Deconstructing Elite Fragmentation in Nigerian Politics

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Abstract
The lack of sustainability in Nigeria is often blamed on the elite in the society. The elite class renders the practice of democracy difficult by rigging elections, stealing state resources, and above all engaging in political brinkmanship. The most daunting of the problems is what this paper refers to as “elite fragmentation” by which is meant the act of the elite class engaging in such open conflicts that make them to divulge the secrets of one another. In the process, citizens get to know how the elite class manipulates the rest of the society to their own selfish advantage. This paper examines the nature of this problem since the 1999 political transition from military to civil rule. The paper focuses on two interesting cases: the conflict between President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar from 2005 to 2007 and the contrived “constitutional crisis” arising from President Umar Yar’Adua’s sickness and death. In both cases “dirty tricks” came into play and the ruling party, PDP, produced the opposition from within and by so doing brought the security of Nigeria to boiling points. In the process of contributing to the debate on the two cases, some Nigerians made statements that are cited in this paper to confirm our thesis on “elite fragmentation”. The data provided in the paper provides a classroom example of how elite fragmentation can contribute towards political instability. The situation suggests readily that democracy is yet to take its firm root in Nigeria and this contributes to the international skepticism about the health of democracy in the country.

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Introduction

Democratic governance has to do with the range of processes through which a society reaches consensus and implement regulations, human rights, laws, policies and social structures – in pursuit of justice, welfare and environmental protection. Policies and laws are carried out by many institutions: the legislature, judiciary, executive branch, political parties, private sector and a variety of civil society. In this sense democratic governance brings to the fore the question of how a society organizes itself to ensure equality (of opportunity) and equity (social and economic justice) for all citizens. Taking the foregoing into consideration, can we really describe Nigeria as a democracy? This paper answer's the question in the negative and presents the country as a case of weak state in dynamic relations with a strong society. Its population is composed of various ethnic, linguistic, cultural and religious groups, each forming a distinct micro-society that unfortunately regularly exhibits the capacity for sectarianism at very short notice. This factor has historically played a critical role in impeding national unity and attempts at institutionalized state building in the country. Solutions to this problem must come from the ruling elite who control and allocate the state resources that all these social forces are competing forces using self-help strategies.

It is unfortunate that the Nigerian ruling elite is not a cohesive or altruistic force. They manipulate ethnic and religious factors for personal gains and in the process present themselves to all and sundry as centrifugal forces rather than the centripetal entities they are expected to be. This is the major reason for the proliferation of violent conflicts in different parts of Nigeria today: with the Jos and Boko Haram crises being the most embarrassing. The fear that the ruling elite would continue to be an obstacle to the process of democratization is now ceding to a new worry in Nigeria and the problem manifests in different ways with the January 2012 fuel subsidy protests providing the most dangerous warning signs. It is the concern that powerful self-interested political actors gain
control over the states to their own advantage and to the enormous losses to the entire societies. The paper focuses particularly on a more serious problem: “elite fragmentation” which since the 1999 political transition has come to be recognized as a major conflict-generating factor in the Nigerian political system. The paper sheds more light on the nature of this problem and the negative impact it has on democratic governance. Some problem-solving strategies are suggested for engaging the problem.

**Understanding Elite Fragmentation**

The political elite are very important in any democratic process in the sense that they have a considerable weight in building and influencing state structures more directly than ordinary citizens, namely in their function of directly taking and enforcing political decisions. It logically follows that if they guarantee and agree on the prerequisites of democratic state-building and enforce them then it could be said that the essential prerequisites for a dynamic state transformation are set (Pareto 1997: 47-52; Gallina 2008: 183-200; Grzymala-Busse and Luong, 2002: 529-554). The point to be made however that it is not only elite consensus that play an important role in a democratic process, it is more important that elite consensus endures and that the political elite act according to the formal institutional framework - notably according to formal legislation that supports the build-up of a strong state. The opposite scenario is what is often described as elite fragmentation.

The word “fragmentation” is used in this paper in an inclusive multidimensional manner that encapsulates familiar social concepts such as atomization, isolation, privatization, alienation, anomie, disintegration, segmentation, ethnic chauvinism and idle religiosity. Following this, “elite fragmentation” as used in this paper refers to how politicians fight dirty among themselves most especially within same political parties or cabinets where people are expected to be in solid relationships, This refers to an expression of strong differences within the governing elite and serious problems between the governing and the oppositional elite (Higley and
Lengyel, 2000; Kagwanja, 2009. xv-i). It refers to the formation of competing groups that would jostle for power in a contested political space.

