

SEEK YE FIRST....

Quite a number of us here are old enough to recall a famous dictum of Kwame Nkrumah, one that riled his christian detractors no end, and indeed, even some of his own admirers, if they happened to be of an extra-sensitive Christian persuasion. That dictum was embossed on the plinth of a strategically placed monument bestridden by his statue and went thus: *Seek ye first the political kingdom, and all other things shall be added unto it.*

Much of the Christian establishment considered it a blasphemous rendition of 'Seek ye first the kingdom of God etc. etc'. Even I had my suspicions that it might have been intended as a deliberate taunt of the school of divine interventionism in matters that fall within the competence of social man, and in the here and now, and was thus applicable to all religious pietisms - moslem, bhuddist, hindu, *orisa* followers and all. No matter, even if only as a purely academic exercise, realities compel us to consider how appropriate or inappropriate was that exhortation, not merely for that time past, which was one of a single-minded nationalist struggle, but for our present. It leads us to a serious consideration of the possibility that we merely delude ourselves – to continue in that same theological vein, this time from Martin Luther King – that we have indeed ascended to the mountain-top and glimpsed the promised land. The delusions embraced by some are even more aggravating: they believe that we have not only seized occupancy of that promised land, but have done so for decades, a glorious achievement towards whose half-centennial anniversary preparations are already underway all around us, with the all too familiar self-preening and prodigality.

As stated in a lecture that I delivered in Lagos about a month ago, I do not wish to be a killjoy. Celebrations are indeed part of the mechanisms of survival – at the very least, they tone up the psyche, both individual and collective. They may even magnify small victories – such as mere survival – into epical feats, and I cannot think of an environment more deserving of that

consolation than ours here, in this very nation space. So, celebrate we shall, savouring the crumbs of mere survival even where the meat of achievement may be lacking. In any case, the landmarks of time are useful wayside stops for stocktaking on any journey, especially on a project that seeks to incorporate a strategy for the rest of the journey. This, I propose, is where that ancient maxim of Kwame Nkrumah becomes pertinent, and its origination especially appropriate. After all, we cannot fail to attribute to him the flagging off of the independence race on the Africa continent. It is an obvious reference point. It leads us inexorably to that point where we are bound to ask ourselves whether or not we have indeed attained that political kingdom. Even more pertinently, assuming that we have, it then prods us to enquire just what are these 'other things' that flow in logically with the attainment of this much sought-after political destination?

It is not too far-fetched to propose that, even if unaware of, or perhaps simply independently of the foregoing, it is within that last quest - identification and actualization of just what 'those other things' are, the 'additives' to, or the harvest of, the farmlands of the political kingdom - that Vision 2020, like Vision 2010 and others before them, claim to justify their existence. Those additives are ritually consecrated under a number of rubrics, perhaps not so glamorous in nomenclature - the Five-Year Development Plan, Ten-Year Development Plan, National Road Map, National Recovery Blueprint, NEEDS etc. etc, all solemnly inaugurated under one regime or the other, especially in developing nations, rationalized through one ideology or the other, or without pretence to any. Such projections meet with dispassionate, objective analysis – which is what one would expect in any society endowed with thoughtful beings. Today we shall first acknowledge, then place to one side, a problem that I have briefly addressed in other public interventions, namely, the origination, patronage, and/or enabling environment of even the most progressive or productive ideas. There are some regimes that should not presume to lay claim to an ability to define what those 'additives' to the political kingdom should be, since such regimes are not merely demonstrably hostile to,

but antithetical to what Nkrumah, and other progressive leaders then and now, would consider a 'political kingdom'.

