

# Darkness, Imoke and God

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*By Okey Ndibe*

Here's the sum of former President Olusegun Obasanjo's vision for Nigeria's power sector woes: it is up to God to see to it that Nigerians enjoy improved power supply. In case some readers think I've made it up, I must hasten to disabuse them.

Last week, Mr. Obasanjo, whose government squandered anything between \$10 billion and \$16 billion on ostensible power projects, told reporters, in effect, that only divine intervention would change the worsening state of power supply in the country. The Daily Champion of Wednesday July 23 captured this latest facile concoction from the former president's mind. In a report captioned "Leave poor power supply to God," the paper reported as follows: "Former President Olusegun Obasanjo yesterday urged Nigerians to leave the poor power supply to God." It quoted Obasanjo's direct words: "Whatever you don't have, then leave everything to God."

In a country that is susceptible to false piety, some people might be impressed by Obasanjo's invocation of God. But those who know better ought to expose Obasanjo's latest fancy for what it is: crap!

Nigeria is perhaps the only country in the world where billions of dollars would be spent to address a problem—and the problem gets worse! If Obasanjo's

expenditure of billions had led to a commensurate improvement in power supply, Nigerians would have applauded him. But his power projects were scams wrapped inside a scandal. Umar Musa Yar'Adua, the man Obasanjo installed in Aso Rock, was first to warn Nigerians that the former president blew \$10 billion of their funds on so-called power projects, but with nothing to show for it. Soon thereafter, Speaker Dimeji Bankole revealed that the price tag for Obasanjo's power schemes was \$16 billion.

Yar'Adua got it wrong on one account. Nigeria has something to show for the billions Obasanjo sowed in the power sector. It has more dependable darkness. For every dollar he "spent" on power, Obasanjo ensured that Nigerians reaped more darkness.

Nigeria must be one of a few countries in the world whose leaders manufacture man-made crises and disasters—and then order God to clean up their mess.

Let's make no mistake: the ghastly state of power supply in the country is not the product of unforeseen policy wrinkles. No, Obasanjo and his henchmen got exactly what they wanted. They planned, designed and executed a policy that was meant to corruptly transfer the nation's resources into private pockets while ensuring that the weak power infrastructure suffered further deterioration.

It is hardly surprising that the House of Representatives investigation of the power sector scandal is now mired controversy. The panel's public hearings revealed a pattern of criminal conduct that sounded too preposterous to be true. Contracts were routinely inflated and then the contractors were paid most of the contract sum—sometimes even before the contractor had lifted a finger to clear a site. Obasanjo issued waiver after waiver that enabled payments to be made without recourse to critical due process stipulations designed to protect the nation from financial exploitations. In some cases, foreign companies were paid in excess of the total sum of contracts—and for little or no work done.

If Nigerians were capable of channeling outrage, the labor unions, students and peasants would have raised hell until Obasanjo and his fellow actors were docked to account for this traitorous exercise in the fleecing of a nation.

It's not too late for organized sectors of Nigerians to push for accountability. With the House of Representatives playing some secretive game with the report of the investigation, student unions, the Nigerian Labor Congress, the Nigerian Bar Association, and other professional bodies ought to serve notice of mass demonstrations and strikes until and unless the politicians in Abuja realize that a nation in Nigeria's squalid state can't afford to sweep a \$16 billion scandal under the carpet.

A nation where a handful of men and women can help themselves to billions of dollars and get away with it doesn't deserve to invoke the ruse of law and order. Now is an excellent time to compel

Obasanjo and his cohorts to explain their costly billion-dollar prodigality.

Last week, Obasanjo as well as Liyel Imoke and Segun Agagu were in the news for different reasons. The former president spouted the canard that God holds the answer to our power crisis. Liyel Imoke, whose installation as governor of Cross River State was recently invalidated, was stating his readiness to defend his actions as a major player in the power sector. An election tribunal declared Agagu a usurper of the gubernatorial seat in Ondo. The three men—individually and collectively—personify the mess in the power sector.

Obasanjo's recipe of divine intervention, truth be told, is a phony and satanic ploy whose goal is to befuddle desperate Nigerians who have taken to the belief that God's job specification is to ameliorate or solve the problems our leaders spend their waking hours creating. Why would God solve a problem that Obasanjo, Imoke and Agagu could have easily handled with a little dose of patriotism, vision and commitment? Let Obasanjo tell us how God may address the nation's power needs? By decreeing that the sun shine day and night? Does he know of one nation in the world where God took over the job of stabilizing power supply?

Imoke and Agagu were ministers in charge of the power sector. In Imoke's case, he started off as the chairman of the special task force on power, their charge being, according to Obasanjo's pledge, to ensure that Nigerians enjoyed "regular, uninterrupted power supply." A friend of mine with a sardonic sense of humor has joked that Imoke's assignment was to ensure that Obasanjo enjoyed regular,

uninterrupted supply of political power—a gambit otherwise known as third term. At any rate, Imoke failed at the task. A man like this, having sagged under an important assignment, would have been consigned to oblivion.

But not with a man like Obasanjo running the show. Imoke’s desultory performance accorded, it seemed, with Obasanjo’s overarching agenda. He rewarded Imoke’s certifiable incompetence by recruiting the man to shepherd the power sector. Then last year, the selfsame Imoke was wangled into the Government House in Calabar.

Imoke has said he has nothing to fear should officials of the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission wish to prosecute. The EFCC ought to hasten to take him up on that challenge. When he appeared before the legislative panel that probed power sector contracts, Imoke brought along a coterie of cheerleaders who applauded his every grandstanding gesture.

On his part, Obasanjo was too sick to appear before the panel but not too indisposed to pen a long epistle to the probe panel. His letter dripped with self-righteous chest beating and invocation of his gerontocratic rights and privileges against being questioned by a bunch of youngsters. He even upbraided the panel for failing to realize the impropriety of asking a non-starter to sign his letter of invitation and for asking a former president to walk into the halls of the National Assembly to take questions. If only this man, so quick to detect so-called lapses of protocol, had been half as diligent in his husbandry of the billions of dollars that went down the power project drains!

Obasanjo, Imoke, Agagu and others won’t easily escape the burden of telling Nigerians the magic of the billions of dollars that bought darkness.

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2. The war we ordered is here
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15. Andy Uba Goes to War (11): What OBJ taught Uba
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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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