Corruption War, Trial Carnivals and Molebi Theory

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Abstract The Buhari government has made war against corruption a fundamental component of its agenda for national rebirth. Since the administration was invested in May 2015, it has waged a relentless and persistent war on corrupt government functionaries of previous administration(s). This study was designed to examine the implications, the mechanisms, the contradictions, the dynamics and politics of Buhari’s corruption war. This study investigated the socio-political dimensions of this war and the role(s) of national institutions. It adopted a descriptive design using a cultural construct, Molebi theory, to examine, analyse and interrogate the carnivalization of the trials of the suspects. This may not be a new phenomenon, but the energies and creativity that go into it these days showed a political trend that is capable of turning suspects’ trials into a circus. The Molebi theory is used to identify and interpret the cultural creed which serves as a mantra of mobilization in support of politicians who are benefactors to their respective families and political associations. A nation that is lamenting a systemic dysfunction in its polity as a result of brazen and chronic prebendal and primitive accumulation should not in any circumstance raise an altar for the celebration of corruption by dancing to court in aso ebi in support of a rogue politician that is being tried for looting of the national treasury. The carnivalization of the trial of a rogue politician diminishes our values, insults our sensibilities, pollutes our cultural space, destroys the foundation of our polity and encourages communal scrambling for the endless gulping of our common wealth.

Keywords Cultural Construct, Molebi, Carnivalization, Systemic Dysfunction, Political Values

1. Introduction

Corruption is as ancient as the Nigerian state but not as endemic as it is in contemporary Nigeria. Series of “Wars” have been waged against it by different administrations that have ruled Nigeria but every time it keeps coming back, assuming more potency and vibrancy and confronting its antagonists with ruthless intensity. Muhammadu Buhari, one of those who had ruled Nigeria in the past (1983-1985) and arguably, the only leader to have demonstrated the moral capacity and political will to “fight” corruption has made war against corruption a fundamental component of its agenda for national rebirth on his second coming as Nigeria’s president. But unfortunately, the corruption war and Buhari’s plan to create a new political order are being trivialized by proponents of corruption and their political households who have turned their trials to carnivals by dancing to court in Aso Ebi, all in a bid to create the impression that their benefactors are victims of political persecution.

This statement of problem which takes its cues from a normative framework, is typical of most underdeveloped societies which desire to establish a new political order without sanitizing the Augean stables. Attempting to establish a new political order on a structure that is socially weak and politically fragmented is nothing short of misplaced strategy. [1]

The discourse on political order is excitingly engaging especially the debate about the emergence and sustainability of a new political order. It sounds presumptive that political order, once it emerges, will be self-sustaining. Samuel Huntington’s Political Order in changing societies [1], manifests the buffet of discourses that has been served on the issue. Huntington argues that, contrary to modernization theory’s progressive assumptions, there was no reason to assume that political development was any more likely than political decay. His position on this was amplified by Francis Fukuyama [2] who contends that:

Political order emerges as a result of the achievement of some equilibrium among the contending forces within the society. But as time goes on, change occurs internally and externally; the actors who established the original equilibrium themselves evolve or disappear; new conditions shift; the society is invaded from outside or faces new terms of trade or imported ideas. As a result, the preceding equilibrium no longer holds, and political decay results until the existing actors come up with a new set of rules and institutions to restore order. [2]

Establishing a new political order in a decaying society...
requires some political discipline, political will and leadership maturity to engineer necessary positives that will neutralize the negative tendencies already entrenched by the old order.

In Nigeria, political dynamics ranging from ethnic discordance, religious and political polarities to corruption are some of the extant characteristics of the old political order. Immediately after being invested into office, the Buhari administration, faced with several agenda options, decided to frontal confront corruption which it considered the dominant platform for the decay in the polity.

2. Corruption War and its Politics

Corruption war is the strategic policy and systemic aggression adopted by the government and its security and law enforcement agencies against corrupt officials in both the public and private sectors for the purpose of establishing a new political order that will usher in a national rebirth. Though there are extant laws with punitive prescriptions on corrupt activities by government officials, the Buhari administration has introduced some extra judicial methods in order to quicken the process of prosecution and facilitate the recovery of stolen funds. The sudden activism of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) established by the Olusegun Obasanjo administration in 2003 was part of the strategy of government to make sure that the agency performed its role with professional diligence. The policy of plea bargain, though not completely alien to the country’s justice system, was also another strategy by Buhari regime to check corruption.

