SCEPTICAL PUBLIC, PUBLIC MANAGERS AND THE DECLINE OF MORAL PUBLIC ON NIGERIA'S PUBLIC SPACE

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tion), Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), Provost of the
College of Medicine, Deans of Faculties of Science and Arts,
Dean of the Postgraduate School, Deans of other Faculties
and of the Students, Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen.*

I stand on the platform of Science to speak to a science of
human relations; that which through its interpretive
paradigms is equally well-rooted in the humanities. I speak
today to, 'SCEPTICAL PUBLIC, PUBLIC MANAGERS
AND THE DECLINE OF MORAL PUBLIC ON
NIGERIA'S PUBLIC SPACE', as the summary of some of
the significant publications in my academic career, a proposal
to a new understanding of our society, and an insight to my
contribution to knowledge. I owe some inspiration to Karin
Barber and her discourse on public culture (1997, 2007), to
John B. Thompson (1995) on the media, and to the philoso-
pher Jurgen Habermas, for ideas on the relationships between
publics and the public space. As they may them-selves
acknowledge, my position is a radical departure from theirs
and, in this wise, a distinctive contribution in its own right. I,
therefore, welcome to this assembly the public managers
presiding over this discourse and the sceptical public seated
before me, thinking about what I would say, and already
putting up some insinuations about my person and
competence. I doubt if the moral public is represented here,
but if, per chance present, let me cautiously extend my
greetings to them as well.

One of the intractable challenges of a 21st century
developing nation is that of managing democracy. A Western
construct, now sold as a global concept, and imperially
imposed as a *sine qua non* of development, developing
nations grapple with it as a special challenge to the norms of
tradition and global acceptability, not just because of the
sensitivity of the West and the moral, political, and economic
insulation that she imposes by its absence, on nations, in
some instances, but equally the wish of these nations to reject

their past as inadequate and problematic without it. They practise democracy, as it were, as a social process, initiated by the inauguration of democratic structures that would provoke and supply the necessary answers to questions of individuality, collectivity, and rights presumed under the notion. The dynamic frame of reference, of what democracy is, accounts for many of the crucial properties of policy, accountability, ideological symbols and associations: that is, in the multivocalness of what otherwise is a univocal concept, diversity, ambiguity, open- and close-mindedness, and primacy of feelings and willing are equally entertained over contrary thinking.

I will argue in this lecture that while democracy has opened up space for more public participation in decision making, and specifically provided the opportunity to challenge the authority for more inclusiveness and social reckoning, which takes into serious consideration different capabilities and needs, it has also become a factor in the cultivation of a resistance culture which manifests principally as scepticism and social rejection of persons and ideas and holds every account and performance in suspect. The increasing dominance of the sceptics on the public space ironically correlates with a decline in the population of the moral public; that is, of those with the moral capital to define the orientation of strategic influence and leverage on divisiveness and antagonism, and raise the moral imagination for new origination of development. The reason is that, the moral public itself is being rubbished by the doubts on their integrity by the sceptical public, and by their own corruption, leaving them vulnerable to all kinds of insinuations on their persons, status and propositions. Few, now, can be trusted to mediate conflicts, and the country moves dangerously towards the precipice.

Basically, in Nigeria's evolving political and development culture, the growing cynicism or scepticism on the public space about governance and development is triggered off and tailored to claims of being democratic or wanting to

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be, and the tendency for democracy to ramify into various and varied semantic systems, while its multivocalness, ungrappled, allows for groups and individuals to relate to the same signifier or instrument in a variety of ways, sometimes contradictory and confusing. Our take is that, uneasy apprehension of the rooting, or loss of democracy, informs the rise of public scepticism and the assault on seemingly harmonious ideologies, cosmologies, legal codes and political institutions. It ought not to be this way, but the apparent scepticism, however, masks a deep recognition of human freedom with a veiled threat, even though it may be a useful antidote to those moves and initiatives that subject all human actions to the powerful will, to which feeling and right are ancillary.

Recently, literature and intellectual musings on governance have been concerned with the role of the public in managing development and cultural process. Karin Barber argued persuasively about the public as a specific history; determination, and forms of constitutionality and relations serving a crucial role in the appreciation of art, cultural transmission, and development. It is her common view that a public provides a rich basis for identifying the social capital and manipulation of ideology, and is instructive on the contrived events which cast it in the role of a watchdog, feared and hated in a respectable society. The publics—since there are many in a society—are engaged in all kinds of activities, and not in the least those of audience to information, public drama and other performances, discussants of public related issues, and organizers of support for and against positions, sometimes led by a capricious individual or group desire rather than the right social or cultural concerns. There is no denying that this renewed interest in the public creates curiosity about the nature of the connection between culture, cognition and perception, and between these and democracy, as these connections are clearly revealed in public affairs.

In Nigeria, where the major public affair is how to relate democracy to development, the challenge and contest is among three major players: the sceptical public, the public managers, and the moral public. The managers survey the public space to monitor and direct development, analyse situations, and devote special attention to ideas and ideals, and to the contextual differences between planned and spontaneous forms. Their role in one regard is administrative, as when they preside over ceremonial occasions and institutions such as this, and on the other hand symbolic, as to extol virtues and promote harmony between contending parties. But then, they hardly rise to the level of the moral public that serves as the ultimate critical and binding authority, and a conflict resolution body endowed with social responsibility and accountability that a composite community can develop. There is, of course, an interchange of roles and status between the two public domains, such that the public manager can also be a member of the moral public. So it is that there is also the possibility of a member of the moral public losing significance and relevance (what is termed *popularity*) and acting only on the public space as a public manager. S/He could even drop further into the sceptical public circles and refuse to play any or both roles. Such a drop in social cognition is not rare, but it comes with some indignity in the sense that such a person could be declared a *persona non grata* in some social circles, more as a result of the publics having lost confidence in him or her. Therefore, he could be refused the role of a public manager when he desires it and even be sneered at as lacking the morality for leadership or public office.

