

# No Longer At Ease

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*By Okey Ndibe*

Former President Olusegun Obasanjo and his small circle of minions sowed the wind and so must brace to reap the whirlwind. The man who covets the title of father of modern Nigeria is now openly mocked, routinely despised, and widely abhorred.

How bad a shape is the ex-president's image in? Let's settle for one anecdotal measure: When former Biafran leader, Mr. Odumegwu Ojukwu, recently suggested that Obasanjo deserved to be taken to the back of his house and shot, few Nigerians protested. It was as if Ojukwu had articulated a widely shared fantasy that had incubated, unexpressed, in many a Nigerian heart.

For eight years, Obasanjo and company deepened social misery in Nigeria. They fertilized economic destitution, all the while enriching themselves. Now, with Obasanjo out of power, more Nigerians are awakening to the depth of the wound he and his stooges inflicted on the nation.

Gradually, the scale is tipping. Nigerians are asking hard questions. They want to know how, in adding two plus two, Obasanjo and co managed to get something other than four.

Here's a man who turned the bar room lingo "I dey kampe" into one of the boastful creeds of his presidency. Yet, to judge from the tone of public discourse, it

is highly unlikely the man is sitting calm these days. Woes have become a staple of his post-public office life. Nigerians, including the elite, can't wait to get their hands at him. They want to slap him around.

The last two weeks have been particularly rough for Obasanjo and his fellow despoilers of Nigeria.

Last week, a German court named several of the ex-president's closest confidants as receivers of bribes totaling ten million euros from officials of Siemens, the German engineering company.

Last week, the Nigerian government docked Lamidi Adedibu, Obasanjo's hero and Ibadan-based thug. In the eight years of Obasanjo's reign, Adedibu got away with many high and low crimes. Nigerian police officers were put at his service to use as he saw fit. He marshaled them, together with his thugs, on a mission to sack civil servants at the Government House and to dislodge then Governor Rashidi Ladoja. Innocent people were killed. Ladoja went on the run. Yet, a spiteful, mischievous Obasanjo waxed reverently about Adedibu. So powerful was the gangster of Ibadan, so unaccountable, that hapless residents of Oyo State came to take his invincibility at face value.

Adedibu's days of government-supplemented terror may have run their course. Obasanjo recently described the old miscreant of Molete as "father of the ruling party." Thank God, Obasanjo is beset by too many problems of his own to shore up the scoundrel called Adedibu.

Last week, the Adamawa electoral tribunal ruled Mr. Murtala Nyako was not properly elected governor in April. That verdict brought to five the number of usurper governors so far rusticated. The first poseur to fall, and the most notorious cast member from the electoral charade of April, was Mr. Nnamdi Emmanuel Uba. Then followed the governors of Kogi, Kebbi, Rivers, and now Adamawa.

Two weeks ago, the Nigerian Bar Association called on Maurice Iwu, the credit-deprived chairman of the "Independent" National Electoral Commission, to quit. Reading it, my first response was: What took the NBA so long?

Iwu is far from the only trigger for April's electoral fiasco that tarnished the nation's democratic credentials and left Nigerians dispirited. Still, the man, more than anybody else, embodies the deliberate, carefully planned frustration of voters.

Iwu's provenance—it is an open secret that the Uba family championed him—spelt failure. Entrusted with restoring Nigerians' faith in the sanctity of the electoral process, he elected to re-make his task. He functioned, and functions still, as if he were a card-carrying member of the PDP, and a devotee of Obasanjo's. For many years to come, Nigerian cartoonists, and the larger public as well,

will regard him as the representative figure of wangled elections.

Every independent monitoring group, local as well as foreign, was shocked to behold what Iwu's INEC fancied as elections. Many courageous electoral tribunals are daily undoing the mess that Iwu wrought. Yet, the man who gave the nation a poor imitation of the would-be martyr, persists in inventing superlatives for himself. On October 16, for example, he boasted: "I did everything for my country. If I am asked to do it again, I will do it the same way because Nigeria deserves the best."

