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Towards a proverbial explanation of political instability in independent Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The challenge of political instability in Nigeria has defied all solutions till date. The National Youth Service Scheme introduced in 1973 and the Federal Character principle entrenched in the Constitution since 1979, among others, have failed to engender peace and stability in the polity. Judging from this, this paper offers a possible explanation for the seeming failure of all efforts to combat the monster of political instability in Nigeria since independence. Given the fact that most Nigerian leaders and commoners alike are always quick in reverting to some proverbs to rationalize their actions or inactions; five of the most widely acclaimed causes of political instability in Nigeria were examined vis-à-vis some selected Yoruba proverbs. This was done against the backdrop of a Yoruba proverb: *Owe lesin oro, oro lesin owe; b'oro ba sonu, owe la fi n waa*. ("A proverb is like a horse: when the truth is missing, we use a proverb to find it"). A thorough analysis reveals that political instability in Nigeria has its philosophical foundations well entrenched in the spirit of selected Nigerian proverbs and concludes that political stability may continue to elude the country as long as citizens indulge in hiding under the cover of the letters and spirit of selected Nigerian proverbs to perpetrate evil in governance.

Keywords: Political instability; Proverbs; Corruption; Nigeria; Ethnicity

1. INTRODUCTION

Nigeria got her independence On 1 October, 1960. However, like in most other new states of Africa, hardly had the colonial flag been lowered than political instability ensued

(Conteh, 1998: 17; Cooks & Killingray, 1983: 183-194). Some of the most prominent factors responsible for this problem, as identified by researchers are: corruption; ethnicity and nepotism; lack of responsible and patriotic leadership; poverty and suppression of opposition (Conteh, 1998: 20; Taiwo, 2000: 15; Thompson, 1988: 16; Iwobi 1991: 5; Nwankwo 1999:21; Joseph, 1991: 6; Adejumobi, 2000: 121). This problem of political instability seems to have defied all solutions till date. Against the background of the fact that proverbs are frequently used in everyday language to support or summarize a point of view (Gandara, 2004: 345), the common saying: "If you want to know a people, know their proverbs" is therefore, considered very germane because, whether called maxims, truisms, clichés, or idioms, proverbs are small packages of truth about a people's values and beliefs. Upon critical analysis, some Nigerian proverbs are believed to offer an insight as to why political stability has continued to elude Nigeria as a nation- state.

For the purpose of clarity, political instability shall be construed to mean:

- (i) "A condition of political system in which the institutionalized patterns of authority breakdown and the expected compliance to political authorities is replaced by political violence" and
- (ii) "The degree of aggression directed by individuals or groups within the political system against other groups or against the complex of office-holders and individuals and groups associated with them. (Morrison and Stevenson 1971: 347-349).

Indicators of political instability include but not limited to riots, civil wars, coups d'état, plots, assassinations, inter and intra-ethnic conflicts, and religious disturbances among others (Eckstein, 1965: Morrison and Stevenson, 1971)

2. PROVERB: IT'S MEANING

The proverb has been defined variously. Delano (1973: 77) refers to it as "the philosophical products of age-long experience of the people". Nwoga (1975: 186, 201) defines it as "the experience and wisdom of several ages gathered and summed up in one expression" or a "terse statement which figuratively gives expression to the point of traditional wisdom relevant to a given situation". According to Bukenya et.al. (2001) cited in Mbiyu (2011), a proverb may also be regarded as a brief, clearly expressed figurative comment on a situation. In a similar vein, the Oxford English Dictionary (1933: 1520) defines the proverb as "a short pithy saying in common and recognized use, a concise sentence often metaphorical or alliterative in form, which is held to express some truth ascertained by experience or observation and familiar to all ...". The Encyclopaedia Britannica (1981: 258) sees a proverb as "a succinct and pithy saying in general use, expressing commonly held ideas and beliefs". In his own view, Mbiti (1995) submits that "proverbs are symbols of communication packed into short sentences or even anecdotes and stories, sometimes carved on wood, stone or other materials, or even sung or danced". Proverbs are drawn from and refer to all activities of society, natural objectives and phenomena. In many African languages, proverbs act as a catalyst of knowledge, wisdom, philosophy, ethics and morals which provoke further reflection and call for a deeper thinking and consideration of issues (Adeyemi and Salawudeen, 2014: 186).