Elite fragmentation includes trench-mentality and the positioning of elite into “enemy-categories” even with same political parties, ethnic and religious groups.7 In both cases, politicians compensate for their lack of serious political oppositional power with power-generating extra-political activities that weaken state system. Hence, Gallina argues that this kind of situation “signifies the discord of the political elite over the requirements for building a democratic system. Elite fragmentation as such is based on the overall principles of informality and power proximity and focuses on personalized relationships which stand diametrically opposed to the requirements for a democratic system, but which function well within autocratic political frameworks. Elite fragmentation poses serious challenges for transformation toward democratic systems, and generally efficient state institutions” (Gallina 2010). There is no simple way to assess this type of problem in a democracy, However, the following are easily decipherable: (a) behavioural indicators of social attachment and isolation within a political party or regime; (b) attitudes and feelings regarding trust and tolerance within a political party or regime; (c) indicators of group heterogeneity and homogeneity; and (d) indicators of group structure. All these are evident in how politicians treat one another or speak about one another. It manifests in how people use state power against another or deny others the use of state power.

Elite fragmentation happens largely in the context of absence of well defined ideological cleavages in a political system and in a situation where despite a long period of having to work together the elite lacks ideological consensus. More often than not, it derives from personality clashes, ill-coordinated personal ambitions, position/role dependent differences in responsibilities and interests than of ideological differences. This kind of situation arises in Weak states with fuzzy institutions and in a situation of “coffeehouse
politics” where “despite the names of political parties, there are no ideas, only personal vanity and intrigues” (Carey2004: 218). It is made more potent by an environment where there are centrifugal ethnic and religious cleavages. This kind of political situation first arises with the elite ganging, usually organized as political parties or interest groups, up for “state capture” and then they run into problems on how to share the benefits.

Elite Fragmentation in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic

Elite fragmentation between different elite groups was clearly evident in the three regimes that have emerged since the 1999 transition: Obasanjo (1999-2007), Yar’Adua (2007-2010), and Goodluck Jonathan (2011 to the present). However, this paper will focus on the happenings during the Obasanjo and Yar’Adua regimes. This is because some of these issues are now becoming fairly settled and now in the public domain having been liberated from the private sphere where they were consigned in the past. The book Power, Politics, and Death recently published on President Yar’Adua by his spokesman, Olusegun Adeniyi (2011) declassified some of these issues. The publication is a classic in how negative elite fragmentation compromises political stability of a nation.

The first major indication of elite fragmentation during the Obasanjo regime was the many godfather/godson crises witnessed from 1999 to 2007 during which some governors were impeached by fellow party members rather than members of the opposition parties (Alben 2005: 79-105; Albert 2006). This is an unbecoming experience in a democracy as party members are expected to have internal mechanisms for preventing their problems from spilling into the open. The second major problem faced during the Obasanjo regime was the conflict that took place between the President and his deputy, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar from 2005 to 2007. The social, economic and political resources committed to this conflict by the two parties also surprised both local and international analysts of political conflicts. During the administration of President Umar
Yar’Adua, the most interesting example of elite fragmentation was the contrived constitutional crisis resulting from the President’s illness and eventual death. Under the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan, a case of elite fragmentation could be clearly established in how the Speaker House of Representatives, Hon. Aminu Waziri Tambuwal was elected in 2011. He was opposed by some power brokers within the ruling party, including Chief Olusegun Obasanjo. He became the Speaker through overwhelming votes of the opposition parties in the House. There are several other emerging issues in the country.

This paper focuses on two graphically illustrative cases: the conflict between President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar from 2005 to 2007 and the contrived “constitutional crisis” arising from President Umar Yar’Adua’s sickness and death. In both cases “dirty tricks” (Migdal 1988: 226) came into play and the ruling party, PDP, produced the opposition from within and by so doing brought the security of Nigeria to boiling points. In the process of contributing to the debate on the two cases, some Nigerians made statements that are cited in this paper to confirm our thesis on “elite fragmentation? The data provided in the paper provides a classroom example of how elite fragmentation can contribute towards political instability. The situation suggests readily that democracy is yet to take its firm root in Nigeria and this contributes to the international scepticism about the health of democracy in Nigeria.

**Case 1: The Obasanjo/Atiku Conflict**

At the initial stage of their administration in 1999, Chief Olusegun Obasanjo and his deputy, Alhaji Atiku Abubakar looked like a perfect match for any civilian administration. The two were united in fighting the many battles that confronted the administration from 1999 to 2003: the violence associated with the introduction of Shariah legal system in some parts of northern Nigeria where the Vice President came from; the insurgencies of the Oodua People’s
Congress, Bakassi Boys, Niger Delta militants in southern Nigerian where the President came from; the Odi and Zaki Biam invasion by the Nigerian military etc. Even when the northern Nigerian power elite tried to challenge the administration of Obasanjo on the account that he was not doing enough for them, Atiku sided with the President against “his people”.

