

Nigeria of the 21st Century is not a Cattle Grazing Field

By

Babafemi A. Badejo, Ph.D

A short while ago, a friend told me about the experience of her son on his way to the computer village, Ikeja, Lagos. For those who do not know, the computer village is not like a village as in Western countries where a village is a desirable place to stay for the rich since most facilities for a modern life are in their villages without the hustle bustle and stress of city life. The computer village is also not like the African village where life is drudgery as basic facilities like electricity and potable water is a pipedream. It is a piece of land in Ikeja where much selling, buying and repairing of imported computers, phones and accessories take place. So, my friend's son intended to repair his laptop and make better use of his time since Covid-19, at that time, kept all students out of school.

At a bus stop, the 25-year-old young man was accosted by the Special Anti-Robbery Squad (SARS) and asked about what was in his bag. He told them he was carrying a laptop he was going to repair at the computer village. The SARS police stated that he was a yahoo-yahoo (cyber fraudster) boy. He told them he was not. They asked for his mobile phone. He asked why? They snatched his phone, powered it, and saw the picture of a beautiful white woman. One of them slapped him severally, telling him the picture is enough proof that he is a yahoo-yahoo boy, ostensibly in love-crime with the lady.

With more beating, the SARS operatives asked him for money to redeem his phone. He told them he had no money. They insisted. He called his mother to please send N2,000 into his account that he needed it urgently. She thought it was for the repair of the laptop. She transferred. Having N3,000 in his account, they accompanied him to the nearest Automated Teller Machine (ATM). He withdrew N5,000 and gave them. He returned home crying. Told his mother what had happened; she flared up, wanting to go meet the SARS. The son asked her to thank her stars that he was not killed and persuaded her not to go there. A list going around on some of the people killed overtime by SARS justifies the restraint of the mother. Another video shot at an #endsars rally is out there of a lady whose brother was extra-judicially killed by SARS operatives and was extorted of N350,000 and even almost added sexual intercourse on extortion to secure the freedom of her brother not knowing he had been killed.

Untold numbers of Nigerians have been killed by members of the Nigerian security forces. On February 17, 2019, a video that went viral suggested that one Godwin Onoja was shot dead by an Assistant Superintendent of Customs, Destiny Onebamho, at the Sagamu interchange facing the road to Ijebu-Ode. His wife was later silenced by a token one million naira in May of the same year. Nothing more is heard about Destiny. The SARS operatives used to announce clearly to Nigerians that they would kill them and nothing would happen. And most of the time nothing happened!

The problem with Nigerian security forces is symptomatic of a general malaise of leadership failure and mind-boggling corruption in most institutions, irrespective of whether they are public, private or even social. With the inverse proportion in the relationship between corruption and the rule of law, impunity and injustice has been the order of the day in Nigeria. As Nigerian misleaders rob us dry, the security forces see nothing wrong in extorting openly from citizens. Funds for uniforms are budgeted but police operatives claim they get a paltry salary without allowances to buy boots and uniforms. As a result, they see it as their constitutional right to extort citizens and resistance results in beatings and/or death.

Billions in naira and/or dollars are announced stolen and when some portions are paid back (if at all), such is re-looted by those given the charge over the pretence of corruption-fighting in Nigeria. That the current administration is as corrupt as the one before it is no longer in doubt. The Transparency International Corruption Perception Index makes the case, aside from the nepotism of our President that myself (in a chapter of a published book), and others have documented over time.

It is great that Nigerian youths organized themselves and took a different style of collegiately democratized leadership arrangement to organize the #endsars campaign that has grown into the quest to end many wrong aspects of living in Nigeria. I whole-heartedly endorse the youths exercising their constitutional rights to peaceful protests. The police are a mere symptom to the raging greed and leadership failure that is decimating Nigeria. Such leadership failure is clear in the cluelessness of Nigeria's misleaders who are having a tenacious resistance to move into the twentieth century and abandon our eighteenth century cattle-rearing using open grazing methods along the roads and farms of others, claiming it is a cultural orientation. Or how does one explain the Nigerian President and his advisers reportedly searching for cattle routes' gazettes of the 1960s when he lives in the posh Aso Villa in a beautiful mega-city that did not exist until recently! All talks are of cattle ranching, as in countries that produce many more heads of cattle and dairy products for the world than Nigeria falls on deaf hears.

The youths should continue with their sophisticated technology-based peaceful protests. It is not for them to bring forward leaders to be compromised by our corruption culture. The format of "bring your leaders" known to Yoruba, Hausa, Fulani, Tiv etc., and our colonizers was not known to many of the Ibo communities until the British chose to stupidly describe them as acephalous and forced "Warrant Chiefs" on them. Our youths who are the majority among Nigeria's population should stampede us into the 21st century. It is for them to refuse that policies should continue to be geared towards archaic environmentally unfriendly ways of cattle grazing as opposed to sustainable ranching. More itinerant jobs can be created for those who would like to wander in the bush when the internet is changing the work culture as the Covid-19 period and, hopefully, after would show.

