

A tale of three candidates

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By Okey Ndibe

Many Nigerians shake their heads in bafflement each time President Olusegun Obasanjo points a finger to accuse a foe of graft. They seem to see a president pointing his other four fingers at himself.

Even so, a president deficient in irony and ethically handicapped seems blissfully unaware of the pathetic figure he cuts. Two weeks ago, while welcoming some visiting American reporters, Obasanjo engaged in his accustomed revisionism by ascribing his feud with Vice President Atiku Abubakar as a concomitance of his stance against corruption. Obasanjo also told the reporters that erstwhile Senate President Adolphus Wabara was netted by the anti-graft crusade. Wabara, hardly notorious for being trenchant, issued a public response that pulled no punches. He reminded the sanctimonious president that he had yet to satisfactorily respond to Atiku's accusation of widespread presidential embezzlement.

Did Wabara's temerity teach the president to spare decent people his hypocritical sermons on corruption? Absolutely not! Like the proverbial Eze Onyeagwanam (King I-don't-want-to-be-told), this president has become adept at dancing naked. Unaware of his political toxicity, he has been leading the rendezvous of PDP candidates across the nation. At each stop, he opens his mouth and lets slip a sentiment so inane as to beggar credulity. If he had honest

advisers, they'd have told him it's time to disappear from the limelight. It's time to cease reminding Nigerians how he has wasted eight odd years of their national life.

Not this man. Cursed with an inflated sense of his popularity, he insists on mounting the podium to lead the ritual of handing flags to candidates. In Akure, he displayed his usual facility for voicing a thought before it's had time to be seasoned. Thrusting a finger in the direction of Dr. Olusegun Mimiko, the president, according to the Vanguard of Sunday, February 4, proclaimed: "Ex-minister Mimiko is corrupt". This piece of verbal recklessness was irresponsibly broadcast at a rally. Where was Obasanjo's proof? None at all. As the Vanguard reported, Obasanjo "said that the former Housing and Urban Planning minister, Dr Olusegun Mimiko, would soon be investigated by the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) for corrupt practice." A man is yet to be investigated, but the god of Aso Rock found fit to publicly defame him.

And the irony was this: the president spoke while holding up the hands of current state governor and PDP gubernatorial candidate, Mr. Olusegun Agagu, a man who may really be in legal trouble. A few days ago, www.saharareporters.com revealed that Agagu "was indicted by a judicial panel of inquiry headed by Justice Obiora

Nwazota for fraud and embezzlement totaling 3.6 million dollars.” What’s more intriguing, the online reporter disclosed that Obasanjo’s government had adopted a White Paper requiring Agagu to “refund the sum of \$3.2 to the national treasury.” But it doesn’t matter, for Obasanjo is nothing less than a god, able to dispense perdition and absolution to whomsoever he pleases. By the strange algebra of Obasanjo’s sense of crime, a man is corrupt only, and only if, having dipped his hand in the public till, he doesn’t pledge eternal loyalty to the president. If you’re a thief, but the president’s pal, then you are assured that EFCC hounds won’t be sent in your direction. And even when anti-corruption agents peer into your affairs and write a report reeking of plunder, you can count on the president to tuck the document underneath some rug.

Which brings us to Oyo state where Mr. Alao Akala, the PDP’s governorship candidate, is alleged to be embroiled in scandals of his own. According to saharareporters, the EFCC’s searchlight on Akala allegedly uncovered some fraud related to rice importation as well as inflated invoices in a book publishing deal. Two weeks ago, Nuhu Ribadu, the head of the EFCC, spoke in Ibadan and expressed disgust that the likes of Akala were permitted to run, and ruin, Oyo state. Such unflattering barbs mean little to Akala, for he is a favorite of the deity who defines and redefines corruption.

The third candidate who is beloved of the president is Nnamdi “Andy” Uba, the PDP’s improbable choice for the governorship seat in Anambra state. Speaking in Enugu, at Uba’s investiture, Obasanjo turned to melodrama. Turning to Uba, the president said: “Standing by

me here is my son from an Igbo woman (Chief Andy Uba) who wakes me up and watches me till I sleep.” One’s immediate reaction was to say to Obasanjo: “Take your son and run! Run away, you and your misbegotten progeny!”

Uba, whose shtick is to project himself as a diligent disciple who has benefited from a seven-year apprenticeship in what he told a reporter was the “Obasanjo School,” is fast becoming a political masquerade. Like his mentor, Uba is transforming himself into a practitioner of the art of self-reinvention. He is gifted at saying what he cannot possibly mean, and acting in a way that is totally at odds with the image he now fervently professes.

Uba is, in short, a scam-in-progress. He is spending a dizzying amount of money to curry affection as well as to confound, if not confuse, the public record. In him we find a candidate who may be not just strange to most Nigerians but may well be unknowable.

There is no question that Uba has a lot of money. Four years ago, he ferried close to \$200,000 in cash on a presidential jet bound for New York. His failure to declare the cash landed him in serious legal trouble, one he paid a fine of \$26,000 to escape. I’m informed that he has made the round of traditional rulers in Anambra, doling out cars and cash with careless abandon. His campaign has also become, I’m told, the largest employer of young people in Anambra outside of the state government. His political foot soldiers, by one account, are quartered in several hotels in Awka, and enjoy inexhaustible expense accounts. A couple of weeks ago, he announced that he was going to personally give fuel subsidies to

motorists in Anambra. The headline in one newspaper read: "Uba subsidizes fuel prices in Anambra". Another newspaper caption, "Andy Uba Splashes N500m On Sports Fiesta", captured the spirit of the man's money-driven politics.

What's troubling is that neither Uba nor Obasanjo has explained the source of the candidate's stupendous wealth. Public records in the United States, where Uba lived before being hired eight years ago by the president, paint the picture of a man who was struggling to pay his bills. He was, at any rate, far from a wealthy man in the U.S. Is Uba prepared to come clean on the source of his money? Did his fortune come at the cost of the collective misfortune of Nigerians?

Uba's larger handicap is that he has yet to establish his bona fides. For several years, the public took him for a physiotherapist or, at any rate, a man with an earned doctorate. But when the tenacious duo of Sowore Omoyele and Ikenna Ellis-Ezenekwe dug into his record, they uncovered disturbing skeletons. None of Uba's post-secondary certificates could be verified. Far from holding a doctorate, the reporters found out that the man doesn't even hold a first degree. Not that a degree is a requirement for a man coveting the governor's seat. But a man who cloaks himself in borrowed academic garbs, and then sustains the façade of legitimacy for close to eight years, strikes me as unworthy of being elected governor. Uba seems content to hide the mask created by his propaganda machine, but even the best propaganda unravels in the end.

For many Anambrarians, Uba's political biography is his undoing. Many in Anambra hold Uba, his brother Chris, and Obasanjo responsible for the

mayhem inflicted on the state since 2003 and even before. The tempestuous Chris Uba has been pilloried for orchestrating the abduction of former Governor Chris Ngige and also for organizing the hoodlums who in 2004 carried out a three-day burning spree of public property. Yet, many suspect that Chris could not have dared if his elder brother, Nnamdi (nicknamed Andy by the president), and the presidency had not lent their muscle and weight. Therein lies Uba's peril, the futility of his quest to govern a state he helped make ungovernable. Like Obasanjo, Uba is widely despised in Anambra. His generous dole outs may buy him deceptive adulation, but winning an election remains a stretch.

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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