Though rumored to be a reluctant step, Atiku supported the second term bid of Obasanjo during the 2003 presidential election. Signs of the conflict between the two started to come into the open following the 2003 election and by 2005 it was getting clearer to other Nigerians that Obasanjo would not allow Atiku to succeed him. On several occasions, the President in press interviews talked in parables about not knowing the person that would succeed him but knowing the particular person that would not succeed him. Atiku knew that the President was referring to him. With a view to dousing the tension and paving way for realizing his political ambition, Atiku was reported to have invited Pastor Enoch Adejare Adeboye, the General Overseer of the Redeemed Christian Church of God, RCCG in July 2005 to intervene in the conflict. He sought to be forgiven by Obasanjo for whatever offence he had committed (Uzuakpundu 2005). Obasanjo told Adeboye that Atiku brought him to the state house not out of any sincerity but to secure the ticket to contest the 2007 presidential election which he felt the Vice President was not fit to contest. Atiku was accused of corruption and disloyalty to his principal. Uzuakpundu reported that it was after this failed peace process that Atiku stepped up his activities in the media, taking the battle to the next level. In one of the interviews he granted, Atiku talked about how the ruling patty rigged elections. The Obasanjo camp did not only engage him through the media but took a number of decisions that forced the Vice President out of office. It was probably in this context that Obasanjo came out in full force against him.

On September 7 2006, the Senate President read a letter from President Obasanjo accompanying some documentary evidence
alleging conspiracy, fraudulent conversion of funds, corrupt practices, and money laundering, against the Vice President. The President claimed to be acting on information received from American government. The Senate set up an administrative panel to investigate the allegations against Vice President Atiku. The report of the panel, along with the findings of the EFCC, claimed that the Vice President utilized for private purposes, funds put in a fixed deposit account for the Petroleum Development Trust Fund (PDTF), a department of government under his care. In essence, the Vice President was acting as money lender with government money for personal profit. Atiku defended what he could defend and claimed that Obasanjo was equally corrupt. He made his points through paid media advertorials and interviews (Albert and Marco 2007: 92-122; Albert 2007: 55-78). At the end of it all, Atiku lost his seat as the Vice President when he decamped from the ruling party which was not ready to make him its presidential candidate for the 2007 election.

Case 2: “Constitutional crisis” under Yar’ Adua

Alhaji Umar Yar’Adua was the presidential candidate of PDP for the 2007 presidential election in Nigeria. He won the election which was conducted on 21 April 2007 and was sworn in on 29 May 2007. President Yar’Adua who was reported to have started having the problem of renal failure since 1999 left Nigeria on 23 November 2009 for treatment in Saudi Arabia. The status of the Vice President in the absence of the President became a subject of public debate. The Nigerian Bar Association advised in December 2009 that Yar`Adua should have handed over power to Vice-President Goodluck Jonathan in an acting capacity during his illness. This provided the background for a Supreme Court ruling on 22 January 2010 that the Federal Executive Council (FEC) had fourteen days to decide a resolution on whether Yar’Adua was "incapable of discharging the functions of his office". Part of the requirements was that the Federal Executive Council should hear testimony of five
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doctors, one of whom should be Yar’Adua's personal physician. This made it possible for the Senate to make Vice President Goodluck Jonathan to become the Acting President on 9 February 2010. Yar’Adua was brought back to Abuja on 24 February 2010 but his state of health was not declared to Nigerians until he died on 5 May 2010 at the Aso Rock presidential villa and buried in Katsina the following day.

President Yar’Adua’s absence from home broke his cabinet and the ruling party into two main groups: the “cabals” said to be opposed to Vice President Goodluck Jonathan exercising presidential power in the absence of the President and the “nationalists” who felt that presidential power was not a personal property of the sick President. The two sides “fought” dirty and brought Nigeria to a point that the possibility of a military coup was envisaged in the country.

**Nature of the Problem**

A negative impact of elite fragmentation is that it leads to ‘washing dirty linen’ in the public. It has to do with the elite breaking their own secret codes and when this happens, the ordinary citizen is shocked by the revelations that follow as the politicians trade accusations and counter-accusations. However, it is in this negative impact that democracy finds its relevance. The more the ruling elite fragments, the more information they provide to the public about how they conspire against the society in the name of ruling. This helps to strengthen democratic governance as the society is expected to use this information for engaging their leaders. To understand the issues better, we need to return to the two case studies.

In the first case, the fragmentation was between the supporters of Chief Obasanjo (the President) and Alhaji Atiku (the Vice President) and in the second case it was between the supposed “cabals” and the “nationalists”. With time, the Obasanjo/Atiku conflict escalated to the point that a few other innocent people, most
especially Governors, started to be dragged into it. A few Governors were impeached for being too close to Atiku. The Yar’Adua “constitutional crisis” too wore the look of a North/south conflict with time with all manners of sectional claims being made by secondary and shadow parties. In the two cases, the media was effectively used by all the stakeholders. For example once Atiku realized that Obasanjo was not going to support his presidential ambition, he started letting out different forms of confidential information about the ruling party and President Obasanjo. At a stage, he granted an interview in which he talked about the election rigging strategies of the ruling party. He equally accused the President of being corrupt. The President responded not only by making counter accusation against Atiku but also sacked his media assistant and redeployed his aide de camp (ADC). PDP too became so polarized that some of its prominent members, including the Chairman, Chief Audu Ogbe, had to leave the party (Marco 2006:18),

