

# Anambra's messy theatre

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*By Okey Ndibe*

After a short interregnum of relative tranquility, Anambra is on the cusp of being turned yet again into a turf for depraved political games. From the look of things, the same misbegotten cast that made the state a theatre of absurdity and anarchy is bent on recreating a nightmare. They'd like to see Anambra renew its lease on infamy and shamelessness. The vultures are hovering over the state, determined to cast it back to the annals of anarchy.

It is no surprise that President Olusegun Obasanjo's official visit to the state became the occasion for the resurrection of this nightmarish agenda. Many of us regard him as the guiding spirit, even instigator, of some of the most reprehensible episodes in the politics of the state.

Obasanjo's design is to hand control of Anambra state and its resources to the Uba clan, especially to the reclusive Andy Uba who for more than seven years has served as the president's most trusted factotum. Hardly seen in public, Andy Uba is nevertheless known as the president's left-hand man, a veritable Man Friday whose cold efficiency rather suits Obasanjo's brand of amoral politics. In gratitude for services rendered, the president, it has been public knowledge for some time, fantasizes about installing Andy Uba as governor of Anambra come 2007.

But between Uba's dreams and the president's fantasy stands the reality that both men are held in the highest contempt in the state, and deservedly so. Uba's odds of winning an election in the state must be negligible.

So what to do about Uba's electoral deficits? Arrange a farcical theatre during Obasanjo's visit to the state last week. In a doubtless rehearsed skit, most members of the state assembly moved an asinine motion asking the president to "release Dr. Andy Uba for the good people of Anambra State who are eager to see him emerge as the next executive governor of the state, come 2007, since he has acquired all the necessary experience to reproduce the achievements of the federal government here in Anambra State." In his equally jejune response, Obasanjo, according to one newspaper, "expressed happiness for the maturity exhibited by the assembly members." On the so-called plea to release Uba for state duties, "Obasanjo said that he would give the lawmakers a reply at the appropriate time but noted that ascendance to the post of governor or any elective post is mostly divine."

This whole invocation of divinity by morally decrepit men must tax God's patience. Perhaps mistaking the president for god, the legislators acted with alacrity. Within hours of Obasanjo's departure, they served an impeachment notice on

Governor Peter Obi, the man currently standing in the way of the emperor's anointed son.

The kindest thing to say about Obasanjo and these legislators is that they have no sense either of shame or irony. A president capable of shame would have been reluctant to thrust himself in the faces of people whose lives he's helped make hellish. If he had a sense of irony, then he would have displayed greater circumspection in his public utterances and conduct.

Can these legislators look at themselves in the mirror and claim to be acting out of conviction, not greed and blind ambition? Do they for a moment believe the canard that Uba, whose posters they unctuously plastered all over the state capital, is an impressive governorship prospect? Without mobile police to protect them, can these desecrators of the land dare enter a public space in Anambra and sing the praises either of the president or Uba? Are they so bereft of moral funds they don't care about the sacrilege of their actions in championing Uba and seeking Obi's impeachment?

Since 1999, when this current misshapen experiment alleged to be democracy was inaugurated, Anambra has been the staging ground for some truly absurd and ridiculous political dramas. In 1999, the misnamed Peoples Democratic Party put a man in the state's Government House who, despite his stellar academic certificates, was a certifiable sham. He frittered away the state's resources in handouts to a small band of parasites in Abuja and elsewhere, leaving nothing to

meet the state's obligations to its residents.

This man, Chinwoke Mbadinuju, given to messianic delusions, asked his groaning victims to chant the mantra: "It shall be well with Anambra." When famished pensioners complained about their unpaid entitlements, he stared them down and then waved them out of his sight. In fact, he made light of their misery, their destitution that he had inflicted. He wondered aloud why they had not sired offspring living in America or Europe and able to remit some hard currency to cushion the hardness of life. Under his watch, school children were subjected to a full year of no studies because unpaid teachers refused to wait on heaven to pay them.