We are thus duty bound to call attention to the dangers of a deep chasm between message and messenger, or, to bring in a more comprehensive, more accessible analogy - between the bringer of the visionary seed and the nurturing ground - which can only be the political kingdom. Even the most dedicated Messenger - or Farmer - armed with the latest in high-yield, blight and parasite resistant seedling - cannot guarantee the next harvest without a thorough preparation of the receptive ground. Without the elimination of that chasm, the midwives and sponsors of Vision 2020 are confronted with nothing but barren ground. What we wish to stress, in short, is that any governance conduct, overt or tacit, through commission or avoidance, through procrastination or indifference, that contributes to the retraction of the horizons of the political kingdom as social primacy in itself, turns Vision 2020 into yet another still birth, an instrument of the diversionary game, a ploy to turn nearly a hundred and a half million people, universally accounted among the most politically sophisticated - well, at least contumacious! - anywhere in the world, into a bunch of gullible collaborators in their own enslavement.

Here is a sobering illustration, a pertinent instruction, since it reminds us that visionary projects must be grounded in palpable realities, otherwise they remain vaporous. It also places the current effort in a wider context - both continental and global. Nothing we have embarked upon here is original or unique; the wheel is not being re-invented. Vision 20/20 is a step along the path of social aspirations elsewhere, but most pertinently on our continent. It does not stand alone. This should be regarded as obvious as saying that, in the formal sphere, Nigeria's laws should bear congruity to the laws of ECOWAS or those of the Africa Union. For example, the recent, landmark judgment of the court of ECOWAS, declaring the right to education of all citizens a fundamental human right, must now be necessarily reflected in any visionary projections of its member states, most prominently Nigeria, in whose capital this judgment was so fortuitously delivered. Other signposts of a Visionary undertaking on the continental level,

even where lacking the force of law, should equally share, if only conceptually, the quality, scope, and ambitions of other restless minds of the continent. As a bonus however, consider the lessons, even where unintended, that can be extracted from the events and environments alongside which, or from within which, those documents emerged! Sometimes such contexts are of vital value, even where merely fortuitous. With that last in mind, let me proceed to introduce the declaration that rounded off a Millennial Visionary document that emerged from a series of engagements by a similar range of minds to the midwives of Nigeria's own Visionary aspirations.

I should begin by offering some detail regarding the effort that went into that document, even if only for its ritual symbolism – the beginning of a new era – centennial and millennial, a universal spur to stock-taking and resolutions for the future. Apart from that epochal notation however, it offers us that disheartening tandem of summitry and deflation that has becoming symptomatic of much of Africa's contemporary history.

The Africa Millennial project was conceived by no less than the then Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kofi Annan, and master-minded in the main by a Beninois professor Albert Tedjevore towards the close of the expiring century. Its planning was extensive, and while it was directed at the conscience of African rulers, it remained firmly propelled by technocrats, professionals, opinion formulators, artistes, intellectuals, prelates and scientists – in short, the very caliber of midwives that produced Vision 20/20. A moving feast of ideas, self-application and resolve, it passed through Maputo, Dakar, our own Abuja, Accra, Cotonou and concluded in Abidjan, cataloguing, planning, assessing, analyzing, and envisioning the African continent in the new millennium. Its final product was, in effect, a combination of a Plan of Action and a Citizen's Charter, its summation appropriately titled, THE HUMAN SPIRIT. I do not feel I am infringing on any copyright by quoting from it rather extensively, since I played a modest part in the crafting of that declaration. It reads in part:

“The vision, primarily and profoundly, is of a continent that is at peace with itself and with the outside world, where the mandates of a just liberation struggle that involved a recourse to arms, are transformed into an internal revolutionary process that empowers the citizen without a recourse to an ethos of violence and militarism. A vision, in short, that takes the welfare, the well-being, and the full self-realization of the citizen AS THE END AND PRIMARY OBJECTIVE OF ALL SOCIAL DESIGNS.

“We hereby affirm our solidarity with the African citizen, as a being of innate dignity and fundamental human rights that must not be subjected to the whims and caprices of any dictator, military or civilian, or the exigencies of politics. We address the African citizen directly, urging each to insist and seize upon his or her rights as a partner in the development of the African environment and polity, as a voice in the future of the continent, and a contributor to the continent’s self-realization. We deplore the opportunistic manipulation of ‘tradition’ for the purpose of relegating the citizen on account of ethnic identity, sex or religious inclination to a second-class status, of denying each citizen the right to self-fulfilment and integration into the full African community. We call upon political leaders to stop the habit of overturning the constitutions of their respective nations in order to perpetuate themselves in power, and call upon the citizen to remain vigilant and resolved in the preservation of their political and civic rights.

