

THE 2003 ELECTION: THE ELECTORATES, THE FOLLOWERS, THE PRESS AND THE POLITICIANS

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We are flabbergasted to learn that the jostling for position in the 2003 political sharing and/or zoning of Nigeria has begun in earnest and the bride (the electorates) is not even involved. This is because politics in Nigeria need not involve electorates for a politician to win an election. To understand why Nigerian electorates remain irrelevant in political and election equation, one has to review the activities and contributions of the Electorates, Press, the Politicians, and the Followers.

THE ELECTORATES

The past three decades have seen Nigerian electorates experience the sledgehammers of military politicians, they faced the wrath of the custodians of their military might, they were pursued by armed robbers and were battered by hired assassins but yet common sense has eluded them. Even then, the common modus operandi of the Nigerian electorates is to hide their heads under the mattress for the clouds to settle, for their complaints to fade away and for the process they complained about to continue and to help in engineering the destabilization of many good programs and complain later. Nigerian electorates are taken for granted and will continue to be taken for granted as long as:

- 1) they are undisciplined bunch sophisticated enough to know what they want but stupid enough to compromise when the going is rough;
- 2) they allow the politicians to give just a little to a few of them in order to dampen the voices of the unheard and hope of the hopeless amongst the citizens;
- 3) they continue to create unanticipated consequences as a result of the ill-conceived principles consider too important to be negotiated; 4) they are too impatient for incremental changes to take place, rather, want to see the big picture right away;
- 5) they are not willing to undergo honest political test in order to truly and honestly modify the political system which they complain so often about to the whole world;
- 6) they are not sophisticated enough to establish new traditions of self-motivated discipline, collective focus, and accountability with which to build each other's confidence, political skills and economic liberation;
- 7) they allow the innocence of the electorates to be taken away by sweet talking politicians and their cronies; and

8) the electorates are astray to the extent that they allow politicians to constantly take them to the cleaners and washed them squeaky clean.

Nigerian politics is now close to the edge of a precipice and we pray that the good Lord will save Nigeria from herself. Isn't it time for the electorates to go through an acrimonious divorce from the failed politicians so as to see the light that the Lord has placed at the end of the proverbial tunnel?

The disorientation of the electorates was accomplished when the military destroyed the middle class for the sole purpose of fracturing and controlling the system. This singular act was diabolic in concept and maniacal in extraction. Unfortunately, the electorates did not see it coming. Some thought they were having fun just at the expense of the weak and the unconnected. It is quite necessary that one is careful not to make the military the only whipping boy because the same electorates that are complaining today actually encouraged the military in its governance adventurism for which the military was not equipped to handle. It is a well-understood political strategy that democracy derives its political strength from the middle class, the politically conscious and educationally astute electorates. When the yardsticks with which the electorates use to measure the performance of their politicians are how well the politicians looted, and how much of the loots gravitate toward them, one sees serious problem in the horizon. With these types of performance measurement, politics in Nigeria will continue to be in a sorry state, democracy would fail woefully with an impending gratuitous violence and with mayhem as its final arbiter.

Nigerian electorates have never had a common shared vision that can propel them to political success. Shared vision and values ought to be the glue that bind electorates willing to communicate and resolve actual and perceive differences (religious, parochial, political, divergent vision, etc.) via some conference arrangement, albeit, Sovereign National Conference or National Conference. Unfortunately, to correct the inadequacies set forth in Nigeria polity, the electorates must begin to enjoy shared vision, unified values, and a will to make tough choices in order to challenge the status quo. After all life, as we experience it comprises of making choices. Deuteronomy 30:19-20 states "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live..." In this case, Nigerian electorates know which choices they need to make to set Nigeria in the path of true demographics and economic growth capable of providing long-term employment, reduce crime, and brighten lives of all the citizens.

The question is then, what can the electorates do to claim their relevancy in Nigerian politics? One thing that can be done to cure the malady is for the electorates to have a common focus, common vision, and common purpose to make Nigeria the giant of Africa. Another option is for electorates to reduce the schism of political fracture, experiment on seeking issues that unit them and see how far such experiment can move Nigeria from her current livid state.

THE PRESS

The Nigerian press, no doubt, has a niche to carve out for itself in Nigerian polity. It is unfortunate that instead of being at the forefront of the fight to bring sanity to the citizens by engaging them in meaningful discussions, and becoming the search light with which citizens see the hypocrisies of their politicians, the press abdicated its responsibilities as citizens' watchdog. Gone were the days when pressmen lived up to the creed of their profession, fought as if there was no tomorrow and were proud of the accomplishments.