Looters of national treasury found themselves in a quandary going by the tough stance of the Muhammadu Buhari administration against corruption. Though President Buhari’s ruling party, All Progressives Congress (APC) made war against corruption a major campaign agenda, nobody expected that the war would commence so soon with the trials of past and present looters of public funds. Nigerians were used to such threats against looters by previous administrations but have always been disappointed with the outcomes of such threats. There was no doubt that past governments lacked the political will to prosecute corruption cases to their logical conclusions. The number of high profile corruption cases that ended with convictions of the looters was nil or at best, insignificant to be noticed or recorded by history. So, to a very large extent, both the looters and the citizens were skeptical about the resolve and the political capacity of the Buhari’s government to deal with the looters, notwithstanding Buhari’s antecedents and records in this regard. But since he came to power, President Buhari has waged a relentless war against looters of national treasury and their accessories. The administration has even gone further to include on its list, public officials who made false asset declarations. In this category are the Senate President, Dr. Bukola Saraki and the former Niger Delta Minister, Godsday Orubebe. The trial of Senator Saraki, which appeared to be the most sensational of all the high profile corruption cases going on under the Buhari administration, was very intriguing. First, Bukola Saraki was one of the prominent PDP members who crossed over to the All Progressives Congress (APC) shortly before the Presidential election in 2015. Second, he was dramatically elected the Senate President with “strategic” support from members of the opposition party, People's Democratic Party (PDP) in the Senate. Third, as an influential member of the APC no one expected the war against corruption to have started within the ruling party itself. This possibly was why his (Saraki’s) trial was said to be political. It was alleged that some powerful members of the ruling Party were not happy with the emergence of Saraki as the Senate president because it undermined the arrangement already designed by the Party. Besides, Saraki’s emergence as Senate President was seen as a betrayal by his Party because it was made possible through a conspirational pact between Saraki and members of the opposition party in the Senate. This pact led to the election of a member of the opposition, Ike Ekweremadu as the Deputy Senate President. With this pact, it became a possibility that someday, the opposition Party may assume the Senate leadership, a situation the Ruling Party was not comfortable with.

Brushing aside the political undertone of the Saraki trial, the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) which was prosecuting the case on behalf of the state, alleged that Senator Saraki made false declarations of his assets between 2003 and 2011 when he was the governor of Kwarar State. He was also accused of making anticipatory declaration of asset yet to be acquired. The third allegation against Senator Saraki was that he owned an American Express credit card account during his tenure as governor. Public officials are forbidden from operating foreign accounts while in office.

The trial of Godsday Orubebe had been described by the opposition as being political. This may not be far-fetched going by the circumstances, and background of the trial of the controversial politician. Orubebe, a former Minister of the Niger Delta in the Jonathan administration, was an agent of the ruling PDP during the Presidential election in 2015. When the results were trickling in and were being announced by the Chairman of INEC, Prof. Attahiru Jega, Orubebe caused a stir when he was handed the microphone to raise his objection or observation. In the full glare of the cameras, Orubebe accused Jega of being biased and prejudiced. His words:

We have lost confidence in what you are doing. If we can send a protest and you cannot take that protest then what are we doing here? Because the essence of why we are sending any protest is to enable you to look at the matter and see whether it has merit or demerit. But when the APC leaders brought their own you went all out to send a delegation to Port Harcourt. [3]
When therefore the Federal Government filed charges against Orubebe for false asset declaration, the PDP contended that it was an excuse to ‘deal’ with him for his exuberance at the Presidential election collation centre in Abuja. However, until the Tribunal delivered its judgements, it would be difficult to conclude that the accusation of political victimization by the PDP was true in all its ramifications. The reason was that the four-count-charge against Orubebe did not come from the blues. Orubebe was accused in counts one and two of failing to declare his ownership of two properties in Abuka. In counts three and four, the ex-Minister was alleged to have received a N70 million bribe from one Pastor (Dr.) Jonathan Alota whose company Chemtronics Nigeria Limited had been awarded contract by the Ministry.

