

# The Challenges of Democratic Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic



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Edited by

Stanley Naribo Ngoa, Farooq A. Kperogi  
and Eghosa E. Osaghae

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These milestones signpost the maturation of Nigeria's democratic culture, just as they mask the disablingly defective structural impediments and practices that have undermined the gains of democratic governance since 1999.



# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Contributors.....	ix
-------------------	----

Prologue.....	xiii
---------------	------

A Toast for Afro-Optimism: A Bibliographical Analysis of Onwudiwe's  
Thoughts  
Stanley Naribo Ngoa

Preface .....	xxix
---------------	------

## **Section I: Dynamics and Deficits of Democratic Governance in Nigeria**

Chapter 1 .....	2
-----------------	---

The Impact of Political Parties and Civil Society on Nigerian Federalism  
Jibrin Ibrahim

Chapter 2 .....	31
-----------------	----

Communication, Citizen Engagement and Democratic Governance  
in Nigeria: Issues, Challenges and Prospects in the 4<sup>th</sup> Republic  
Bala A. Musa

Chapter 3 .....	53
-----------------	----

The Nigerian State and the Management of Armed Conflicts:  
Rethinking the Amnesty Approach  
Okechukwu Richard Oji

Chapter 4 .....	71
-----------------	----

The Developmental State and Democracy in Africa: Lessons from East  
Asia and Prospects for Nigeria  
Obadiah Mailafia

Chapter 5 .....	88
-----------------	----

Healthcare Development in Nigeria: The Dilemma of Democratic  
Governance  
Daprim S. Ogaji and Tubonye C. Harry

Chapter 6 .....	128
The Political Culture of Corruption in Africa: Evidence from Nigeria	
Eghosa E. Osaghae	
<b>Section II: Critiquing the Fourth Republic</b>	
Chapter 7 .....	140
Watchdogs that Don't Bark or Bite: An Analysis of the Death of Critical Journalism in Nigeria's Mainline News Media in the Fourth Republic	
Farooq A. Kperogi	
Chapter 8 .....	160
Nigeria: <i>I-Beg-You</i> as Moral Philosophy	
Nimi Wariboko	
Chapter 9 .....	169
Fiscal Federalism and Democratic Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic	
Vincent Nmehielle	
Chapter 10 .....	183
Performance of the Nigerian Economy: Will the 4 <sup>th</sup> Republic be Different?	
Akpan H. Ekpo	
Postscript .....	201
Nigeria's 4 <sup>th</sup> Republic: Disinformation, Hate Speech, and Electoral Politics	
Stanley Naribo Ngoa	
Epilogue.....	226
The Last Word	
Ray Ekpu	
Index .....	237



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**Stanley Naribo Ngoa** (Ph.D., Wits.) is a multi-disciplinary academic and a communication theorist with an eye for media in politics. He is published in refereed journals, has presented at scholarly seminars and conferences, and has given keynote speeches at governmental and international gatherings. Currently a Professor of Communication Studies at the National Open University of Nigeria, his contributions to theory building include the concept of Deviant Communication in Agenda-setting studies, Social/Educational Propaganda, "TPD," and "Theory ESC."

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# PROLOGUE

## A TOAST FOR AFRO-OPTIMISM

### STANLEY NARIBO NGOA

In 2012, Ebere Onwudiwe turned 60. Sixty years represents more than half of a century. This product of 50 and 10 as a range, if measured on a Celsius scale, will, in a living organism, represent a body heat in excess. Sixty is therefore a milestone synonymous with Diamond Jubilee. Diamonds are types of gemstones, and Ebere speaks for every meaning of the word: transparent, of many parts, and skilfully combined.

In October 2012, friends of the diamond planned to honour him with a festschrift as is traditional with the academe. But eight years down the road, the book never saw the light of day and Ebere died. He did not just die; rather, he was visited and snatched by the notoriously cold fingers of COVID-19. Ebere was one of our own.

Ordinarily, and perhaps on a first meeting, he did not come across as a multi-disciplinary academic. His Pidgin English was typically old “pitakwa”<sup>1</sup> style but delivered in a rather nasal Owerri language idiom that became synonymous with the secessionist Republic of Biafra. Take another look, and he reminded you of the cerebral Chinweizu; for, besides the acute intellectualism common in both men, they also share the same type of unmistakeable grey spikes for hair adorning the cranium, face, and jaw.

At 60, save the grey spikes for hair, even his frenetic Bob Marley-like jumping dance steps did not give him away as such. At 60, he simply cut the figure of a “jolly good-fellow”.

But there is something that gave him away as an intellectual conundrum: his hilarious but measured laughter, an impeccable choice of words for matters of the intellect and a face that lit up on the mention of “politics” or “economics” – both of which you soon realise were his comfort zones.

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<sup>1</sup>A pre-civil war alias for the bustling city of Port Harcourt.

Indeed, his tenacious lucidity for otherwise abstract issues in politics and economics jerked you into the realisation that you were in the presence of an authority in both subjects (economics and political science). And, of course, he was a full professor of behavioral sciences.