The membership of a moral public involves the immersion of most of private self totally in public affairs, resolving differences of opinion in the public, and without the slightest suggestion of selfishness and instrumentality. The moral public is empowered by society with the ritual of renewal and affirmation of "national/community ideology, repeated several times in a community life, and finds itself

within organizational modality primarily because it charts such paths and passages that others would leave to chance or consider a risky business" (Myerhoff 1975).

The democratic society, as that in Nigeria, offers numerous examples of ideology that contend for loyalty in circumstances which confront the necessity for shared meaning and violate the democratic ideology in two ways: that there must be a consensus, and truth must be discernible. The ideological contention has merely resulted in lack of consensus and the peddling of lies. Given these realities, individuals involved in such contentions must be ready to confess they have fallen short of the ideal, when it is necessary to do so, chastise themselves as King David, the biblical hero, often did, and repent, with pledges to do better next time. This becomes of course, difficult for the sceptical public, always unable or un-willing to transcend their adopted positions and much willing to fight for the enthronement of their position than accept that of others. Within the context of this development, what this amounts to is that they would not even mind if lies are paraded as truth and society becomes engulfed in conflict that seems intractable, as long as the moral public failed, by repositioning the truth, in the active role of mediation and reconciling differences in opinions.

The crisis in the Nigerian judiciary, of late, brings home the varied dimensions of the latent moral crisis both related to and inseparable from social and political crisis in the Nigerian society. The sceptical publics have had a great role to play in its unending scenario. The Nigerian judiciary, as many writers that comment on the Salami-Katsina-Alu imbroglio have noted, is on trial; one that has to do with morality and bureaucratic norms. Salami was the President of the Nigerian Court of Appeal while Katsina-Alu was the Chief Justice of Nigeria. The former occupied the lower rung of the hierarchy to the latter on the judicial administrative scale. The imbroglio finally brought into the open the scepticism Nigerians have nurtured for a long time on the integrity of the judicial system they have watched over the years characterized by

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judges pandering to politicians' wishes. There had been rumours, too, of many of them being lobbied into giving unnecessary injunctions, and common is the insinuation of bribery that cumulatively provoked Tayo Agunbiade of *The Compass* (August 26, 2011:47) to ask the following rhetorical questions bordering on scepticism: "Can we get back to those old days?" "How can the corridor of the judiciary be swept clean of this mess?" An equally disenchanted *Nigerian Tribune* in its Friday Edition of 26th August, 2011, made the following remarks on what it described as the mess in the judiciary: "Judiciary at a crossroad"; "Salami: End of an era?"; "Messy judicial affairs in Retrospect"; "What becomes of judiciary?"; "Ayo Isa Salami: A judge and his many controversies"; and ended with putting a question mark on the judiciary. These screaming headlines in the papers highlight and explore what happens to a community when public managers fail and divisiveness, conflict and competition, arise in an ideological milieu with a confused sense of morality.

The community was divided for Salami and Katsina-Alu along political lines, with the government opposition in support of Salami's actions while pro-government forces were against him. Salami had alleged that his administration of the judiciary was meddled with by Katsina-Alu, substantiating his case with alleged CJN interference in the Sokoto governorship appeal case. But Salami himself was in the eye of the public storm on the allegation that subsequently became a petition, that he was corruptly influenced in two appeal cases by the opposition against the incumbent powers in Osun and Ekiti. The Nigerian Judicial Council (NJC) sat on the petitions, with Justice Dahiru Musdapher presiding. Katsina-Alu, who should have presided as the CJN, excused himself to avoid conflict of interest. The panel cleared the CJN of the allegations levelled against him by the PCA and indicted the PCA for having lied under oath. It, however, cleared the PCA of the allegations of financial inducement and the conviviality levied against him by the governors relieved of their positions by the judgment in the cases

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involving them. The facts led to the setting up of another panel headed by Justice Ibrahim Auta of the Federal High Court. The panel recommended that the PCA should apologize to the CJN for false complaints. He refused and went to court. The NJC then recommended to the President of Nigeria that he should be relieved of his post. The President did just that; and the sceptical public took to the streets.

Whether they were right to do so or not is not the issue for discourse in this paper, since it is well within the norms of democracy, of right. It is instructive to note, however, that nowhere in the story did the moral public play a significant role in the conflict resolution because those who should, have as well, become co-opted into the fold of the sceptical publics, speaking on behalf of one or the other of the combatants. The lines of division were clear, as the sceptics situate their positions on the axis of whether this is an institutional crisis or interpersonal conflict; an administrative flaw or a matter of ideological difference and morality. The sceptics have their own truths, which correspond to an experience of their own—namely, their experience is unique and unassailable. The public managers had presumably had their integrity doubted as the conflict acted out as a systematic suspension of familiar reality and regulation despite the highly structured and traditional nature of the judiciary. For all its disorderly possibility and expression as demonstrated in protests on the streets, and an avowed intention of anchoring democracy, individual freedom, and rule of law, scepticism in the Nigeria style, seems to be unregulated as a cultural justification of truth and reliability, and anchor of consensus.

It is equally significant to know that the conflict started as a disagreement among the public managers, here exemplified in the offices of the PCA, CJN and the NJC, and the sceptical public merely made familiar but dogmatic statements about formal ideologies, and rendered them as adequate accounts for social situations and historical reckoning. Their primal identities were not completely lost in the myriad of dynamics of development; as one discerning observer noted:

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Right now the Labour Congress, the Nigerian Bar Association, the National Association of Nigerian students, the Commonwealth Lawyers Association, the Nigerian Medical Association, and all manners of human rights groups are joined in opposition to the illegality of the NJC and the President. They cannot all be wrong; they cannot all be politically motivated or instigated by the ACN (Action Congress of Nigeria) and other opposition parties. But would commonsense prevail, or is it already too late? (Fagbenle 2011:80).

