

Father's Day Lunch and Corruption Discourse

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Sunday, June 17, 2018, was claimed to be Father's Day for this year. It is the only one fathers get as compared to the plethora of days dedicated to mothers. For some reason, Western consumerism creates all sorts of days to make merchants happy. Presents are purchased from merchants for mothers as fathers receive phone calls or at best, WhatsApp messages.

I have stopped wanting to resist all the consumerism that accompanied such days as Valentine's Day, Mother's Days etc., after all, as the name of a good Professor friend of mine goes in Yoruba, "Ninalowo" meaning, money is meant to be spent. But then, you have to have money in the first instance before you can spend it. And the reality in today's Nigeria is sharp horizontal and vertical social inequalities.

Well, to avoid the drift, I received a call from my son sometime last week asking if I would be available for a Father's Day lunch on Sunday. I knew I was in Ijebu-Ode for a wedding on Friday and Saturday which could easily drift into Sunday. But without hesitation, I accepted the lunch offer. As a child, I had been paying for this man's lunches, dinners and breakfasts a while back. So, it was great to be asked to a lunch that proves the US saying of "no free lunch in America" wrong. He would pay, and I do not have to pay back with something else—at least not immediately to the best of my knowledge.

We agreed that I would be picked up from my residence. And off we went to Isaac John Street, at Ikeja to some Chinese Restaurant called Zen Garden.

The pictures of meals on the menu were quite inviting but the prices very steep, including ordinary soda water. In any case, I did not have to worry. My son was paying.

I remembered the first time I had wanted to give my wife and two daughters (long before my son was born), a Chinese meal at what was called Peninsula Restaurant on Victoria Island, Lagos, as a poor lecturer. I had thought it was like cheap Chinese food of my student days in America. But as soon as I entered the restaurant, I knew there was trouble because on one of the tables was the Chief of Naval Staff and a beautiful lady—it was during the dark days of military rule in Nigeria. I knew I was in the wrong place. The waiter sized me up and told me "this is Chinese Restaurant ooooooh". Confidently, I responded with: so what? My pay for the month went for the dinner because of my stupid ego. We learnt our lesson. Bloody civilians, when they are lecturers are not to partake of the goodies in this part of Lagos of those days.

At Zen Garden, I was intimidated by the quantum of food. I had taken late Chukwudifu Oputa's guidance on minimal intake over 60 for a longer life to heart and had been practicing it since my 61st year on earth. So, seeing so much over priced Chinese food in front of me required some battle plan. For a change, I decided to let go.

Equally important, if not more important, was the discourse we had. Corruption in the private sector of the Nigerian economy. A lot of Nigerian common patrimony is being shared in the private sector. Banks are rotten through to the CBN. My son, until April was an Investment Banker, having worked on Wall Street, after qualifying as a System Engineer in the US (thanks to the generous remuneration from my employers), then joining a South African bank to work on Mergers and Acquisitions across Africa. He had recently left the banking world to go into private equity.

In banking business, several subterfuge are in place to intentionally have Banks take over designed bad debts as initial collaterals are released to borrowers in order for him/her to go to another bank to raise other loans that were planned to fail.

I reminded my son of the time of the present Emir of Kano as Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria.

He had embarked on an apparent effort, as he claimed, to pursue all bad debtors. He started and got Banks to publish some names. How do I know if what was published were all there was as bad debts? I cannot tell. How do I know what happened to debts that were repaid? The system was opaque to the un-initiated like myself.

Sanusi Lamido Sanusi, wielding the powers of the Governor of the CBN, went on take over a few banks deemed or declared insolvent and sold them to new buyers under new names. Intercontinental Bank Plc fell within this period.

These efforts were well before the to be Royal Majesty became a Whistleblower on the shenanigans he claimed to be seeing at the NNPC. He was confusing over how much money was being stolen. But there was agreement that billions, in US dollars, were missing. The PDP government in power, rather than pay the CBN top man the returns for being a Whistleblower, made sure Sanusi Lamido Sanusi was suspended from office and so, the enfant terrible, eventually lost the CBN treasure trove to Emefiele but inherited the huge savings late Emir Ado Bayero had put aside for the rainy day at the Kano Emirate Council. What's my problem as a Yoruba man, as to the management of the Kano Emirate Council's savings? I am not sure I want to undertake a discourse on that now.

Instead, my son and I, examined the normal intervention of our law enforcement entities on sleazy deals at the private sector. It seems the enforcers and guardians of our laws normally took advantage of hapless non politically correct thieves by sharing out of the loots. There are normally beautiful high society ladies who tend to serve as middlemen for such beneficiaries during the process of taking part of the loot and allowing the looter a new lease of life until caught again, if caught again. We drifted from the greed in our banking system and decided to tackle the Chinese food. This time, I chose to not worry about all sorts of Chinese permanently buying up our industrial and commercial space disobeying every labour laws knowing what Indians knew in the last century: just pay the emotionally shouting officials some money and pass the cost to consumers rather than argue. However, the Indians did not pose future threats as may end up being the case as the patterns of Chinese settlements and the building of China towns all over in total disregard for us.

Deciding to cure my intimidation and enjoy prawns and beef, I wondered about the paucity of knowledge on many fronts on the fight against corruption in Nigeria. How come our intellectuals and investigative journalists are not keen to find out the real people behind those bad debts that Sanusi Lamido Sanusi brought to our national psyche and how they are doing today? What assets were indeed recovered and what was done with proceeds? Equally interesting should be the arrangements for AMCON to bail out banks, airlines etc., as people who shared the money loaned out by the Banks are left alone with their collaterals and we, the joint owners of national patrimony are made to absorb their grand lifestyles even with some of them asking to have their "properties" back for free? What collusions are taking place in the private sector that are derailing our national development and leading to untold poverty for the masses of the people including the poor woman the Emir of Kano spoke about in a viral video in which the child of the lady, waiting for a help of 3,000 naira to enable her buy medicine for that child, died on the long queue of people wanting to

see the Emir for such small hand-outs? Why is nothing being done within the private sector to ensure that those who share illicit monies in the private sector are not allowed to live like kings enjoying proceeds of their crimes? How come we do not have institutions that are dedicated to assets recovery from illicit primitive accumulation of our corrupt animal elites?

Well, back to the food before returning home with a take away package for mummy, I was happy I was bought a Father's Day lunch. I enjoyed it thinking about memories of the birth and growth of my only son who by the way gets the same treatment from me among his 3 sisters. I remembered his writing to me at age 11 that I had abandoned him and left him with four women, denying him knowledge about the ways of men. I was involved in trying to make peace in several conflict zones where families were not allowed and only came home as a visiting father although with more days than the South African miners who came into mining hostels as absentee fathers to earn the upkeep for families at home but ended up drinking up much of their earnings. No, as I said earlier, my own employer was more generous and allowed history to absorb me of the problem of being an absentee father since I was lifting a number of people within my immediate and extended families out of poverty through paying for some education. I felt extremely happy at this lunch as I could see another life that I molded on worthy character over the phone, showing a lot of promise. Glad he is pulling his weight along with the confidence that he does not have to be a crook to live well in Nigeria. I ended up doing what I normally do less of: prayed. I gave the Yoruba prayer to the effect that my grand child would, down the line, take him to a Father's Day lunch and/or dinner. In the end, my son received prayer for himself and his daughter who should soon arrive on earth. Maybe I paid back for the sumptuous lunch and indeed did not have free lunch.