Then, what you may call one more surprise completes the cycle. Together you walked into the rather expansive lounge of his long-time friend (Professor Julius Ihonvbere), and he headed straight for the corner where the grand piano stood and before you knew it, he was dishing out something that looked like a classic of the “old blue eyes”—Frank Sinatra. But then he went: “Naa, not at all. It’s an old oriental number someone taught me ...” This last attribute could simply be taken as confirmation of the notion that people who are properly schooled, especially those who went to “one of them schools”, play one musical instrument or the other, and humble and frank as he could be by telling you, “That’s the only thing I can play”. It tells a lot.

Now, just as you need no convincing that Nigeria is a “crippled giant”<sup>2</sup>, no one need to tell you that Professor Ebere Onwudiwe was a properly schooled and well-grounded academic who had excelled in his chosen disciplines of politics and economics; he was a policy analyst of repute and a seasoned newspaper columnist.

Professor Onwudiwe served the African Peer Review Mechanism as a consultant, served the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa in Ethiopia as a consultant on governance and had taught at, amongst other institutions, the United Nations University, Costa Rica; Antioch College, Ohio; as well as the Ohio State University. He was Director of the Centre for International Studies at the Central State University, Wilberforce, Ohio, where he taught and retired as Director of the National Resource Centre<sup>3</sup> for African studies at the same university.

At the last count, our subject had, to his credit, 12 books on Africa – some of which he co-edited. These include *Nigerian Federalism in Crises: Critical Perspectives and Political Option*—with John Archers, 2005; *Nigeria’s Struggle with Democracy and Governance* - University of Ibadan Press, 2004; *Afro-optimism: Perspectives on Africa’s Advances* - Praeger,

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<sup>2</sup> Osaghae, E. Eghosa. 1998. *Crippled Giant: Nigeria since Independence*. Indiana University Press.

<sup>3</sup> One of the fifteen centres of excellence for research, teaching and instruction in fields needed to provide full understanding of Africa designated national resources by the US Department of Education, Washington, DC.

2002; and edited the *International Journal of African Studies*, previously known as the *Journal of Human Relations*.

He left an impressive number of authoritative book chapters too and over 150 *OP-ED* pieces within and outside Nigeria. The most recent of his academic articles and reviews appeared in the *Journal of African Policy Studies*, *Development Practice*, *Research in African Literatures*, *Boctoc - a Journal of Russian Academy of Sciences*, *Transition - a Journal of Du Boise Centre at Harvard University*, and *Current History*.

Locally, his editorial opinion articles have been widely read and acknowledged in the *Guardian* and *ThisDay*. He was a guest columnist for *Newswatch*, the pacesetter of news magazine journalism in Nigeria, and wrote a regular column for the influential *BusinessDay*.

Outside the continent of Africa, he had been published in the *New York Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *International Herald Tribune*, the *Christian Science Monitor* and the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. Others include the *Columbus Dispatch*, the *Houston Chronicle*, the *Dayton Daily News* and the *Congressional Record of the United States of America Senate*<sup>4</sup>.

Ebere Onwudiwe's entry into the *Congressional Record of the US Senate* was rather dramatic but a confirmation of his erudition as he brought to bear his mastery of the disciplines of politics and economics.

In an April 1990 emotion-laded *New York Times* op-ed piece<sup>5</sup> titled, "In Nigeria, Voiceless Victims of Debt," he had written, apparently, referring to the intergenerational effects of Nigeria's foreign debt on the country's citizens, especially the hapless rural ones for whom Nigeria's acceptance of IMF conditionalities has meant cuts in government spending in order to save money to repay foreign creditor banks that led to decay in hospitals, schools and other infrastructural facilities.

In the said *New York Times* article (for which Nigeria ought to be appreciative of Ebere's patriotism), the author narrated how four old people "died since June of last year" in the Nigerian village where he was born—a village where not many people lingered in grief – "for these elders had

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<sup>4</sup> Prof. Onwudiwe's personal information data base.

<sup>5</sup> Onwudiwe, Ebere. 1990. In Nigeria, Voiceless Victims of Debt. *New York Times*, April.

reached the average ripe age of 48.” He said he was unable to attend the burial ceremonies.

According to Professor Ebere Onwudiwe, when he was in high school, Jude and Amajouyi—two of the dead four—were traders in Aba, (the commercial hub of pre-Civil War Eastern Nigeria) where he attended boarding school. Jude and Amajouyi were not only proud of Ebere as their home boy in a boarding school but equally made him proud by investing in him.

“Each Sunday,” he recalled, “they managed to find a few Naira to spend and bought Ovaltine, sugar, milk and biscuits. Then I would get a call from the school prefect to come meet my visitors. They made me proud and happy. They invested in me. I was their hope.” On his part, he had also planned to one day repay their investment in him by “doing something directly for them.”

