

Etiaba's father, not mine

Wednesday, 22 November 2006

By Okey Ndibe

Virginia Etiaba appears beguiled by the false glow of being identified as Nigeria's first female governor, but she is a pathetic usurper and poor advertisement for Nigerian women. Nigerian women are every bit as capable as their male counterparts to take on the burden of governance, but they hardly deserve the sad brand of pioneer that Mrs. Etiaba represents. In permitting herself to be smuggled into office through a process tainted with illegality, judicial impunity and legislative legerdemain, Mrs. Etiaba has brought a dampening pallor to what might have been a moment of gender triumph.

Etiaba has herself to blame for consenting to be cast in a political drama calculated to truncate democratic ethos. When a renegade group of Anambra legislators, obeying marching orders from the presidency, unconstitutionally announced the impeachment of Governor Peter Obi and asked Etiaba to take over the reins, she initially rebuffed them. It was a wise, principled and morally intuitive response. It was also an admirable act of moral courage. Had she sustained it, she would have served notice that she was possessed of a moral fiber that could withstand all the blandishment and lure of power and its trappings.

Alas, Etiaba's moral compass served her for less than twenty-four hours before she flung it aside and shamelessly sneaked back to the soiled altar to present herself for investiture. It was a treacherous act by a woman who ought to have known better. How could somebody who spoke such moral vigor so insouciantly betray her ideals? What actuated this sordid volte-face? Was it greed, or else some other frailty of character?

Whatever the source of her bizarre, baffling and tragic choice, Etiaba has now more than earned the opprobrium of all decent people. She has squandered her moral capital in pursuit of ephemera, a deal with the Devil itself. Has she clinched the title of first female governor in Nigeria's history? History, I hazard, is likely to remember her as Nigeria's first female double-speaking, back-stabbing gubernatorial opportunist. And also as the first woman to prove that, when it comes to blindly grasping for power, Nigerian women may be as adept as their men. Not exactly the kind of exemplar with which morally steadfast women would wish to be encumbered. Her sponsors, those drumming the tragic music to which she is dancing, may deceive her all they want, but Etiaba will make a poor candidate for public adulation.

On the heels of her assumption of discredited office, Etiaba went calling on President Olusegun Obasanjo at his mischief-manufacturing redoubt called Aso Rock. She was escorted in by Emmanuel Nnamdi Uba, Obasanjo's erstwhile factotum on "domestic" matters, a man the president intends to "select" into office as the next governor of Anambra state. Like the president, Uba is beset by deep ethical deficits, one evidence of which is the scandal of his illegal conveyance on a presidential plane of \$170,000 in cash into the United States. Uba is also widely seen as the real mastermind of the 2003 abduction of then Governor Chris Ngige. Many regard him as the author of the three-day orgy of destruction that swept through Anambra in November, 2004.

Etiaba came across as ignorant of the terrible symbolic significance of her visit to Obasanjo, and in the company of the execrable Uba. Emerging from the meeting, she spoke to the press about the purpose of her visit in accents that further betrayed her vacuity. The Vanguard of November 15 carried the headline: "Uba, Etiaba, Obasanjo in loyalty talks". A sub-headline read: "I have come to pledge my loyalty to Baba, says Etiaba". Emerging from the meeting, Etiaba told reporters that her governorship was "the will of God." Hear Etiaba: "How I became governor is the act of God. It is God's making. I am a child of circumstance. Truly, how I became governor, only God can tell." Then she made the obligatory noise about "moving Anambra forward" and her determination to institute "good governance."

On the prospect of her own impeachment, Etiaba said she "never prayed for that" (as if Obi knelt down day and night to importune God for impeachment). She also reached for the language of maternal sentimentality: "I intend to work with [the legislators] for the smooth development of the state. They are my children. They will understand me...I will work with them as a mother and children for the progress of Anambra state."