The sceptical publics, as mentioned, are professional bodies and the political parties that can claim to be in the opposition. Whether they can or cannot be wrong is another issue, and one that is not for discussion here. However, a peculiar character of these sceptical publics is that, they are formed from opposition to official position within and outside of bureaucracies; they think of their opposition as natural and commonsensical, and view any action from the public managers that may come later as rather late, prejudicial, sinister, incompetent and suspicious. The solidarity of these sceptical publics, when and if ever they come together, is inherently negative; but they are individually and collectively unstable in their constitution and reconstitution, and their solidarity lasts only as long as they share the notion of a perceived enemy. Each member, each group, is, fundamentally, free at any time to carve out a sphere of autonomy, to create a space where it can express the creativity, integrity and power denied to it elsewhere on the public space or in the bureaucratic structure maintained by the public managers.

Given the circumstances of error, mistake, indiscretion, instability of the polity, and the inexperience of performers, it is inevitable that the various sceptical publics would clash with public managers; as the bureaucratic organizations in the developing countries are frequently led by strong, opinionated

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men that make it difficult for the dreams of the masses, their subjects, to be realized, for them to achieve many of their demands, or even have access to resources. Members of the opposition, reconstituting at will into sceptical publics, wait to respond to any development, and engage the structure creatively or violently, relying on the play of imagination and the richness of utopian thought for their assault: "The truth value of imagination relates not only to the past but also to the future: the form of freedom and happiness which it invokes claim to deliver the historical reality" (Turkle 1975:87). They act when a potential for repression or disadvantage is perceived in a body of thought and, or action that vigorously voiced the freedom and liberation of man. But their reaction itself always border on the denial of their own or others' humanity as many of what they criticize they also do within their own circles and bureaucracies which is, indeed, a ground to be suspicious of their own motives. Moreover, there is a sense of general will they canvass, which is suspect because the bodies they draw their opinion from are themselves not truly representative of the diverse interests in the body polity.

Since the existence and justification of the sceptical public lie in its oppositional value, which could in fact slip into contempt and disdain for whoever it dislikes, we can also expect the public managers to turn into a sceptical public particularly when their actions are consistently read negatively by some publics, and are rejected and their status have been classified and labelled to impugn a certain level of competence, intent and integrity. But, then as the war goes on, the victims are the unsuspecting public falling into the traps of ignorance, lies, drama of the absurd and ego, thus turning them eventually into a sceptical public

The Unsuspecting Public
When the public manager has become a sceptic, he refuses appointment or promotion for the worker that was perceived to be in the opposition for, who knows, he can be dangerous!

He works on the privileges that are due the opposition and denies him any position within or around his office, for that could be the instrumentality to fight him back later, and hastens the process of a structural or political reform that ensures no immediate threat to his position. The cultural reality in the system, over which he presides becomes oblique, removed, and tendentious; in an apparent effort to satisfy the self or the public he represents, but which results in a drawback, as it puts the established conceptions of merit, standard, and performance into new questions. It is, in fact, the suspicion between the public managers and the sceptical public on performance, reform and morality that breeds most of the conflicts that flow into the public space as discourses and rallies, because both engage each other in an unrelenting effort to prevail, and so work with a certain determination, and in theatres of language, into which a great number of unsuspecting publics are co-opted, and doubtless, ignorantly.

The Public Opinion as Arbiter of Conflict

The conflict within the social system works out in two ways: among the public managers, about authority, responsibility, power and the nature of empowerment, and between them and the sceptical public, about the sense of accountability, responsibility, empowerment and level of corruption. Once the conflict starts, it marks off the intellectual and social landscape of persons and groups, differentiates the field of discourse, and privileges an ontological status of culture and philosophy through which each party traces its position and difficulties in constructing and deconstructing the route and descriptions to the problematic of generating consensus. There is immediately a search for a hero/heroine, figures that indicate contextualized, positional and relational locations, such as Awolowo, Salami, and Katsina-Alu, within the political affiliation, ideological leanings, epistemological perspectives and philosophical orientations they share. The heroic personality is contextualized, in a way as to define the distinctiveness of their position; as each takes account of new

evidences for and against each other that account for the circumstances in which knowledge is valued, and relationships are read subjectively. Positioning themselves as often as they do in paradigms, symbolic complexes, space and time, differentiates them as democrats or conservatives—the two publics that make representations to the society about development from self-declared locations of authority, and benefit, while relativity of views is indicated in their locations of the different and the heroic.

To one group can be brought the charges of treating people as objects, of hearing the words but not the music, and to the second, the case is one of impressionism, of treating people as puppets, of hearing the music and not the word, and, of course, of parochialism. There can be various and varied combinations of the subjectivities. Small wonder that none of the two parties think, right from the start, that the conflict is resolvable even when the legal process is used. Hence, in the Salami/Katsina-Alu imbroglio, even after Salami went to court, the opposition continued to use public protests to register their disenchantment, ostensibly believing that public opinion has more credibility. They may not be totally wrong! But, whose opinions do they have in mind— that of the media they vigorously, insistently but corruptly seek, or that of the ordinary masses outside, as rented crowds?