Professor Onwudiwe sent money regularly to the old and infirm at home, but he did not prioritize his plan for Jude and Amajouyi. They could wait because our “home boy” assumed that people like Jude and Amajouyi would grow old before they died; that when he finally returned to Nigeria, he would be there for them. And then the news from home came. Jude got a cut in his foot and died of tetanus. “He had a home doctor ... he could not afford a hospital.” As for Amajouyi, he just got sick and died. He had no medical attention, either. “It was too expensive.”

Albeit Ebere blamed himself that had he sent N800 – “that’s \$80, less than my average monthly phone bill”—to pay for the hospital, none of these men would have died. His major source of anger hinged on the fact that “to appease a faraway institution called the International Monetary Fund, Nigeria has slashed public spending for health. The I.M.F. is there at the insistence of foreign banks who lent billions of dollars to my country in the 1970’s. The Nigerian Government spent all of the money, some of it unwisely, and now the foreign banks want to be repaid.” He added: “this has not been kind to the voiceless poor in villages like mine.”

The article caught the attention of and aroused the empathy in Senator Paul Simon (Mr Simon has since died. He was the Democratic Party Senator from Illinois) who presented on floor of the US Senate Ebere’s article as follows:



“Mr. SIMON: Mr. President, recently the *New York Times* carried an op-ed piece by Ebere Onwudiwe, Associate professor of political science at Central State University of Ohio.

What he has to say about the debt situation is a very human, individual perspective, but it should be listened to.

We have to work out a better answer than we now have. We cannot say to nations, you can ignore your debt, without saying that you would be impoverished but for the imprudence of earlier leaders.

On top of that, our high interest rates caused by our fiscal imprudence have added to the problems of the indebted nations. To get interest lowered for Nigeria, as well as other debtor nations, would ease their burden appreciably.

I ask to insert the article written by Professor Onwudiwe into the RECORD at this point. The article follows ...”

That article was not only “inserted” in to the “record” of the US Senate, but it has also been included in “Shaping of the modern World”<sup>6</sup>, a publication of Simon and Schuster. “Shaping of the Modern World” is a collection of outstanding works that for five centuries (since 17<sup>th</sup> century) introduced events, ideas and developments that have best explained the human condition and shaped modernity. Works featured in “Shaping of the Modern World” include those of William Bradford (1650), Thomas Paine (*Common sense*, 1776), Kwame Nkruma (*I speak for Freedom*, 1961) and Nelson Mandela’s freedom speech on his release from 27 years of incarceration on Robben Island (1990).

The cumulative effect of that mild but symbolic drama on the floor of the US Senate that cold April morning in Washington on Nigeria’s debt burden is incalculable and can only be better imagined. This explains the reason I said earlier that Nigeria ought to be thankful to Ebere for his love of country and concern for her labouring citizens, especially the “voiceless poor in villages like mine”<sup>7</sup>. But, as in everything Nigeria, political prostitutes make the honours list while the Eberes of Nigeria remain the country’s unsung heroes.

And, whereas he remains unsung in his fatherland, the government and people of Togo, in a nationally televised ceremony (31/03/2001) conferred

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<sup>6</sup> See: <http://www.businessdayonline.com/national/13111.html>

<sup>7</sup> Onwudiwe, Ebere. 1990. In Nigeria, Voiceless Victims of Debt. *New York Times*, April.

(by the Togolese President) on him, Officer of the Order of Mono - OOM (an equivalent national honour to Nigeria's OON) in recognition of his efforts in creating scholarship opportunities for many Francophone students in the United States and for generally being a worthy ambassador of the African continent.

This, therefore, is a toast to Professor Ebere Onwudiwe, a toast for his intellectual idea – *Afro-optimism*—an idea that is not just a contribution to theory building, but also an approach and elucidation to the ambiguities of theory and theorists about Africa. For him, insouciant as the racism in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*<sup>8</sup> as an imagery of Africa may be, Africa is a possibility and a “can-do” 21<sup>st</sup> century continent. Despicable as African countries' self-inflicted politico-economic woes may be, Professor Onwudiwe hoped that utter disaster as predicted by some apocalyptic prophets was not and would not be the continent's fate. Rather, when and where necessary, he put the blame squarely at the doorsteps of the origins of Africa's woes.<sup>9</sup>

This is reflected in virtually all of his newspaper columns, just as they are in his books and academic journal articles. In thoughts and deeds, he could be said to be Afro-optimistic (we shall shortly see Afro-optimism, a scholarly area where Ebere achieved world-class distinction) and perhaps be described as “Afro-centric,” if not an “African original.”

Writing in the book *Afro-optimism*, Ebere said his temptation had been to blame the intellect of some of his American students for thinking of Africa mainly as primitive and full of wars and hunger. However, upon reflection on the frustrations of University of Wisconsin at Madison Professor Elaine Fair whose experiences with her students were probably worse than his, he changed his mind that the students just did not know the real Africa and that the problem was “nationwide and not limited to Central State and Wright State universities, where I have had the privilege of teaching many bright students”<sup>10</sup>.

