

BUHARI: In Loving Memory of Nigeria's Best President

By Majekodunmi Oseriemen Ebhohon

Former President Muhammadu Buhari died in a London clinic, the same kind of foreign medical sanctuary he routinely sought while his own countrymen withered in under-equipped hospitals he failed to upgrade for eight straight years. The announcement, barely two hours old, has already begun to stir a familiar dust. Soon, his loyalists will attempt to canonize him, as is customary for Nigerian politicians who failed in life but hope to succeed in death. But before the floodgates of selective eulogy open, before history is photo shopped into a hymn, let us document—firmly, clearly, and without frills—the wreckage this medical tourist left behind. To begin with, unemployment under his watch achieved Olympic levels. When Buhari took over in 2015, unemployment stood at 10.4 percent. By the time he staggered out of office in 2023, it had soared to an embarrassing 33.3 percent. Youth unemployment reached 42.5 percent, a number so high even mathematicians winced. Under Buhari, what Nigeria had, felt less like a government and more like an eight-year induction into eternal damnation. For many graduates, there was no reason to update their CVs—only their survival instincts. Meanwhile, poverty deepened like a well with no bottom. In his reign of numerical disasters, Nigeria became the poverty capital of the world. Over 133 million Nigerians lived in multidimensional poverty—penury that had nothing to do with Ajala, the molder of heads, but everything to do with the economic mismanagement of a cauldron of blood letters, led by this same killmocrat who pretended poverty could be fought with slogans.

Under the dictator, poverty became an inheritance. Innocent children entered the world with debt stamped on their foreheads. They suckled hunger, wore deprivation like skin, and marched through life clutching receipts for promises never made to them. Regarding inflation, the less said, the better—because the more one says, the more ridiculous it sounds. In 2015, inflation was hovering around 9 percent. But by 2023, food inflation alone had breached 20 percent. Bread, once a companion of the common man, became a visitor only the rich could host. Tomatoes sat behind glass like precious stones, and those who once held salaries now held their breath. Even the streetwise, men and women born with cracks on their heels, found themselves kneeling from desperation. While poverty and inflation danced hand in hand, Buhari's economic growth numbers crawled behind like a reluctant goat. Nigeria's GDP growth averaged just over 1 percent during his tenure, far below population growth. The country slid into two recessions—first in 2016 and again in 2020—confirming that under Buhari, the economy staggered, staggered again, grew weary of staggering, then quietly lay down and went to sleep. In terms of national debt, Buhari's government gave Nigerians a crash course in generational bondage. The national debt grew from ₦12 trillion in 2015 to a stomach-churning ₦44 trillion by the end of 2022. Most alarmingly, 96 percent of government revenue was being used to service debt. Even on basic infrastructure like electricity, Buhari's government ran like a phone with no SIM card. In 2015, Nigeria's national electricity generation was nothing to write home about. Grid collapses became so frequent they could be scheduled like public holidays. Nigerians became so reliant on generators that they no longer hear their sound. The General himself would have needed a generator to read a memo about the darkness he ruled over. Businesses paid more on powering themselves than on actually doing business.

On healthcare, the hypocrisy was so glaring it hurt the eye. Buhari never trusted the very hospitals he claimed to fund. He visited London clinics more often than he visited the restroom. He was President of Nigeria but a patient of the United Kingdom. Isn't it interesting that the man died in London, not in Daura, not in Abuja, not even in a "world-class" hospital promised in budget after budget. It is fitting that he died far from the system he presided over—he ran from its consequences even in death!

Security? Let's not insult ourselves. Boko Haram multiplied. Bandits

acquired more weapons than civil servants had pens. Kidnapping surged by over 360 percent. Killings increased by 248 percent. Entire regions lived in fear. The Nigerian military, once Africa's pride, spent more time denying failures than achieving victories. Under Buhari, insecurity was a ministry.

And then there was corruption. The anti-corruption crusade he rode to power on became an expired sachet of promises. Selective prosecution became the norm. Friends were protected, enemies were prosecuted, and the Economic Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) turned into a circus with no ringmaster. Public funds were looted right under his nose, and sometimes while he slipped into the kind of sleep known only to Jaja Wachuku. Budgets ballooned. Ghost projects mushroomed. Nigeria became a bazaar, and the man with the broom somehow forgot how to sweep. Under the dictator, education took punches in the dark, round after round, with no referee in sight. The Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) went on strike so often that university calendars were renamed after strike seasons. Parents paid school fees for courses that never ended. And while public universities crumbled under neglect, Buhari and his elite circle sent their own children abroad—far from the ruins they created. With neither offices nor industries in sight, many male students—those who dropped out, or somehow managed to graduate—drifted into what they call Hustle Kingdoms, popularly known as HK: an informal network where young men learn and practice internet scams. Their female counterparts, meanwhile, became hookuppreneurs.



Even on civil liberties, his government walked backwards. The #EndSARS protests were met with the full venom of the state—guns where there should have been listening, blood where there should have been reform. Protesters who outran his bullets marched straight into the open arms of his prisons. He heightened surveillance. Banned Twitter. Journalism became a risky job. That one, anyway, has always been. It is worth repeating that this was the man who claimed to be a born-again democrat. Yet his tenure was defined by sluggish responses, disconnection from the masses, and a disturbing tolerance for state violence. When Nigerians complained, he responded with ghostwritten statements read hours late. When markets burnt, he tweeted prayers. When fuel queues returned, he turned his face to the other

side.

Even the most routine executive tasks seemed to require divine intervention. He appointed ministers six months after assuming office. At some point, he said the ministers were “noise makers”—a curious self-own for a man who handpicked them. Time and again, Buhari proved that power, in the wrong hands, is like a drum given to a nuisance: there will be noise, but no rhythm. As for foreign policy, he spent more time abroad than an ambassador: conferences, summits, medical trips, air miles! He was often missing in action when the country needed a face. He knew the tiniest insect at Heathrow but had no idea what ASO Rock looked like. And so, as the tributes pour in and the headlines try to scrub the mud off his ruins, Muhammadu Buhari will be remembered as the man who left Nigeria worse than he met it. He inherited a struggling country and managed to give it a limp. His presidency was an excavation, digging up every problem and multiplying it by mismanagement. Of course, they will try to praise him. They will say, “He was disciplined.” They will say, “He meant well.” But we know better. The yam he promised to protect was eaten, the barn was burnt, and the firewood, stolen. Now that he is gone, he will not feel the queues at the fuel station. He will not hear the generator roars. He will not explain why the youths are still fleeing to Canada. But we—those who lived under his shadow—will remember. And when we remember, we will laugh to prevent tears.

And finally, as our ancestors would ask when the market burns and the owner blames the wind: who appointed the wind as manager? Or in this case, how did this kind of individual get elected—twice?