

Ekiti and Rumors of Electoral Reform

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By Okey Ndibe

A few weeks ago – April 10, to be exact – I wrote on this page that the then forthcoming electoral debacle in Ekiti State foretold the sham that will take the place of the general elections of 2011. In the opening paragraph of a column titled “Ekiti as a preview of 2011,” I warned: “Those who persist in seeing Umaru Musa Yar’Adua as a democrat at heart had better pay attention to the macabre show the man took to Ekiti State.” Yar’Adua, I continued, “comes across as a man who wants power at all cost and for its own sake.”

I wrote those words in the context of Yar’Adua’s bizarre campaign stump in the hotly contested state. First, the resident of Aso Rock manufactured alleged achievements for Mr. Segun Oni, the party’s governorship candidate and impostor who was justly removed by an appellate court. Then he stood by, a confounded and tragic figure, as Speaker Dimeji Bankole tried to galvanize a smattering of party faithful with a fully treasonous campaign speech.

Dimeji told his audience that the PDP had pocketed Ekiti in the elections of April 2007 with the use of police power. A speaker who habitually misspeaks, Bankole then reminded his listeners that their (ruling) party boasts the “commander-in-chief” of the Nigerian Armed Forces. Not one to settle for a coded message, Bankole was not shy to spell out what he meant. This time

around, he assured, the party would deploy the intimidating force of the military to capture Ekiti.

A president worthy of the name would have recognized the grave danger of Bankole’s perverse speech. He would have immediately stepped forward, asked for the microphone, and publicly rebuked the speaker for telling the world that the PDP’s idea of an election was to stage a coup d’etat against the wishes of the electorate. Yar’Adua glumly listened to statements that amounted to a threat to subvert democratic ideals.

If Bankole’s martial rhetoric was disturbing, things got even more ludicrous before the April 25 date of the rerun polls. Next and a few Nigerian websites posted the taped voice of Governor Olagunsoye Oyinlola of Osun State doing his treasonous best to rally PDP partisans. Oyinlola, a former military officer, is heard rehearsing an armed strategy to intimidate and suppress opposition sympathizers. He pledges to equip PDP operatives with military uniforms and weapons to enable them to “capture” Ekiti.

In a country where the rule of law is more than a cynical fad, Oyinlola’s taped plan to sabotage democracy would have elicited universal condemnation. The man would have been flushed out of his gubernatorial seat and led away in handcuffs, a disgraced figure.

Not in Yar'Adua's Nigeria. Oyinlola remains in the office he has tainted by his odoriferous speech, among other unbecoming acts.

It's painful to gloat that one's dire prediction about Ekiti and 2011 is being vindicated. Yet, when a character like former President Olusegun Obasanjo takes to mocking the man he imposed as Nigeria's sleeper-in-chief, Nigerians had better take notice. It's a sign that things are truly bleak.

Reporters recently asked Obasanjo to weigh in on Umaru Yar'Adua's avowed reform of Nigeria's electoral laws. The former president blithely retorted that he wasn't aware that any polling reforms were in the offing.

In its terseness and wicked indirection, the response was typical Obasanjo. Of course, the former president is smarting from a sharp decline in his fortunes within the ruling party. At a recent gathering in Abuja that it styled a convention, the ruling party pretty much whittled down Obasanjo's powers.

It was only three years ago that the PDP tagged Obasanjo "father of modern Nigeria." The same party seems on a mission to deflate the expired emperor's ego. Its convention stripped Obasanjo of his dream to hold a monopoly on the chairmanship of the party's board of trustees unto death.

Increasingly vilified, even ostracized, by many of the men and women he smuggled into power at various levels, Obasanjo's legendary vindictiveness appears aroused. His revenge? To tell the

truth - at least on occasion - about the bunch he hoisted into illegitimate power.

Some tell the truth as a way to set themselves, and others, free. Not Obasanjo. For him, it seems, the motivation for speaking truth is merely to get even. However untoward his motivation, what matters is that we now have Obasanjo's confession that Yar'Adua's vaunted electoral reform is a yarn, another jiggery pokery.

Nobody who's watched the sordid events in Ekiti can retain confidence in Yar'Adua, the PDP or the national electoral commission to husband democratic ideals. Even as the drama in Ekiti fostered fears of a military putsch, the PDP hunkered down, determined to snatch the state by unfair and foul means. Maurice Iwu, a man with neither an ounce of integrity nor sense of shame, worked feverishly behind the scenes to gratify the ruling party's plot. What was this "independent electoral umpire" doing at a meeting that featured such PDP stalwarts as Yar'Adua, Bankole Dimeji and David Mark, but with not a single participant from the opposing AC?

Ekiti was Yar'Adua's opportunity to silence skeptics by demonstrating his seriousness about ethical and electoral reforms. Alas, the man (and his party as well as INEC) chose to reveal the fake product they've been marketing as electoral reforms.

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Okey Ndibe is a novelist, poet and political activist. He is the author of *Arrows of Rain*, a critically reviewed novel published in 2000. Ndibe founded *African Commentary*, a magazine described as "award-winning and widely acclaimed." He 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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