One of those negatively affected by the Atiku/Obasanjo conflict was Senator Rasheed Adewolu Ladoja, the former Governor of Oyo State. He still believes that he was impeached from office as a result of his affinity with Atiku and opposition to the third term agenda of Chief Obasanjo, Narrating how his problem started, he observed that:

You see Chief Obasanjo, I went to see him in Ota. I told him that I was hearing about this Third Term thing. He said don’t worry yourself, it is not true. I said I would have wondered because, even the one you have now you were not qualified for it!.. I may be naive but at my age, what else do you expect me to do. To be telling lies? I told him all that I knew and he said okay, okay, thank you very much.

But when I got home that night, Governor Gbenga
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Daniel called me and said: You came to Ota today, I said yes. You came to see Baba, I said yes. He asked: What did you discuss with him? I told him and he said oh, yeh, yeh, he said Oun ma so e die dun arinle (that he was going to ground you). I said okay if God gives him the power to do that.

You know that they came to invade the secretariat on the 2nd of December 2005, baba (Adedibu) led them police and all of them came to invade the secretariat and the Governor’s Office was destroyed partially, my deputy, the incumbent governor, was in his office. And I called him to ask; “Bayo, what are you doing in that office? Please get out of the place and come to the Government House that before they entered into the Government House they would know how to defend it”...He said okay sir. That was the last time we talked before the impeachment. Even before the impeachment, during the impeachment and when we came back, that was the last time we talked (Adefaka 2010).

By his own confession, Ladoja actually went to Abeokuta to get himself into trouble with Obasanjo over the Atiku/third term issue. However, the interview granted by Dr. Dejo Raimi, a leader of the Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) in Oyo State, confirmed the fact that Obasanjo was involved in Ladoja’s impeachment but the story line is different. In the interview he granted, he did not only confirm this belief but also educated us on how Obasanjo made Ladoja the Governor of Oyo State. He observed that

There was an important person who played a big role in Ladoja choice as governor, and that is Obasanjo. We took two names including Yekini Adeojo to Obasanjo who was the President. When we gave him
the list, he rejected Adeojo, saying that as a retired Army General, he was not expected to sit in a meeting with someone who retired from the Army as W01 or W02. Therefore, he asked us to look for someone who is a graduate. He asked us to choose Ladoja who is a graduate of Geology.

That was how Obasanjo supported Ladoja, and because of that I thought Ladoja should be grateful to Obasanjo for whatever he is doing in politics. But when problem started between Obasanjo and Atiku, I went to Ladoja and told him that it was the time to pay Obasanjo back due to the role he played in his political success. He said, well, We cannot continue to have uniform in the Villa as President. He opted to support Atiku. But I told him Atiku was also in uniform. I advised him not to support Atiku, but he insisted that he had made up his mind” (Adeoti 2011).

Trying to create the impression that Ladoja was probably not impeached directly because of his fraternity with Atiku, Dr. Raimi observed that: “Unluckily for Ladoja, he attended a meeting hosted by Fasawe in Owo, Ondo State, where he insulted Obasanjo so much. One of those who attended the meeting recorded it and went to show it to Obasanjo. Then Obasanjo made up his mind to get him impeached. Obasanjo and Adedibu were the two big forces against Ladoja to escape impeachment, and if the Governor is impeached, the Deputy takes over. So that was how Alao-Akala came in”.

However, Obasanjo did not impeach Ladoja directly. The work was done for him by Chief Lamidi Adedibu, the “strong man of Ibadan politics”, who had his own scores to settle with the Governor in addition to being an anti-Atiku person on the account of the Vice President’s opposition to the third term agenda. Dr. Raimi also spoke on this:

I warned Ladoja against confronting Adedibu. It is the same Ladoja that brought Alao-Akala into
politics as his running mate. Having chosen Akala, somehow, things went wrong. Of course, it was the late Chief Lamidi Adedibu that helped Ladoja to get the ticket to become governor at that time. Ladoja told us that Adedibu got the ticket for him on a price and that he had paid him off. I warned him that in politics, you do not pay off a godfather like that. I told him to continue to pay royalty to Adedibu. It was the same issue of royalty to Adedibu that caused trouble. Ladoja showed me a list of 13 commissioners in which, Adedibu had 12 out of them, Ladoja contested the slots but Adedibu insisted that it was part of the royalty Ladoja should pay him. But in the long run, he gave Adedibu two slots which he refused. That was really where things went sore. As that matter was on, I met Ladoja and warned him...”