In 2003, the PDP plunged Anambra into a different kind of crisis. The party reclaimed the governorship in an election so patently rigged that the proper name for it became general "selection." A young upstart named Chris Uba proclaimed himself the godfather of everybody who'd been declared victorious on the party's slate. Flaunting his connections to the president and sodden with power, he tried to pocket the then governor, Chris Ngige, demanding that billions of naira of state funds be transferred to him. When Ngige demurred, Uba marshaled an Assistant Inspector-General of Police as well as truckloads of armed police officers to abduct the recalcitrant governor and forcibly remove him from office.

The nation convulsed with outrage, legal luminaries joining other citizens to insist

on Uba's arrest and trial. But a president who hardly meets an illegality he doesn't relish, commanded his party to declare the impunity "a family affair." Emboldened by the president's support, Uba's impunity knew no bounds. In November of 2004, hoodlums loyal to him swept through the state in trucks, torching public buildings and vehicles. Their orgiastic arson left in its wake damage estimated at thirty billion naira.

The arsonists were captured, on television lens no less, enjoying a free run of the state, often accompanied by the police! The import was unmistakable: the wholesale destruction of public property had the blessing of the presidency. And the point was to force Ngige into doing business with the power-drunk godfather. Nothing less than the then governor's submission and unconditional surrender would have been acceptable to Uba and his sponsors.

In the end, Ngige was removed, not because he surrendered to Uba/Obasanjo, but because Peter Obi, the true winner of the 2003 election, secured judicial validation of his mandate. Obi's tenacious pursuit of his mandate earned him barbs from many critics who felt that Ngige was doing well, and should be encouraged in his defiance of a misguided godfather and a president unfazed by evil. But many also admired Obi's insistence that he was not at liberty to abandon an office that was entrusted to him in 2003. Though impressed by Ngige's steely resistance as well as his visible achievements in road construction, I pitched my camp with the

latter group. Some of my friends accused me of naivety and puerile idealism, but I still feel comfortable with my decision.

Still, it galls to see a president widely seen in Anambra as personifying perfidy take the podium to inveigh against Ngige. Unaware that his very words indicted him, the president told an audience that the state's problems owed to the take over of the political environment by people who did not have the quality of eminent persons from the state such as "Azikiwe, the Asikas, the Mbanefos and many others." Is the president hounding Ngige and Obi as a way of sneaking Andy Uba into office? Does Obasanjo believe, then, that Uba is not only superior to Ngige and Obi but also the intellectual and moral equal of Azikiwe?

Ngige can take comfort, at least, in being mentioned in the same breath as the Great Zik. The president should be worried that he is often measured, and unfavorably, against Sani Abacha and Ibrahim Babangida.

## Readers' Favorites

1. Nigeria's savaged children
2. The war we ordered is here
3. What I saw in Nigeria
4. Murder Incorporated
5. No Longer at Ease
6. My Vote for Andy Uba
7. Achebe, Soyinka, and the Nigerian Mess
8. My Biafran Eyes
9. My Father's English Friend
10. A female speaker's manly vices
11. The education of Umar Yar'Adua
12. The triumph of barbarism
13. Achebe's apt censure
14. Andy Uba Goes to War (1)
15. Andy Uba Goes to War (11): What OBJ taught Uba
16. Why I Take It Personally
17. Andy Uba's highest bid
18. The folly of the Nigerian elite
19. Fraud Incorporated
20. Etiaba's father, not mine
21. Our laughing president
22. Fayose and God's response
23. My 419 Call
24. A feud of three bulls
25. More reasons to ignore Soyinka
26. Who does Obasanjo work for?

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### About Okey Ndibe



Okey Ndibe is a novelist, poet, political activist from Yola, Nigeria. He is the author of *Arrows of Rain*, a critically reviewed novel published in 2000. Ndibe relocated to the United States in 1988, where he founded *African Commentary*, a magazine described as "award-winning and widely acclaimed." Ndibe is also a published poet, and a former associate professor of English at Bard College at Simon's Rock. He currently teaches fiction and African literature at Trinity College in Hartford, CT. Okey Ndibe is finishing his second novel titled *Foreign gods, incorporated*.

#### Speaking Engagements

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