An Empirical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

In every political system, there are fundamental structures and institutions which are established for the performance of vital roles or functions in the overall interest of the system. No modern political system can operate smoothly or even survive without these indispensable components. This essay draws attention to the “unlegislative” activities of Nigeria’s National Assembly (legislature) since 1999, and it is shown that the legislators have focused more on accumulation of wealth than on the performance of their legitimate duties. It is also contended that Nigeria’s legislators since 1999 have violated rules governing the remuneration of public officials, and by taking over a huge chunk of national wealth, they have shown that they are not bothered by the high level of poverty among the masses. It is concluded that any system that concentrates national wealth in the hands of a few people is undemocratic.

Key words: National Assembly, Legislature, Plunder, and Underdevelopment.

(A) Introduction

“The National Assembly has taken undue control of the instrument of wealth transfers to institute a resource capture and thus maximize its share of wealth transfers. Considering the parlous state of the economy and the relative penury of the Nigerian worker the self service award by members of the National Assembly is a gross misdemeanor and abuse of public trust. That the members continue to defend the outrageous remuneration is evidence of their capacity for pathological behavior”.

“Politics in Nigeria means primitive materialism. Our political leaders are in a rat race for the acquisition of houses..., choice parcels of land, posh cars, business houses and shares in blue chip companies... one prominent federal legislator once had 32 expensive cars...such display of affluence by Nigerian legislators is unheard of elsewhere” (emphasis added).

The above assertions by two Nigerian scholars aptly capture the increasing anger and frustrations of most Nigerians at the extremely irresponsible, selfish and avaricious proclivities of members of the Nigerian Parliament (i.e., the National Assembly) in particular, and the entire political class in general. When the members of the military segment of the political class handed over power to their civilian collaborators in Nigeria in May 1999, many Nigerians had hoped that the affairs and resources of the
country would be managed by the operators of the state in a manner that would not only promote the welfare of the majority of the people but also ensure the overall socio-economic transformation of the country. More than a decade later, this hope has remained cruelly dashed by the political class through their extremely despicable performance in governance.

This essay draws attention to the unpatriotic and ignoble role of Nigeria’s National Assembly (i.e., the legislature at the federal level) in impeding the country’s journey towards progress and development. This is in view of the allocation of an overwhelmingly disproportional share of national resources to the members of this arm of government – even though majority of Nigerians live in excruciating poverty. When a society is bifurcated into two: the rich and the hungry, it is difficult for one to be neutral. In this paper, we are not neutral; we are on the sides of the Nigerian people who, over the years, have been made to live in sub-human conditions in spite of the enormous resources which Nature has generously bestowed on their country. Indeed, as Osundare (2012) has pointed out, as a country, Nigeria has enough to make life comfortable for ALL of us and generations yet unborn; but it is – though bountifully endowed – a criminally misgoverned country.

In this essay, we shall attempt to support the view that Nigeria is a thoroughly misruled country and that crimes have been committed against it and its people by the political class. And members of the National Assembly during the period under review are among the biggest culprits. This essay is organized into four parts. The introduction forms part one; in part two, we examine the National Assembly as an arm of government and its major functions are highlighted. In part three, we present an analysis of the National Assembly in Nigeria’s Fourth Republic as a symbol of self-enrichment and plunder in spite of the mass poverty that pervades the country. It shall become clear in this section that Nigeria’s legislators are more interested in their personal comfort and pleasure than in the performance of their statutory duties. Part four contains the conclusion.

(B) The National Assembly As An Organ of Government

In every political system, certain important structures and institutions are created or established for the performance of vital functions and roles for the stability and overall survival of the system. The legislature is one of these structures. The Nigerian legislature, which is called the National Assembly, is bicameral in nature. That is, it has two chambers: the Senate being the upper chamber while the lower chamber is called the House of Representatives.

