obi-not-tinubu-won-in-rivers.html, reconfirmed by www.bbc.com/news/65163713. By contrast, Prof. Attahiru Jega’s management of the 2015 cycle, with over 44% turnout, is generally assessed as having been more ethical and competent than anything since the 1993 election run by Profs. Ọ̀mọ́rúyí and Nwáósú under the open ballot system (before it was annulled by decree). By now the line between insouciant incompetence and LIHOP is blurry at best: www.vanguardngr.com/2023/04/why-recs-are-reckless-justice-nwais-report, www.premiumtimesng.com/opinion/594801-the-lessons-from-adamawa-by-jideofor-adibe.html *àtí bẹ̀ẹ̀ bẹ̀ẹ̀ ló* [ad infinitum].

3. (*A*)*tí-ínú-íhú* “someone who is from the inside of the deep” (Awóyalé 2008), a befitting tag for a person of obscure familial origins (possible birth name “Lamidi Amoda Sangodele”), prone to diploma *forgerylization*, holding unexplained vast personal wealth and with a U.S. heroin-related rap sheet, cf. newswirengr.com/2023/10/03/jaroog-a-kperogi-6-major-findings-about-tinubu-from-the-csu-documents_westafrikanweekly.substack.com/p/1-bola-ahmed-tinubu-from-drug-lord.

Àṣìwájú ‘forward leader’ cf. *Àṣìgùn* ‘chief who races ahead in battle, *Àṣípa* ‘war commander’ (Abraham 1958, 95, Awóyalé 2008), analogous to the neobiafran title “*Ọ̀nyẹ-ń-dú Maàzị́*” [‘Sir Guide’] Nnàmdí Káńú” www.vanguardngr.com/2020/07/ipob-directs-media-personnel-to-halt-all-attacks-on-yoruba/.

Èmì nì ọ kàn, ‘Now it’s my turn [to take it]’, literally ‘It’s me that it [power] has hit/touched/reached [next in the queue]’ (Awóyalé 2008, punchng.com/emi-lokan-nine-other-political-events-that-shaped-2022/).

“godfather of Lagos” (a.k.a. “the Lion of Bourdillon” cf. sunnewsonline.com/new/lion-of-bourdillon-ait-fights-back/) as applied by an on-and-off protégé:

“El-Rufai was met with a tidal wave of criticism from party members and critics after his comment at a forum on Friday about steps to curbing godfatherism in politics. The governor boasted that he defeated and retired four political godfathers in Kaduna State, saying the feat could be replicated anywhere, including Lagos State. El-Rufai added that the fact that only one million out of the six million registered voters in Lagos voted in the last general elections was an opportunity to end godfatherism in the state. ‘Connecting with the people; the tin godfather, you will retire him or her permanently. But it is hard work; it requires three to four years of hard work. So, if you want to run in 2023, you should start now’, he said. Observers quickly analysed El-Rufai’s comments as an attack on his fellow All Progressives Congress party member, Bola Tinubu, a former Lagos governor. Tinubu is regarded as the godfather of Lagos politics.”

“I have no apology, El-Rufai says about Lagos godfather comment” (*Guardian*, Lagos, 13 May 2019, guardian.ng/news/i-have-no-apology-el-rufai-says-about-lagos-godfather-comment/).

And now, by popular acclaim, his excellency’s newest chieftaincy title: *Baba Ebí-ń-pa-wá* ‘Daddy Hunger-is-killing-us’ (leadership.ng/tinubu-ebi-npa-wa).

4. Prof. C. Ọ̀dinkálú (facultyprofiles.tufts.edu/chidi-odinkalu) reported first-hand to the BBC on 26 February (audio 5’32” available on request). See now also the report of the E.U. Observer mission www.euas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/2023/EU_EOM_NGA_2023_FR.pdf.