The accusation against the Buhari administration that its war against corruption was one-sided or political seemed hasty and speculative. Since it came to power, the government has been waging the war with relentless passion and its victims included politicians, lawyers, civil servants, members of the Armed Forces, bankers, government contractors and private businessmen who connived with politicians to launder billions and millions of dollars and naira outside the country. Some of the fraud cases were as bizarre as they were mind-boggling. The figures alleged to have been stolen from government treasury by some of these suspects were frightening and alarming. A former Chief of Air Staff, Air Marshal Mohammed Dikko Umar was charged for himself and some of his staff, for receiving $115m from a former MD himself received $26m in cash. [5]

Possibly convinced of the weight of evidence against him, Umar sought an out-of-court settlement with the EFCC. His lawyers told the trial judge about the negotiations going on between their client and the EFCC. But the Commission rejected Umar’s proposition of an out-of-court settlement preferring plea bargain instead. Even at that, the Commission wanted the plea bargain to come with at least a light sentence. According to the Commission;

We are aware of plans by the ex-Chief of Air Staff for an out-of-court settlement but as a Commission, we will go for plea bargain if he was ready to return all the cash credited to him… What we have is a criminal matter not a civil disagreement between the Commission and the ex-Chief of Air Staff. [4]

Elucidating on what would be acceptable to the Commission, the spokesperson for the EFCC, said that Umar should be willing to forfeit and refund all the funds credited or traced to him in cash or in terms of assets. According to the Commission, even if the plea bargain would carry a lighter sentence to serve as a deterrent to others, it was still better than out-of-court settlement.

Also, Umar’s successor as Chief of Air Staff, Alex Badeh was taken to court on a 10-count charge of breach of trust and corruption for allegedly diverting N3.97 billion from NAF’s account. This happened when Badeh was Chief of Air Staff between September, 2012 and December 2013. Badeh was said to have used part of the money to purchase a house at 9, Kumasi Crescent, Wuse for his first son, Alex Badeh (Jnr) at N260 million, with N60 million in renovation and N90 million was spent on the furnishing of the house. The same was done for his last son for whom he bought a house of N320m on the same street.

Umar and Badeh were not the only Air Force Chiefs that were prosecuted by the Federal Government for corruption. Another senior Air Force official, Air Vice Marshal Olutayo Oguntoyinbo was taken to court on a one-count charge of receiving N166m bribe. Oguntoyinbo was accused of receiving the bribe from a contractor to the NAF, Societe D’Equipments Internationaux Nigeria Ltd, using a company Spaceweb Integrated Services Limited, with an account in Wema Bank Plc.

It was not all an Air Force affair as some banks Managing Directors were also arrested for collecting bribes from politicians who had stolen from the public treasury. For instance, the Managing Director and Chief Executive Officer of Fidelity Bank, Mr. Nnamdi Okonkwo, was arrested along with some of his staff, for receiving $115m from a former Minister of Petroleum Resources, Diezani Alison – Madueke. It was alleged that during the build-up to the 2015 Presidential election, Diezani invited Okonkwo to help her handle some cash which would be disbursed to electoral officials and groups. According to the EFCC, Mr. Okonkwo confessed to the commission during interrogation that during the build-up to the Presidential election, Diezani invited him to a meeting in Abuja. At the meeting, Diezani told him that some companies would deposit some funds in his bank and that she would give him instructions on how to disburse the funds. The first company, Auctus Integrated, deposited $17.8m into the bank. The second company Northern Belt Gas Company, deposited $60m while another company, Midwest Oil and Gas, deposited $9.05m. A fourth company, Leno Laitan Adesanya deposited $1.85m while the MD himself received $26m in cash. [5]

In distributing the money which was said to have come from proceeds of stolen crude oil, the sum of N681m was
given to some INEC officials as bribe. Some of the beneficiaries include the Resident Electoral Commissioner for Cross River State, Mrs. Gesil Khan (N185m), Electoral Officer in Isoko-South Local Government Area of Delta State, Fidelia Omoile (N112,480,000) INEC’s Administrative Secretary in Delta State, Uluoobi Obi Brown (N111,500,000), former Deputy Director of INEC in Cross River State, Edem Okon Effanga (N241,127,000) and the Head of Voter Education in INEC in Akwa Ibom, Immaculata Asuquo (N214,127,000).