The speaker presides over the House of Representatives while the president of the senate, who is in the line of presidential succession after the vice president of the republic, presides over the upper chamber. Each of Nigeria’s thirty-six states has three senators (plus one for the Federal Capital Territory of Abuja), while population determines the number of constituencies in each state for a total of three hundred and sixty members of House of Representatives. Senators and representatives serve four-year terms and are elected at the same time (Mundt, Aborisade, and LeVan, 2008:689). This means that Nigeria’s National Assembly comprises of 469 members (360 representatives and 109 senators). The import of this figure (469) is that it is the befuddling luxury and obscene opulence of 469 persons that partly – and dialectically – generate and reinforce the crippling poverty and pauperization of over one hundred million hapless Nigerians!

It is important to reiterate the point that the legislature is a very vital organ of government, and there is no political system that can operate effectively without a law-making institution. As Ajayi (2012:78 and 80) has observed, the legislature is an integral component of democracy and the most prominent physical feature of democratic governance, and it is taken as the chief means of expressing popular will, a body that can speak on behalf of, and for, the people. It is therefore the assembly of people’s minds and the general will of a nation’s populace. Unfortunately, Ajayi’s characterization does not depict Nigeria’s experience since 1999. Members of Nigeria’s National Assembly have neither spoken “on behalf of, and for, the people” nor have they represented “the general will” of the Nigerian people. They have been more interested in grabbing as much of national resources as they can. Indeed, Nigerian legislators have been unfazed by the ubiquity of poverty and misery in the country.
In one of his essays, Egwu (2005:19) also attests to the importance of the legislature. According to him, the legislature which may be defined as a body of persons in a country or a state vested with power to make, alter and repeal laws is the realm of representation and the site of sovereignty. In his view, to begin with, modern democracy, especially the liberal democratic type, is about the people exercising power through their elected representatives, and thus the importance of the legislature does not only arise from the fact that its functions are versatile, encapsulating executive and judicial functions; it is also the only expression of the popular will of the people.

The legislature (National Assembly) is statutorily empowered to perform some fundamental functions for the general good of the society. The 1999 Constitution of Nigeria charges this organ of government with some critical responsibilities. For instance, Section 4 (2) of that Constitution states that “the National Assembly shall have power to make laws for the peace, order and good government of the Federation or any part thereof with respect to any matter included in the Exclusive Legislative list set out in Part 1 of the Second Schedule to this Constitution” (cited in Anyebe, 2009:58).

The functions and powers of the legislature have also been listed to include: law-making; power of the purse (financial control of the Executive); confirmation of appointments; constitutional amendments; ratification of treaties; forum of debate and ventilation of grievances; power to conduct investigations; impeachment of chief executives and deputies; and general supervision of the Executive (Coker, 1999:52-54; Akinsanya and Davies, 2002:138 – 149). In addition to these, Ajayi (2012:78-79) has pointed out that the legislature also plays an appellate judicial role in the sense that it can reverse administrative decisions based on petitions by aggrieved individuals against some administrative actions considered unjustified. Moreover, in his opinion, the legislature also enjoys disciplinary power in a democracy, as it can discipline any government official through suspension or outright dismissal.

On his part, Anifowose (1999:180-182) adds the following to the list of functions/powers of the legislature: electoral roles; representation; interest articulation and aggregation; supervision, scrutiny and surveillance; and educating and informing the public. In his own analysis, Heywood (2007:340-343) summarizes the principal functions of legislatures to include: legislation; representation; scrutiny and oversight; political recruitment and training; and legitimacy.