“The marginalisation of the female sex on any grounds is a policy of retrogression that the African continent, with its need for the fullest mobilisation of human resources, can ill afford. More fundamentally, it is a gross act of injustice that is no better than the consignment of Africans to a sub-human status through centuries of the slave trade by other races. This millennium should be dedicated to the full emancipation of the African citizen, backed, we recommend, by a Citizen’s Charter to which all members of the newly-formed African Union should be signatories.

“More than land, minerals, oil or other material resources, the human entity remains the primary end of society. The ongoing civil wars in the Congo, the Sudan are not beyond immediate solution and we call for energetic efforts to terminate these costly negotiations of a continent’s maturity. We call for a new era of honesty, where acts of oppression, intolerance, marginalisation, internal racism and other states that result in civic alienation are not wished away, nor crimes against humanity, including genocide, called by euphemisms that only breed the culture of impunity among a criminal solidarity.

“While the structures of justice should be implanted and should function on universal principles, the processes of healing and reconciliation, based on the humanistic extracts from African traditional societies, should become a prominent feature in conflict prevention and resolution.

“The future of Africa cannot be sustained on lies, or on deception but on the undoubted resources - human and material - of the continent. We owe a duty to the progenies of this millennium to turn this potential into a dynamic reality that will annunciate, in palpable terms, a true African Renaissance.

The location of that concluding meeting was Abidjan, Ivory Coast. President Gbagbo had ascended to power through a baptism of fire, and that scenario was only too typical of what was happening in other parts of the continent. It is understood therefore that the debates, and their conclusions were not conceived in a vacuum. This takes us straight into the hard lesson, the sobering checks on visionary flights into idyllic ether.

Yes, what was happening on the very location in which that Millennial Vision was expounded, events in denial at the time, events that would shortly reinforce, yet again, the negative dynamics on which the fortunes of a continent have been constructed for well over half a century of self-rule – the self-augmenting dynamics that translate as the slippery grasp on negative reality and the impotence of response? Abidjan merely serves, fortuitously, as the actualization of a continental malaise. Parallels within this nation, even as we speak, are not difficult to find – except of course for the ostriches in our midst, aided by the would-be dispensers of palliatives for the deepening fissures within a political kingdom still fifty years in the making.

Only a few years earlier, Ivory Coast had been the much lauded, stable exemplar of the democratic ethos. Indeed, that confidence in its democratic stability spilled over its boundaries onto the rest of West Africa and beyond, even after the death of the arch-survivalist ‘democratic’ patriarch, Felix Houphouet-Boigny, the ‘strongman’ and chieftain of Yamasoukrou. The death of the strongman did not immediately signal, for most observers, any danger of the nation falling apart. They were woefully wrong! A new leadership – hotly contested - under President Gbagbo eventually emerged. Whatever other agenda Laurent Gbagbo nursed for the nation, he appeared conscious of her potential – indeed mission - to move the continent further into a truly open twentieth-century society, and thus he instigated the age-old rites of initiatives that sought to mobilize the intellectual and productive potential of the continent for a quantum leap in development.

That initiative took place at least a year before Kofi Annan's Millennial project. President Gbagbo invited a number of African scholars and technocrats to an inaugural meeting – twice postponed – for the establishment of an African Academy for Sciences and the Humanities, to spearhead Africa's march into the future. Africa's intellectual army responded enthusiastically as always, placing itself at the disposal of political leadership. It was on account of that very promising, indeed exciting initiative by the Ivorian president that Professor Albert Tedjevore, the leader of the Millennial Commission, chose Ivory Coast, with the approval of his colleagues, as the terminus of the caravan of brain storming. How could we not be confident that, in Ivory Coast, we had a government whose vision coincided with ours, members of the Millennial Commission, a government that was headed by an intellectual, a historian, who, through his own combative and progressive career right from student days, could be guaranteed to champion long side-lined propositions with total commitment, right into the corridors of power in the new Africa Union?