Whereas Ebere's American students thought of Africa mainly as primitive, full of wars and hunger, to Fair's students, Africa “is 'a basket case,' 'jungle-covered,' 'big-game safari,' 'impoverished,' 'falling apart,' 'famine-plagued,' 'full of war,' 'AIDS-ridden,' 'torn by apartheid,' 'weird,' 'brutal,' 'tribal,'

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<sup>8</sup> Achebe, Chinua. 1988. *Hopes and Impediments*. New York, Doubleday.

<sup>9</sup> Onwudiwe, Ebere. 1990. In Nigeria, Voiceless Victims of Debt. *New York Times*, April.

<sup>10</sup> Onwudiwe, Ebere and Minabere Ibelema (eds.) 2003. *Afro-Optimism: Perspectives on Africa's Advances*, Westport, CT: Praeger.

'underdeveloped' and 'black.'" Moreover, Professor Fair's students describe Africans as "having AIDS,' 'lazy,' 'crazy,' 'corrupt,' 'troubled,' 'underdeveloped' 'fighting all the time,' 'brutal,' 'savage,' 'exotic,' 'sexually active,' 'backward,' 'tribal,' 'primitive' and, again, 'black.'" <sup>11</sup>

So, tempted as he was to blame the intellect of his (especially middle-class and white) American students for thinking of Africa mainly as primitive and full of wars and hunger, he noted that it was hard to blame young Americans (who may not even know that there are more than 50 other African countries living in relative peace and prosperity) for this lack of accurate knowledge of Africa when, as a matter of fact, the only thing pre-college young Americans see and read about Africa are corruption, war and starving refugees in Liberia, Ethiopia, Somalia and Rwanda. "They," he cautioned, "should not be blamed for assuming that these anomalies constitute Africa's only reality" <sup>12</sup>.

According to Onwudiwe, while it is also tempting to heap the blame solely on the shoulders of the media, he advanced the proposition that the problem goes much deeper than blaming the media; that is, when considered against the fact that "even revered Western intellectuals of the past from G. Friedrich Hegel to Harvard's Josiah Royce to distinguished sociologists Charles Cooley and William Sumner contributed to the distortion of Africa's reality" <sup>13</sup>.

To Professor Onwudiwe, defining Africa as synonymous with a place where bad news comes from amounts to "Afro-pessimism." This view of Onwudiwe's, published in *the New Dictionary of the History of Ideas* <sup>14</sup>, is fast becoming the standard definition of that concept, while its impact is also being explored in economic literature, albeit Schorr seems to believe economists do not, for the most part, study Afro-pessimism <sup>15</sup>.

Whereas Schorr <sup>16</sup>, briefly, defines Afro-pessimism as the "perception that Africa has always been and will continue to be a scary, backward, poverty

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<sup>11</sup> *ibid*

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*

<sup>13</sup> *ibid*

<sup>14</sup> Onwudiwe, Ebere. 2005. *Afro-pessimism. The New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*

<sup>15</sup> Schorr, Victoria. 2011. Economics of Afro-Pessimism - The Economics of Perception in African Foreign Direct Investment. Nokoko, Fall (2), 23-62. Institute of African Studies, Carleton University (Ottawa, Canada).

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* p.23

ridden place”— a definition which, perhaps, also explains all the other condescending descriptive canvas for displaying Africa and Africans— Professor Onwudiwe’s entry on Afro-pessimism in the *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas* seemingly ignored the “perception” and rather took the middle ground, which is that the truth about Africa’s impoverishment lies somewhere between the analyses of Afro-pessimists and Afro-optimists. “There is no doubt that corrupt and uncourageous leadership have been the bane of socio-economic development of sub-Saharan Africa in the postcolonial period”<sup>17</sup> Nevertheless, that is not to say that Africa is incorrigible and irredeemable and will “continue” to be so. After all, externally induced problems combined with internal inefficiencies are liable, if not legally responsible, for stunting Africa’s political and economic growth.

In other words, the continent’s perennial, woeful political and economic failures, manifest in the decay in social foundation and infrastructure (in Nigeria for example), can all be seen in the light of what Rita Kiki Edozie<sup>18</sup> – paraphrasing Onwudiwe – refers to as “continuous and complex experiment premised upon dynamic state-society histories and structures,” but certainly not without the hangovers of colonialism and prejudices of Afro-pessimistic scholarship.

Thus, Afro-pessimism will include, on the one hand (by African countries, perhaps, for fear of or acceptance of being a “scary, backward, poverty ridden place”) the importation of antiquated, if not moribund, political theories and models for application in Africa’s democratic advancement and, on the other, a “contribution” by western donor-countries, perhaps out of sympathy for this “scary, backward, poverty ridden place.” Some of these theories and models are hardly in use in the “contributor” countries.

For example, in recent times, that is, since the bug of democratization bit the African continent, especially in such West African countries as Nigeria, Ghana, Senegal, and Ivory Coast amongst others, there has been a fascination with the concept and activities (some for the right reasons and others not necessary at all) of civil society organizations as catalysts for good governance.

