

Mark down and out, Yar'Adua's odds down

Monday, 25 February 2008

By Okey Ndibe

Last Saturday's invalidation of David Mark's "election" as a senator provides an occasion for Nigerians to seriously contemplate the grave man-made flaws of their electoral systems. The Benue State Electoral Tribunal ruled, in effect, that Mark's election was defective, and arose from the disenfranchisement of voters from two local government areas.

If the tribunal's verdict stands on appeal—and many legal experts consider it thorough and sound—then the implication is that a stranger had usurped a seat he was not given by the electorate. Mark, let's not forget, has been functioning as Senate President. If we take our democracy seriously, then it's about time we weighed the consequences of permitting a poseur to hijack the steering wheel of the nation's legislative business.

If Mark's constituents did not send him to the Senate, then it follows that other forces entrenched him there. Who might these forces be? One is former President Olusegun Obasanjo, whose aborted third term fantasy Mark fervently championed. Another is the hierarchy of the (misruling) Peoples Democratic Party that has squandered billions of dollars of the nation's resources with little to show for it. There is a faction of the retired military establishment of which Mark is a notorious and unflattering specimen. Mark's "election" could not have been possible without the connivance of Maurice Iwu whose chairmanship of the nation's electoral commission has been nothing short of calamitous.

A Senate President sponsored by a coalition of such negative forces is unlikely to serve his constituents' best interests. That, in the end, is one of the chief reasons to rusticate all the David Marks that fester in our public life, from the Senate and other legislative bodies to elective executive offices.

Nigeria is much betrayed by its elite, including David Mark, whose service as a military minister for communications yielded abject failure. Mark compounded that failure with gratuitous insult to Nigerians. Part of his permanent public resume as minister is a dismissive statement that poor Nigerians had no right to aspire to own telephones. Left to Mark, telephones would remain an exclusive status symbol for the nation's well-heeled, most of them raiders of the public purse. Thanks to such elite disconnection, a Nigeria with all it takes to be a success story has been turned into a dungeon of despair and a metaphor for perennial failure.

To shake off its wasted legacy and regain a vestige of its promise, Nigerians ought to be in a hurry to catch up. And our challenge is to catch up, not to such countries like Malaysia, South Korea and Singapore that used to belong in our league. No, we're now a sorry

elephantine nation panting far behind Ghana, Uganda, Botswana, and South Africa in the race for development and progress.

A country in our kind of bind can't afford to have at the helm of its affairs men and women who are beholden to such rotten entities as Obasanjo and his fellow sowers of perdition. A Nigerian Senate swept clean of hijackers of mandate should be more attuned to the task of using legislative instruments to hasten the nation's race to achieve an economically and socially viable nation.

Mark's fall is cheerful news for a people desperate to find their democratic feet. It's no surprise that news of his defeat triggered spontaneous celebrations in his home state. Justice C.I. Uriri, who read the verdict, simply delivered music to the ears of Nigerians who care deeply about democracy.

The Benue State Electoral Tribunal deserves commendation for the dispatch, and remarkable courage, with which it has done its job. By marking Mark down, the tribunal completed the dismissal of all three senators from the state smuggled into the Senate by the PDP. It's the first tribunal to complete a rout of senators from any one state. It had earlier invalidated the alleged elections of two of the state's other senators, George Akume and Joseph Akhagerger.

My hope is that the Justice James Ogebe Presidential Election Tribunal would demonstrate the same patriotic fervor by calling Umar Yar'Adua's "election" by its proper name: a fraud and an assault on democratic values. Ogebe's challenge is either to write his name in the history books as the man who spoke intrepidly from the bench in defense of Nigerians' democratic rights to choose their leaders or who lent himself to the forces sworn to frustrate the nation's flowering as a polity where the people's voices come to bear.

Like Mark, Yar'Adua was not elected. Instead he was selected by Obasanjo as part of the former president's depraved desire to subordinate a nation of more than 100 million to his puny whims. Even those who believe Yar'Adua to be the answer that Nigeria needs at this time ought to see the wisdom in annulling his purloined, and therefore diseased, mandate. If Yar'Adua is to be an effective leader, and to rise to his full potential in the service of the nation, then he needs a mandate that is not burdened by fraud. He needs a free hand to operate without feeling that he owes his political life to a despot's self-serving calculations.