Our Millennium Commission concluded its sessions under Gbagbo's hospitality. It was not possible to remain insensitive to the tremors that had begun to circulate under our feet. Barely a few months later, Gbagbo's government became preoccupied with more urgent concerns than a long-term mobilisation of the creative resources of the continent. It had first to secure its very survival, and the survival of the nation – a cycle of the self-cancelling motions that have bedeviled the continent. Beyond the human suffering, beyond the trauma of individuals and communities, there is the repeated stalling of projections that would, if faithfully executed, constitute in themselves at least some means towards the prevention of conflicts. That is the grinding irony. The grounding of visionary concepts, the nursery bed of a stable political kingdom receded further and further into the horizon. Often, the message is impeccable, the Messenger however becomes the disabling proponent. The political kingdom could not be secured on the terrain of Ivory Coast.

Sure, it will be argued that it is not unprecedented that an economic and national recovery project has been launched, and with notable success, in one nation space or the

other, where the 'political kingdom' has not been actualized, and occasionally even under the most repellent of rulers. History is not short, I know, in the catalogue of such instances. And so this takes us back, inevitably, to what you and I understand, not so much by what the expression *literally* denotes, but what we consider formed the basis of Nkrumah's exhortation. All we have to do is take ourselves back to the political status, not just of the nation, Ghana, of which Nkrumah was leader at the time, but of the other African nations-to-be. That status was clearly one of domination. A people under alien domination and alienated power. Take this down to its most accessible level and you cannot fail to conclude that when Nkrumah spoke of a 'political kingdom', he could only have meant – a liberated state of nation being. The end of colonialism and the restoration of a people's existence in a condition of that collective dignity known as self-determination. That proclamation of the priority of a 'political kingdom' was made sixty years ago. It is also possible to insist, given Nkrumah's ideological leaning, that he meant more, that he was not thinking of just any liberated society, but one that was founded on a clear-cut progressive ideological foundation. We would be quite justified to pursue that line of interpretation, and there has been no shortage of analytical and programmatic expositions on what, for the African continent, that ideological orientation should be.

However, even without the reminder that we are gathered here on the tail-wind of a global anniversary – the 20th anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall, symbol of a once powerful ideology – I believe that we find ourselves at a stage of history and development where we are obliged to focus outside ideologies in order to agree on a most basic, common denominator of what the political kingdom meant for African nationalists in the 1950s, and 60s, a meaning that has exacted unquantifiable sacrifice from our peoples during their struggle for independence. It does not matter the form of colonialism - the settler format such as obtained in Kenya and the Rhodesias, or the more subtle forms - indirect rule - as in Nigeria, not forgetting the racist mode that made the violent liberation struggle in apartheid South Africa inevitable, or the bruising wars of independence in former Portuguese colonies – Angola, Mozambique, Guinea Bissau and Cape Verde. Put simply, we shall not find that common

denominator in the **ideological** base of those struggles. The ideological choice that informed the liberation struggle within a nation such as Senegal was miles of theorizing distance from, for instance, that of her neighbouring Guinea Conakry, a nation which, at this moment – let us pause to note - is drenched in the blood of her own citizens, savagely mown down by a new set of imperators in black skin and inherited jackboots. Guinean mothers and daughters were humiliated and degraded, raped in the open sporting field, in broad daylight. We shall address that latest diminution of our humanity in another place. To return to our search - just what was the element that was common to all those struggles against external domination?

But first, when we speak of self-determination, are we speaking of a bloodless entity such as 'nation', 'country' or 'state', or are we speaking of the humanity that unambiguously defines, fulfills, and re-produces its very existence within those geographical expressions? Language is supposed to clarify, but language also often makes us forget the authentic, innate properties of some realities for which language is mere vehicle. Nation is one such agent of obscurantism. Nation, through usage, has become identified with 'flag', with 'national anthem', with borders, with 'sovereignty', with independence day marches, with football hysteria and other puerile but well funded emotions and even, most lamentably of all, with individuals as rulers. 'Nation' has been permitted to obscure and subsume its constitutive humanity. If that were not so, the rulers of Guinea Conakry would not slaughter its people like cattle nor Omar Bashir of Sudan turn two and a half million of its citizens into flotsam and jetsam on their own ancestral lands.