Whether by default or otherwise, the point that Dr. Raimi was trying to make is that Ladoja’s impeachment cannot be totally detached from the latter’s closeness with Atiku. The other Governors who did not want to be impeached by Obasanjo or his supporters kept a distance from the Vice President. The testimony of Fayose, an impeached Governor of Ekiti State on this is quite interesting. To him, the conflict between Atiku and Obasanjo was as early as the 2003 elections were concluded and won by Obasanjo. He observed:

That was in 2004. There was a meeting that we held in El-Rufai’s place in Life Camp (Abuja). That night, we were about six governors there. Atiku was there too. The next minute, Obasanjo woke me up. (mimicking Obasanjo) and said: "Aye, Ayo, Aayooo, how many times did I call you? I heard you were at that meeting yesterday. I said yes, I saw Otunba
Fasawe there’. He said: ‘Forget Fasawe. He is a businessman; I don’t know him any more’. I said, I also saw this other person there. He said they are no more friends. He said ‘if i see you following Atiku, and giving excuses, I will consume you. I will crush you’. When you see such signals and you are in the territory of the lion, you must manage your life carefully so that you don’t end up in his stomach. But I regret not tackling Obasanjo then (Oshunkeye and Omafodezi, 2010: 12).

Fayose went further to justify why he could not stand his ground against Obasanjo in the Obasanjo/Atiku conflict as he claimed Governor Orji Kalu of Abia State did. His explanation calls attention to why first term Governors are often more pliable than those serving their second term in office. He observed that:

...you forget that I was a first-term governor then, and Kalu was in his second term. Meanwhile, don’t forget that I had enough enemies from Ekiti who would have taken advantage of that. Maybe my government would not have lasted that long. So, in an attempt to run away from the deep blue sea and the roaring lion, I ended up in the lion’s tummy (ibid.)

All these interesting revelations would not have been made public but only in the context of elite fragmentation. In other words, what elite fragmentation does is to make the elite make public the discussions they had or agreements they reached in the secret. Mohammed Haruna sheds more light on this:

The way Obasanjo and Atiku Abubakar have exposed their nakedness in public, it will take more than a miracle for the latter to realize his political ambition of becoming the country’s No. 1 citizen. As
for Obasanjo it would take an even bigger miracle for him to repair the
terrible damage done to his image as an untainted international statesman,
Far from most Nigerians shedding any tears for the mutual destruction by
the two, Nigerians would indeed have been having a good laugh at them if
the whole sordid affair did not mean even more suffering for Nigerians. As
in all wars, the resources of the country would be used to fight the civil war
in the presidency to the great detriment of the people’s welfare... Neither
President Obasanjo nor Vice-President Atiku Abubakar is fighting for our
welfare or for accountability or for democracy. Atiku Abubakar may have
fought the Third Term Agenda (TTA), but he fought it essentially for
himself and not for democracy (Haruna n.d).

The Yar’Adua case also generated different forms of elite fragmentation. In dealing with
the matter, the elite fragmented along ethnic and “opportunistic” ones. More northerners were
opposed to political power being transferred to Goodluck Jonathan while more southerners
wanted it transferred to him. Some Muslim religious leaders who visited Yar’Adua before his
death tried to vent this popular northern Nigerian sentiment about the issue. They visited the
President in November 2010 and Dr Ibrahim Datti Ahmed, President-General of the Supreme
Council for Sharia in Nigeria (SCSN) reported that the President was much better than many
Nigerians had been told. According to him, Yar’Adua was recovering speedily and might return
sooner than expected. He said "he is convalescing and I am speaking as a medical doctor
myself.” As evident in a situation of elite fragmentation, Datti also cautioned Acting President
Goodluck Jonathan not to attempt to ask for more powers. "Goodluck Jonathan has all the
presidential powers at his disposal. Why do they need to remove Yar’Adua from office before
they could exercise such powers? My advice is that he should
continue to exercise these powers even if it means doing so until the end of this tenure, if there is no hidden agenda in all these, let Goodluck continue to run the government as Acting President. Asking for anything more will not augur well for the country” (Oguntola 2010).

On the other hand, some Christian clerics visited the same Yar’Adua and came back with a different report. The Nation newspaper reported that Bishop David Oyedepo who was one of them declined comments thereafter. Rev, (Dr) Yesufu Obaje, former Presidential chaplain, also one of the visitors, merely said, “We saw him and prayed with him and I see it as a pastoral responsibility…” Also reporting about the visit, Pastor Emmanuel Kure offered slight insights into Yar’Adua’s condition. According to him, "He isn’t a Christian, so I don’t think he would understand what we said on his behalf. He was able to grunt out an Amen”. One of the clerics under condition of anonymity provided a vivid picture of what he saw and he said ‘it would be the miracle of the century for Yar’Adua to return to power...He was motionless, just lying on a chair without talking or shaking. Though his eyes were wide open, one could not say for sure if he was really seeing anything or anybody. So, the information that he shook hands and looked well remains a far cry from what we saw. It would take a big heart of faith to believe he can survive. In fact, I left feeling it would be the miracle of the century for him to return to office”. This last comment is itself an evidence of elite fragmentation: it was a reply of the Christian cleric to the earlier position of his Muslim counterparts on the state of health of the president.