Yar'Adua may well be the nice guy that his handlers have advertised, but that is, finally, beside the point. As "president," he has been, inevitably, wishy-washy. He leaves the impression of one confounded by the onerous challenge of leadership. Unable to rise above the illogic of his path to office, he has been captive to the dictates of all manner of narrow interests. He is remote-controlled, it is clear, from Ota Farm. As "leaders" go, he

has been a sorry sight to behold, his statecraft marked by hesitancy where decisiveness was called for, paralysis where agility was required.

The point is this: that the best guarantee that a leader would serve the public interest, and be accountable to the citizenry, is to assure that such a leader's mandate emanates from the unfettered will of the people. Those who believe in Yar'Adua's soundness for the job of president, and who swear by his sense of mission, ought to wish for the man's rescue from the encumbrance of his "election." In one of the admirable pronouncements of his time in Abuja, Yar'Adua has acknowledged that he is the beneficiary of an election fraught with malpractices. He spoke the truth, even if he chose to do so in euphemistic language. He has also argued that he would have won in a transparent contest. That strikes me both as a lie and an act of grave self-indictment.

Given the degree to which Nigerians loathe Obasanjo, and the public perception that Yar'Adua was chosen by the former president as a man to be trusted with cloaking Obasanjo's manifold crimes, Nigerians would have had to act counter-intuitively to vote for Yar'Adua. But even if we allow, for the sake of argument, that Yar'Adua would have won fairly, then his cooperation in a massively rigged election becomes even more grievous and unforgivable.

Assuming that Ogebe debunks INEC's lie that the presidential polls were credibly conducted, Yar'Adua should now take his political life in his hands. He should make his case to Nigerians as to why he considers himself the man that fits the current Nigerian moment. He should submit his credentials, as governor and impostor-president, to the scrutiny of the Nigerian people. Above all, he must convince Nigerians that when he speaks, they may rest assured that it is Yar'Adua speaking rather than Obasanjo borrowing his voice.

Possessed of no powers of clairvoyance, I cannot presume to know how Justice Ogebe and his colleagues are going to rule today. But I sure hope the tribunal has the courage to undo the rape of the Nigerian voter that was consummated on April 21, 2007.

Regardless of the tribunal's verdict, Nigerians ought to brook no confusion about one man, Maurice Iwu. Each passing day, the world receives new information that illuminates the scale of Iwu's connivance in a series of electoral heists. Iwu's hired apologists may write as shamelessly as they wish to put a gloss on his disastrous record, but sensible people cannot be fooled. It is beyond partisan politics: Iwu ought to go, and now is the time to boot him from his perch.

Iwu's leadership is called to question each time a tribunal throws another "election" in the trash bin. In Benue State senatorial races, Iwu and his commission have scored zero

percent! Lest we forget, more than three hundred Nigerians perished in the violence that attended Iwu's sham of an election. To leave Iwu in an office he has devalued is to betray the memory of those who died needlessly in an orchestrated deception. Nigeria wasted billions of naira in an exercise that was designed to be a travesty, and each naira of those billions might have gone into more meaningful national investments. Iwu should be facing a jury, not thumping his chest at decent society while falsely accusing himself of being an accomplished electoral umpire.

Lamidi Adedibu and other matters:

Who governs Nigeria? The answer to the question, I'm afraid, is: Lamidi Adedibu. A few weeks ago, Mr. Olusegun Obasanjo declared himself Adedibu's disciple. A disciple is one who derives his outlook and models his actions on a venerable figure. Shortly after Obasanjo's enlightening proclamation, Yar'Adua told a wedding crowd in Ota that Obasanjo was "my leader." You get the point? What Obasanjo learnt from his Molete guru he has passed along to his Aso Rock surrogate. Any wonder, then, that Nigeria is trapped in an Adedibu state of material degradation and moral dishevelment.

Several readers wrote to ask what I thought about Mr. Andy Uba's recent "victory" at the Appeal Court in Enugu. My response came in two parts. One, as a versed lawyer friend told me, the paper the judgment is typed on has more value than the judgment itself. Two, one should not begrudge Uba his fantasy of being Anambra's "governor-in-waiting." In a flush of generosity, one in fact wishes him to be governor-in-waiting in perpetuity!

As for Justice Muktar Coomasie who reportedly wrote the verdict, the curiosity is that the man then got nominated for a seat on the Supreme Court.

|

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.