From the foregoing, it is clear that apart from the all-important function of law-making, the legislature also performs other functions which are equally fundamental to the society. There is no doubt that in any society where the legislature adequately discharges its responsibilities to the people, this organ of government can serve as an instrument of accountability, a symbol of good governance, and a vehicle for the promotion of the welfare and wellbeing of the people. Regrettably, the Nigerian National Assembly since 1999 has glaringly lacked these attributes. Indeed,

...the national parliament has consistently failed the nation. Since 1999..., it has been unable to truly exercise its function of maintaining checks and balances in government, especially in curbing corruption. Its story, rather, has been a harvest of criminal corruption scandals – the bribe-for-budget scam, alleged scummy pension fund deals, etc. Nowhere is the fact that our lawmakers are corrupt and ineffective more evident than in the $620,000 fuel subsidy scandal, a.k.a. Faroukgate, and the ongoing Herman Hembe trial... (“Editorial” in The Punch, January 31, 2013.

(C) Nigeria’s National Assembly: A Symbol of Waste and Plunder in the Midst of Mass Poverty

One agonizing paradox about Nigeria is that it is a grossly underdeveloped country inspite of the fact that it is blessed with huge human and material resources. For example, Nigeria is one of the world’s largest producers of crude oil, from which it generates huge revenue. Joel Brinkley (2013), for instance, reported in March, 2013 that Nigeria produces an estimated 2.4 million barrels of oil each day and at the price of $93.61 a barrel, the country makes $224 million in income daily!
The above amount represents a tiny fraction of Nigeria’s wealth. But inspite of this, the country remains embarrassingly underdeveloped. The characteristics of an underdeveloped country have been listed to include: general poverty; agriculture as the main occupation; dualistic economy; underdeveloped natural resources; unfavourable demographic features; unemployment and disguised unemployment; economic backwardness; lack of enterprise and initiative; insufficient capital equipment; technological backwardness; and foreign trade orientation (Jhingan, 2007:22viii-29). All these features and more are present in Nigeria. In its editorial, The Punch newspaper of 7th September, 2012 presented the stark reality of the Nigerian situation. According to it, despite producing oil, Nigeria has a quarter of Africa’s extreme poor; more than 100 million Nigerians live on less than £1 a day; the country has the most poor men and women after India and China. The newspaper also reminds us that Nigeria now has 10 per cent of the world’s children out of school, 10 per cent of the world’s child and maternal deaths, and 25 per cent of global malarial cases. This view is reinforced by Stephen (2012:21) in his analysis. As he puts it,

...despite her riches in human and natural resources, the country is classified among the poorest in the world. The 2011 UN Human Development Index ranks Nigeria 156 out of 187 on the world list of countries with inadequate water supply and sanitation coverage globally. Accordingly, the 2012 World Bank’s Ease of Doing Business report ranks Nigeria 133rd out of 183 economies, implying that the country lags behind 132 others in terms of how easy the regulatory and physical environment permits the start and conduct of a business. In the area of health, the country has the highest maternal mortality/morbidity rate in Africa and the second highest infant mortality rate in the world.

Stephen also adds the problems of social infrastructure crisis, 42 per cent youth unemployment, and a tragic 49 and 59 years life span for male and female respectively.

There is no doubt that if Nigeria’s legislature (the National Assembly) had – since 1999 – done its job in a patriotic and selfless manner, the above dreary statistics could have been improved. The poor performance of this arm of government – in the area of discharging its primary responsibility, i.e., law-making – can be gleaned from the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of Bills Passed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>532</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The 532 bills passed by the National Assembly in eleven years cost Nigerians over N523.4 billion! (Anyebe, 2009:69).

It would also be instructive for us to glance through the budgetary allocations of the National Assembly for a given period of time, and these are contained in the following table.

