

# Between our FG and New York Times

By Suyi Ayodele

The New York Times in its June 11, 2024, edition described Nigeria as a nation of 200 million citizens who are skilled at filling the gap for government. Let me quote it directly: "A nation of entrepreneurs, Nigeria's more than 200 million citizens are skilled at managing in tough circumstances, without the services states usually provide. They generate their own electricity and source their own water. They take up arms and defend their communities when the armed forces cannot. They negotiate with kidnappers when family members are abducted. But right now, their resourcefulness is being stretched to the limit." For writing this, our federal government thoroughly abused The New York Times at the weekend. It said the newspaper lied. You and I know it is the government that lied, denying the truth! The piece, written by Ruth Maclean and Ismail Auwal, with graphics supplied by Taiwo Aina, is titled: Nigeria Confronts Its Worst

government resorted to blame-game. Bayo Onanuga, President Tinubu's Special Adviser on Information and Strategy, who responded on behalf of the government said that instead of blaming Tinubu for the current pains in the land, Nigerians should blame General Muhammadu Buhari, whose government, Onanuga accused of spending \$1.5 billion monthly to defend the Naira! To Onanuga, and the presidency he represents, Tinubu should be absolved of all blames because he inherited the present economic problems from Buhari.

The above is the thinking in the circle of power. Everybody else must be blamed but themselves. I wonder what Onanuga was thinking when he penned all the incomprehensible verbiage contained in his rejoinder to The New York Times piece. What is the difference between Buhari and Tinubu? While Buhari was borrowing the "\$1.5 billion monthly to defend the Naira", what did Tinubu, Buhari's godfather say? Or, if

*Nigerian government officials need neurological attention. I mean every alphabet in these words. I say so because I believe that most of them are suffering from auditory hallucination. Everyone in government appears to hear voices and noises that are not in tandem with the reality on the ground. The groaning in the land is too loud enough for the deaf to hear. But those in power hear something different, non existing reality! That calls for serious medical attention. Medical experts are on the same page that auditory hallucinations are associated with schizophrenia and other mental health conditions. They explain it as "a disorder that affects a person's ability to think, feel and behave clearly." Nothing, in my opinion, aptly describes our leaders than this definition! If I were to be the only one to choose those who get to power, the first parameter I would set would be for all government officials, or would-be government functionaries to go for a mental health examination.*

Economic Crisis in a Generation. It dwells deeply into the ailments of the Nigerian economy under the Bola Ahmed Tinubu administration. It says: "People in Africa's most populous nation are suffering as the price of food, fuel and medicine has skyrocketed out of reach for many. Nigeria is facing its worst economic crisis in decades, with skyrocketing inflation, a national currency in free-fall and millions of people struggling to buy food. Only two years ago, Africa's biggest economy, Nigeria is projected to drop to fourth place this year. The pain is widespread. Unions strike to protest salaries of around \$20 a month. People die in stampedes, desperate for free sacks of rice. Hospitals are overrun with women wracked by spasms from calcium deficiencies." The newspaper knows where the problem lies. Again, I quote it: "The crisis is largely believed to be rooted in two major changes implemented by a president elected 15 months ago: the partial removal of fuel subsidies and the floating of the currency, which together have caused major price rises."

The naked truth by the foreign newspaper drew the ire of the government. Rather than address the issues raised in the article, the

indeed, Tinubu made Buhari president, did he not have the responsibility of ensuring that his protégé did the right thing in government? During the 2023 electioneering, when Tinubu said that he would continue with the policies of Buhari, what exactly was he talking about? In the last one year, how much has Tinubu committed to support the Naira? When, about two months ago, Onanuga and other Aso Rock clappers said that we should thank President Tinubu for making the Naira to appreciate against the dollar, which magic did the president use then? What is the simple explanation of floating the Naira?

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**auditory hallucinations are associated with schizophrenia and other mental health conditions. They explain it as "a disorder that affects a person's ability to think, feel and behave clearly." Nothing, in my opinion, aptly describes our leaders than this definition! If I were to be the only one to choose those who get to power, the first parameter I would set would be for all government officials, or would-be government functionaries to go for a mental health examination.** When leaders are cut off from the reality of the situations of the masses, the poor in the society suffer. This is our case in Nigeria now. Those in charge of our affairs are far away in distant lands. They are as unfeeling as they are as unapologetic about their abysmal failure. The gap between the leaders and the led is too wide. In the comfort of their cozy offices, those in authority over us don't feel the heat on the streets.

The current party in power got to the saddle over nine years ago. In the build-up to the 2015 general elections that produced this current administration under the banner of the All Progressives Congress (APC), Nigerians were so tired of the woeful outing of the then-ruling People's Democratic Party (PDP), such that they developed the cliché of ~~"Anything or anyone but Jonathan."~~ ~~A friend, who had since checked out of the country for second slavery in Europe because he could no longer cope with the crushing economic situation in Nigeria,~~ told me then that if the APC fielded a goat against President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan (GEJ), he would go and vote for the goat. Truth be told, PDP, like we say in our street lingo here, nor dey give joy! So, when the APC threw up the most lethargic candidate in the person of General Muhammadu Buhari as its presidential candidate, some of us warned that the nation was heading for a calamity. Nobody cures a curse with another curse, we cautioned. But we were shouted down!