The “opportunistic” fragmentation had to do with where each of the people in government - whether northerners or southerners - stood in the government. Those who felt their bread would be better buttered around Jonathan wanted him to be in full control of the government; those closer to Yar’Adua did not want him to relinquish power. The position of Dora Akunyili (the Information and Communications Minister) can be used to illustrate
this interesting issue. When the Yar’Adua issue started, both did their best in letting Nigerians know that the situation was under control, The two seemed to have formally parted ways following the Supreme Court ruling of 22 January 2010 that the Federal Executive Council (FEC) should within fourteen days decide a resolution on whether Yar’Adua was fit to continue to function as the President. The FEC resolved that President Yar’Adua was not incapable of performing as president. Exactly eight days after the FEC took that decision to beat the 14 days ultimatum given by the court, the information and communication minister, at the 11th FEC meeting held during the absence of Yar’Adua, created a fiasco, when on February 3, 2010 she attempted to read a paper entitled “State of the Nation” which was to advise that President Yar’Adua hand over power to Vice President Goodluck Jonathan (Durodola and Okeke 2010; Adeniyi 2011214-216).

Akunyili advanced three reasons for her position. She argued that Nigeria was drifting in a dangerous direction and that the position paper represents the popular opinion of domestic and international communities. She argued that the absence of the President was hiking the Niger Delta crisis as there was nobody to formally follow up the discussions with the militants granted amnesty. Also in the paper, the issue of some federal ministries that were without permanent secretaries came up and Akunyili said since the vice-president did not have power to appoint or swear them in, it means that those ministries would continue to be coordinated without permanent secretaries. The other cabinet members were embarrassed by Akunyili’s paper and the Information Minister was shouted down. Her action was considered a betrayal and a procedural incongruity. But the arguments that ensued later between the Information Minister and the Attorney-General of the Federation and Minister of Justice Michael Aondoakaa (SAN) suggests that there is more for Nigerians to know about the two prominent Nigerians. They traded blames which were not fully developed because of the decision of the two of them to cut short
their conflict. Aondoakaa started it all with this statement: "Bringing the memo to the FEC is just to make herself an angel. She wants to be seen as a populist. Whatever she wants to gain from it is still personal ...What she is trying to do is self-seeking; let her go and confront herself with what happened in NAFDAC. The italicized statement (by me) suggests that there are still some things to be made known to Nigerians about Akunyili’s leadership of NAFDAC that is for now not in the public domain. The response of Akunyili too is instructive about Aodoakaa: “those who live in glass houses should not throw stones because when you point a finger at your perceived enemies, the other four are pointing at you” (Alli 2010). Having worked together, these Ministers know themselves but the public know them only by what the media report.

What Akunyili did was a risk but she was not totally consumed by it. On the other hand, the point was made earlier that some Governors got into trouble by standing on the wrong side of the Obasanjo/Atiku conflict. Same thing happened in another episode in the Yar’Adua’s “constitutional crisis”. This has to do with how the former Chaimian of PDP, Chief Vincent Ogbulafor used his own hands to dig his “political grave” (Adeniyi 2011:216). He paid a supposed solidarity visit to the Vice President, Goodluck Jonathan, on the same day that Akunyili presented his controversial memorandum and his rhetorics got him into trouble. He started his speech by quoting from Psalm 62:11 of the Holy Bible which says that “God has spoken once, twice I have heard; power belongs to God”. He went further to observe that:

Throughout this period, you have demonstrated patriotism and measure (sic) of loyalty and statesmanship. You have through exemplary selflessness held the government and the country together in spite of the mischief of a few. You have discharged your duties in the absence of Mr. President with distinction. We are proud that you
have refused to be distracted by needless debates and controversies originating from some of our opponents. We maintain our earlier assertion that with you effectively (in) the saddle, *there is no vacuum in the presidency* (Adeniyi 20111216 but the emphasis is mine),

The above statement presaged Ogbulafor’s arraignment for stealing of public funds by the Independent Corrupt Practices and Other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) at the High Court of the Federal Capital Territory in May 2010. He later lost his position as the Chairman of the ruling party.