Yoruba world views, especially those coded in their *Alo*, (folktales), provide a position. These folktales contain the human struggle to reclaim the representations of the self or the collective through trials, conflict, of most often zoomorphic figures. A major catalyst, of what is, in fact, an attempt to locate conflict in an ideological setting and praxis of *positionality* and relativism, is the general dissatisfaction of one or the other in the conflict or even the public with the status-quo, with positivism, and the contextualization of norm and standard. The corresponding embrace of subjectivism and relativism, opens up representation and acts toward interrogation by the sceptical publics. This point has been

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increasingly brought home in the character that *Ijapa*, the tortoise, exemplifies, as one who dares to take on authority, objects to formulaic positions, reconstitutes expectations, transgresses boundaries and subjects all representations to new interpretations. With *Ijapa* in a story, you cannot assume that through one person you can get at the truth and you cannot expect to locate the truth, as you want to, in a particular position; you would have different versions of the truth in the story, in the public domain: as exotic, as comic, as arbitrary, and as legal; but the relevant one is always the choice of the public or the ordinary masses and that itself can be prejudiced, cannot be predicted.

But then *Ijapa*'s story sometimes highlights the value of the sceptical public. Take the example of the *Ijapa-Igbin* (Tortoise-Snail) conflict which centred on the stealing of yams from the latter's farm. *Igbin* is an in-law to *Ijapa*, and both were ordinarily successful in the society. But there was famine, and whereas *Igbin* could survive, *Ijapa* was threatened with not only negative status mobility but also death. One of the options available to him was to steal. And he succeeded for a while doing so until he was trapped and caught by his in-law (sounds uncanny and familiar?). The in-law would not brook the nonsense, which is a violation of the ground norm of decency and integrity. He meted out his punishment, which left *Ijapa* in a sorry state—actually close to death. The passersby that witnessed the scenario at dawn, just immediately *Ijapa* was caught, supported *Igbin*'s penalty for the crime. But by the evening, returning home from the "market" where they had gone to transact their daily businesses, and realizing that *Ijapa*, still serving the penalty, was being brutalized beyond measure and ought to be freed, they reversed their support for *Igbin* and condemned the inhumanity in him. *Ijapa* was freed.

The point is that the moral as well as the physical development that *problematize* representation are critical toward arbitrariness, violation of norms, and conflict, because they immediately create space for multiple realities. Both the

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moralist, sceptical public, and the apologists, the public managers, for instance, that *problematize* space and time, can juxtapose old representations against new ones from the margins. They can, strategically, use the evidence before them as a tool of and for counter discourses of subjects and objects, which are often the base for political and economic exploitation. They do so, positing a difference between "we" and "they" within the larger context of freedom. The contours of moral and physical development move towards the need for freedom as defined by rejection of pain, of lack and of the restriction of voice/movement, as the basis of anticipating or celebrating release from the moorings of structural locations and representations—the opportunity to re-engage represent-ation, through hegemonic presence, created from an authentic position.

Undoubtedly, in any conflict, public opinion matters, and although this may start off as public managers' initiative, and turned into the court of the sceptical public later, the final opinion as we read in the *Ijapa-Igbin* case, finally rests on a moral position that is not basically of the truth of the motivation, or that of the institutional order, but of a construct of an abstract good. Such a truth may or may not be seen in men, in their physicality and the physicality of their situation, but in what proves truly liberating: i.e. the truth that the Jews were once in bondage, that they fought their way to a trophy, the Canaan land; that Nigeria is not developed, that there is pain unrelieved at physical and spiritual levels; that there was a crisis of confidence in Yoruba society, that *Ijapa* stole. "This kind of truth destabilizes identity, de-essentializes representation and renders it heterogeneous, plural and uncertain" (Anyidoho 2006:160).

There are various and varied connections of truth to the public pain anyone or a collective suffer, which are aptly narrated, commented upon, and symbolized in public texts like folktales. It was, in fact, clear to us on the reading of slogans on public vehicles (Lawuyi 1988) that such public identities as related to space of ethnicity and ideology, like

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religion, are destabilized and de-essentialized in the experiences of the pain of the taxi drivers' negative mobility, as well as their experiences in a fluid, unstable, system of negotiation, exchange, and value of man's inhumanity to man. And when we turned to a different text, organized for the media by the elite for their consumption, like Congratulations and Obituaries (Lawuyi 1991), we noticed a shared commonality of pain thoughtfully explored through the influence of complex and dynamic identities grounded on performance and ambition. There is pain also in the universities where, as in the larger society, traps are set up and acknowledgements are written with skewed references betraying denials, exploitation, and scepticism; we asked, who can save us from ourselves (Lawuyi 2006a; 2006b), as we looked into a university culture where parochialism, co-optation and traditionalism serve as substitutes for universality, merit and change. The students protest against the pain they experience in writing their theses or dissertations, in their acknowledgements, and of their institutional deprivations by creating pain for road users as they set up roadblocks (Lawuyi 2004). We are interested in these pains not only because we are forced to agonize on them everyday but also because the epistemological, moral and political dimensions of this pain take on the form of a comic truth querying the absolutist notion of position, self, universality and responsibility we always defend. Their basic grounding, which is on the need for response, responsiveness, and accountability, critically reveals a much needed interventionism as a strategy of relieving pain. Much later in our scholarship, we saw the same evidence of pains in traditional texts like *Oriki* and the folktales; for, apparently, traditional culture was asking the same questions that are of much concern to us now, about human welfare—questions that precipitate a move from the edge of things to their centre and turn into a mode of discourse, invented to display a frantic desire for order and frame, for meaningful answers.

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It is apparent that conflict in the Nigerian system has continued because there is nobody to spare the public from the pain of disputations directed at position, corruption, accountability and relativity and the use, rather than at culture; for if those that criticize the regimes end up, on being given the opportunity to lead, acting as those they had criticized, it is because they are incompetent to vacate a truth and interrogate their culture and nature in the frame of *Ijapa-Igbin* conflict. The culture critique in the story of the conflict is that, the idea of formulating an advantage with respect to a societal, national, cultural or other grouping, runs the risk of essentializing some groups and de-essentializing others. And we are informed by Anyidoho (2006:161):

> However, this is not necessarily problematic if we realize that all social categories we appeal to are essentialist in that they are social and historical constructions (Fuss 1989). The real question is not the nature of these categories but the ends to which they are put.