We need to settle this once and for all. Nobody, especially any adult in Nigeria, who witnessed the perfidy of the PDP between 1999 and 2015, would give thumbs up for the party and the government it ran for 16 years. However, for anyone who was already an adult when Buhari first came to the nation's political limelight in 1983, such a fellow would never wish for a second time of Buhari in power and in government. But it happened. For eight solid years, Buhari, as the President and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, ruled over us. For those eight years, all Buhari did was to blame the PDP and its 16-year rule for virtually everything from the mundane to the most bovine issue. Sadly enough, Nigerians, especially most of the educated class, joined the blame-game wagon. Everything bad was heaped on the PDP, particularly, Buhari's immediate predecessor, GEJ. From being named a clueless president, to his wife, Patience, being body-shamed by one of the most celebrated scholars in the Black race, Professor Wole Soyinka, Nigerians indulged Buhari as he sat in the Aso Rock Villa flat-footed! The nation's economy went from being bad to being completely comatose. The security architecture, one of the crosses upon which GEJ's administration was nailed, completely collapsed under the watch of the Daura-born retired General. Buhari became President-do-nothing! He was so toneless that he could not even effect any change in his cabinet! His wife, Mrs. Aisha Buhari, at a time was so frustrated that she voiced out that her husband barely knew anybody in his cabinet. Buhari's era was an era of presidential absenteeism. He was nowhere; he did nothing, yet many things did Nigeria in! Nigeria was literally dead! All Nigerians got was the blame on the PDP for ruining the nation. Even when we argued that Buhari was 'voted' in to correct the abysmal performance of the PDP, the government clappers said that the damage caused by the PDP was such that it would take eternity for anyone to correct them! Among the Buhari clappers of those ruinous eight years are members of this present government of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu. Tinubu was indeed the chief promoter of Buhari! So,

when the Buhari era was fading out and a new round of elections was around the corner, not a few Nigerians warned again that the APC's failures under Buhari must not be rewarded with another electoral victory. Granted that the PDP's perennial presidential candidate in the 2023 general elections, Atiku Abubakar, is in no way different from the old PDP, the nation was presented with an alternative in the avant-garde Labour Party (LP), and its candidate, Peter Obi. Unfortunately, sentiments came in and took the better part of us all! The major factor then was the silly political arrangement known as turn-by-turn, which the Tinubu campaign body nicknamed Emilokan! No other argument was allowed to flourish. The slogans being: "Tinubu made Buhari president. Tinubu 'built' Lagos. The man has paid so much for democracy. He has the magic wand. He uses technocrats and experts, bla bla bla!" Nigeria went to the February 2023 election a divided nation. The Igbo people outside the South-East became endangered species. The election was held. The rest is now history.

President Tinubu is in power today. He has spent one year and 20 days in office. What has he done differently from the past administration? Just as he promised to continue with the policies of his predecessor, ~~Buhari, President Tinubu has taken the issue of blame game to the next level. Since May 29, 2023, when he assumed office as the President,~~ Tinubu has blamed everybody else but himself for the woes that have been the lot of Nigerians in his over one year administration. A most interesting aspect of the blame game is that Tinubu's tirades now are against his fellow party man and mentee, Buhari! For once, the PDP, and particularly, former President Jonathan, can now breathe fresh air of freedom. In any case, it would have been completely uncharitable of the Tinubu administration to turn to the PDP or GEJ as the proverbial scapegoats for the present economic tragedies.

There should be a limit to perfidy in government circles. I think government spokesmen should learn the art and act of communication. They should study the audience before emitting whatever they are asked to do. Methinks there is a problem with the guys handling Tinubu's communication channel. The way they are going, a day will come when they will mistakenly blame the president himself. They have lied so much. There is nothing left in the bag of falsehood hanging on their shoulders. Where is Buhari, for God's sake? On the moon, or he rubs disappearing cream every day? If he created the present woes, why not ask him some questions? And come to think about it: where is Tinubu's famed strategy? Where is his legendary masterstroke? Why should the deity of success forsake him when it matters most?

**Let this be my last shot at Onanuga and his fellow ranting gang in power. Nigerians are hungry, simple! They need food on their tables and in their bellies. Tinubu promised "Renewed Hope." It is too late for him to change the narrative. He promised to fix the economy and make life more abundant. Anything short of that is an abysmal failure. Nigerians cannot differentiate between Buhari and his 'maker', Tinubu. To an average hungry Nigerian, APC is APC. They no longer remember the party called PDP; that is history. Let the president get down to work. Nobody wants to listen to the story of how much Buhari borrowed every minute to support the Naira without telling us how much Tinubu is spending on the same improvidence. That na old tori! A very nauseating one for that matter! Nigerians don't need anyone else to tell them that Buhari was a huge mistake! If the Onanugas of Aso Rock don't have any plausible explanation to give on why their idol has been so pitiable in government, can we advise them to cut the cackle and just get us there!**