It is essential to note that proverbs, which form an integral part of the society, reflect and shape social life. In their concise form and authoritative style, they provide us with rich linguistic data for the study of cultural beliefs and social values of a particular society (Mbiyu 2011). This view is in tandem with Mbiti's (1995) observation that proverbs are drawn from the whole society and that every part of the society is captured in the proverbs.

From these definitions, one may rightly glimpse that proverbs are philosophical expressions of a people which encapsulate their views, opinions and ideas about various issues of life. Proverbs provide us with a rich source of wisdom and are set within the cultural and social environment of the people who have produced them (Mbiti, 1991: 27). Indeed, many people know a lot of proverbs and are skillful in citing them at different moments and for different purposes, some good, some dubious. As such, proverbs are believed to inspire specific actions of Nigerian political office holders by providing a basis for the rationalization of their actions and/or inactions. Among the Yoruba people, proverbs are relics, preserved and transmitted over generations.

3. ON CORRUPTION

Generally speaking, corruption may be used to refer to acts relating to abuse of public office for private gain (Dahida and Akangbe, 2013). It implies exploiting one's public position, the commonwealth and power for personal benefits (Awofeso & Odeyemi, 2014: 241). It is essential to state here that though corruption is a global phenomenon, it is more prevalent and destructive in the Third World countries and particularly in Nigeria where it has become an endemic problem threatening the country's socio – economic and political development.

Diverse opinions have so far been expressed about the nature and scope of corruption in Nigeria. Williams (2000: 16) submits that "corruption and wild extravaganza of mismanagement... have characterised Nigeria's existence so far". In a similar vein, Lawrence (2000: 24) argued that corruption is the order of the day in Nigerian politics, while Adejumo (2000: 124) also emphasised the institutionalisation of the theft of public funds.

The extent of corruption and corrupt practices in the country may, however, best be appreciated when viewed from the periodic rankings of Transparency International (TI), an international organisation that studies corruption amongst and within countries of the world. In 2004, Transparency International (TI), ranked Nigeria as the third most corrupt country in the world, after Haiti and Bangladesh (Adeyeri, 2010: 33).

Its position in 2007 was ninth while she was ranked as the 34th most corrupt of the 177 countries studied in 2013. In 2014, the corruption perception index of TI ranked Nigeria 136th out of the 175 countries studied. (Liolio, 2013: 31-32; Ogundele & Adetayo, 2013, cited in Awofeso & Odeyemi, 2014: 245).

Manifestations of corruption in Nigeria include: squandering and stealing of public funds; misappropriation of funds; award of contracts in violation of due process; unaccounted transfers; receipt of 'kick-backs' and upstream fees; looted funds and wealth kept secretly abroad; gratification involving monetary, pecuniary, material or even physical favours like sexual relationships; money laundering including extra-legal and illegal transfer of fund across national borders by official controls over such transfers; abuse of office, including the violation of the oath of office by an incumbent, debasement of official procedures for personal

financial or non-material gains and obstructing due process or rule of law for political advantage among others (Okolo, 1999: 29; Babarinsa, 1999: 5; Adejumobi, 2000: 124-125; Onimode, 2000: 32).

Corruption has indeed become a festering wound that continues to batter the hopes of a good life and meaningful development in the country (Nwankwo, 1999: 20, 28; Oluwadare 2005: 123). Unfortunately, however, the various mechanisms put in place for combating this menace by successive governments including anticorruption campaign, the Ombudsman system; system of inventory of property and assets; illegal wealth investigation system; internationalisation of corruption control; anti-corruption law; the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission (ICPC) as well as the Code of Conduct Bureau have not deterred its occurrence. On the contrary, Nigerians, almost on a daily basis, are even devising various ingenious methods of perpetrating corruption (Nwankwo, 1990: 20, 28; Oyeleye, 1978: 152). Consequently, Okigbo's assertion (cited in Bassey et al., 2013) that corruption is today 'systemic', "making it difficult for anyone who is part of the system to escape from experiencing and being a part of it is absolutely right. This perhaps explains Amaechi's (2014) submission that Nigeria has witnessed a situation "where corrupt behaviour has dogged successive Nigerian political leadership at different levels and in varying degrees" (Amaechi, 2014 as cited in Awofeso & Odeyemi (2014:246).

The negative effect of corruption on a nation is multidimensional. According to Aluko (2004), cited in Awofeso & Odeyemi (2014:242), it: depletes a nation's wealth and increases the costs of goods and services; discourages people to work together for a common good and encourages frustration and general apathy among the people, just as it widens the gap of social inequality between the rich and the poor; and impedes democracy and the rule of law, resulting in cynicism, reduced interest in political participation and political instability.