Other beneficiaries of the N23.3b scam include Femi Fani-Kayode (N840m), Cross River State Chairman of the PDP, Mr. John Okon (N500m), Minister of State, Foreign Affairs, Dr. Nurudeen Muhammad (N500 million), Ex-Minister of Foreign Affairs, Ambassador Aminu Bashir Wali (N950m), Senator Chris Anyanwu and Mike Ahmaba (N700m) and lono Adesanya ($1.85m).

Money shared to electoral officers who would manipulate election results in favour of the PDP did not just come from one source. It came from many sources. One of such sources was the Goodluck Jonathan Campaign Organisation headed by Senator Nenadi Usman. The organization was alleged to have collected the sum of N2.5bn directly from the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN). Usman, a former Minister of State for Finance, was said to have received from the Central bank the sum of N4 billion out of which the N2.5 bn was transferred into her company account while another N140m cash was said to have been paid into her account in Zenith Bank with account number 1000158311 domiciled in 7, Kacha Road, Kaduna. Usman through this account transferred money to several persons including the Director of Publicity of the organisation Chief Femi Fani-Kayode who received N840m from the ‘stolen’ funds. It was through this same account that Chief Olu Falae and the Goodluck Support Group collected N100 million and N320 million respectively. It was for this purpose that the EFCC arrested Senator Nenadi Usman. She was invited to explain how, and in what capacity, the Central Bank was transferring money into her account and also to give the list or names of the beneficiaries of the mysterious funds.

The Buhari administration did not concentrate its institutional energy and resources on corrupt politicians alone. The EFCC was also able to beam its searchlight on the civil service where it uncovered a nine-man syndicate which exploited the gaps in the Integrated Personnel Payroll Information System (IPPIS) to defraud the government of N1 billion supposedly paid to “Ghost Workers”. At the end of a thorough and comprehensive investigation into the case, the EFCC had uncovered 37,395 “ghost” workers on the Federal Civil Service payroll. Some of the civil servants behind this fraud were arrested, prosecuted and sanctioned. Accordingly, most of them even forfeited their assets within and outside the country. According to the Chairman of the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences commission, Mr. Ekpo Ita, about 61 or 62 houses were seized from some civil servants suspected to have acquired such assets through corrupt means.

Though the former President of Nigeria, Goodluck Jonathan had not been linked directly with any of these frauds apart from the fact that some of those involved claimed to have received his approvals for their actions, the involvement of his cousin, Azibaola Roberts in a $40 million (N12.7b) contract obtained from the office of the National Adviser to “pacify” militants in the Niger Delta could cast direct aspersion on his integrity. Already, Roberts had stated that he was being persecuted because of his blood link with Jonathan. Even when the Commission claimed that Roberts could not produce any documentary evidence to show how the $40 million contract was awarded, how it was disbursed and the list of beneficiaries, his lawyers still believed that Roberts was being persecuted and punished because of his DNA, as a relative of Dr. Goodluck Jonathan.

Roberts was not the only relations and associates of Jonathan arrested for questionable contacts. Waripamowei Dudafa, a former Special Assistant on Domestic Affairs to ex-president Goodluck Jonathan was also arrested by the EFCC for a ‘strange’ account found in his name with almost N900 million deposits. Dudafa, a kinsman of Jonathan was accused of giving N10 billion to delegates at the Presidential primary of the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in December 2014, in which Jonathan was the only candidate. The money was said to have been diverted by the Office of the National Security Adviser from a signature Bonus Account in the Central Bank of Nigeria. The money was believed to have been diverted from oil receipts as follows: $5m (November 14, 2004), $47m (November 27, 2014), £4m (December 3, 2014) and £1.6m (December 24, 2014).