The sceptical publics, fastly becoming the cynical publics, make arriving at a public opinion difficult by their appeal to discourse of essentializing identity; and, also, an ontological predicating of social categories, and moving them into an absolute, metaphysical justification. This does not mean, however, that society does not need them, the sceptical publics—indeed, as we argued elsewhere (Lawuyi 2012), a character like *Ijapa* would have died for nothing if not for the sceptical public that came to his rescue. But society does not need the pain of what Yoruba would describe as *atenumo*, highlighting same thing often and often in irreconcilable circumstances, to give the greatest credence to a representation and opinion. When the push comes to the shove, how good is the truth being canvassed—without self interest—by anyone?

The Moral Public: The Disappearing Species and the Challenge to Development

Sadly, for as long as the Salami-Katsina-Alu controversy raged, the big men of the society refused to speak directly to the issue, and only did so through surrogate voices. Specifically, there were no comments from leaders like Generals Olusegun Obasanjo, Ibrahim Babangida, and the elite of the military class. There was no intervention from kings who, ordinarily, beat their chests as custodians of culture and the primus interpares. Granted the intellectual class was already compromised through the position of its ASUU (Academic Staff Union of Universities) that favoured Salami, there were still many giants of the class outside the system that could have spoken but refused to do so. The business community failed the same expectation. They were equally silent, maybe because there was nothing business-like in the issue or because they shied away from the possibility of being categorized with others as a community of resistance, opposition (and what this entails for their remaining as a "moral public"). If this is true, it is a genuine fear that other classes may well entertain; and it portends a grave danger to the civil society regarding its stability and sense of truth; i.e. what do we make of a long-standing feud on the public space? However, it is obvious that a serious pre-dilemma they confronted is that of a subject's location in a discourse, as the indicator of his *positionality*.

Basically, the moral public's job is to de-essentialize identity, free it from the entanglements which determine its biases and the biases toward it, create a moral posturing about the truth, which sets people free, and as centre of power and knowledge serve as leaders raising social consciousness to new ideals in the process of harmonizing knowledge, wealth and power with social ends. There was once a time, when such people were a force to reckon with, because of the genuine political liberation they guaranteed for the oppressed and the exploited and their foresight to embark on a well-articulated and consistent agenda of reform. Indeed, at

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various stages of the struggle for freedom and democracy, their residences served as haven for those on the run (of ASUU officials, military rebels and the politicians); their connections became the platform for easy flight of political victims out of the country, their courts the forum of open deliberations involving the civil society, and their wealth the support for community's progressive agenda. The moral public exists in each community, but their influence is restricted only by their reputations as men of vision and moral integrity. Their positions on public issues are not always immediately obvious; deliberately so because they are the courts of the last order, the servants of the ideology to promote trust and restore confidence to the cynical, traumatized and troubled people.

But in their watch, Nigeria has slid further into murky waters of chaos, into a cynical society that lives in doubt of anything there is, including themselves; and into a sneaky feeling of despondency and hopelessness that inexorably erode their cultural self-confidence, shaken to the roots of their universalist self-understanding, to make them all the more aware of their own particularities and limitations. If a Yoruba proverb must be applied, "*agba ki wa loja ki ori omo tuntun wo*" (the elderly in the market straightens the course of things), but not in this circumstance that the elder must himself battle with his crooked posture, a cripple by a defeatist attitude and a lack of will. "*Ori omo ti wo! Ori agba gan ti fe ja!*" (The child's head is already crooked, even that of the elder is about to sever). The real issue is what to make of the historic value of their moral essence that forms the basis of their self-awareness and capability. From the standpoint of the sceptical public, they are morally frail. Wole Soyinka, a strong member of the sceptical public that would easily but dangerously fit into the moral public, points in this direction:

So, perhaps we are all overdue for a corrective, a counter-culture, beginning, naturally, with those who least deserve the collective antidote of post-

humous calumny, since this is a nation that loves to do things upside down, insists that left is right and right, left only to turn it all inside out – between morning and nightfall. (Soyinka 2011: 16)

The impunity of power, corruption and inordinate wealth has created a moral dilemma for Nigeria, and her moral public, and hung on her is a form of revisionism and demonization that has virtually grounded all, including development. In the situation that Nigerians live, the moral public must distance themselves from certain of the extant cultural practices. But, perhaps, there is hope, as one writer highlighted below:

No matter the degree of decadence in which any nation is trapped, there are still always some beautiful ones, even if a microscopic minority, who give hope that a better, saner society is possible. (Ayobolu 2011:64)

Ayobolu, the writer of the quote, did find a moral public after a long search. The search itself has become tedious and requires a painstaking effort in the morass that Ayobolu's fellow writers, on the media pages, joining the sceptical public, have created, shifting our attention from the truth to falsity of propositions, and ideas to personalities, through the advantages and disadvantages of vocabularies. Sometimes I think I am reading literature rather than news, and logic rather than truth. In doing so, public discourse has assumed a literary genre "which exhibits the relativity of significance to choice of vocabulary, the bewildering variety of vocabularies from which we can choose, and the intrinsic instability of each" (McCarthy 1991:23).