Today, the press is a replica of the society it finds itself. Corrupt politicians easily buy the pressmen for the sole purpose of making them mouthpiece and a sounding board for ill-conceived policies. Today, the press is among money grabbing, and bad politician promoting citizens selling the Nigerian electorates to the highest bidder. Only very few of the press

vigorously challenge the present political status quo. Instead of the press digging out information on issues that can make electorates become informed citizens, the press sometimes uses its vantage position to focus the attention of electorates/citizens on unimportant issues. For instance, is it relevant for the citizens to be fixated on IBB power tussle and planned comeback? Would it rather not be advantageous for the citizens to know how to checkmate any scheming politician through ballot box referendum? After all, de jure and by constitution, IBB is still a citizen of Nigeria no matter what opinion the press may have of him. The electorates/citizens must also be given the right to accept or reject any politician including IBB that do not fit well defined rules of new political engagement in Nigeria. If the press cannot provide any compelling evidence why citizens' votes should not be sold, then it is doing a lousy job. It is unfortunate and very repulsive that Nigeria is incapable of having a press that is above board, a group that does not have sinister motives in their presentation of facts. Another case in point is when president Obasanjo told the citizens in no unmixed terms that if anyone could come up with information about hidden loots of Nigerians, he (Obasanjo) would go after such looters. The press ought to have provided all necessary collectable evidence and dare the president refuse persecution. This is how a responsible press ought to have acted instead of folding its arm even when Fashanu, the Nigerian footballer in London provided some evidence from his own achieves.

POLITICIANS

Politics is defined as art or science of governing a political entity such as a nation, and the administration of its internal and external affairs to the benefit of the masses governed. Politics must also ensure, as part of this artful governance, peace and tranquility between the governing, the governed and the external actors. Democracy is defined today as it was defined in the days of old, as government of the people, by the people and for the people. I still believe in the goodness of all human beings to do good until proven otherwise. In politics, wanting to do well and doing well are different animals in the same kingdom. It is not uncommon for the electorates and followers' to cast aspersion on well-meaning politicians when their trap is not falling into. Such aspersions, in Nigeria politics, often become the defining essence by which a politician is known. Nigerian politics is yet to be disinstitutionalized so that the electorates can take control of those they elect in to office by providing honest assessment of their stewardship, providing midterm report cards while keeping politicians on continuous performance review. A politician that is worth his/her salt must balance both internal and external responsibilities.

Unfortunately for Nigeria, she is still looking for a detribalized president. The person that fits such description is yet to be born and, if born, is yet to function in the current Nigerian political environment. If I am born Hausa, an Igbo, or Yoruba man, why would anyone in their right mind expect me to denounce my tribal DNA with which I will forever be identified whether I like it or not? All we can hope for is that a politician of any tribal persuasion can rise above sectionalism and the attendant parochialism inherent in all human being and do the right thing for the greatest number of his/her citizens. The simple fact of the matter is that decent and good politicians can and will make more money than they are currently stealing and carting away to foreign lands if their economic policies at home are favorable to growth. Do we think there will not be capital flight to foreign lands if America's economic environment becomes unfavorable? For example ex-president Clinton will make more money after leaving office than he made while in office because he is still respected and genuinely engaged in policies favorable to most American citizens.

The current politicians who are again scheme their way into office have unfortunately not yet proved themselves worthy of the mandate given to them by Nigerians, nor has the political equation which can make Nigeria become worthy of democracy been balanced. These politicians have not given Nigerian electorates/citizens the reasons why they should be returned to office but, of course, they don't have to because citizens' political temerity is assured. Nigerians (Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, etc.) have suffered unimaginable set backs within the last 30 years. Nigeria must speed up the process of arriving at a viable democracy because time costs. She

must design a new political order that is simple enough for ordinary citizens to comprehend because complexity costs and she must be resolute in building the self-confidence of her citizens because ineptitude very costly. If Nigerians do not act quickly in her political realm, it shall be *deja vu* all over again.

Dr. Saraki, the honorable kingmaker in Kwara State politics was recently interviewed and asked among other questions why he thought the young politicians want to take over from the old. His answer was apolitical but an *ex parte* summation. In his view, at sixty-seven, he is still ready to serve the country and nobody can question that. Dr. Saraki says

"The young ones are too much in a hurry, you don't want to learn from us, you can't buy experience from anywhere I'm still on my last lap, I'm not tired, I'm just taking a stroll on the road. You see a lot of things are happening in the parties. First, no more discipline within. If you join the Army today, you don't say you want to become a General or Major, you start from the beginning, but this is our problem today. All over the world the party is supreme, it's about experience, but it's not the case in Nigeria."