3. Molebi Theory and Trial Carnivals

The Molebi theory is a derivative of Akinjogbin’s Ebi concept. The Molebi theory is a socio-political coinage that captures the idiocies and nuances of members of an expanded ‘political’ family who mobilize themselves in solidarity for a rogue politician, civil servant or an individual, standing trial for prebendal and primitive accumulation of public funds. In most cases, these “molebi” shamelessly ignore or discountenance the obvious evidence and proof of reckless looting of public treasury by their benefactors. Their shameful circus of solidarity is not inspired by any nationalistic or patriotic zeal for the protection of our commonwealth but it is determined by the gratuitous benefits which accrue to them from the filthy wealth acquired illegally, immorally, shamelessly and recklessly by their benefactors from the national treasury. A benefactor’s “molebi” are beneficiaries of his ill-gotten wealth and
dubious hospitality. Such benefactors have developed a fraternal cult of dependants and hangers-on who defend their vices and undermine the cultural and social values that are the hallmark and pride of the African society. The molebi theory emphasises the sustenance and promotion of some basic ideals that are the bedrock of a solid society founded on honesty, hard work, integrity and credibility. Though, the theory encourages cultural solidarity and social fraternity among the members especially in celebrating and identifying with individual, and collective achievements, it is against the spirit and objective of the theory to mobilize members of the collective in celebrating and identifying with political villains who are undermining and desecrating the values that define the cultural sanity and decency of a typical African society. When a people therefore, out of ignorance and stupidity, contribute money for aso ebi in order to attend the trial of a rogue politician, one should question the character and integrity of such people. Molebi doctrine is rooted in deep values which are promoted in order to enhance socialization among members who share the same cultural space, and identify with the same idealistic and ethical values.

In theorizing on the Ebi concept which was first articulated around 1961, Akinjogbin conceptualised a small social unit among the Yoruba that evolved through historical and cultural ties. According to him, the Ebi is the smallest social unit among the Yoruba which consists of everyone who can be traced to be related by blood, no matter how far removed in time or space. [7]

He explained further:

The Ebi includes the dead Ancestors whose remains are buried inside the house and who are regarded as being constantly present with and watching over their living part of the family. It also includes the unborn children who are sometimes regarded as incarnations of departed ancestors. What binds the people together is blood relationship which is regarded as being stronger than any other connection. [8]

In the course of authenticating the significance of the blood connection, he alluded to two Yoruba sayings which exemplify the strength of this feeling: fi epo ro o yato si fi eje ro o’ (There is a difference between an oil mixture and a blood mixture) and “Bembe ni mo fi ba lamorin tan, ko se ibe danu’ (no matter how remote your blood relationship is with someone, you cannot slice it away). [8] He went further to articulate how the Ebi works:

Whatever a member of the Ebi has can be legitimately used by another member provided the owner does not need it… Even where sharing will sometimes be inconvenient for the owner, he will still do so if the alternative is absolute deprivation for the other members of the Ebi. The belief is that whatever good or ill befalls any member of the Ebi befalls all. [8]

In Molebi theory, however, members of the Molebi don’t have to have blood relationship or share any cultural history. What binds them together is their loyalty, commitment, allegiance and belief in their political and economic godfathers. The Molebi is a clan or cult of dependants and followers whose political career and economic survival are determined by their level of subservience and fanaticism to the creed of the group and the ego of their godfathers. These are people whose beliefs, ideas, styles, thinking and behaviour have been synthesized into a religion that is centred around the persona and essence of a man transmuted into a god by the collective submission of his dependants and beneficiaries. In the African society where politics has become a vocation, profession, career and job, politicians with massive resources mostly acquired illegally through dubious activities are the ones serving as the symbolic heads of the Molebi. They recruit and cajole members into the Molebi through a project called “Political philanthropy” where people are offered, placed, appointed and elected into offices with or without merit for as long as the members have demonstrated their readiness to be covenanted into the Group. Once in the Molebi, the members’ rise and fall, wealth and health, life and death, survival and destruction will now be determined by their resoluteness or failure to defend the creed, philosophy, and faith that the Molebi professes. With this kind of resolve on the part of the members, the Molebi institution becomes a hydra-headed monster with members of the group involving themselves in looting of public funds, killing of political opponents, rigging of elections, bribing of security agencies, inflation and non-execution of contracts, forgeries, judicial manipulation, rape, thuggery, and so many other vices. Like the Ebi concept, members of the Molebi also believe that “whatever good or ill that befalls any member of the Molebi befalls all”

Therefore, the Molebi calls for support by mobilizing its members, home and abroad, to participate in a carnival-like rally in solidarity with their godfathers who are being tried for any of the vices mentioned above. They sew “aso ebi”, they rent crowed, they hire buses, okadas, and trucks, they organise band boys, they hire thugs, they mobilize market women and employ singers, signing and dancing to the court in support of a rogue-politician.

It is not uncommon to see spectacle like this in our courts or in our streets, but such celebrations are only for victories not for trials. Employing this kind of celebration during trial impinges on the independence of the judiciary to play its role in the society without any form of intimidation or harassment.