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<sup>17</sup> Onwudiwe, Ebere. 2005. Afro-pessimism, *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, 2005

<sup>18</sup> Edozie, Rita Kiki. 2006. Nigeria’s Struggle for Democracy and Good Governance: A Festschrift for Oyeleye Oyediran (Review). *African Studies Review*, Volume 49, No.1, 182-183.

Take, for instance, the January 2012 civil society and labour unions mass action that nearly crippled Nigeria.

Even so, our erudite scholar wondered that in all his years of teaching politics (with emphasis in American government) in America, major texts on the subject hardly give vent to the term civil society. He observed that absence of the term was not limited to just texts on American government. In general, he argued, the term was no longer part of the "active discipline of comparative politics and was, for instance, only available to graduate students in political science and political sociology in the 1950s through the 1970s from the history of political thought"<sup>19</sup>.

According to Onwudiwe (in his introduction at the Second Wilberforce Conference on Africa held 1998, in cooperation with the Association of Nigerian Scholars for Dialogue, a multidisciplinary organization of Nigerian scholars in the USA and Canada that he co-founded), for civil society as a political idea to be meaningful, useful to Africa, and remain contemporary, it is imperative to inaugurate an African perspective on civil society with emphasis on comprehensive investigation of the different aspects of civil society issues, including "ethnicity, ethnic political parties, media, democratization, development, gender and non-governmental organizations and traditional actors"<sup>20</sup>.

Professor Onwudiwe's intellectual activities transcended the classroom as he practicalized or translated his classroom expositions into field instruments. During the reign of General Sani Abacha from the mid- to the late 1990s, for example, he co-founded the Nigerian Scholars for Dialogue, a multidisciplinary organization of Nigerian scholars in the USA and Canada to keep political issues affecting Nigeria on the front burner. This group, in its search for peace in Nigeria and the political way forward for the country, held conferences and positively contributed to the 1999 constitutional debate. The recognition for this initiative came when Justice Niki Tobi publicly acknowledged the group's contribution at the presentation of debate document.

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<sup>19</sup> Onwudiwe, Ebere. 1988. *AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES ON CIVIL SOCIETY: A Report of the Second Wilberforce Conference on Africa held in cooperation with the Association of Nigerian Scholars for Dialogue*. New York: Triatlantic Books.

<sup>20</sup> See the Introduction to: Onwudiwe, Ebere. 1998. *AFRICAN PERSPECTIVES ON CIVIL SOCIETY: A Report of the Second Wilberforce Conference on Africa held in cooperation with the Association of Nigerian Scholars for Dialogue*. New York: Triatlantic Books.

His contributions in the fields of military rule in Africa, civil-military relations, international relations literature and, particularly, the dignity of Africa and Africans or Black people in general are immense. But Ebere did not let his concern for and contribution to the dignity of the Black person to dilute his sense of decency and objectivity.

Ebere argued that superiority complexes on both sides – i.e., black and white or American and African— cannot establish a new togetherness between the two. He would lambaste a black person just as he would a Caucasian. It really did not matter.

Writing in the *Columbus Dispatch*, the professor of political science recalled that the philanthropic Rev. Leon Sullivan had between 1991 and 1995 organized three African and African-American summits (in three African countries) with the aim to create a “new togetherness” between Africa and the United States “for the future of Africa.”

According to the author, the first two summits— held in Abidjan, the Republic of Côte d’Ivoire in 1991 and Libreville, Gabon, in 1993—led to such actions as conditional debt-relief programs, the sinking of thousands of wells, a “Thousand Teachers for Africa” program and a dual-citizenship program for Americans of African ancestry<sup>21</sup>.

As stated earlier, Onwudiwe did not permit his concern for the dignity of the Black person to dilute his sense of decency and objectivity. He narrated in the *Columbus Dispatch* article two incidents that dismayed him at the third of the Sullivan summits in Dakar, Senegal from May 1 to May 5, 1995.

First, he observed that not every African American who attended the conference was there to achieve the summit’s objectives. “Some were quite impatient and even uppity,” he noted. At the Hotel Meridian, where most of the activities took place, one particularly ill-mannered American woman shouted at a man she assumed to be African. “In America, we wait our turn,” she said. It turned out the man accused of lacking a queue culture “was an American”<sup>22</sup>.

The second incident, which was also somewhat embarrassing, was when, according to Professor Onwudiwe, he introduced Dr. Walter Ofonagoro (then Nigeria’s information minister) to Barbara Reynolds of *USA Today*.

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<sup>21</sup> Onwudiwe, Ebere. 1995. Africans, U.S. black enrich one another, *Columbus Dispatch*.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

Ebere Onwudiwe narrated that Randall Robinson of *TransAfrica* had been carrying on a protest campaign through the news media in America against the military government of Nigeria, which Ofonagoro served as information minister, and Reynolds' newspaper, *USA Today*, the second largest daily in the United States, wanted to hear Nigeria's response to Randall Robinson's campaign.