But - back to our theme – nation and people. There is an expression that most vividly captures this phenomenon: 'within every fat man, there is a thin one struggling to get out.' The notion of 'nation' is very much of that nature – within the insatiable, aggrandizing, corpulence of 'nation', there is, not just one, but a multitude of repressed, undernourished humanity struggling to get out. We shall shortly encounter the nature of that nourishment of which such humanity feels so justly deprived. For now, let us constantly bear in mind what has just been stated - that language betrays us unwittingly, so that when we say that this or that nation is

thriving, it is not inaccurate, but what we really mean is that the humanity of that nation is thriving. When we speak, by contrast of a 'failed state', or 'collapsed nation', the effect refers to a people within a provisioning ship that is badly holed and has lost its rudder. Nation may produce and flaunt statistics such as Gross National Product, or Per Capita Income, it does not produce the wealth that lies behind the calculations - it is the people who do. Nation does not consume or are consumed, it is the people that do, and are.

Each time we hear the expression, this nation is at war with another, what we really mean is that the citizens of that nation space are killing or getting killed by the citizens of another nation space. Nations do not hold guns, fire rockets or push the nuclear button - people do. And thus, to come back to the very start of our interrogatories, when we talk of liberation, we are merely misappropriating language – in a positive way, admittedly - when we claim that a nation has attained its liberation. It is the people who are set free, and nation comes into the discourse only because the people have struggled to be free within that adopted, adjusted, bequeathed or heroically defined spatial construct that comes to be known as nation. It is the people that willed it to be so. To conclude this brief exercise of cutting through the brambles of usage, liberation – the spur that has launched a thousand nationalist wars throughout history - that common denominator of struggle, sacrifice, triumphs and losses, means the liberation of **peoples**, of the humanity that inhabit a nation space, not the liberation of overarching structures such as nation, or theoretical derivations. It is possible to conceive of a people without a nation, but to think of a nation, or – in this instance, a kingdom without people - is a notion that belongs in the contradictory world of secular metaphysics. All this may seem straightforward enough, but there are actually people on this earth who think, plan and move into execution otherwise. Moving Vision 2020, or indeed any other development project, off the launch pad had better bear this in mind.

What is true for national planning is even more glaring as we attempt to render palpable the element that unites all the various struggles for liberation. On behalf of what or whom is any struggle undertaken? The answer of course is neither its animal kingdom nor its ecology,

any more than the underpinning ideology of the struggle or other social, theoretical construct. Such constructs merely serve to focus the mind, as rallying principles. Nor is it - as some religious and materialist extremists throughout history till today would have us believe - either the kingdom of God or the kingdom of Mammon. It is not for any of these abstractions but - the very humanity of the embattled space. And thus we can proceed to assert that the political kingdom that forms the basis of our quest is not attained as long as the humanity within a geographical enclave, known as nation, is not fully liberated. The substitution of one set of deniers, one set of expropriators of that liberation for another – external or internal, the latter being known as internal colonialism - does not amount to true liberation, any more than does the liberation of one group of individuals or geographical section at the expense of, or in relation to another. It is either the full notion of liberation is embraced, or we freely admit that the struggle is not over. Liberation admits of no relativity.

So now, to the next question: what, exactly, does liberation consist of? How is it apprehended? Again, we need not mystify that word – let us rescue it from rhetoric and assert, quite forcefully, that it is the liberation of the potential of every human being for self-development, leading to a sustainable level of collective self-fulfillment. Liberation means the unleashing of the intellectual and productive forces of every single member of society without discrimination – man, woman and child, young and old - and to the fullest extent of their potentiality. It requires the abandonment of the restraining order, the total eradication of the order that mandated, in the first place, the struggle for liberation of a people from external domination. It means a condition of manifest self-determination. If, for instance, the adventure of colonialism was based on the presumed inequality of peoples – which it certainly was – then a fundamental principle of liberation must be recognized as the total elimination of all notions and policies of inequality among those who inhabit any nation space. Where such inequality exists, the priority of any planning, any visionary undertaking must be the creation of social circumstances, and the pursuit of policies, that totally eradicate such practices.

