

Chalker the fraudster and other tales

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By Okey Ndibe

Before our very eyes, grand lies are being concocted and sold about Maurice Iwu's dud contraption that he and his coterie have misnamed elections. There's the canard that, regardless of the massive rigging that Iwu oversaw, the PDP and its slate of candidates would have won the elections at any rate. This is a pernicious notion, and a certified lie, and its intent is to mitigate the enormity of the crime perpetrated by a coalition of the ruling party, a compromised police, and electoral officials at all levels. More on that lie presently.

For now, let's turn to a shameful, British-made version of the crude lies being fed to Nigerians and the world. A woman who styles herself Baroness Lynda Chalker owns the patent to one of the grandest of these deceptions being telegraphed to mislead the gullible in Nigeria and elsewhere.

Speaking last week at a meeting of the Honorary International Investors Council, Chalker, according to a report in Nigeria's *ThisDay* of Friday, May 4, "criticized the international media for exaggerating the electoral fraud said to have characterized the just-concluded general election in Nigeria, adding that it is not only peculiar to Nigeria."

In making a straw man out of the media, Chalker no doubt gave great comfort to the master riggers of April: the president, his party, the criminally compromised

Nigerian police, and a chain of electoral officials. Besides, the Englishwoman, who makes a tone of money out of Nigeria, proved that nothing deprives a person of her senses as thoroughly as the blind pursuit of lucre. The good old baroness was saying in effect: "Just show me the money and I'll make a thorough fool of myself on your behalf."

And what a pathetic figure this genteel woman cut, a desperate propagandist from the gray metropolis of England caught with her stinky foot in her mouth! "I want to say one thing to the international media," said Chalker in a scolding accent. "It is all very well to believe that the system in America and Europe are without faults. They are not. I can tell you that I have had dead people vote against me in elections. We have evidence to prove it."

Well, what do you know? Once upon a time, some dead voters had the temerity to cast their votes against Baroness Chalker. Whereupon the baroness developed an imperfect theory of elections, seeing polls as occasions for fraud. Alas, Chalker the fraudster entered the annals of history!

Ideally, Chalker's perorations should be dismissed as being so self-evidently hollow as to be laughable. In England, her verbal miscues would have been turned into fodder for post-prandial jokes. "Oh, that baroness and her plague

of dead voters!" Unfortunately, Nigerians can't afford to laugh at Chalker and move on. Her doctrine, patently false as it is, has the potency of a virus. And there is not a shortage of Nigerians waiting to latch on to just this kind of anecdote to rationalize the bizarre creature that Obasanjo seeded and Iwu bore into fruition. "You see," some among us are already saying, "Nigerians didn't invent rigging. We didn't start the practiced of stuffed ballot boxes. For that matter, we don't hold a monopoly on electoral malpractices. A white woman has just confessed that dead people vote in her country. How dare you criticize Iwu, the president or the PDP?"

Chalker's comments were, to put it simply, cash-driven. At Obasanjo's behest, she's a player in Nigeria's power industry, but a controversial player at best. For one, Nigerians are yet to see any demonstrable positive impact of her enterprise. Instead, she has acquired a reputation as one whose posture is hostile to Nigerians' popular aspirations. Her ghastly effort to champion Obasanjo's aborted third term scheme was defining. It stamped her as a woman whose agenda is at odds with direction of Nigerians' dreams. To put it squarely, Baroness Chalker may be Obasanjo's pal, but she is an enemy of Nigeria.

Her participation in an investment council that has to do with Nigeria points to a perverse mainstay of Obasanjo's economic policy: the transfer of Nigeria's resources to a tiny cabal of local and foreign interests with questionable agenda. Chalker's designs are at war with Nigeria's democratic interests and economic interests. She should walk.