Some Nigerian proverbs indicted for providing motivation for corrupt orientations in the country are examined below:

- (i) *"Eni to ba se ni dii pepe nii je ni dii pepe"*
"He who works at the barn deserves to eat at the barn"
- (ii) *"Ibi koko eni ba so si laa tii ka"*
"One harvest's his/her cocoa seeds where it produces its seeds"
- (iii) *"Eni ifa ko to si nii pee ni haramu"*
"It is he who misses a booty that accuses the lucky ones of wrong deeds"
- (iv) *"Baa gboko fun were odo ara re ni yoo roko si"*
"Give a hoe to a mad man and he will hoe in his own direction"
- (v) Getting the opportunity of climbing the iroko tree is something that does not happen often

The above cited proverbs may be aptly described as 'blue-prints' for corruption in our society. Perhaps this is why Taiwo (2000: 15) asserted that Nigerian leaders believe they are helping themselves to Gods bounty when they loot. The hope of establishing a nation free from corruption may therefore continue to be a mirage.

4. ON ETHNICITY AND NEPOTISM

Nigeria is no doubt, a highly complex and ethnically diverse country. With over 400 ethnic and sub-ethnic groups, it qualifies it to be regarded as a plural society. No wonder, therefore, that politics is highly ethnicized and political competition and access to power is overtly drawn along ethnic lines; taking different volatile forms and dimensions. This largely explains why ethnic pluralism in Nigeria has more often than not been characterized by contestations and struggles for access to power and the resources of the Nation-State (Vande, 2012). According to Nnoli (1978) ethnicity is more pronounced in societies where inter-ethnic competition for scarce resources is the rule. Osaghae (1995) agrees with Nnoli that ethnic conflicts arise from situations in which people from varying ethnic groups decide to employ their differences in the pursuit of competing interests.

This phenomenon of ethnicity “is associated with the delineation of an ‘in group’ vis a vis ‘out group(s)’; formulation of stereotypes of definite group nature, and other negative attitudes such as prejudice and discrimination which eventually culminate into conflict” (Bello-Imam, 1987: 265). The attendant effect is that it has contributed to “a common consciousness amongst the ‘in group’ on the basis of which it discriminated against the ‘out group(s)’ in the process creating internecine rivalries- since ethnic struggles were focused on the rewards of the political system(the dictum of sharing of the national cake). This has created a tremendous potential for disunity at the centre” (ibid).

Ethnicity has continued to be the bane of Nigerian politics and is even regarded as a scourge that has contributed significantly to the myriad of conflicts and problems in the country since independence (Bayart, 1993). For example, each ethnic group regards access to State power as an excellent opportunity to ‘enjoy’ State economic and political resources. This is largely explained by the fact that the state controls almost all aspects of economic and political dispensations. Access to State power for any ethnic group is thus regarded as a ‘golden opportunity to become major benefactors in terms of economic development of their region, government appointments, and so forth (Osamba, 2011: 127). No surprise therefore that ethnic groups tend to mobilize together to ensure or safeguard that access (Nnoli, 1998). This mobilization in turn inevitably exacerbates ethnicity and ethnic consciousness.

Without much doubt, it is well-known that ethnicity and nepotism are twin-sister concepts forming part of the most debilitating problems facing the post – colonial state of Nigeria (Osaghae 1992: 24). This is manifested in series of inter-ethnic, intra – ethnic and other forms of group violence too numerous to mention in the country (Taiwo 2000: 86). It is also expressed in the scramble for economic and political advantages among various groups (Joseph 1991: 6; Taiwo 2000: 88). In all these, individuals have always sought the support of their better-placed kin-folks (Joseph 1991: 7; Ejionye & Emereuwaonu, 1986: 277). This primordial link is hampering the national integration process as competition for the allocation of resources remains a zero-sum game (Ikime 1985: 28).

It is disheartening to note, however, that ethnicity has never been seen as a misdemeanour by our leaders with all sincerity as observed by Osaghae (1992: 214). He noted that the most “avowed anti-ethnicists not only depended on ethnic constituencies, but also pursued ethnic balancing acts to remain in power” by seeking to win support on the basis of ethnicity and language (Tordoff 1997: 92). The political elites have indeed played a significant role in raising ethnic feelings. For instance, Nigerians have always regarded holding political offices as a golden opportunity to have a fair share of the national cake

(Osamba, 2001). In other words, ethnic groups who are in control of political leadership at a given time feel that they should be the key benefactors in terms of economic development of their region, government appointments, and so forth.