While that equality, in its absolute ramifications, is not readily guaranteed by inherited baggage, and the complexities of society as we live it today - such being the sluggishness of evolution of human consciousness and social will in this direction – we can proceed to search for the barest minimum that should remain accessible to all – and at any given level of development – as innate properties through the very act of being members of a human community, thus paring down from the optimum of desirables to the absolute minimum, the most accessible and unexceptionable. Such innate properties, or indices of a human commonality would be readily conceded as, for instance: equality before the law; equality of access to the resources of the land by those who occupy and animate such land; equality of opportunities for participation in the generation of, and the sharing of, the products of social labour; equality of every individual in relation to the other, which in turn implicates, at its most basic level – the equality of voice in the assignment of management positions in society. I use ‘management positions’ deliberately in preference to ‘leadership positions’, since I wish to persuade us to substitute that vexatious, imprecise, compromised and manipulative idea of ‘nation’ with that of the far less complicated, more palpable reality of ‘real estate’. When you think of a piece of landed property, you think of a manager, not a ruler. It is as good a basis as any for the reorientation of thinking.

With that, we can return to our earlier question – what did they have in mind, those early paracletes of the liberated estate, among whom we have elected Kwame Nkrumah as pointer? If those just mentioned basics were not what the anti-colonial, anti-imperialist, liberationist sweep across the continent meant for us, then, in heaven’s name, let us simply reverse the motions of the clock, invite back our formal colonial masters, place those universal symbols of enslavement – chains and shackles - on our wrists and ankles and resume the deportation of our own kith and kin to the Americas and the Caribbean, to Arabia, Persia, Iraq and, even in some cases, to remote China.

I have referred already to the trap of language. However, in that earlier lecture on our very topic, I did admit that certain devices of language – or more accurately, expressions - also

liberate. So, what language, sticking to that last of the indices of social liberation – the equality of voice in the designation of management positions of society – what language has society evolved for the determination of those equalizing indices? Call it symbolic. Call it ritualistic. Call it purely abstract, insubstantial or ephemeral – it is however a practical function directed at a singular social purpose, and that function is one that is undertaken only by the humanity within that real estate. I refer, quite simply, to the vehicular language of the vote – unambiguous, quantifiable, and accessible – or, meant to be. It is the language of simple arithmetic, not of quadratic equations. There is no pre-literate society that did not learn to count. Alas, the fact stares us in the face that this nation space, decade after decade, has failed to respect even this tokenist engagement, the vehicular language of which is the vote, for the determination of its own equitable management. Thus, if, at this most basic, most elementary, most tokenist, ritualistic level, the political kingdom has been denied again and again, then we are not walking, talking, free men and women of this world. We exist, quite simply, as vassals, as inmates of an expropriated real estate, better known as a slave plantation. We - that is, you and I - are not masters of our own destiny – that, at its most basic, is the definition of slaves. Let's not beat around the bush – well, let me give the devil his due – maybe I should have said, glorified slaves.

And now let us take ourselves back to yet a question that has been left hanging from the beginning - what are those 'other things' that the conjurer of that vista – the political kingdom - had in mind as the dues of, the 'additives' of a 'political kingdom'? I have just summarized them. The more practical aspects, daily affective, pragmatic essentials – power, health, shelter, food etc - are no more than what Vision 20-whatever and its predecessors undertake to confer on us, the humanity of this nation space. And what we declare, very simply, is that it is not possible to attain one fraction of it, at least in any sustainable way - for this is the crux of the matter – without the enthronement of a 'political kingdom'. Those who coined that expression had in view the kind of real estate through which I have tried to take us,

a fully liberated social habitation, a community of free people of unleashed potential, whose conduct is regulated by a language of quantifiable choice – the equality of the vote.