So a few dead people voted against her. So the last two presidential elections in America were dogged by questions about hanging chads in Florida and possible hanky panky in collation of votes in Ohio. In other words, they were imperfect elections. Surely, Chalker can't claim not to know the distinction between an election marked by a few flaws and the Iwu-supervised species in which flaws, imperfections, fraud were on vulgar, arrogant display.

Has this dame of British politics ever witnessed an election in England in which thugs grabbed ballots boxes and fled? In which the police set upon known sympathizers of the opposition parties? In which ballot material and electoral officials were absent at polling booths, yet spectacular results were magically generated? In which, as happened in Ondo, the ruling party had no candidate but nevertheless won a senatorial seat? Has Chalker seen anything to equal the silly theatre that took place in Anambra, a state where the ruling party's gubernatorial candidate was initially awarded votes that exceeded the number of registered voters—and this after a sham process? Has she participated in an election in which more than three hundred lives were lost, most of them at the hands of the ruling party's thugs? Does she know of an election outside of Nigeria where a presidential candidate allegedly won more than seventy percent of the votes, and then the whole country sinks into a depressed funk?

It served Chalker's purposes (and I daresay Obasanjo's and Yar'Adua's) to trot out the tantalizing but ultimately deceptive mantra of the inherent imperfection of elections. That elections are imperfect is one thing. That they

could be turned into a gleeful game that rewards the most brazenly fraud-minded is another thing. To put it in different words, it is one thing to recognize that certain peripheral glitches attend the best planned electoral contests. It is a different animal altogether to imply, as Chalker's stricture comes dangerously close to doing, that imperfection is the essence of elections.

Chalker excoriated the international media for pointing up the way in which what Nigeria billed as elections were turned into a gory carnival, leaving a landscape littered with the maimed and the dead as well as ballot-hijacks and stuffing. That Chalker would stand on this most slippery of grounds to chide the media reveals something profound, and deeply troubling, about her character.

Left to her, Obasanjo and Iwu would be decorated for achieving the ultimate destiny of elections: perfect imperfection! It is hard to resist the conclusion that her effete raillery against the media was calculated to ingratiate her with Yar'Adua whom she imagines as Nigeria's next captain.

Chalker is not the only liar standing. There's the now incessant cant that the PDP would have won the elections rigging or no. Like any lie repeated often enough, it's acquired its own cache, become a seductive yarn, now voiced (as if irrefutable) even by some who should know better. Yet, nothing could be more illogical than this supposition.

Most independent accounts indicate that Obasanjo's party would have suffered a devastating defeat. Many election observers concluded that the party was routed throughout the south-west (even

sustaining a humiliating loss at the president's ward). Besides, the party is widely despised in the south-east, a consequence of the president's ruinous policies that left major federal roads in the Igbo-speaking states to degenerate into death traps, his contempt for the developmental aspirations of the region, the mischievous propping up of Igbo scoundrels and misfits, and the presidential complicity in the destabilization of Anambra state. In the Niger-Delta, it is known that antipathy to Obasanjo and his party runs wide and deep. What species of magic, then, could have won the ruling party its so-called triumph?

Even if Umar Yar'Adua, who carried the PDP's baton, were beloved of the northern masses or elite, he would still have had to split the northern votes in a three-way contest with the ANPP's Muhammadu Buhari and AC's Atiku Abubakar. On what, then, did his landslide hinge?

There is, besides, the lie that those cheated out of their mandates should concede to the usurpers and join hands with the cheaters in order to "move forward." It is a toxic idea floated by people who are allergic to principles. Its purpose is to consolidate fraud and empower the iniquitous.

All defrauded politicians should borrow from the tenacity of Governor Peter Obi who, after being cheated out of his mandate in 2003, threw himself, with unbending determination, in a legal effort to reclaim his hijacked office. Even now, as Nnamdi Uba haunts Anambra with his farcical mandate, Obi is in court seeking leave to complete his truncated tenure.

Would that more Nigerian politicians exemplified the same doggedness.

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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*.

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