A close examination of some Nigerian proverbs suggests that ethnicity has been a part of our political traditions and culture since time immemorial. Hence, ethnic cleavages may not die. Some examples of these proverbs will suffice:

- (i) *“Omo eni kii se’di bebere ka fileke sidii omo elomiran”*
“One would not decorate the buttock of another man’s daughter with beads at the expense of one’s daughter who is equally qualified”
- (ii) *“Eni mi o seni, eniyan mi o s’eniyan, o ya ju alaroo lasan”*
“Though one’s kinsman is bad and irresponsible, he is still better than a stranger”
- (iii) *“Ki olomu da omu iya e gbe*
“Everyone should manage his or her problems separately”.
- (iv) *“Ba mi n’omo mi ko denu olomo*
“Flog my erring child comes from the lips, don’t hurt him/her comes from the bottom of the heart.
- (v) *“Kekere ni mo fi ba lagbaja tan ko see fobe bu*
“No matter how minute, you cannot forsake he with whom you have blood affinity”.
OR “blood is thicker than water”.

The above-cited proverbs are, with little doubt, if any, nothing more than philosophical propaganda for grousing ethnic sentiments and favouritism. A majority of Nigerians have, therefore, reverted to the letters of these proverbs to rationalise their obnoxious ethnic practices and inclinations.

Consequently, when political leaders initiate policies and programmes that promote their ‘ethnic interest’ as against ‘national interest’ that is ethnicity in action. It is such policies and programmes that breed discontent between ethnic groups and make the competition for scarce resources conflictual (Akpan and Ering 2010: 148).

Jinadu (1985: 73) suggests that “with scarcity being a major constraint in politics, ethnicity becomes a crucial criterion for regulating political conflict and distributing public goods in situations of plural diversity”. Incidentally, this philosophy is so much entrenched in Nigerian politics that any political office holder that attempts to act otherwise is, not only regarded as a bastard, but is also, condemned as an outcast in his primordial community. This largely aligns with Pierre van den Berghe's (1981: 191) observation that “ethnicity is such a powerful sentiment that, once mobilized, it cannot always be controlled”.

5. ON POVERTY

The *Journal of Poverty* (2002) notes that poverty is "an overall condition of inadequacy, lack, scarcity, destitution and deficiency of economic, political, and social resources". The *Encyclopedia Americana* (1989: 495) sees poverty in two perspectives namely, lack of money which refers to an insufficiency of cash required to satisfy basic human needs and powerlessness which means the inability of the people to enjoy the political choices open to them by which they are governed by force and are denied their rights. To Obaseki (1997), poverty refers to the inability to acquire the basic necessities of life needed for decent living

and the absence of the means for self-actualization. Aluko (1975) also defines poverty as ‘lack of command over basic consumption needs such as food, clothing and shelter’.

Closely related to this, Iguisi (2002: 20) sees poverty as deprivation of material requirements for minimally acceptable fulfillment of human needs. It is apt to agree with Fairbanks (2000) that poverty is degrading to human beings; and the life of the person afflicted by it is comparatively miserable.

Former President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria has identified poverty as a major hindrance to political stability in Nigeria. According to him, “poverty and democracy are strange bed fellows. Poverty breeds frustration and frustration frequently breeds aggression” (Federal Ministry of Information 1999: 271). The 1996 report of the Federal Office of Statistics, Abuja, as cited by Falegan (2001: 2-3) attests to the rampant scourge of poverty in the country with 67.1million Nigerians (about 66%) living below poverty line. A majority lack gainful employment, while more are faced with the danger of untimely retirement or retrenchment (Falegan 2001: 1, 3).

It should be noted that such a poor citizenry cannot support a lasting democracy and stability in any nation. Poverty has indeed been promoting corruption among public office holders and thuggery among the youths. It is also promoting jealousy, hatred and suspicion between the poor masses and the few rich individuals. Indeed, poverty in Nigeria remains both the trigger for, and consequence of, many more political struggles in the country. Interestingly, some Nigerian proverbs have rightly predicted the negative impact of poverty and inequality in a polity. Below are some examples:

- (i) *“Owo to ba dile lesu n be nise”*
“An idle hand is the devil’s workshop”
- (ii) *“Aja to ba yo ko le ba aiyo sere rara”*
“There can be no intimacy between a hungry dog and a well-fed one”
- (iii) *Okun inu la fi n gbe t’ode*
The emptiness of the stomach causes the weakness of the legs.
- (iv) *“Eni ebi npa kii gbo iwaasu”*
“An hungry man gives no attention to church sermon”.