5. Strictly the current *rēs publica* is only the third, because the previous civil electoral episode (1990-93) was aborted *in uterō* by its peculiar creator. *ògá* ‘high-ranking/top-ranking person’ (Abraham 1958, 506), colloquially *master*, *boss*, *bigman*.

6. The cited source intends a gigantism of crude petrochemical output, but the original measure of the country’s exceptional size was demography, as a captive market (ambiguity intended) for the United Africa/Royal Niger Company (1879-1900) of George Goldie, who sold the juicy territory on to the British Empire for a princely sum. Mrs. Flora Lugard then tactfully chose *Nigeria* as a less “inconvenient” abbreviation of “Royal Niger Company’s Territories” (Shaw 1897, 6, cf. 1905, 7) when her original “suggestion that Nigeria be called ‘Goldesia’... met with a flat refusal from Goldie himself” after “Goldie refused her offer of marriage” (Kwarteng 2011, 276, 287). Nigeria’s current, official population guess is widely regarded as inflated by 20% or more thanks to casual/deliberate upward errors compounded in successive censuses, but more grounded truth may soon land from the sky via GPS grid sampling techniques. By then, it will only remain to conduct Nigeria’s *elections* by satellite imaging as well—All in favor, look up and wave!

7. *Oòduà*, alt. *Odùdunà* “deified founder of the Yorùbá race [sic]” (Awóyalé 2008). *Egbé Ọ̀mọ́ Odùdunà*, founded in London circa 1947 by the Ịjẹ̀bù lawyer Qbáfẹ̀mí Awólófó, who in turn begat the lineage of political parties AG>UPN>AD>ACN>APC (cf. Coleman 1958, Sklar 1963).

Qbàtálá “the god who personifies the strength of purity, fecundity of truth” (Wenger 1983, 88) e.g. unlike this: thenigerianlawyer.com/extent-of-statutory-involvement-of-incumbent-jin-olukayode-arinwoola-in-the-process-to-appoint-mr-olukayode-arinwoola-mr-a-judge-of-the-federal-high-court-of-nigeria/.

An insider describes less divine spirits in Ariwoolá’s court: gazettengr.com/nigerians-now-bate-supreme-court-because-its-occupied-by-judicial-bandits-bribe-takers-justice-dattijo. In the event, the court expediently evaded specifically responding to the Labour Party brief: nitter.d420.de/ChidiOdinkalu/status/1729869087353049409.

8. Neither opposition party accepted the perfunctory Supreme Court endorsement (26 October) of the electoral tribunal’s openly partisan “judgement with ‘Tinubu Presidential Legal Team’ imprinted on its over 700 pages” www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/626761-explainer-why-tinubu-lawyers-mark-on-etc-of-pepc-judgement.html.

9. The unfinished history of Abiófá’s martyrdom is vividly narrated by Ọ̀mọ́rúyí (1999) and Fálána (2001). *Àṣìwájú*’s crafted image of anti-Abacha hero is belied by the role of Abacha’s infamous financial *portaborse* as principal road contractor to Lagos State in the Tinubu era (*This Day* [Lagos], 20 July 2008 cited by www.thecapital.ng/tinubu-powerbrokers) and by the same individual’s role as “confidante [sic] of Mr. President” #15241 in Nigeria’s delegation to the 2023 U.N. climate conference in Dubai (unfccc.int/sites/default/files/resource/PLOP_COP28_on-site.xlsx, cf. nitter.d420.de/TheSerahIbrahim/status/1730957872962396281).