Asking the young politician to wait in order to acquire experience from the older generation is disingenuous because one does not follow an incompetent general to a foxhole. The experience that honorable Saraki invoked is a blanket experience but it is not the experience young politicians want. The experience of political gerrymandering is a lousy one for the youth to acquire. Unfortunately, the young politicians have acquired such experiences and are doing worse than the old ones. The young shall grow and they need transparent, real and genuine transferable experience. This is what is causing Nigeria's political problem, old politicians not knowing when to gracefully bow out especially when they become the problem rather than the solution. Even when Nigerian politicians know that they are ineffective in serving their constituents, they hang on to power. Power, we are told, corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Zoning of political offices is inimical to accepting failure. If Nigerians agree to pick the best leader to lead, then all talks about zoning inconsequential in Nigerian politics. Nigerians must be gracious to leave the scene for capable politicians to run the show for the benefit of all Nigerians. Now, suppose, the presidency is zoned to a section of a country that does not have qualified person, does this mean that Nigeria is doom because if Nigeria must pick from the zone, she is guaranteed a mediocre president. How can we hang on to zoning instead of responsible leadership? The present zoning strategy is obviously a joke just like when incompetent military personnel were promoted generals, not for their excellent performance but for coming from catchment areas. The result was the weeping generals in cable of standing their grounds for the political decision they made. Politicization of the military was a bad decision for our military and political zoning is still a bad decision for democracy no matter how one looks at it.

THE FOLLOWERS

As readers can observe, I purposely separated electorates/Citizens from the followers. It is said that those who cannot lead follow. Here, I define the leaders as good politicians and good electorates/citizens. There are two types of followers: inform followers and blind flowers who have blind and inordinate ambition to milk the system to the fullness of their incompetence. These are the types that Nigeria should worry about. They come in all shapes and colors, and they can be educated or uneducated. Interestingly, they can be found among the Hausa, the Igbo, and the Yoruba. They always seek insecure leaders and latch on to them for dear life while sucking live out of such leaders. These are, indeed, the sycophants of the nation, what the Yoruba refer to as "a ba Oba ku." They are the ones that will defend any leader of disrepute with illogical reasoning such as after all, he allowed some of us steal while he was stealing. They make sure that no one benefits from their presence in this world.

In an earlier article titled "A NEED FOR A GROUND ZERO STRATEGY IN NIGERIAN POLITICS," I proposed that Nigeria needed to start from ground zero as if the system had not been perturbed or polluted. My reason then was and is still is that most Nigerian leaders do not have the capacity to challenge the status quo because their hands are in the cookie jar or because they have bargained their conscience away. Given such an antecedents, it would be better to establish the new rule for dealing with the new kleptomaniacs. If strategy was also proposed with the hope that the capitals that left Nigerian shores would find their way back when a new society based on a vision of economic prosperity is created by patriotic Nigerians. Right now, president Olusegun Obasanjo seem to be chasing his shadow in claiming that he does not know who looted the treasury but at the same time grand standing Nigerians and parleying with the old and new looter in the dark. As Jesus said to those trying to stone the prostitute, if you are innocent, feel free to cast the first stone. Of course, we all know what happened. The ground zero strategy was purposely formulated so that the president would not get himself in an embarrassing situation of chasing elusive targets but continue with the job of building the nation call Nigeria. Unfortunately, he didn't get the hint.

There are different shades of Nigerians. There are those that want to give their best to Nigeria for the sake of future generation of Nigerians even though Nigeria hasn't treated them right. There are others who are the true electorates/citizens, good pressmen/women, and entrepreneurs. There are, of course, those that consistently fan the flame of discord among citizens and appeal to their least common denominators in order to divide Nigeria along cultural, tribal, religious, economic lines. These are the Nigerians that Nigeria must be afraid of because they will sell Nigeria to the highest bidder in a minute. Which group of Nigerians do you belong to?

Nigerians must be united as friends and not as adversaries to set, for the first time in the country's history, a standard that future generation will behold as dear and special for true economic recovery, political cost containment, reduction in our social inequalities and for creation of real measurable prosperity. There exists a pitiful state between the Electorates, the Followers, the Press, and the Politicians who will be courageous to lead Nigeria into excited state of her nationhood. This is a tall order and a challenge to all patriotic Nigerians.

We are all watching.