These proverbs could easily explain the restiveness of the youths in the Niger Delta region in particular and across the country as a whole. It is worthy of note that a majority of youths mobilized for the various armed conflicts are unemployed. Poverty affects tolerance of others, positive relationships with subordinates, self-esteem and sense of personal competence and leads to frustration and aggression. (Inglehart 1997; Fairbanks, 2000: 271).

Such a frustrated people have unleashed terror in the Nigerian polity over the years. Inyang (2009:197); Egunjobi (2007); and Ogege (2011) agree that the high level of poverty among Nigerians accounts for the high wave of political violence, insecurity and political instability in the country as a survival strategy by the poor. The main lesson here is that as long as poverty remains in a polity, political stability may continue to be a mirage because acts of hooliganism would continue to thrive (Thompson 1988: 16).

Unless the elite and the government start seeing the welfare of the poor as a priority, they risk the anger of the frustrated poor. This implies that pushing the poorer and less privileged segment of population even lower, denying them opportunities to ever rise from the bottom will eventually evoke consequences of hardly imaginable proportions.

6. ON LACK OF PATRIOTIC LEADERSHIP

Nigeria is bedeviled by lack of patriotic, sincere and responsible leadership since independence. In a multi-ethnic society like Nigeria, where ethnic loyalty is rife; the efficacy of a responsible and patriotic leadership cannot be over-emphasised for promoting national integration. Unfortunately, Nigerian leaders have been too parochial, ethnic oriented, power drunk and insincere. Elements of irresponsibility exhibited by Nigerian leaders are classified into three for the sake of convenience: lie and deceit; prebendalism; and clinging tenaciously to power. Here again, some aspects of Nigerian proverbs appear to provide a philosophical foundation for the irresponsibility of Nigerian leaders.

6. 1. Prebendal Politics

Richard (1983:32) identified prebendalism as a major manifestation of irresponsibility of Nigerian leaders. This refers to a situation in which loyalists are rewarded with political portfolios. However, one may observe that this idea of prebendalism has a good expression in some Nigerian proverbs. Take for instance:

- (i) *“Gba fun Raaji nile ni gba fun Gbada loko”*
“When you give me a gift I will reciprocate your kind gesture”
- (ii) *“Taa ba tori igi gbodi, a si suna fun ni ya*
Meaning: “To whom much is given, much is expected”
- (iii) *“Gba mi nigba ojo, ki n gba o nigba eerun”*
“Assist me in the rainy season that I may help you in the dry season
- (iv) *“Eni to ba dami siwaju yoo te’le tutu”*
“Every good turn deserves another”

The reality is that when Nigerians utter expressions like those cited above, they are implying a reciprocal relationship for mutual benefits. This has been promoting uneven development in the country. The spirit of collective responsibility has also been greatly hampered among Nigerians.

6. 2. Lie and Deceit

Disgustingly, there is a gulf of difference between the promises and performances of our leaders (Iwobi 1991: 5). At each turn of every new administration in Nigeria, promises are made and hopes are raised. Eventually, the hopes are not only dashed, the promises are equally violated by blatant state failures arising from insincerity of leaders, corruption and mismanagement of state resources (Ogundiya, 2009: 136). When confronted on this act of deceit and lie, most Nigerian leaders would react as if to say:

“Baa leegun eni o jo ti ko si jo mo, ija o si mbe”

“If one’s masquerade refuses to dance and display as earlier promised, there is no quarrel in that”

This lack of accountability is an element of bad governance as observed by Chalker (1991: 42). Paradoxically, the various arms of government that should have acted as checks and balances on their respective excesses have also taken solace in some proverbs for their unperturbed attitude. Some examples will suffice:

- (i) *“A kii toju onika mesan-an kaa”*
“You don’t count the toes of a nine-toed man in his or her presence or One does not count the fingers of a nine-fingered person in his or her presence”
- (ii) *“Gbogbo aso kaa sa loorun*
: *“We don’t spread all the clothes in the sun”*
- (iii) *“E je ka leyoro jina ka to ba adie wi”*
“Let’s chase the fox away before we chastise the fowl.
- (iv) *“Bonigba ba pe igba re ni ankaara, won a si ba fi ko ile*
“If the owner of a calabash calls it a worthless calabash, others will join him to use it to pack rubbish”.