### Table 2

**The Budget of Nigeria’s National Assembly (1999 – 2009)**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years</th>
<th>Recurrent</th>
<th>Capital</th>
<th>Yearly Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>3,164,009,471.00</td>
<td>228,554,000.00</td>
<td>3,392,563,471.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>3,750,646,870.00</td>
<td>1,808,983,844.00</td>
<td>5,559,630,714.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>15,488,000,000.00</td>
<td>12,000,000,000.00</td>
<td>27,488,000,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>22,661,939,230.00</td>
<td>5,500,000,000.00</td>
<td>28,161,939,230.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>23,347,116,582.00</td>
<td>4,942,940,000.00</td>
<td>28,290,056,582.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>32,229,324,335.00</td>
<td>2,500,000,000.00</td>
<td>34,729,324,335.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>49,895,731,049.00</td>
<td>5,536,726,509.00</td>
<td>55,432,457,558.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>49,530,731,049.00</td>
<td>5,254,946,862.00</td>
<td>54,785,690,445.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>59,806,588,124.00</td>
<td>6,594,279,159.00</td>
<td>66,400,867,283.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>96,975,333,760.00</td>
<td>15,597,453,761.00</td>
<td>112,572,787,521.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>101,392,333,760.00</td>
<td>5,250,000,000.00</td>
<td>106,642,333,760.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: The Sunday Punch, June 7, 2009 (Cited in Anyebe, 2009:69).*

From the above table, even a cursory look at the “recurrent” column – which has to do with administrative costs and the allowances and other privileges of the legislators – would reveal the fact that for Nigeria’s “law-makers”, the emphasis is on their pecuniary interests. These figures even fall short of the amount of resources which the country actually spent on the National Assembly.

It is important to note that members of the National Assembly are paid various entitlements as determined by the Revenue Mobilization, Allocation and Fiscal Commission (RMAFC), the only body empowered by the Constitution of Nigeria to do so. The following table contains the approved remunerations of a Senator in Nigeria.

### Table 3

**The RMAFC Approved Salary and Allowances for Each Senator in Naira**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>S/N</th>
<th>Items</th>
<th>Approved Remuneration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Basic salary</td>
<td>2,484,245.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Hardship allowance at 50% of Basic salary</td>
<td>1,242,122.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Constituency allowance at 200% of Basic salary</td>
<td>4,968,509.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Furniture allowance at 300% of Basic salary</td>
<td>7,452,736.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Newspaper allowance at 50% of Basic salary</td>
<td>1,242,122.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Wardrobe allowance at 25% of Basic salary</td>
<td>621,061.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Recess allowance at 10% of Basic salary</td>
<td>248,424.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Accommodation at 200% of Basic salary</td>
<td>4,986,509.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Utility at 30% of Basic salary</td>
<td>828,081.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Domestic staff at 75% of Basic salary</td>
<td>1,863,184.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Entertainment at 30% of Basic salary</td>
<td>828,081.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Personal assistance at 25% of Basic salary</td>
<td>621,061.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Vehicle maintenance at 75% of Basic salary</td>
<td>1,863,184.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Leave allowance at 10% of Basic salary</td>
<td>248,424.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Per Annum</td>
<td>29,479,749.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A Senator’s Legitimate Salary Per month</td>
<td>₦ 2,456,647.70</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

From the above table, the legitimate total earning of a Senator for a month, as originally determined by the RMAFC, is ₦2,456,647.70, and a member of the House of Representatives too is supposed to earn ₦15,186,875.38 per annum, which translates into ₦1,265,572.95 per month (Amaefule and Larney, 2011, cited in Ajayi, 2012:86). But as outrageous and indefensible as these entitlements are, Nigeria’s legislators have never been satisfied. The 6th National Assembly, for instance, fixed for itself a bulkier pay package, which awarded to a Senator ₦15.18 million per month in salaries and allowances, while each member of the House of Representatives got ₦10.59 million per month or ₦127.18 million per annum (Amaefule and Larney, 2011, cited in Ajayi, 2012:86).