Heroic activism three decades ago by those resisting Babangida's reckless annulment and Abacha's mad fascism is not matched in many of the same individuals by equally courageous pushback against today's equally blatant, wholesale violation of Nigerian civil franchise. Notable exceptions include the forthright accusation of "daylight robbery" voiced by Ayò Adébáńjò, 94-year old elder of the perpetually factioned ethno-political lobby Afenifere, as well as a slap-down tweet about the followup Lagos poll, "You selected yourself. Everybody saw it unfold" by Fọlá.rín alias Falz, the lawyer-rapper whose indefatigable father Fẹ́mí Fálána the human rights attorney inherited the popular title "Senior Advocate of the Masses" from his own mentor the late Gani Fawehinmi, founder of the National Conscience Party in 1994.¹⁰ Meanwhile the current APC head flack—a former editor of Abiólá's *National Concord* who survived Abacha's *gulag*—tweets crude threats against the Igbo-speaking residents of Lagos, while Igbos perceived as voting for an opposition candidate in the Lagos governor's race suffer an ethnically explicit, physical assault by their local *baálẹ́*'s *agbèròs*.¹¹

One month of unseemly silence is more than eloquent enough about the political past. On the 25th anniversary of Abiólá's arrest, Nigeria's literary Nobel lamented that "anyone should attempt to reduce the June 12 struggle to that of an ethnic project" (Sóyínká 2019) but now the APC media director tweets out a textbook psychological inversion of this exact idea, asserting that "Peter Obi of Labour Party seeks the annulment of the election of President-elect Bola Tinubu just like the military annulled MKO Abiola's election of 12 June 1993".¹² So if June 12th was all about democracy not *àmàlà*—nor about *nwọ́wọ́* dancing for that matter, as Sóyínká once quipped during a similar debate—why are its veterans so undecided which side they're really on, this time?¹³