"Unfortunately," Ebere wrote, "the minister, Walter Ofonagoro, was inattentive and disrespectful to Reynolds" and rather turned the opportunity to make Nigeria's case into a "pompous, paternalistic lecture" on the history of global military rule<sup>23</sup>. The author wondered what minister Ofonagoro's reaction would have been had Barbara Reynolds "looked like Barbara Walters"<sup>24</sup>.

It sounded like "black-on-black" aggression, yet both incidents are a negation of the Sullivan initiative and the spirit of the "new togetherness" ... "for the future of Africa",<sup>25</sup> all of which one could still accuse of contributing to the data of Afro-pessimistic theorists. But our subject of discourse is an Afro-optimist. He argued that, despite the negativism, the fortunes of Africa – especially of sub-Sahara Africa—by the turn of the twenty-first century seemed to have turned markedly for the better.<sup>26</sup>

However, Onwudiwe was not all about academic pyrotechnics. In his newspaper columns, he wrote to "talk-the-talk," that is, while being so ever entertaining with a notable power of description, he projected into prediction, cautioned when and where necessary, advised and generally demonstrated a stylistic brilliance that was unmistakable.

Sample 1: In the "The Obama dividend"<sup>27</sup>, he predicted, just before the Obama political hurricane swept America with "yes, we can", that, while the excitement about Obama in Africa was inevitable, as the prospect of a Black president for the most powerful country in the world stirred the Black pride, lurking behind that excitement and pride was also the "stated or unstated expectation that America's first black president — not to confuse that with Bill Clinton's metaphoric appellation — will shower Africa with American dollars ... That will not happen."

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Onwudiwe, Ebere. 2005. Afro-pessimism, *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*.

<sup>27</sup> Ebere Onwudiwe. 2008. The Obama dividend, *BusinessDay*, September 3.

The professor of Political Science predicted that it was improbable that a President Obama would do more for the African continent than his predecessors had done, noting that, even if as a visionary, progressive leader he wanted to, Obama just “can’t”:

In the words of the author: “You see, if Obama is elected president, all Americans—supporters and detractors alike—will fixate on his every move. New experience is always cause for anxiety. For Americans, having a black president is as new an experience as there can be. After all, it would be happening for the first time in the country’s 232 years of independence. Any move by Obama to significantly shift U.S. foreign aid to Africa will probably cause a stir and would easily be blocked”<sup>28</sup>. That prediction came to pass; we are in Obama’s second and final term in office as president.

Sample 2: Senator Eme Ufot Ekaette, Chairperson of the Senate's Committee on Women and Youth, in 2008 proposed a bill that addressed the question of Nigeria’s youth and “indecent” dressing. The proposed bill aimed at taking a bite out of Nigeria’s “moral decadence” in the senator’s opinion became necessary as she (and perhaps many others too) found the unconventional dress style of the youth somewhat unsettling.

In his reaction to Senator Ekaette’s proposition, Ebere did not agree with some cynics “that the moral rhetoric of the bill and its oblique religious zealotry is a dangerous cover for senate's inaction on the legion of more important problems facing this multicultural country.” He described the senator’s intention as “noble” and her effort as “brave” for showing so much “tough love to our young people” whose cloth sense, albeit unacceptable, should be encouraged from the praxis of knowledge economy.

The *BusinessDay* columnist explained a knowledge economy as one in which the most crucial factor of production is knowledge rather than land and labour, capital and tools. According to him, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, economies of the most developed countries are knowledge-based while Nigeria’s were still mired in King Oil, feverishly drilled with borrowed knowledge. Meanwhile, he argued, Nigerians were busy worrying about the hanging boobs of their youth rather than the quality of their education<sup>29</sup>.

Professor Onwudiwe cautioned that fashion and dress sense was a form of self-expression which, when allowed to flourish, was an important measure

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ebere Onwudiwe. 2008. Knowledge Economy and 'indecent' Dressing, *BusinessDay*, 14 July.



of societal tolerance and a necessary condition for attracting and unleashing the untapped and often dormant creative energy of young people. "The extent to which a state allows its citizens free expression, fashion being one example, is an indication of tolerance for diversity. For the development of innovative ideas, diverse societies trump monolithic ones every time. In their dressing (which is nothing but surface appearance), some of our youths may choose to look conventional, hipster, bohemian, eccentric, geek, or goth. Let them all be. Self-expression makes the spirit soar, and our economy may be the better for it."<sup>30</sup> That bill did not seem to have seen much daylight on floor of the Senate.

Sample 3: Citing the construction of Abuja, the Federal Capital Territory (FCT) as a child of necessity from the traffic jams and overcrowding that became the trademark of the country's erstwhile capital city, Lagos, as one possible answer to the Niger Delta question, Ebere advised in his column<sup>31</sup> that leaders of the Delta basin should as a matter of necessity demand to be built, from scratch, a brand-new Federal Delta City (FDC) on territory carved out of adjoining Niger Delta states. He argued that construction of the FDC was doable because, just as the congestion of Lagos demanded a creative solution which resulted in the investment that is Abuja, so does the Niger Delta crisis.