This kind of prattle only goes to prove that Etiaba is gifted in the deployment of woolly reasoning to justify a manifestly odious choice. In scandalizing God's name, she also demonstrated a facility for cloaking perfidious conduct with the mantra of divine determinism. Her invocation of God's name could be dismissed as, well, silly conceit. But what conclusions might we draw from the explanation she offered on her visit to Aso Rock? She was quoted in the Vanguard as stating: "I came to pledge loyalty to the president because he is the father of the nation."

Etiaba's parley with reporters revealed a disturbing poverty of judgment on her part. Since when did the constitution or political convention require that governors pledge loyalty to the president? I don't recall that she once conveyed the same pledge of fidelity to the people of Anambra state. In fact, her willingness to grovel before Obasanjo points, directly rather than obliquely, to the illegal process that contrived the absurdity of her claim to be a governor. My suspicion is that, when Etiaba spoke so expansively about God's will, she

rather meant Obasanjo's will. Her aggrandizement of the president is in keeping with a reprehensible practice among Nigerian politicians. Obasanjo is called Baba (as if he were some fabled Mediterranean potentate) or father of the nation. Such apotheosis of a man of limited imagination has bred a cult of the personalization of power. The subjection of Obasanjo to this sustained flattery has created, in a man with no sense of irony, an idea of himself as nothing less than a god. Hence the impunity with which the president has assaulted, and continues to assault, noble ideas as well as sacred ideals.

Etiaba's desperate latching on to this contemptible culture speaks volumes about her sense of responsibility to the people of Anambra, the only sovereigns who ought to count in any legitimate governor's calculations. Properly understood, Obasanjo is the father of Iyabo and Gbenga and his league of other children. Nothing in his office empowers him to be any other Nigerian's father; he is certainly no father of Nigeria.

At any rate, there are good fathers and atrocious fathers. A good father exudes love. He is associated with such ideals as equity, prudence, self-control, and a high sense of responsibility. He seeks always to bequeath salutary values to his progeny. That's the caliber of father that I had. Would Etiaba step forward and assert that the present occupant of Aso Rock is a model of irreproachable conduct?

If Etiaba is beset by amnesia, then perhaps she needs to answer pointed

questions. How did her so-called father respond when, in 2003, the Uba clan arranged the abduction of then Governor Chris Ngige? The answer is that he shielded the criminal masterminds. Was the president roused out of his nonchalance when, months later, thugs (who were escorted by the police) laid siege on the state? No. When Etiaba met her "father," did it occur to her to ask him why nobody was ever prosecuted for that three-day reign of terror? How many inches of federal roads has her so-called father tarred in Anambra? She must have read how Emmanuel Uba, the man Obasanjo desperately wants to wangle into the Anambra governor's office come 2007, flew to the United States with a huge stash of dollars stowed away to treat himself to another \$100,000 car and to buy \$45,000 in equipment for the president's farm. Did Etiaba muster the courage to ask "the father of the nation" why he and his lieutenants continue to luxuriate in wealth while the masses wallow in abject destitution?

Would Mrs. Etiaba kneel down and pray to God that her children and grandchildren may be like the president? Would she look her children and grandchildren in the face and say: "I want you to closely observe and emulate this president"? In the inmost recesses of her heart, would she be proud if her loved ones turned into riggers of elections, hypocrites, sponsors of illegal impeachments, sly architects of third-term, and couriers of the (unaccounted) cash in planes? It is sad that, when history gave Etiaba an opportunity to stand tall and be counted, she fell short by jumping for a rotten carrot dangled to

tempt her. Obasanjo may be the father of her illegitimate claim to office of governor, but (thank God) he's not my father.

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?

Read or download more titles at

<http://www.okeyndibe.com>

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

To discuss a speaking engagement, please contact Okey Ndibe by e-mail (okey@okeyndibe.com) or by phone (860.306.7843).

PDF conversions done with Adobe Acrobat Professional 6.0 (US & International Patents) under license to All Hands Business Solutions, Inc.