

Celebrating Miss Nigeria

Babafemi A. Badejo, Ph.D.

The 43rd edition of Miss Nigeria took place on November 30, 2019, at the Convention Centre of Eko Hotels and Suites, Victoria Island, Lagos. For the first time, I attended such an event.

My attendance was due to the much hype around me on the event. My last child Abidemi left the family educational concern, Yintab Private Academy to go work for the Miss Nigeria enterprise as Manager for Ms. Chidinma Aaron, the 42nd Miss Nigeria. She had given us a lot of sleepless nights driving from work for 2-3 hours to return home from work given the crazy Lagos traffic that has not bothered the Governors of Lagos since when I cannot say. When I came to Lagos as a student of the best University in Nigeria - University of Lagos - in 1973, Lagos was already congested.

The Murtala/Obasanjo administration of Nigeria thought the answer to traffic in Lagos was to move Nigeria's capital. The capital was moved to Abuja, but the allure to Lagos became even stronger for Nigerians. The population explosion continued as expansion of infrastructure failed to keep up. Even the maintenance of the little available infrastructure has been bereft with consistent mediocrity.

The Governor that I would easily and unequivocally state as having integrity - Lateef Jakande - knew that we must have a mass transit arrangement. But the current President of Nigeria as military Head of State killed the dream of millions of Lagosians and we all continue to suffer in Lagos to date. Governor Fashola started building light rail with Chinese loan. They say that light rail project covering a necessary but small portion of Lagos is about 65% completed. He left office in May 2015 and his successor abandoned the project for four years not caring about the interest rate that is accumulating. Please don't ask why Governor Ambode cancelled the Fourth Mainland Bridge that was already awarded as well as the light rail of his predecessor. He built terminals that are largely abandoned. Of course, for a selfish reason, he was not totally bad because he solved Berger junction bottleneck that serves the exit to my residence. That had been obvious but abandoned before he focused on it. Then he bought 820 busses that he is being asked to account for but he seems to be on temporary (I hope), self exile or is he just lying low within Nigeria?

Though as a retiree, I can avoid traffic a little bit by planning my movement. But Bidemi cannot. Closing at 5 pm and watching Google map on when to actually leave work, she tended to return home normally about 10 pm and at times close to midnight, stressed up as myself and her mum had also been stressed waiting for her to open the gate into our residence. And this is easier on her because we are subsidizing the work by her using her mother's car fulltime including running Miss Nigeria official responsibilities without compensation for transportation. She wanted experience outside of the family and we are gladly supporting her.

So, it was a pleasure to further support her by witnessing the crowning of the 43rd Miss Nigeria. Of course, she got her sister-in-law Mrs. Afolabi Badejo, to sponsor the event using her chocolate production brand name - Sokolad - as entry point. Even the big sister - flew in and attended. So also were my bosom friend Prof. Raphael Omotayo Olaniyan and his wife Mrs. Grace Johnson-Olaniyan in transit from Atlanta to Akure at the event. Our friends and son's mother and father-in-laws - Mr. & Mrs. Ogunbanjo and their two beautiful daughters-one now our family-member were present. Of course the panel of judges were too many to be named. The Nigerian Ministers of Information/Culture and that of Women Affairs were also in attendance.

I am not sure I am excited about parading girls to be picked as most beautiful when men are not so paraded. This is more so when the concept of beauty I was socialized into has been changed by the Western or largely

American media that Africans have been subjected to. I was brought up to cherish women who show some plumpness at the right places as women should be. The Nigerian women of my younger days also wore their kinky African hairs in the Afro style with pride and plaited them into different attractive styles as they like. Today, all the beauty pageants were in, (I don't know whether Indian or Brazilian) hair extensions to their own natural hair or they wore wigs. These days, it is no longer unusual to find African women with blonde wigs. They appear as real dumb blonde.

The display of the 38 girls was one of the highlights. The reduction of the number to 15 was traumatic for the girls. Then for no explained reason, they brought in Miss Abuja to make her a wild card. And she survived into the final 5 on the basis of questions asked.

My most important highlight of the night was little 9-year-old Ms. Phoebe Boniface who as a 3rd year Primary School from an Anglican public school at Potiskum who spoke above her age in a playlet on the ills of parents forcing their children to pursue careers the parents want. Apparently, her school was burnt down in 2013 and a pitch for support to the school was made. I wondered, however, about what the House Representative and the Senator for that part of Nigeria have been doing with budgetary allocations for constituency projects. It is good that the current Chairman of the Nigerian Independent Corrupt Practices Commission would push further and seek accountability on the hundreds of millions of dollars being self-allocated for themselves by Nigerian fat belly Legislators.

Ms. Beauty Etsanyi Tukura won the 43rd Miss Nigeria crown.

Media challenge won by Miss Adamawa and received 250,000 naira. Ms. Bornu who sprained her leg won Ms. Congeniality and also received 250,000 naira.

Interesting is the fact that the contest appears to be choice of Ms. Southern Nigeria. It was the girls from the South that represented the northern states in the large part. I do not know if there was faulty a out the arrangement. I would have been happy if the representation was on the basis of state of residence and not boycott of the pageant by northerners. I hesitate to write religion because the religious distribution of Nigeria is much indigenous in the north. Looking also at winners over the years, only one out of the first 42 could possibly be of Northern Nigerian origin.