If anybody needed proof that this miss-road umpire is beyond redemption, here it is, in his own words. Failure is forgivable, but Iwu's shamelessness makes him a clear and present danger to the nation's democratic aspirations. To leave this man to steer the next round of elections is to doom the nation to repeat an electoral catastrophe it can ill afford.

Iwu should go—now. In fact, he should never have been there in the first place. Nigerians, it is clear, want no part of him. In a Daily Trust poll, 88.8% of respondents wanted him out. That's nearly nine out of every ten Nigerians.

Last week also saw what must rank as the weightiest political development in the After Obasanjo—AO—era: strident clamors for the ex-president's indictment on corruption charges.

Despite his best effort to appear composed and unflappable, Obasanjo must be sweating bullets at night. And he must be plagued by sleep deprivation. For all his pretension to be an anti-corruption warrior, the former president

has come to epitomize graft and greed. His very presence oozes corruption and decadence. He has catapulted himself from a near destitute nine years ago to the dizzying heights of wealthy Nigerians. And since the Nigerian constitution does not permit for a president to keep a second job, we must surmise that he amassed his riches in office. Illegitimately.

In office, he'd strutted and affected sanctimoniousness. He'd challenged anybody with a scintilla of evidence of his corruption to come forward. Few took him up. But since leaving office, he has drawn consistently unflattering attention. As president, he'd raised billions of naira—and an equal weight in ethical dust—ostensibly for his presidential library. It has since been revealed that he's poured a good deal of the funds into building a big hotel.

Last week, the Coalition Against Corrupt Leaders (CACOL) called at the Lagos office of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission. Anti-Obasanjo placards hoisted, the group went to deliver a petition for the ex-president's criminal investigation. They asked the EFCC to arrest and prosecute Obasanjo now. And what a damning dossier they compiled on Obasanjo.

They alleged that, between 2001 and 2007 when he ought to have devoted himself wholly to the nation's business, Obasanjo spent N40 billion to set up Bells University of Technology in Ota. The protesters reminded the anti-corruption body that the ex-president reeled in more than N6 billion in donations for his private library. And they carpeted the former president for abusing the powers of his office to expand his farm. In 2004,

Obasanjo showed deplorable—and potentially criminal—sense of judgment in permitting Mr. “Andy” Uba, a presidential factotum, to buy him farm equipment worth \$45,000.

“For eight years,” wrote the CACOL officials, “while he was in power, Chief Obasanjo sustained a devilish desire to strengthen his chicken farm while exploiting the power of his office to mortally destroy his competitors.”

With CACOL's petition in hand, Mr. Nuhu Ribadu no longer has any excuse for shirking his responsibility to investigate Obasanjo. CACOL spokesman, Mr. Debo Adeniran, has served notice that, should Ribadu lack the spine to arrest Obasanjo, his organization would let the world hear about the agency's double standards.

According to a report in PM News, CACOL even drew a short bio sketch of the ex-president to help the EFCC to get the right man. They stated: “Obasanjo currently lives in Ota...He spends most of his time in the day at the Obasanjo Farms in Ota and could be seen at home in the evenings with his friends, most time playing draft.” Then they continued: “He is dark, 5.9 feet tall, stocky, with brown eyes. He is easy to anger, pugnacious, infuriated easily by logical arguments in almost every encounter and easily

Provoked...”

In a country that's all-too susceptible to the seduction of ethnic sentiments, it is instructive that the Yoruba have been as vocal as anyone else in pushing to have Obasanjo answer for his misdeeds in office. In The Daily Independent of November 18, Afenifere, a Pan-Yoruba

socio-cultural group, insisted on a comprehensive investigation of Obasanjo's tenure.

It is, I hazard, now a matter of time. Obasanjo and all the cohorts he shielded during his reign cannot permanently postpone the inevitable unmasking.

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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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