The spectre of reality in the Nigerian situation is that the scepticism in the society has enjoined the discourse of plurality, when it is particularly marked by a tendency to

ignore other's standpoint, as it promotes its own brand of historicism and activism. The use of language has also suggested the possibility of people engaging in dubious enterprises such as epistemology that is endorsed as truth, and treating them as patterns adopted for good reasons. The tendency towards classification and stereotyping leaves no room for an objective space to locate the moralist; and in this wise, the rest of the society may still have, ironically, to fall back on and plead with the sceptical public to create that space for a way out of obscurantism and (mis)representations. This is much evident in the quote below:

> It is not all gloom and doom. Efforts are being made by sceptic activist, groups and their partners to address the problem and these efforts are yielding results. (Igwe 2011:64)

The message is directed to witch-hunters, not impossible with sceptics or even the public managers, but it resonates well into other moral fabrics and the quest for problem-solving. It is good to also listen to the writer say:

> A very vital aspect of the enlightenment cam-paign is the sceptical challenge. Renowned sceptics like James Randi have used this facility to clip the wings of purveyors of paranormal and superstitious nonsense. (Igwe 2011:64)

That is, scepticism is, in itself, a challenge to provide evidence, proof or demonstration of what people speak and write, capable of resolving problems; which then takes us to the views of Karin Barber on publics:

> In the fluid, rapidly changing, heterogeneous populations of modern Africa, moralizing dis-courses allow people to convene and consolidate new publics with flexible boundaries that can expand, contract or dissolve according to context. They thus build and rebuild the shared knowledge

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on the basis of which new publics – hetero-
geneous as to dialect, local traditions, political
allegiance, class and religion – can understand
themselves as classes, ethnic groups, nations and
supra-national collectivities. (Barber 2007:168)

I wish to disagree with the essentializing conclusion and
remind us that the *Ijapa-Igbin* conflict serves as a rejection of
this position. But there is a brilliant lead, which as she argued,
starts when sceptics are really concerned with moralizing
discourse as a way of dissolving boundaries and rebuilding
shared knowledge basics, of which a new public, hopefully
the moral public, can emerge whose views on issues can
transcend the essentialized.

Morality belongs more to the public space, because it is
about character and it is about human beings and their
images, as object of public knowledge (Barber 2007). What it
stamps on public discourse is the value of character or image
to the understanding of man, his capability, and his develop-
ment. The sceptic's concern is not irrelevant to the civic
minded ethos of social democratic liberalism to begin with,
particularly as one whose concerns of the self is the renewing
of the pragmatist tradition, but it cannot be assumed to be that
of the moral public because of their critical posture, but
because they are able to relocate the tension between their
radical contextualism in the situatedness of reason, in the real
and the ideal within the domain of developmental social
practice. The moral public offers an alternative to conser-
vative contextualism by organizing communication around
idealizing context-transcending presuppositions. That is why
character matters much to it as epistemological behaviourism
because it has something to offer to all: "the accountability of
subjects, the objectivity of the world and the truth of
statements" (McCarthy 1991:27).

Concluding Remarks

The thrust of our contribution has been that the fault in our development is not in our stars but in our culture, a culture experiencing the gradual death of a moral public and thus of character as model to be embedded in practical context in distinctive ways. We have equally argued that the sceptical public and not the cynical one, has a role to play in directing development, but that this does not make it a moral public, for both roles are kept distinct in culture to serve the public managers in their role of governance. Both serve as checks and balances coextensive with, and, indeed, constitutive of social life generally; the sceptical public checks the public managers, while the moral public supervises the goings-on between the sceptical publics and the public managers. The moral publics are not the typical big men in the ordinary sense of being measured by wealth, position and power. They are big, being in the service of reason, truth, freedom, and justice. There is no escaping the relations and effects of their relevance ultimately, for men must constantly seek after these values, which their society has, regrettably, made into commodity and privatized.

But if the society has *commoditized* and privatized what the Big Men dispense, it has equally warranted the condition under which the public managers fail, by praising them, and participating in their dubious enterprises as epistemology that endorse their non-satisfactory pattern of performance. The public managers, the elite of the system, highly educated and mostly professional, described by Ayandele (1974) as the deluded hybrid of cultures, and by Turnbull (1969) as confused mind of problematic status in developing cultures, parade as isolated minds, bound to fail expectations because they are hunted by the logocentrism of contradiction and power in their ambiguity and identity that seek to bring an end to the philosophical tradition that runs in their blood. They fail because they fail to realize they have to purge themselves of the internal contradiction that runs into inconclusive ends, and equally fail for the arrogance that seeks to exempt them from the contempt tied to the culturally

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variable and historically changeable forms of social practice they advocate. No mater how they think of their performance, most of which fall short of the ideal, anyway, they are the victim of a hybridized culture that seeks to bridge and disengage simultaneously at the same time from other social practices, leaving the gap which arrests their movements toward the ideal. More often under the illusion of their own supremacy, they violate the rights and privileges of others, ironically without remorse, because they have disconnected themselves from the moral which permits a self-reflexivity, cultural commitment, and character that falls into the premises of well-regulated domains, and justifies the validity basis.

We are, of course, in a society now dominated by sceptics and there is no other evidence of this than the level of noise on the public space, the endless disputations we engage in at seminars, conferences, banking halls and on pages of news-papers, the increasing dominance of violence on the streets and in the homes, the abusive language public writers use in the name of freedom, and the disrespect we have for leadership and the system we operate. This is, of course, unexpected, for the sceptical public is, itself, made up of the elite whose culture and orientation we have alluded to in various parts of this essay. The blind fight with the blind. That is the reason for the noise. But even if we were to accept that there are one-eyed members of the community, who wants to have them as children? There are three reasons the field cannot be left entirely to any of them: One, the level of ignorance is increasing among the other masses made to learn half-truths and prejudices that incriminate the opposition—we enjoin you to read our media discourses carefully. Two, the body and mental sensitivity of the public is agitated, destabilized and hurt by the unending disputations raised at every mistake and even credible acts. We hasten to say that that is why some Nigerians are hospitalized today. Third, they have so much politicized public discourse at the expense of the very need of the nation—the belief in the system. That is why an increasing number of the citizens are losing faith in

her. Nothing in nature is perfect, only faith, commitment and hard work make it so!