Òkété, báyii ni iwàà rẹ, o bá Fà mu'lẹ!¹⁴

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10. "It was daylight robbery, Adebajo faults INEC on election results" (*Vanguard*, Lagos, 3 March, www.vanguardngr.com/2023/03/it-was-daylight-robbery-adebanjo-faults-inec-on-election-results/).
"You were not re-elected. You selected yourself. Everybody saw it unfold. You are only deceiving yourselves" (twitter.com/lacontrevoie/status/1637729726511849472, cf. www.vanguardngr.com/2023/03/lagos-poll-you-selected-yourself-not-re-elected-falz-tackles-sanwo-olu)
Also see "Mr Yakubu" (30 March 2023), a 3-minute audiovisual *yabí* [trash-talk] of the "share-man" of "Eye Neck", produced with Olánrewájú Ògúnmé fun alias VectorIhaViper: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nm8U1pYAX8M.
- Fẹ́mí Fálána SAN has denounced the "shame" of the 2023 polls www.vanguardngr.com/2023/10/its-not-ideal-for-judiciary-to-determine-winners-of-elections-falana and insisted on the 2009 Uwais recommendations to achieve "credible elections" www.vanguardngr.com/2023/11/credible-polls-impossible-without-constitutional-amendment-falana.
11. "Lagos is like Anambra, Imo, any Nigerian state. It is not No Man's Land, not Federal Capital Territory. It is Yoruba land. Mind your business', Onanuga said, tweeting a photo of Peter Obi, an Igbo from Anambra State who backed Gbadebo Rhodes-Vivour, a Yoruba from Lagos, in Saturday's election." (*Vanguard*, Lagos, 19 March 2023, www.vanguardngr.com/2023/03/onanuga-cautions-igbo-against-interfering-in-lagos-politics, cf. twitter.com/aonanuga1956/status/1637221887582388225).
- "Igbo leaders in Lagos call on Sanwo-Olu to release detained chief" (*Vanguard*, Lagos, 21 March 2023, www.vanguardngr.com/2023/03/igbo-leaders-in-lagos-call-on-sanwo-olu-to-release-detained-chief).
baálẹ́ 'district sub-chief' (Abraham 1958, 95).
agbèrò literally 'luggage porter' (Abraham 1958, 164), effectively 'tout operating in the informal economy sector', colloquially *street urchin*, *thug*, *area boy* (cf. Sóyínká 1995, Jega 2000).
12. "Peter Obi wants to treat Tinubu like IBB did to MKO Abiola – Onanuga" (*Vanguard*, Lagos, 22 March 2023, www.vanguardngr.com/2023/03/peter-obi-wants-to-treat-tinubu-like-ibb-did-to-mko-abiola-onanuga, cf. twitter.com/aonanuga1956/status/1638222543067684872) and predictably enough, the chief dramatist of Nigeria has doubled down on the same dramatic scenario: "just like under Babangida" (www.vanguardngr.com/2024/01/there-was-conspiracy-to-annul-2023-elections-wole-soyinka).
13. *àmàlà* 'stiff porridge of rehydrated *iyẹ́fun* *èlùbó*, the flour of dried yam or manioc' (Abraham 1958, 511, Awóyalé 2008).
nwọ́wọ́ a *sàkàrà* dance style characteristic of the Ìjẹ̀bu Yorùbá region.
- Sóyínká's remark, paraphrased here from memory, was made to Òtù Ndi Ìgbò nọ nà Nótàmérica at Boston University on Sunday 4 June 1995 in the presence of Dr. O. Ndi.bé. But this time around, the senior dramaturg reverts to old habits (1972, 1994, 2006) of casting himself as 9ja's leading *dramatis persona*, ostentatiously discomfited by certain online interlocutors' verbal "fascism" and "refusal to entertain corrective criticism" — "enb, Baba" — as he expends more column inches to amp APC fury at a TV interview when the LP vice-presidential candidate warned — plausibly and presciently enough — that the APC's judicial self-succession would be "the end of democracy". Safer to engage in distraction and blame the victim's choice of words: "I do agree with Seun Kutí; 'Obidients' is one of the most repulsive, off-putting concoctions I ever encountered in any political arena" (www.premiumtimesng.com/news/top-news/592310-soyinka-accuses-obidients-of-fascism-says-they-dont-entertain-corrective-criticism.html) so as to change the subject from gross electoral malfeasance, archly minimised as "not exactly the most edifying exercise that we've been through" (www.vanguardngr.com/2023/04/2023-elections-why-i-did-not-endorse-any-candidate-soyinka). Yes oo, *igá Prof.*, mek yu dey teach alldem *arí-òkè* [hillbillies] *betúú* humility! Dem for first consult una own longsuffering copy of *Roget's English Thesaurus*. But should in case na Supreme Court deliver anoda *àbíkú* [= stillbirth] *í kẹ́*? After the election tribunal verdict, the author known affectionately by the name of his ruthlessly opportunistic character *Kongí* doubled down on sanctimonious hypocrisy — literal theatricality — to "say categorically" that the Labour Party "lost the February 25 election" (www.vanguardngr.com/2023/09/labour-party-knows-obi-lost-2023-polls-soyinka), thereby slyly asserting that somebody else 'won' though by dint of vote buying, vote suppression and noneuclidean arithmetic. Resting his case on an oracular conspiracy of "clandestine forces", the highbrow brand ambassador of southwest progressivism insists that "the labour movement, which is not my favourite movement... became a regional party" — an ethnic excuse as transparent as an *eégún*'s threadbare veil exposing the exhausted dancer's wobbling knees beneath. (Full interview: www.youtube.com/watch?v=d420.de/OkeyiNdi/status/1702814843651207643). O kò tó *è kè* *ò rọ́ yí í gbé* 'This matter has become too big for your *agọ́* shroud to hide' (cf. Abraham 1958, 184).
- For the record and Sóyínká's pique aside, the iambic prosody of the first two syllables of the English word *obedient* is a perfect proxy for missing tonemarks on the Igbo name *Obi* LH whose denotation 'dweller in an ancestral shrine' is distinct from that of the noun *òbí* HL 'chest/heart/mind'. Ignoring the *obedient* hint, the default (BBC-grade) Anglicisation of the toneless spelling O-B-I is trochaic, wrongly evoking Igbo HL tones and thus badly botching the candidate's name.
14. [So this is how you behave, pouched rat/*Cricetomys gambianus*, although you swore an oath on the sacred oracle!] (cf. Abraham 1958, 465).