When Saraki’s trial commenced at the Code of Conduct Tribunal, on September 18, 2015, he was accompanied to the Tribunal by about 84 Senators who came to solidarize with him. Some of these Senators include his deputy, Ike Ekweremadu, Dino Melaye, Stellah Oduah, Samuel Anyanwu and eighty others. Two of these Senators themselves, Ekweremadu and Oduah are also standing trial at different courts for different crimes. Ekweremadu was
charged with forgery of Senate rules while Stella Oduah is standing trial for the purchase of two armoured BMW vehicles at a cost of N255 million by the Nigerian Civil Aviation authority in 2013.

Like Saraki’s trial, the trials of Stella Oduah, Godsdays Orubebe, Olabode George, Bola Tinubu, Sule Lamido, also attracted dependants, followers community leaders, family members, business associates, contractors, church members, Islamic clerics, politicians, professionals and students bodies. On the days of the trials, these people would storm the court in different uniforms, with drums and trumpets singing and dancing, praising those who have been brought for trials and excoriating those who brought them for trial. This way, attention is shifted from those who perpetrated the crimes to those who are prosecuting them for the crimes.

The way these people were being celebrated during their trial suggested that they were being persecuted for their political beliefs, values, activities, and convictions. This may not be totally true. While not dismissing the possibility of political persecution in some of these cases especially that of Godsdays Orubebe who almost truncated the last presidential election with his eccentric intervention at the collation centre, most of the allegations against people like Saraki, Bode George, Stellah Oduah, Lamido and sons appeared so believable that the accused could only wriggle out of them by employing legal technicalities.

Even at that, most of the accused still contended that they were being vilified because they belonged to the opposition.

One of them, Stella Oduah was of the opinion that the Federal Government was using the EFCC to persecute prominent members of the opposition. She alleged that the government had perfected plans to try outspoken members of the PDP on trumped-up charges so as to be able to turn the country into a one-party state.

Rather than face her trial with a view to extricating herself from the allegations of using or spending N255m for the purchase of two BMW vehicles, Oduah looked for legal protection using political victimization as an excuse.

In his own case, Ike Ekweremadu adopted a diplomatic approach in what looked more like an act of desperation. The Deputy Senate President went on an international propaganda by writing strategic international organisations and some friends of Nigeria. In a letter he wrote to the Parliaments of the United Nations, European Union, United States, United Kingdom and some other foreign missions. Ekweremadu strongly emphasised the political dimension of the case without giving any hints on the criminal aspects and the fact that the case was already before the court. What kind of intervention was Ekweremadu, a lawmaker, expecting from nations which believe in the separation of powers and the sanctity of the judiciary? In the letter (which surprisingly was not copied or sent to the African Union or the ECOWAS Parliament), Ekweremadu submitted:

You may wish to further judge for yourself whether this unfolding scenario, coupled with the clampdown on the opposition, such as targeted arrests and indefinite detention of opposition figures and dissenting voices inspite of court pronouncements and in clear violation of the Nigerian Constitution, as well as the sustained marginalisation of the South-East and the South-South Geopolitical zones of Nigeria, does not constitute a grave danger to the Nation’s hard-won democracy… You may also wish to judge for yourself whether this trial orchestrated against me is not a political trial, calculated witch-hunt, barefaced intimidation, and a clear attempt to emasculate the Parliament and silence me as the leader and highest ranking member of the opposition in Nigeria. [9]

Notwithstanding the vituperations in Ekweremadu’s letter, it is a common practice among politicians to always politicize their predicament in the hands of government irrespective of the merits of the charges and allegations against them. If Ekweremadu was complaining of being politically victimised because he belongs to the opposition, what does he have to say about the Senate President who belongs to the ruling Party and was charged along Ekweremadu in the same forgery case? In his own case, Saraki was not asking for any diplomatic intervention, he only attributed his travails in the hands of the government to the existence of a cabal in the Buhari government who was out for him because of his political principles. In a statement he issued on the forgery case, Saraki remarked:

…it is farcical to allege that a Criminal act occurred during Senate procedural actions and the mere suggestion demonstrates a desperate overreach by the office of the Attorney General. These trumped-up charges are (sic) only another phase in the relentless persecution of the leadership of the Senate. As leaders and patriots, it is time to rise above partisanship and to move forward together. However, there is now a government within the government of President Buhari who have seized the apparatus of Executive to pursue their nefarious agenda… let it be abundantly clear, both as a citizen and as a foremost legislator, I will continue to rise above all the persecution and distraction that have been visited upon me. [10]