The youths should continue to drive out all those trying to ride on their struggle to fame, including those tithe-extorting so-called religious leaders who have been blessing corrupt kleptomaniacs before now as they all deplete our national patrimony. And these same religious leaders are, all of a sudden, wanting to pray for and preach to the youths. The youths should also continue to separate the wheat from the chaff as they stop marauders being sent to disorganize them as part of the calculations for 2023. There are also thieves who are beginning to loot businesses under the pretense of being part of #endsars.

Our youths have only spent about a week in their agitations for change. It is probably the longest in the post-flag independence period. The question is: How will this end? I have no answer that is based on knowledge. However, I can suggest some possible scenarios and indicate my preferred option as a parent who was involved in the struggle against military rule as a member of the great University of Lagos, Akoka ULSU Executive 1974/75 when we sought to remove Gowon from power after today's nice elder statesman and prayer warrior announced that the year 1976 he had fixed to return the country to civil rule was no longer realistic. We probably provided the environment for late General Joseph Garba announcing Gowon's removal on July 29, 1975. I was no longer on the Executive when Dimka tried to overthrow that administration and we overwhelmingly dared tanks before the coup attempt was announced thwarted. We moved en-mass from Akoka towards Dodan Barracks but were dispersed after we had crossed the Carter Bridge when we were assured that the coup had failed. If my memory has not failed, I believe I was in the company of my long-term friend, Kayode Adetola, now a Pastor. I continued with ASUU's resistance against Buhari/Idiagbon and Babangida whose Administration I fought with my daughter through to the Supreme Court with the aide of Lawyer Solomon Olugbemi as he then was and late G.O.K. Ajayi, (SAN).

This digression is to encourage the youths to recognize that the struggle for change has been a long historical one from the Ijebu resistance of British control in 1893 and the Bini resistance in 1897 through to the Opobo people; Herbert Macaulay and many others before Azikiwe, Awolowo, Enahoro, Ahmadu Bello, Aminu Kanu, Waziri Ibrahim etc. I am extremely happy that our children are trying to finish our unfinished business of realizing a better Nigeria. The Yoruba normally pray that their children should be an improvement over themselves.

Scenario 1

The peaceful protests continue and the President refuses to send out tanks to mow down our children. This is unsustainable. The rentier corruption-ridden economy is worsening daily as people are stealing like there is no tomorrow and people are becoming further impoverished. There is talk of recession. So, indefinite protests hampering economic activities cannot continue.

Scenario 2

The President rolls out the tanks and mow down our children to force an end to the unique peaceful protests that are accompanied by 21st century brain-power. Forget about crocodiles smiling and cyber war. Crocodiles do not smile and the youths at the fraudulent toll gate will incapacitate our military even before the start of cyber war. This scenario could lead to the youths running away like those who faced Abacha. NADECO went outside and many Yoruba people were victimized, including Dr. Yinka Adebayo and myself, who were UN staff members.

Another option under this scenario of tank roll-out could be parents joining their children to soak the streets with their blood as martyrs. This option is equally possible. After all, we saw conservative Pastor EA Adebayo, who was on October 5, 2020 told to shut up after breaking a long silence by asking for restructuring, fall in line in support of the youths to carry a placard over last weekend in green suit and white shirt. His placard stated that God hurts when His people hurt. The consequences of this option could range from Libya, Mali, Egypt, to Sudan, etc.

Scenario 3

The National Assembly has visibly failed our youths. Under this scenario, they cannot solve the problem they are part of. A sovereign national conference of nationalities and Nigerian youths could be assembled to consider options for change in Nigeria. Anything is possible under this option.

For me, the minimum is to ensure that Nigerians have utmost freedom, which is the summation of all the freedoms from hunger (zero hunger), freedom from all sorts of discrimination, including gender; freedom from poverty, etc and freedom to live in a just society, freedom to have the rule of law reign supreme which means the throwing out of corruption, freedom to associate, etc - all of which are envisaged by the UN-led and Nigeria-agreed SDGs Agenda 2030. To have utmost freedom, we must #endcluelesslycorruptleadership at all levels - from local government through to eschewing corrupt state misleaders and, of course, pretentious overlords and oppressors at the federal level. For me, a Confederal constitution in which the centre is accountable to the nationalities that set it up is best for Nigeria. It is not the bureaucratic restructuring that is tolerant of corruption that some are canvassing under the guise of high-sounding expressions like “fiscal federalism”. As if the current excessive cost of governance is not oppressive enough, they want to set up a fourth layer of governance. A confederal constitution would be the best way to prevent #EndNigeria. Fortunately, our self-centred legislooters who have apportioned untold sums of money to themselves and are being pursued by the ICPC, as EFCC fails to look into the “off the

mic” episode has realized the need to amend the 1999 Constitution. We would like to suggest that we need more than cosmetic amendments.

To conclude, the Nigerian youths have shown that change is better when it emanates from the brain as opposed to brawn. All the threats of going to war from segments of Nigeria over the cyber organized protests of Nigerian youths serve no useful purpose as these youths are not scared like some of their parents. How can a minority be bluffing? Power is widely dispersed and as shown by Nigerian youths, it is not limited to the barrel of the gun. We all saw Yugoslavia and should prevent Nigeria going that way. The Niger Delta people fought the Federal might to a stand-still and late President Yar’Adua capitulated. Please let’s not talk yet about Boko Haram for now.