Furthermore, the two houses awarded other allowances to themselves. These included car loans and a severance allowance. As car loan, each Senator got ₦8.1 million while a Representative received ₦7.94 million. At the end of the tenure of the senate, each member was to earn ₦6.80 million as severance package. Each Representative received ₦5.96 million for the same purpose (Amaefule and Larney, 2011, cited in Ajayi, 2012: 86 – 87). They also awarded to themselves Duty Tour Allowance (DTA) per night, when members travel within or outside the country. Within Nigeria, each Senator got ₦23,000 while a Representative was entitled to ₦21,000., but for a tour outside the country, a Senator was paid ₦800 (₦120,000) per day, while a House of Representatives member received ₦550 (₦82,500) (Ajayi, 2012:87). As Ajayi (2012:87) has aptly put it, besides these earnings, members of each House committee collect both sitting and service allowances, which are not within the determining power of the RMAFC. This is apart from the pecuniary benefits from the ministry or parastatals that the committee oversees. It is because of the accruable pecuniary gains from the committee’s membership that members of the two Houses often engage in intensive lobby of the leadership of the Houses to be given plump committees where they can maximize their gains...

It is important to point out that shortly after their inauguration in 1999, the federal legislators made it clear that they were in Abuja to make a fortune for themselves. For instance, Chuba Okadigbo (who later became Senate president) once said that as a Senator, he was neither in Abuja to live in “cockroach hotels” nor “spread poverty” (Awoowede, 2002 cited in Obo, 2004:170). The legislators have indeed fulfilled their promise to enrich themselves at the expense of the Nigerian public. In a lecture he delivered in Lagos in 2010, Itse Segay, a respected Nigerian Law Professor criticized the Nigerian legislators for making themselves the highest paid law makers in the world, earning even more than the United States’ President and the British Prime Minister. According to him, in 2009, a Nigerian Senator earned about $1.7 million per annum while a member of House of Representatives earned $1.45 million. His estimate also put the Nigerian Senate president as earning ₦250 million quarterly and ₦83 million per month while his deputy earned ₦50 million monthly. Moreover, ₦1.024 billion was allocated as quarterly allowance to the 10 principal officers in the Senate, with each of them earning ₦78 million every three months, or ₦26 million per month (Odunlami, 2010: 24., Ademosu, 2012:26).

The above figures were amplified by the governor of Nigeria’s Central Bank, Lamido Sanusi in 2010. In a University convocation lecture, he revealed that Nigeria’s federal legislators consumed 25% of the country’s annual budget. He pointed out that the 2010 recurrent budget stood at ₦500 billion while the recurrent expenditure of the National Assembly stood at ₦136.2 billion, amounting to about 25% of the recurrent budget (Manuaka, 2010: 55). In their researches, Ekeke (2012) and Ezukanma (2012), focusing on the office of Nigeria’s Senate president, agree that the country is being plundered by the legislators. Observing that the current Nigeria’s senate president pays himself at least ₦600 million a year, Ekeke (2012) puts it graphically thus:

What Mr. Mark pays himself in one year is the salary of a US president for ten (yes, ten!) good years. What Nigeria’s number three citizen takes home, legally, in one year, is what the number one citizen of the world’s biggest economy... earns in ten years. Because no president stays beyond eight years in America, it means what David Mark gives himself as earnings in one year is what will pay at least two American presidents – one for eight years and another one for extra two years. That means before Mark
 concludes his four-year term, he would have amassed enough money from our treasury that will pay United States presidents for forty years!...

On his part, Ezukanma (2012) points out that the president of the Nigerian Senate earns eighty four million naira (₦84,000,000) every month, that is, 1,008,000,000 naira (₦1.008 billion) every year, and that the latter’s monthly salary is more than the yearly salary of the president of the U.S.A. He also states that the average Nigerian Senator earns about 10 times as much as an American Senator and more than 4 times as much as the American President. And while expressing his consternation, Ezukanma (2012) angrily asks: “are the men and women that populate the Nigerian legislature not thieves: colourful, puffed up thieves masquerading as legislators?” Most Nigerians know the answer to this question.

An analysis of the following table which contains the earnings of some political office holders in the U.S.A easily reinforces the view that Nigeria is being raped and plundered by its legislators. It also shows the difference between a country that is properly run, and one that is misruled.

### Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>US Dollars</th>
<th>Naira Equivalent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>President</td>
<td>$400,000</td>
<td>₦60m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V. President</td>
<td>$227,300</td>
<td>₦34.1m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaker of the House</td>
<td>$223,500</td>
<td>₦33.5m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority Leader (Senate)</td>
<td>$193,400</td>
<td>₦29.1m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Leader (Senate)</td>
<td>$193,400</td>
<td>₦29.1m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Senators</td>
<td>$174,000</td>
<td>₦26.1m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Majority Leader (Representative)</td>
<td>$193,400</td>
<td>₦29.1m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority Leader (Representative)</td>
<td>$193,400</td>
<td>₦29.1m</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabinet Secretary</td>
<td>$193,400</td>
<td>₦29.1m</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Ezeoke (2010:56) has reported that the British prime minister earns €190,000 per annum (₦43.7 million), and a member of parliament in Britain receives €64,766, an equivalent of ₦14.9 million. This implies that what public service means to the Nigerian legislators is different from what it represents in other climes.

Members of Nigeria’s National Assembly have never pretended about their gargantuan appetite for state-funded comfort and luxury. Amuwo (2012:184), for instance, reminds us that each new House of Representatives spends huge sums of money on operational vehicles and personal vehicles for the members. In 2008, according to him, ₦2.3 billion was spent to procure 380 operational vehicles and personal vehicles for the members. In 2008, according to him, ₦2.3 billion was spent to procure 380 operational vehicles for 89 standing committees, and in addition, Peugeot 407 cars were supplied to the lawmakers at the rate of ₦6.1 million each for individual use. He also points out that at the end of their tenure in 2011, legislators paid a paltry sum of ₦800,000 each and took the cars away. In 2012, The Punch newspaper reported in its editorial that the House of Representatives had approved an increase in their quarterly allowances from ₦15 million to ₦27 million, and that the Senators had earlier awarded themselves ₦15 million each. These sums translated to ₦38 billion for the 360 representatives and ₦19.62 billion for the 109 senators, and these are allowances outside the emoluments prescribed by the statutory body that is empowered to do so (The Punch, March 30, 2012).

Nigeria’s legislators also have the reputation of always unilaterally increasing budgetary allocations meant for their arm of government. A few examples would suffice. The 2000 budget was jerked up from ₦559 billion to ₦677 billion, and out of the additional amount, ₦22.15 billion was exclusively meant for the benefit of the lawmakers., in 2002, a budget proposal of ₦884 billion was sent to the National Assembly but the Senators upped the figure to ₦1.08 trillion, adding a whopping ₦250 billion. These additional funds were always meant for purposes other than the ones that would benefit Nigerians (Bakare, 2005:37). Before the 2013 budget was passed, the National Assembly had
raised it from ₦4.924 trillion to ₦4.987 trillion. A media report attributed to a presidential aide stated that “the National Assembly is asking for extra ₦93 billion as overhead expenses, which they have hidden under constituency projects. This is despite the fact that they had earlier budgeted ₦100 billion for constituency projects” (The Punch, January 31, 2013:17).

Because it is more interested in self-aggrandizement and accumulation of wealth, the National Assembly has abdicated its primary responsibility to the Nigerian people. Multinational companies and other business organizations engage in different anti-social activities and execute various inhuman policies against Nigerian workers., oil companies’ activities have become more destructive on the environment of oil-bearing communities., and telecommunication companies charge extortionate tariffs for very poor services. The tariffs charged by MTN (a South African Company) in Nigeria, for instance, are far higher than what South Africans pay in their country. Indeed, as Ibaba and Nwaorgu (2004:43) have found out, “it is widely known that Nigerians pay the highest GSM tariff in the world”.