These proverbs imply an attempt to conceal the truth, an attitude that is prevalent among Nigerians. When confronted on acts of misdemeanour, Nigerian leaders have always refused to apologise, responding in harsh and foul language saying:

- (i) *Kaka kile o ku, ile a sa”*
“The soil would rather lose its fertility than die”
- (ii) *“Bowo o ba see san, a a ka leri”*
“If the arm refuses to be flung, it would be carried on the head”
Or: “To hell with criticisms”.
- (iii) A bird does not change its feathers because the weather is bad.

This sense of lack of transparency and accountability has indeed eroded the legitimacy of government and contributed to the rise of groups that embrace violence and reject the authority of the state (The Nation, 2009:14).

Another major character of our leaders has been their reluctance to relinquish power. They tend to stay longer than necessary in office (Akinola, 1996: 1). Here again some proverbs offer some insights into the philosophical foundation of such an act. For instance

- (i) *Ati ki oje bo oloosa lowo, o ku baba eni ti yoo bo”*
“The ring has been put on the idol worshipper’s finger, who then dare remove it”.
- (ii) “No one spits out the honey put into his mouth”

These proverbs suggest a violent resistance to change and an arrogant resolve to hold on tenaciously to power. This may rather explain the resort to electoral fraud by our politicians and the ‘maradonic’ style of leadership of military rulers. It led to the fall of the first and second republics and the abortion of the third republic (Babarinsa 1993: 3). Chaos, bloodshed, looting and arson are some of its by-products (Thompson 1988: 15).

7. ON SUPPRESSION OF OPPOSITION AND POLITICAL INTOLERANCE

Conteh’s (1998: 20) identification of intolerance of dissenting opinion and opposition groups, among others, as causes of political instability in Africa is very much true of Nigeria. In Nigeria, dissent has been criminalized and has been ruthlessly crushed either by legal or extra – legal means (Adejumobi 2000: 121). Bluwey (1992) has suggested that African regimes have been indulgent to survive because they were minorities. Consequently, the principles of rule of law and fundamental human rights have suffered in most African States

including Nigeria. Hence, through press censorship, incarceration of political opponents and outright extermination in extreme cases, the opposition is silenced. (Ayele 1992: 107; Thompson 1988: 55, 78; Fadahunsi 1970: 14; Aluko 1998: 84; Soyinka 1996: 16; Africa Today 2000: 25)

A cursory look at the content and spirit of some Nigerian proverbs reveals that the seeming intolerance of opposition has its roots firmly entrenched in our cultures. Some examples will suffice:

- (i) *“Eni to ba foju d’oba, awowo a wo”*
“He who dares the king will be ruthlessly dealt with”
- (ii) *“Arobafin l’Oba n pa”*
“The king exterminates those who dare or underrate his authority”
- (iii) *Itakun to ni k’Erin ma w’odo t’ohun t’erin lo n lo*
“The stump that attempts to hinder the elephant from going to the stream would rather be forced to go along with it”

It is clear from these proverbs that for political leaders to have perceived their opponents as enemies and security risks, they were only acting in conformity with philosophical lessons offered by some proverbs. It may also be seen as a fallout of traditional African political system of divine and life kingship whose authority may only be queried with grave consequences. Lessons from these proverbs would therefore suggest a kind of cultural approval for repressive and intolerant governments. This is actually promoting political instability in Nigerian politics.

8. CONCLUSION

In this paper, an attempt has been made to discuss five of the numerous factors said to have accounted for the problem of political instability in Nigeria. The paper observes that, despite series of conscious attempts by subsequent governments at eliminating them or, at least, reduce their negative impact, the problem of political instability seems to be aggravating. It is observed further that an attempt to explain this unwholesome development suggests that the numerous causes of political instability in Nigeria have their roots firmly entrenched in some selected Nigerian proverbs. From the foregoing analysis, it is imperative to state that as Nigerians earnestly yearn for political stability, the excesses of public office holders believed to be championed largely by the spirit and letters of these seemingly obnoxious proverbs must be put in proper check, or else, political instability may not only continue but the attainment of a viable and lasting democratic structure may become utopian. This is because the roots or the fabrics of the society are already rotten as the selected proverbs suggest. This is a very dangerous development as another Nigerian proverb observes that “when the roots of a tree begin to decay; it spreads death to the branches”.

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