Our central argument in this paper is that the ruling elite sustain themselves in power by protecting information about themselves away from the public. Elite fragmentation provides one of the isolated cases where such confidential information is divulged. This happens in the context of what could be regarded as “mudslinging matches”: people trading dirty accusations. This could come in the form of open confessions about what one party did to illegally empower the other. A general example is the position of the leadership of Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF) on how Chief Olusegun Obasanjo was made Nigerian president in 1999. During one of the tours of the Forum to the 19 states in northern Nigeria in October 2008, its Chairman, General Ibrahim Haruna (nd) confessed that northern Nigerian elite forced Obasanjo on Nigerians as the president of Nigeria in 1999. Yet, the former Nigerian president was alleged to have done nothing for the region that empowered him. Thus, Haruna had to tender “unreserved apology” to Nigerians for this “mistake”. But this was no news to Nigerians. It was widely known that Obasanjo was meant to be a pawn in the hands of northern Nigerian elite after the 1999 election but for reasons best known to him the former Head of State disappointed his political godfathers and instead became an indefatigable
godfather himself. Calling attention to the depth of the problem Haruna observed that:

If a people single handedly, for the purpose of togetherness, brought out somebody from prison and made him president and he has caused Nigerians pains and that same person has realized his mistake and is going round the country to tell everybody I am sorry over the woes of Nigeria caused by this man I think that is what ACF is doing and Nigerians should find a place in their minds to forgive us (Compass news 2008:3)

Just as the North was said to have imposed Obasanjo on Nigerians, the latter imposed President Yar’Adua on the country in 2007. Throughout the period of President Yar’Adua’s sickness and treatment in Saudi Arabia, Obasanjo was constantly lampooned for forcing a “sick President” on Nigerians. Obasanjo’s formal response to these Nigerians came during the question and answer session of the seventh yearly Trust Dialogue optimized by the Abuja-based Media Trust Limited, which he chaired in Abuja on January 21, 2010. The response was triggered by a question asked by one Buhari Bello Jose, who accused the former President frontally of being the architect of the “ongoing constitutional crisis” in the country. Obasanjo observed that ”When in year 2006, the idea came as to succession; I was convinced in my mind that a southerner succeeding me will not augur well for this country. So, what I did was to look for a Nigerian with three qualities; First, somebody with enough intellectual capacity to run the affairs of this country; second, somebody with enough personal integrity and somebody that is broad-minded both politically and religiously to run the affairs of this country”. He continued further:
I knew that Yar‘Adua has kidney problem and was under dialysis and that he went abroad for the treatment when he was the governor of Katsina State. Before I picked him, I asked him questions and he gave me the medical report that states that he is no longer under dialysis. I asked medical experts to interpret the report and they told me that once you had completed your dialysis, you have had a successful kidney transplant and can live as long as God wants you to live. If medical experts had said that, who am I to begin to think that the dialysis will fail?.... I campaigned with President Yar`Adua and when the rumours came that he (Yar`Adua) was dead, I called him on phone and asked him: ‘Umoru, are you dead or alive’ For you to say that Olusegun Obasanjo deliberately picked an invalid to succeed me is an insult...I know the sacrifice that I made for this country, both in peace and in war. How can I, who has made huge sacrifices for the country, do what will not be in the interest of this nation? Nobody picked Yar‘Adua so that he will not perform, if I had done that, may God punish me (businessdayonline 2010:8).

This is more of a damning confession than self-defence. It indeed shows that neither Nigerians nor PDP chose Yar‘Adua to lead Nigeria. He was imposed on the party and Nigerians by Obasanjo and it would have been difficult for Nigerians to formally know this but for the opportunity provided by elite fragmentation, Obasanjo’s statement speaks directly to the issue. He said “what I did
was to look for a Nigerian with three qualities”. If other Nigerians were involved in the process leading to the nomination of Alhaji Yar’Adua, then the health issue would have carried higher weight than Obasanjo’s unilateral action did. Obasanjo argument was also weakened by the fact that he failed to name the medical doctor who told him that Yar’Adua was fit to rule; neither was the medical certificate shown to Nigerians as a proof of Obasanjo’s sincerity. It was simply a case of the elite class imposing themselves on Nigerians and the story getting to the rest of Nigerians when their leaders are in conflict.

The former Minister for Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Mallam Nasir el-Rufai who is now in exile granted several interviews in 2009 in which he claimed to have been instrumental to the nomination of Yar’Adua as the President of Nigeria. Though a close ally of Chief Obasanjo, El-Rufai claimed that Yar’Adua was not as transparent as claimed by Obasanjo and that his name was in fact on the corruption list compiled by the Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC). His name had to be removed from the list ahead of the Presidential nomination in 2007. This information too could not have come to the public domain but for elite fragmentation. El-Rufai observed that Nuhu Ribadu, the then EFCC Chairman, was persuaded by Aliyu Gusau (Obasanjo’s National Security Adviser who has now become the NS to Acting President Goodluck Jonathan) to remove Yar’Adua’s name because "Umaru’s corruption was not personal, and was productive relative to other venal Governors" (Olujibi 2009).

El-Rufai observed that Yar’Adua had to be brought down to Abuja in a presidential jet to obtain the nomination form for which Ibori was said to have personally paid N5m (US $40,000). Over a
period of three months El-Rufai claimed to have helped Yar’Adua to organize several activities within and outside the PDP before the primaries scheduled for January 2007. What he too was indirectly saying was that he was a strong member of the ruling elite during the Obasanjo regime and could not understand why the regime of Yar’ Adua which he helped to make had to force him into exile.