His advice did not go to leaders of the Delta only; he had some for the Federal Government which he believed had the sole responsibility to permanently resolve the Niger Delta problem. In his opinion, if Abuja was built because of the sheer need for administrative convenience, then, the Niger Delta question was more serious than the traffic jams and overcrowding that led to the construction of the brand-new city of Abuja. "What we are faced with in the Delta," he observed, "bothers on national survival. There is, therefore, a more cogent reason to build the FDC in the Delta than we had when we built the FCT in Abuja"<sup>32</sup>.

The author was not simply talking about prebendal politics but a sincere piece of policy advice to government for the political will to implement a political investment loaded with unquantifiable economic benefits. Our columnist considered his "Abuja option" proposition as a concrete, visible and eminently measurable investment in the Niger Delta which, when

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ebere Onwudiwe. 2008. The Abuja Option, *BusinessDay*, July 20.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

completed, should be Nigeria's second planned metropolis that could start as the hub of new petrochemical industries.

In his own words:

The value of building an Abuja in the Niger Delta goes beyond the provision of gainful employment. The psychological benefit should not be underestimated. When the first skylines of the FDC begin to rise, they will serve as substantive and incontrovertible manifestation that some of the enormous funds derived from the region are being reinvested at the source. That alone is bound to soothe the long-simmering anger that has erupted into portent insurgency. Moreover, such a city, complete with a Federal University of Petroleum and other institutions funded by government, the oil industry and the private sector in general, will bring development and modernity to the long-suffering Niger Delta villages by spreading infrastructural development across the adjoining areas. It will also attract all manners of Nigerians and foreigners alike in a way that will decongest places like Lagos (if that is humanly possible)<sup>33</sup>

The FDC was not built; but there was (or is) the government's amnesty programme for Niger Delta militants and, of course, the Niger Delta Ministry. But, perhaps, the most outstanding of Professor Ebere Onwudiwe's contribution to the academe and by extension the human condition is his scholarship on Afro-pessimism and Afro-optimism where he achieved world-class distinction, where his works are frequent staples of citation in the literature.

Three works of Onwudiwe's ("Africa's Other Story"<sup>34</sup>, "Image and Development: An Exploratory Discussion"<sup>35</sup> and "*Afro-Optimism: Perspectives on Africa's Advances*"<sup>36</sup>), especially *Afro-Optimism: Perspectives on Africa's Advances*, can be described as a locus classicus.

Indeed, Professor Ebere Onwudiwe dreamed Africa, thought Africa, wrote Africa and theorized Africa and Africans. For him, much as Robert Kaplan (whom he described as a "percipient Afro-pessimist") has suggested, Nigeria is one of those complex societies where a "dilution" or even a "crack-up" is

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ebere Onwudiwe. 2002. "Africa's Other Story." *Current History*, vol. 101, no. 66, 225–228.

<sup>35</sup> Onwudiwe, Ebere. 1995. "Image and Development: An Exploratory Discussion." *Journal of African Policy Studies* 1, no. 3, 85–97.

<sup>36</sup> Onwudiwe, Ebere, and Minabere Ibelema (eds.) 2003. *Afro-Optimism: Perspectives on Africa's Advances*. Westport, CT: Praeger.

to be expected "in the next decade and half ..."<sup>37</sup> Ethno-nationalism (in Nigeria for example), expressed in ethno-political chauvinism, religious and political fundamentalism, struggles over resource control and the complaints of marginalization running visceral in people and wild on the streets may not necessarily represent a tangible evidence of the country's so-called fragile unity and likely disintegration; rather, they are indications of discontent with the current state of affairs, a renewed reminder for recognition as an integral part or member of the confederating units and, or simply, ethnic competition.

Ethno-nationalism, that is, ethnicity and nationalism, are different expressions of collective public identity. "Their core difference lies more in their distinctive records and social foundations, even when both exist simultaneously in the same country. The resultant diverse experiences of ethnicity and nationalism endow each with varying meanings and historical memories"<sup>38</sup>.

And, as he pointed out in the introduction to *Nigeria's Struggle for Democracy and Good Governance* ..., "pessimists will find evidence in the book of the perennial failure of Nigerian politics; optimists, however, will point to the emergent crop of Nigerianist scholars and their analysis of the country's politics as a continuous and complex experiment premised upon dynamic state-society histories and structures"<sup>39</sup>.

Thus, Africa's well-known developmental political/economic problems are not peculiar to Africa. They also exist in political communities in every other part of the world. More importantly, the continent's politico-economic problems do not exhaust the story of politics in Africa, because "for every horrific political story in Africa, there is another story of courageous and creative political enterprise accomplished under circumstances that those who live and vote in developed democracies could not even begin to imagine."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Onwudiwe, Ebere. 2004. Communal Violence and the Future of Nigeria. *Global Dialogue* Volume 6, no. 3/4 - Summer/Autumn.

<sup>38</sup> Onwudiwe, Ebere. 2001. A Critique of Recent Writings on Ethnicity and Nationalism. *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 32, No. 3, p. 213-228.

