

Silence in the face of evil

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By Okey Ndibe

A few days ago, a friend of mine just returned from a trip to Nigeria rang me up. "Okey, Anambra State is like a funeral," he said as soon as I picked up the receiver. There was all the dourness in his voice.

"Why?" I asked.

"Because of Andy Uba," he responded, saying the name like one voicing a terrorizing incubus. "The man has brought a chill on the state. He is slowly but surely buying up every traditional ruler and the so-called Igbo leaders. He's doling out cash and cars to secure the silence of some big shots in the state. He has bought an estimated hundred buses on which are splashed his campaign slogans. Everybody is saying that Obasanjo sent Uba to conquer Anambra by force."

"It's like a coup-in-progress," I suggested.

"Exactly," he agreed. "It's nothing but a coup. People are saying that, in a free and fair election, Andy Uba will lose to a goat. And I mean, any goat. But the president has armed him with the police to intimidate the people. He's not holding any rallies. I hear the man can hardly string a few words together to make coherent sense. He has been empowered by the president to go and steal the governorship in broad daylight. That's why the state is already in a bereaved mood."

"But why would the people of the state allow themselves to be cowed?" I asked. "Uba and Obasanjo can't withstand the blitz if the people stand up as one and say no."

My friend guffawed. "Okey, it's always said that the people's will is stronger than that of their oppressors. But sometimes I wonder whether it's not just theory. How many people would come out to confront Uba who moves about in presidential jets and helicopters and is always surrounded by heavily-armed police and soldiers?"

"My friend," I scolded, "you should have a little sense of history. Think about what's happening in Iraq, the continuing resistance to the American presence there. Think about Chinese students standing defiantly in the path of an armored tank. Even in Nigeria, think of the 1970s and early 1980s when students took on fearsome Nigerian regimes. Look at what's happening in the Niger-Delta. After years of skulking in the shadows to bemoan the plundering of their land, the youth there have become militant. They're slowly showing a picture of hell to the arrogant profiteers in Abuja."

"And talking of the Niger-Delta and plunderers, I hear that Uba made his money from the oil sector. It is said that he has operated virtually as Obasanjo's aide on oil matters."

"The president lawyer recently claimed that Uba had made his money before his appointment as senior special assistant," I said. "That's why we were told that it wasn't odd for Uba's girlfriend in America to buy \$45,000 equipment for the president's farm."

He boomed with laughter. "The amazing thing about corrupt Nigerian officials is that they think all Nigerians are fools. So they concoct any lie and tell themselves they can sell it. I have talked to a lot of Nigerians who knew Uba in his days in California. I haven't found a single one of them who would say that Uba was a wealthy man. Many of them are amused to hear Uba described as a successful businessman."

"So why are people not revealing these things?" I asked. "If Uba is a dud, and people have that information, why are they letting him get away with it? Why is nobody exposing him? Why let him and the president's office get away with patent lies?"

"People are not as ignorant as Uba's camp and the president hope. Nigerians in the streets know more about Uba than the newspapers are reporting. Everywhere I went in Anambra, people were openly saying the things they know about this guy. The trouble is that the press has been compromised."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"Well, think about it," he said. "There are serious questions about the source of Uba's wealth. Those close to his younger brother, Chris, say that he openly reveals

that Andy was the brain behind the abduction of Ngige in 2003 and the widespread arson in the state months later. So people are wondering why a man who quietly organized the destruction of public property in his state now wants to be enthroned as governor. There are even questions about the man's educational credentials. Some people who know him insist that he doesn't even have a first degree, much less a doctorate. Yet, he's always addressed in the Nigerian press as Dr. Uba."

"Are you saying, then, that the press is deliberately shielding the man?"

"Well, are you not curious about the way the Nigerian media handled the expose about Uba's money laundering scandal?"

In 2003, Uba used President Obasanjo's official plane to bring in cash of \$170,000 into the United States. The money was subsequently handed over to Loretta Mabinton, a Nigerian attorney resident in Portland, Oregon. She used most of the funds to purchase a \$100,000 Mercedes Benz for Uba. American investigators discovered that Mabinton also bought equipment valued at more than \$45,000 for Obasanjo's private farm in Otta.

Uba's failure to declare the huge sum landed him and Mabinton (who told U.S. investigators that she and Uba were engaged) in legal trouble. In the end, they accepted to pay a fine of \$26,000 to settle the case out of court.

"What about the currency scandal?" I asked my friend.

“Are you not amazed by the speed with which that scandal has been taken off the pages of newspapers and magazines? I spoke to one editor in Lagos who confessed that Uba’s people doled out massive bribes to induce editors and reporters to stop snooping into that embarrassing story.”

“Are you sure of these speculations?” I inquired.

“My brother, I said that an editor told me about it. And he wasn’t exonerating himself, either. In fact, he confessed that the money was just too tempting to reject. That’s why, overnight, newspapers erased the scandal from their pages. Instead, they devoted their pages to publicizing Uba’s weak effort at damage control.”

“Nobody is going to hide their sordid acts forever,” I retorted. “Not even if he has all the money in the world. In time, Uba and the presidency will face exposure, shame and retribution. Of this, I’m certain.”

“I hope so,” my friend said. “Uba’s group is not preparing for any election next year; the man knows he has no electoral ground to stand on. So they’re planning to steal the governorship and other elective offices. It’s known that Uba is composing a log of candidates for all the positions, from Senate to local government councils. He’ll just ask INEC to announce those on his list as winners. As I said, it’s a coup-in-progress.”

“That coup will fail,” I predicted. “Take my word. It’ll fail. Even if Obasanjo uses

violence and rigging to foist Uba on the state, his rule will be short-lived. He’ll eventually go the way of Alamesiegha and Fayose. But perhaps with greater ignominy.”

“I hope so,” my friend echoed himself. “Throughout Anambra, people are asking why so many of the state’s prominent citizens have taken to silence. Why is Alex Ekwueme silent? Odumegwu-Ojukwu, Mbazulike Amaechi, Emeka Anyaoku and the host of traditional rulers: why are they silent?”

It is a question that haunts me too. Evil stalks Nigeria. Impunity reigns. Once again, to borrow from the title of one of Wole Soyinka’s polemical books, Anambra is being turned into Nigeria’s open sore. In the face of such vileness, this consecration of turpitude, why do we hardly hear a whimper from the Ojukwus, the Ekwuemes and the Anyaokus of our state? Are they not unaware of the pall over their state, the casting down of their people’s spirits? Dare we think the worst even of these elevated men?

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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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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