But when the people complain, all you hear is: this or that company has been “summoned” to appear before the National Assembly., and after much water has passed under the bridge, the said company continues with its business as usual. In Nigeria, corruption has become a dependable tool of statecraft, and these companies and the political elite know its “usefulness”. This point is captured by Ogbu (2011:27) who reported that it is alleged that the multinational telecommunications company, MTN, gives free monthly recharge cards worth ₦7,500.00 and ₦10,000.00 to every member of the House of Representatives and every Senator. Another cogent evidence that the National Assembly has failed in the performance of its statutory duties can be seen in the huge number of abandoned federal governments projects across the country. As a leading Nigerian newspaper recently put it,

...had the National Assembly been alive to its responsibilities since 1999, the country would not have had over 11,886 abandoned projects, according to a report by the Presidential Project Monitoring Committee... The country reportedly needs about N7.8 trillion to complete these projects (“Editorial” in The Punch, January 9, 2013).

The fact that the National Assembly has failed the nation is reflected in the general poor state of the country.

(D) Conclusion

In the preceding passages, an attempt has been made to draw attention to the fact that since 1999, members of Nigeria’s national legislature have neglected their primary responsibility of law – making and other oversight functions, and have rather concentrated on the pursuit of pecuniary gains. It has been demonstrated that despite the fact that over 70% of Nigerians live in crushing poverty and misery, a huge percentage of Nigeria’s wealth is spent on the members of the National Assembly, and this, in our opinion, is not only immoral and undemocratic but also unfair and unjust.

In an interesting analysis, Elaigwu (2004:61-62) surmises that in the political terrain, we have three groups of politicians, namely, “politicians”, “political contractors”, and “political touts”. The “politician”, in his view, is one who is dedicated to politics and seeks to acquire and use power in the interest of his electorate – for the maintenance of law and order, provision of welfare, and the pursuit of the interest of the State in relations with other states, etc. The “political contractor”, to Elaigwu, is a businessman in the political terrain, for whom democracy is tolerable nuisance, which provides greater access to resources. To the “political contractor”, the ends of democracy and values are unimportant even though he may be shouting them at public fora. The “political tout”, according to Elaigwu, is the hireling of the contractor and does his bidding, even if it involves maximum dispensation of violence. From our presentation in this paper, it is clear that members of Nigeria’s National Assembly from May 1999 to date belong to the class of “political contractors” since they have clearly shown that they are only interested in cornering public resources to themselves.

It is glaring that those who have occupied seats in Nigeria’s legislature since 1999 do not deserve to be addressed as “Honourables” because their actions and perceptions of public service are
...a legislator who is selfish, who seeks his own pleasure arrogantly in pursuit of self
approval, who pursues wealth ruthlessly by dedicating his time and services not to the
business of law making but to the daily increase of his bank balance through duplicity,
thief, and all forms of criminal practices, including murder of political opponents, is
definitely not a candidate for integrity...(Makinde, 2009:37).

The findings of this essay have been reinforced by a report by The Economist magazine which
revealed that Nigerian federal legislators with a basic salary of $189,500 per annum ($30.6m) are the
highest paid lawmakers in the world. Quoting data from the International Monetary Fund and The
Economist magazine of London, the study looked at the lawmakers’ basic salary as a ratio of the
Gross Domestic Product per person across countries of the world, and it was established a Nigerian
lawmaker’s basic salary (which excludes allowances) is 116 times the country’s GDP per person of
$1,600. This is estimated to be 52 per cent higher than what Kenyan legislators, who are the second
highest paid lawmakers, earn (Ameh, Josiah, Abioye, Alawiye, and Adesomoju, 2013:27). It should
be remembered that the reported figure does not include a shipload of allowances; it does not include
bribes; it does not include vast extortion fees that the legislators collect from nominees whose
appointments require the parliamentarians’ confirmation; it does not include contracts (Olumhense,
2013).

Any political system or mode of governance that tolerates or encourages the appropriation of a
country’s commonwealth for the benefit and comfort of a few people while the vast majority of the
masses live in want and penury is an anathema and unacceptable.

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