Permit me to refresh your memories of some recent events in the past few years, and even earlier. In a remark that was related to the crisis in the oil-producing region, I asked the question: what on earth happened to Vision 1960? Well, I'm afraid that remains the crux of our dilemma. That question was meant to provoke the question: whatever happened – not even to the dreams but – the very pragmatic basics of that declaration of independence? To the structured pillars of nation building? To, for example, the concept of federalism? I must remind you that, in order to ensure that the colonial overlords were sent back to their island home, a number of painful concessions were made by the convocation of the first-generation nationalists. The constitution that ushered in independence was by no means perfect – no constitution ever is, it is the human operators that make it work or collapse, once the basics have been agreed. Among those basics was unanimity that a federalist, not unitarist structure qualified as the most appropriate plinth around which governance variables, and internal relationships between the parts of a heterogeneous nation such as ours, could be sustained. Neither Federalism nor Centralism is just a word – we're back again to language cautionaries! Both expressions are related to the very strategies and means of development, and the productive interactions of the humanity within a nation. In other words, you do not even speak of a Four, Five or Ten-Year development plan until you have decided – in plain terms – the issue of centralism or decentralization.

That is only one core issue among others. If anyone thinks it is a purely academic issue, then, to bring it down to an issue that generates genuine anxieties in many minds today, both here and internationally, such an individual must be one of those pie-eyed creatures who are also convinced that a government amnesty, once openly embraced by a group of armed militants, has settled all issues that led, in the first place, to the commencement of armed insurgency. That issue – centralism or federalism, including its fiscal implications, persists, and predominates. Once settled as fact, as operational basis, not as lip-service or rhetoric, it lays the

foundation for the sought-after political kingdom. Seek that, and all other things shall be added onto it, not least of which is a guaranteed, sustainable peace and harmonious interaction among the constitutive parts. It terminates the culture of dependency of the constitutive parts – reclining in complacent governance indolence, knowing very well that at the end of every stipulated period, manna will fall into the outstretched cup of expectation. By contrast, a right choice instigates the culture of competitive productivity and healthy rivalry in all fields of governance responsibility.

So how did the federalist principle get derailed in the first instance? We all know the answer. Through the spurious, nation championing postures of the military. It was in the self-serving interest of the military to centralize governance, that is, centralize the control of resources, disbursing and withholding at whim, distorting the very organic processes by which communities of disparate entities have historically cohered and developed – and sustained their tempi of development. Let us never omit that latter requirement – sustainability - not flash-in-the-pan achievements, or coherence sustained only through the will and terror of one individual or power cabal, even where seemingly enlightened. Centralism turns governance into a game of courtship of an indolent, unproductive, but rapacious centre. After all, there are pundits who, totally lost to shame, have endeavoured to suggest that the nation benefited economically even under Sanni Abacha's centralist dictatorship. Of course, some individuals did profit economically, but has that to do with the Nigerian people? And where is even that nation itself today? Where is the elementary technology of power generation that a modern nation requires to sustain itself? Were policies pursued by that illiterate and pathologically acquisitive dictator a model for all time? Were they ever sustainable? One thing we do know for certain: the centralist ideology that was introduced by General Aguiyi-Ironsi, its very adoption that was cited as the main justification for his elimination, became the article of faith of his very executioners, to be sustained, reinforced, and virtually consecrated by every succeeding regime after him – military, civilian or 'militrician' - never mind what havoc it has evidently wreaked, and continues to wreak on national development, its proven capacity for rulership

incontinence, contempt for accountability, lop-sided and illogical allocation of resources, arrogance of power, a general degradation of civil society and the attenuation of social will. The 'nation' was pronounced robust, since the condition of the nation was only what the all-aggrandizing state chose to declare it was. The people however diminished in inverse proportion, and were soon reduced to the proverbial shadows of themselves, while the shiny girth of the nation proved worm-eaten within.