Undoubtedly, criticism is, indeed, a logical factor in democracy; but the integration of action orientations, via the consensus built following orders, seems no less an alternative to acrimony rested on political prejudices and biases. The most daunting challenge this public, the sceptical public, is unwilling to tackle, and know that it does have the capacity and capability to do, is to move away from its essentializing and subliminal self-destructive discourse and submit to the self-determination of the people which, at present, is last in the pluralism of ideas of the sceptical publics.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, the analysis done here delivers some painful implications. First, the sceptical publics are growing by the day and what this implies is that we can expect less rigorous and more acrimonious debates on the public space when people are unable or un-willing to examine the good and relevant in the opinions of others. In essence, I see the public growing, without a faithful commitment to the Freedom of Information Act (FOI), in ignorance, particularly as relevant facts are twisted, manipulated, distorted for the justification of unwarranted positions. The gullible public are painfully carried along a stream of lies, half-education, and immorality, which they are apt to trust because the operators are elite in the image of the biblical older man of God from whom truth and dignity have since departed and only act in the glory of the old self. Second, as the sceptical publics grow, there is much pressure on the public managers to walk cautiously, think much more carefully, and act much more reluctantly. This could be good in itself except that they are also likely to receive less praise and acknowledgment from the sceptical public who *ab initio* had consigned them to a position of distrust. In the final analysis, there may be nobody who knows how to do things correctly.

Third, the pattern in the growth of the kind of sceptical publics we have now means we may have problems recognizing the moral publics in our situations. This is like in science cancelling the intervening variable. This may have no

dire consequence on some experiments, but those who need it are permanently crippled. In sociological experience, there are some societies where, as in the Western countries, the moral public is not so conspicuous as social agencies, but they are heroic societies that Nigeria is not, and can refer their experiences to the particular celebrated national heroe's/heroine's act, work, governance, statements and the like as adopted by the parties for meaning, direction, consequence, and resolve. What this implies is that as the influence of the moral public declines, there must be a thorough search for genuine national heroe's/heroines; the conservatives in Nigeria have failed us in this regard. But, how do you get that in a society increasingly dominated by scepticism and cynicism?

We think the greatest debt a party like the Peoples Democratic Party of Nigeria (PDP) owes Nigeria is to flag a hero to give direction to its thoughts and actions much as the "progressives" had done with Chief Obafemi Awolowo even if many of them cannot correctly quote, read and make sense of his thoughts and emulate his actions. This critical gap continues to deny the relevance of heroism in our public actions, and makes it even difficult to discern the truly heroic which cannot be found in the uncritical choices for national merit awards. It may not be late for the party to tailor its activities to some heroic acts but in the present dispensation, such a decision would suffer from scepticism.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Sir, I have just endeavoured to put across to the public my state of thinking and feeling on the Nigerian project in which I am, as an intellectual, engaged. These thoughts on the paradoxies and contradictions of the Nigerian State attest to gaps in the project and the differences within and between the groups in it. We know that one part is always ignorant of, or uninterested in, or disdainful of, what the other is doing and, by implication, do not work with it to win progress or reform in that sector. This knowledge is one of the challenges of the present enterprise that we must unravel. Also, Sir, I have endeavoured to put across a view of Anthropology as a discipline that is responsive to new and old

developments, and in Nigeria, is concerned with redeeming morality and positioning it for development. I move next, now, to a discussion of the self, an aspect of the inaugural discourse I hesitantly adopt.

Acknowledgements

In 1988, then a budding scholar, Geoffrey Taylor wrote in the *London Guardian* a review of one of my articles, which has since been the cornerstone of my approach to intellectual discourse:

> Anyway, some honour is due to Mr. Lawuyi for giving Sociology a good name...whatever his purpose, and his paper does not omit the customary academic disavowals, he conjures a real world of real people... if this is Sociology one could even read more. Perhaps the subject has advanced since the days when a review of

sociological books in the Economist carried the headline, justified it seemed at the time: taller men have longer trousers. (London Guardian August 1, 1988)

That great historian and friend, Toyin Falola, also wrote:

I was privileged to be associated with Dr. Tunde Lawuyi, then a staff member in the department of Sociology at Ile-Ife, and one of my most devoted colleagues and friends. Dr. Lawuyi is both erudite and prolific, with a cultural understanding far superior to mine. His essays on Yoruba religion and society inspired me to return to the role of culture in the development process, although I have had to reject many of his aggressive interpretations. (Falola 1998: xviii)

I have gone to this extent quoting voices because they are not condescending, opportunistic, prone to tokenism nor trading in intellectualism that materialize as awards, fellowships, or grants (I have deliberately and calculatedly avoided) but are the direct views or insinuations that place me directly in a rank of scholarship, measured me with them and with the current state of knowledge, and is their (status) views of my production and intellectual class without any commitment to them. To the best of my knowledge, these scholars have not changed their impressions of me. I appreciate them not because I need their voices or that of others to define who I am, but to insinuate as to the difference in my scholarship which, inclusive of my Ph.D work on the Seminole Freedmen of America, enjoys a modest attention on the internet and by scholars across the globe.