<sup>39</sup> Agbaje, Adigun; Diamond, Larry; Onwudiwe, Ebere (eds.) 2004. *Nigeria's Struggle for Democracy and Good Governance: A Festschrift for Oyeleye Oyediran*. Ibadan University Press.

<sup>40</sup> Ebere Onwudiwe. 2002. Africa's Other Story. *Current History*, Volume 101, no. 655, p. 225-228.

Hence, Ebere Onwudiwe's scholarly niche, Afro-Optimism, serves as answer not only to the "percipient Afro-pessimists," but also to scholars and theorists of Afro-pessimism. Afro-optimism as an idea addresses perspectives on Africa's advances, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa by highlighting political achievements and gains as against the pessimistic notion and idea that the continent rather than advance has regressed since independence from colonial adventurers.

Had COVID not set its sights on Ebere, he would be wisdom personified at 71 years old in 2023. And rather than a "diamond," he would have become "platinum."

This is a toast to a man and his ideas. This is a toast to an African original.

## PREFACE

What you have in your hands is the product of a labour of love in the service of friendship. The idea for this book started when friends, mentees, and admirers of the late Professor Ebere Onwudiwe, the perspicacious Nigerian American scholar of political science, decided to honour him with a festschrift on his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday in October 2012. However, a combination of unanticipated hindrances frustrated the materialization of the festschrift.

By December 2020, Onwudiwe inquired why the honour his friends and mentees promised to bestow on him in the form of a collection of essays had yet to materialize. So, like a traveller in a hurry, he pleaded with the editors of the book project in his honour to invest efforts to actualize it. That December, before leaving for his Isu Njaba village in Imo State, Nigeria, he had, over dinner, expressed (as was usual with him), his concerns about “politics Nigeriana,” especially as it related to the country’s economic fortunes. He had noted that all political, cultural, social, and even intellectual activities were determined by society’s general organization of economics. He worried about the economic geography of Nigeria and contextualized it as a part of the challenges of democratic governance.

Upon reflection on the events of December 2020, it would appear that Onwudiwe was mantic or premonitory both about his life and about Nigeria. About two weeks and four days after his return to Abuja from his hometown, social media was abuzz over the news of the death of Professor Ebere Onwudiwe. He had gone to his hometown of Njaba to receive a traditional title that acknowledged his contribution to his natal community. While there, he thought that he had come down with an “unusual malaria.” The next day, he tested positive for COVID-19. Two days later, the man died.

This book started life as a project to honour Onwudiwe’s life. Sadly, it was his death that renewed the life of the book. In a way, this book celebrates the life and scholarship of Ebere “Nwanem” Onwudiwe. It is an extended, enlarged, and enriched version of what would have been his 60th birthday festschrift. Although it is no longer one, it is now dedicated to his memory. Thus, the book begins with a prologue titled “A Toast for Afro-Optimism: A Bibliographical Analysis of Onwudiwe’s Thoughts.” It derives inspiration

from one of Onwudiwe's last major scholarly works on Afro-optimism. In 2003, Onwudiwe co-edited a book with Minabere Ibeleme titled *Afro-Optimism: Perspectives on Africa's Advances*. The book enlivens perspectives on Africa's advances and explodes the widespread orthodoxy in Western scholarship that Africa regressed the moment that colonial governments left its shores.

*The Challenges of Democratic Governance in Nigeria's Fourth Republic* threads different themes. It is divided into two sections of six chapters each, making a total of twelve chapters. The first section deals with the dynamics and deficits of democratic governance in Nigeria. The second section critiques the country's Fourth Republic, which began in 1999 in the aftermath of the defeat of 16 years of continuous military dictatorships and continues to this moment. The Fourth Republic is the longest continuous stretch of civilian rule since Nigeria gained formal independence from British colonialism.

The first six chapters of the book represent social cartography in practice. These chapters' narration of antiquity, analytical competences and solid argumentations provide the critiquing chapters of the second section with the required fundamental arsenal. For example, Jibrin Ibrahim's authoritative historical background in chapter one not only gives details of the "state and society in Nigeria" but also traces the gene transfer responsible for today's putrefaction – tribalism/ethnicity, religion, corruption, a jaundiced electoral system, and ultimately oil and petroleum rent which have put the political economy notches above "civil society and political parties in the dynamics of Nigerian federalism."

In chapter two, Bala Musa explores the intersection of communication, citizen engagement, and democratic governance in the Fourth Republic. In chapter three, Okechukwu Richard Oji examines a novel conflict-management strategy that was birthed in the Fourth Republic: offering "amnesty" to combatants engaged in armed conflicts with the state. The chapter points out the consequences of this kind of conflict management tactic to the sustenance of democracy.

In chapter four, the late Obadiah Mailafia compares the practice of democracy in East Asia and Nigeria and draws parallels, differences, disjunctions, and lessons. In chapter five, Daprim S. Ogaji and Tubonye C. Harry embark on a comprehensive overview of the health system in Nigeria. They observe that Nigeria's health system, public leadership, and health intervention programmes in the Fourth Republic are all collectively