Well, the military finally departed – or, did they? Have they ever left? The military bequeathed to this nation a perpetuation of itself in the form of a secretive, and thus uncontested, unconstituted, illegal and anti-people constitution, then imposed on the nation a member of its class to sustain it. That individual pronounced himself the ultimate harbinger of the 'political kingdom' – but took the expression literally. After all – he evidently said to himself - there is no kingdom without a king, and who, in the entire kingdom was more qualified to lay claim on the fallen crown? If that individual had not believed more in himself as the king of all he surveyed, than in serving wholeheartedly even the narrow entity he was supposed to re-invent and sustain – the entity that is now generally known as the militrician club - he would have succeeded in blinding most of the nation to the fact that his class, the military, was still in charge. Being the crude, power avaricious operator that he was, he made a hash of it, tried to substitute himself for the constitution that his own people had imposed on the nation. Thank goodness! He could easily have chosen the path of a general partisanship of evil, instead of a restricted coterie of the beneficiaries of evil. And so it was that, spearheaded by a handful of principled legislators and a fully aroused resistant will of the people, that Great Hypocrite of Nigerian History was unmasked and toppled from his intended perch of President for Life.

The centralist curse endures however, and will undo the nation, as long as the will to fundamental restructuring remains flaccid. Thus the voice of the people remains lost, muted or violently distorted. It was out of frustration, the frustration of so many years, decades, that made the long-suffering Nigerian goose of the Delta revolt and take to arms, sickened by the now complacent misappropriation of her golden egg. Has that knowledge informed Vision 20-

20? Has it affected the lackadaisical approach of government to the central question – a truly democratic and federal re-structuring as a pre-requisite for the attainment of a stable political kingdom? Not in the least. All energy is taken up with sustaining the status quo, with the perpetuation of a colossal inequity.

This is where Kwame Nkrumah's maxim obtains its relevance. That he himself derailed along the way and substituted a monarchical personality cult for a people's collective will is all the more reason why we should take his injunction to heart – history, including its negative extractions, exists primarily to impart its lessons on our present. In any case, the continent did not have long to wait before being forced to measure his successors against his shadow, a contrast that is so painfully applicable to the majority of the continent's leaders. He also possessed and demonstrated in abundance that which in such lamentably short supply throughout the African landmass - Vision.

The actualization of such a Vision ultimately rests on the people, not on the propagators of the confusionist rhetoric of nation. Again and again, the people have signaled their eagerness to dialogue in the civilized language of humanity – the vote – and again and again they have been thwarted, beaten back by venal gatekeepers entrusted with the key of that political kingdom, corrupted arbiters who deny the people their preferred leaders. The unworthy, and unrepentant custodians of that key do not deserve a place in decent community, least of all as stewards of a people's will. Even more crucially, the instrument that permits their serial treachery must be thoroughly overhauled, so that it cannot be manipulated to facilitate criminal collaboration, resulting in forced and illegal entry into, the usurpation and corruption of that sovereign territory of the democratic kingdom. A hard-working panel has produced a much-lauded document that is in the public domain, the call for its adoption has been deafening even to trees and rocks. Even so, additionally, has the call for a genuine people's document that transcends the present tract of enslavement – the military constitution that seeks to pass for the people's - a document of contempt and alienated centralism that, for over twelve years, has sought to enshrine the impossible notion of a nation without a people.

It is time to demonstrate, in an unambiguous way, that the very contrary is the only truthful reality. It is time to manifest that the composite that goes for 'nation' is not abstract but palpable. It is time, in practical terms, to stoke up on water bottles, acquire stout walking shoes, iron rations, oil the wheelchairs for the needy and supply crutches for the lame, time to patch up the threadbare sashes that hold the future against our women's stooped backs, and pay a courtesy call, *en masse*, on the alienated upholders of an imposed, untenable, predatory order. We owe this to the generation we have inflicted on the world. It is time to set out on the search for that elusive, democratic kingdom that is the minimal deserving of the collective labour of fifty years. And thus I conclude with my now ritual exhortation: when you hear the tenants of this glorified slave plantation cry, 'Enough of waiting, and enough of stalling', let us not lag behind. I speak directly now to those of us who have been designated worthy of a people's meritorious award – let us embrace such annunciation of the first step towards a true people's liberation - let us lead the way.

Wole Soyinka