**Conclusion**

What the above shows is that the ruling elite collude in several ways to cover up their secret deals in power. But it all seems that those who know about these deals (often within the ruling elite) do not totally forget them or discard them but “file” them up the information for opportune time to make them public. It is at such opportune time, most especially when the politicians bicker, that the public gets to know some of the deals. The “waiting time” for the issue to be made public and prosecuted (if a criminal case) could take as many as five years or more. This is why some of the people taken to court for graft have about forty changes against them. The question that a bewildered assessor of the situation would ask is: why has it taken so long for the state to realize that the crime was ever committed?

In concluding this paper, the point has to be made here that elite fragmentation is an important ingredient of democratic governance. Indeed, democracy naturally presupposes and requires elite fragmentation. By making public what was hidden, elite fragmentation provides information about issues to be critically engaged and debated by the public. In a normal society, politicians fragment in their attitude towards a given public policy. This enables the public to join the debate. The expectation of democracy is that such disagreements are settled by consensus. Elite fragmentation becomes counterproductive where it assumes dangerous proportions such as contributing to state disintegration or the collapse of a good regime. This hardly happens in a true democracy but where democratic processes are perverted and people
quarrel over personal instead of public interests. It is in this respect that the Nigerian experience departs from the global best practices.

The reader would observe that all the issues raised in this paper have to do with members of the ruling party in Nigeria, PDP, quarrelling openly with one another and the institutions of state if not the entire country are dragged along. For example, Adeniyi observed in his work how the Yar’Adua issue negatively affected many other people inadvertently. One of them according to him was the Chief of Army Staff, Lt. General Dambazzau-a man he described as a “brilliant military officer and fine gentleman” (Adeniyi 2011:260). Adeniyi observed that:

Dambazzau had been caught in the crossfire of Nigerian politics simply on account of being a northerner like the President. Yet the reality was that as long as Yar’Adua was alive and had not been removed, he remained, in the eyes of the law, the commander-in-chief of the armed forces...Dambazzau and the entire armed forces were therefore caught in the dilemma of serving two masters, and it was clear that nothing, barring his removal as chief of army stall, would pacify Ijaw leader, Chief Edwin Clark, who had publicly announced himself as Jonathan’s godfather. The charge against Dambazzau was the deployment of troops by the Brigade of Guards on the night the president arrived in the country, even though the military’s standard operating procedure for such exercise was followed (Adeniyi 2011:260-261).

What we need to note in all these is that the two cases in this paper were problems generated within PDP, rather than by the other political parties against the ruling party. This makes this a true case of elite fragmentation. What this suggests is that the party members are not held together by any definite political ideology. The party
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would have to deal with this critical issue in order to truly earn its image as the “biggest political party in Africa”.

How do we deal with this kind of problem? Burton and Higley recommended “elite settlement” for solving the problem. This according to them consists of broad compromises among previously warring elite factions, resulting in political stability and thus providing a necessary precondition for the sustained practice of representative democracy. To identify the common features of elite settlements, Burton and Higley drew upon four historic cases: England in 1688-89, Sweden in 1809, Colombia in 1957-58, and Venezuela in 1958. They argued for the extraction of elite settlements from their current embeddedness in such concepts as bourgeois revolutions and democratic transitions, and advocated greater attention to the elite paradigm in efforts to explain macropolitical outcomes (Burton and Higley 1987: 295-307). The case studies referred to by the two scholars are not in harmony with the Nigerian situation. The ease studies have to do with when the elite are altruistically divided over national problems and a national framework is put in place for dealing with the issues. It departs from the Nigerian situation in which a power cabal “captures” the state and its structures and uses them in a manner that gradually destabilizes the entire country or a part of it. The conflict between President Olusegun Obasanjo and Vice President Atiku Abubakar and the fallout of the “constitutional crisis” created by President Yar’Adua’s interests are largely driven by selfish rather than sincere national interests. As the gladiators bickered, the global community watched in askance.

Yet, some lessons can be taken from the suggestions. It is that Nigeria cannot move forward until personal transformation takes place in the ruling elite in the country. How do we ensure this? The first is for the political class in Nigeria to acknowledge the fact that they and not the people they rule constitute a major burden on the democratization efforts in Nigeria. They would need to have a
change of attitude. Money must not be the attraction for coming to take up public offices but the genuine interest to serve the people. For now, Nigerian politicians demonstrate a poor knowledge of how the ruling elite can be held together. This is obviously a minus for the present system. It is hereby suggested that the scrapped Centre for Democratic Studies, established by the Ibrahim Babangida administration, should be revived. Politicians should be made to spend some weeks there before they are allowed to assume power.

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