I have always wanted to do things differently and well, and through such prove a point of racial and social significance. Writing much later on another work co-jointly written with a long-time friend, colleague and formidable scholar of Harvard University Professor J. K. Olupona, a foremost scholar on religions, Professor Rosalind Hackett of

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Harvard University, said, "they are pioneers of a new frontier in the study of religions in Africa" Coming home, that gentle character of sound academic integrity, Professor Idowu Olayinka, former dean of the Postgraduate School, University of Ibadan, now sitting comfortably as the Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Academic), remarked about another work: "One of the things scholars are distinguished by is the ability to choose a seemingly ordinary, commonplace object, event, theme, or phenomenon, and to devote such scholarly rigor to it that not only do its different ramifications become exposed and coherent, its very working becomes both fascinating and predictable. It is the ability to see the ordinary beyond what it appears to be that Professor Lawuyi brings into brilliant display in this lecture as he rigorously and extensively treats acknowledgments an issue that would attract less than a casual remark from many others" (see Lawuyi 2006:vi). He likened me to Albert Einstein the outstanding physicist! Dele Layiwola would follow several years later with "Lawuyi, in his characteristic originality and fervor, has shocked us into a new awareness of the banal and commonplace turned novelty" (2012: vii).

Need we say more on this kind of ego trip that marks our inaugural discourse, adds nothing substantial to it, but nevertheless attests to the positive acknowledgments from solid, brilliant, and world renowned scholars, in my own case inclusive of but not limited to Karin Barber (who prescribes my papers for courses in the University of Birmingham, England), Toyin Falola (a great, fantastic, friend who has dedicated some of his books to me), Mathews Ojo (who, in spite of his international status as Nigeria's foremost scholar on Pentecostalism, would hardly be satisfied with what he writes until I have read it), Sola Akinrinade (the Vice-Chancellor, who though an historian would search libraries locally and abroad for my publications to read), Dele Layiwola (the alter-ego, and one more than a friend, but a brother, who wrote the foreword to my forthcoming book. I acknowledge his wife too), Tunde Agbaje-Williams (my elder

brother, who would like to protect me by insisting that, in Nigeria, only University of Ibadan is good for me!), Jimi Adesina (who felt I should be in the Sociology Department of this University rather than the Anthropology Department after reading my works, and writing a critique to one of them), Femi Taiwo (the wonderful, highly valued cerebral friend and brother in Philosophy who christened me *Ojogbon* when I was just an ordinary lecturer) and H.O.D. Danmole (that brilliant Ilorin/Lagos scholar who seeks my views even on the mundane!). All of them and others, who are *egbon* and *aburo* but no *baba* and *iya*, too numerous to mention here (and mostly located in the Departments of Archaeology and Anthropology, Philosophy, History, English, Communication Arts, Institute of African Studies, etc. of U.I) have created the pride in me that I detest and daily wrestle with; but, still, I appreciate your giving me the energy to desire to be different. To those students and colleagues who take me as their intellectual father, the sounding board of their ideas, stars in their own endowments (they know themselves), I am so glad I met you, and so proud of you. I await your own inaugural lectures in due course. My spirit prays for you and in this spirit I see you as much greater than I. I have set you on a path I am sure you cannot regret. Indeed, as my spiritual mentor and a man I have never met, never been in his church, "The Synagogue" but share his philosophy of greatness and service, based on faith, hope and charity, T.B. Joshua, would say: the best in you is yet to come!

To the public managers here seated, I want you to know I have made my own small and modest contributions to knowledge by separating public discourse as a genre, defining it as a sociological enterprise, unravelling its anthropological roots, and pioneering the study in Nigeria. I have successfully linked publics with public space through culture so that we can better appreciate the dynamics of politics, performance, and development. I have led others in initiating research in anthropology of media and disaster in Nigeria because I am troubled by their impacts on human potentialities and think

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many institutions and colleagues would recognize the difference I have made in defining and refining knowledge on human capability by examining public morality, anthropologically, and administering anthropology, anthropologically. Let me say to the sceptical publics what a great friend, Senator Iyiola Omisore, and I share in common, and make him deserving of my respect, in spite of what his critics would say: For me titles, wealth and position count less; but my motives, desires and concerns about man and development should speak to you about my values and wish for you and my nation. My thoughts are about the good, the best and the lovely. Those in my Department know this, and I am grateful to every one of them.

On a final note, I recognize you all. All is well. Thank you and God bless you all.

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BIODATA OF
PROFESSOR OLATUNDE BAYO LAWUYI

Professor Olatunde Bayo Lawuyi, a native of Iresi in Boluwaduro Local Government of Osun State, was born in Awe, Oyo State, on 9th June 1952. He specialized in Socio-cultural Anthropology after a training that started at University of Ife, now Obafemi Awolowo University, which earned him a B.Sc degree, and later an M.Phil degree of the University of Jos. At University of Illinois, Urbana-Champaign, U.S.A., he earned the M.A and Ph.D degrees in Anthropology. His initial interest was in political anthropology, particularly ethnic studies, and the focus was ethnic relations in America. He is one of the very few African scholars that have studied the American culture, anthropologically, for a Ph.D degree. The primary interest was the relationship between African-Americans and Seminole Indians.

Since he returned to Nigeria in 1985, he has taught and researched on African development, popular culture, media and tourism. He has well over 100 journal articles, and chapters in books, to his credit. A substantial number are in the leading journals in his field. They are the subjects of consultation and reviews by scholars, both in literary texts and on the internet. He has written 4 books, which are in print, and some others may come out soon.

Professor Lawuyi is a recipient of Oyo State Scholarship, and a Federal Government Fellowship. He taught at Obafemi Awolowo University, rising to the level of Senior Lecturer, before going to serve as Pioneer Head and Professor of the General Studies Department of Ladoke Akintola University of Technology, Ogbomoso, from where he left for University of Transkei, Umtata, South Africa (now Walter Sisulu University), as Head and the first professor ever appointed. He arrived in University of Ibadan in 2001 as Visiting Professor of Anthropology in the Department of Archaeology and Anthropology, and became an appointed professor later.

He is the first anthropologist to reach that status in the Department. Since 2010, he has been serving as the first Professor of Anthropology to head the Department. He is, fundamentally, an institution builder and a pioneer or foundation-laying scholar in all the places where he has worked. He is the mentor to many students and staff.