The general impression one can make from what Saraki, Ekweremadu and their Molebi are doing is that by carnivalising, politicalising and ceremonialising their trials locally and internationally, they are trying to intimidate and possibly present the judiciary to the world as an institution that is being used by the government to harass and browbeat the opposition into submission. It is also a ploy by the corrupt politicians and their molebi to discredit the anti-corruption war of the government believing that once the government and its anti-corruption war is discredited and stripped of any credibility, the moral support expected from the public by the
government will no longer be forthcoming. Such propaganda may work in favour of the politicians in the short-term but it is very unlikely that it can survive the massive propaganda machine of the government in the long term.

4. Creating a New Ethical Order

As long as the Buhari government remains in power and pursues its corruption war agenda with ruthless and determined precision, it will be difficult for the corrupt politicians to distract the government from establishing a new ethical order in Nigeria. Reinforcing this view, a former National Democratic Coalition (NADECO) Chieftain, Ayo Opadokun, advocated for the creation of special courts to fast-track corruption trial. He also canvassed for support for President Buhari in his corruption war. This is how he puts it:

If we fail to support the Buhari’s government’s anti-corruption war, we should not be surprised that the war will lose its vibrancy and focus and the supporters of corruption, who have subverted public institutions and are possibly plotting how to take out Buhari or eliminate him will receive a boost. [11]

Sharing this view on the political philosophy of the federal government and its drive for a new ethical order, Prof. Itse Sagay, Chairman of the Presidential Advisory Committee Against Corruption, revealed that the Federal government was set to create special courts to speedily try corruption cases. Prof. Sagay who spoke in Abuja at an Anti-Corruption Summit organised by the Federal Ministry of Justice in conjunction with a group, Open Society Initiative for West Africa (OSIWA) and ONE Africa disclosed that the Federal Government was laying a solid foundation and building solid structures to combat corruption by establishing special courts to try special offences, including corruption, kidnapping among others. His words:

…Our aim, target and objective is to create institutions in which all corruption cases will see effective investigation, effective prosecution, speedy adjudication and effective sanctions and we hope that at the end of our work, long after we have left the scene, result of what we have done will be permanent and will be positive in the whole administration of criminal justice system. [12]

Pooh-pooing some citizens’ preference for the Jonathan administration because of the current hardship in the country, Prof. Sagay exclaimed.

I heard some people are declaring their preference for corruption, because under corruption, life was easier and more pleasant for them. To me, this is the ultimate demonstration of perverse mentality, immaturity and ignorance. …If the former government had been returned to power in 2015, by now Nigeria would have become a completely failed state… So, all the works that are going on now are to stem the disaster that was facing this country to enable the government to move forward, therefore, those who want corruption, indiscipline, irresponsibility and cluelessness to return should be grateful to GOD that their wishes had not come to pass. [13]

Nigeria’s blueprint on how to curb corruption was given an express approval at an anti-Corruption Summit in London on May 13, 2016. The Summit which was hosted by the former British Prime Minister, David Cameron, was another global effort to complement local initiatives on corruption war. It was Global Forum for Assets recovery which will bring together governments and law enforcement agencies to address the return of stolen loot and assets to countries like Nigeria, Ukraine, Sri Lanka, and Tunisia. [14]

5. Conclusions

A nation that is lamenting a systemic dysfunction in its polity as a result of brazen and chronic prebendal and primitive accumulation should not in any circumstance raise an altar for the celebration of corruption by dancing to courtin aso ebi in support of a rogue politician that is being tried for looting of the national treasury. The carnivalization of the trial of a rogue politician diminishes our values, insults our sensibilities, pollutes our cultural space, destroys the foundation of our polity and encourages communal scrambling for the endless gulping of our common wealth. The people’s rights to freely express their feelings and sentiments in a democracy should be guided by political values which strengthen the capacity of the system to serve justice without fear of intimidation and harassment. Like the people, democratic institutions, particularly the judiciary, have the sacred responsibility to ensure that the entire democratic project is completely insulated from vices that pose danger to its sanctity, survival and sustainability.

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