

# **Our President and The Corruption Feast in Abuja**

By

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I visited Abuja on April 29, 2022, with my wife to witness the marriage of my nephew Adeniyi Shonibare with Imoleayo Olotinbia. It was a very interesting process for a union. The three pivotal highlights of the marriage ceremony: Traditional, Church Service, and Reception, which took place over two days, were held at the C.C.C. Luli Cathedral, Kado Life Camp, Abuja. The bride and groom's parents are staunch Celestials and the Church premises provided adequate space for the events thus saving from the excessive costs of rented halls.

We stayed at Jabi and had to drive to the Church premises. I was dazed to see the insane driving style in Abuja that I had never been exposed to during any of my earlier visits. I used to think driving in Lagos was gross but my Abuja experience showed the general lawlessness in the country. Traffic lights were ignored. Lacking the dexterity of order in the disorder of Lagos, it was hellish. What should have taken us 7 minutes took well over 30 minutes!

The marriage ceremony itself was spectacular. I know that the Celestial Church of Christ (C.C.C.) people, especially the women dance vivaciously inside their nice white flowing gowns without footwear but, the extent of gyrations to rap tunes; some of which extol the vices of Yahoo Yahoo boys, etc. was unbelievable. The ecstatic joy, especially from dancing is probably part of the allure that has made the C.C.C. survive far beyond the death of its founder. The Angels living with God must be jealous of the fun at the C.C.C on earth. After all, Angels are portrayed to only be repetitively performing lacklustre flipping of their wings and singing hallelujah intermittently!

While we enjoyed C.C.C. erotic dances, I mused about the Church, especially about how its founder late Prophet/Pastor Samuel Oshoffa had fulfilled his vision on 29 September 1947 in Porto-Novo, Benin. I also appreciated the fact that the C.C.C. did not join the prosperity preachers who really are thieves under Yoruba culture since they give succour to thieves who pay tithes and got relief from worrying about the hereafter.

I seldom visit Abuja, the political capital and most important seat of corruption in Nigeria. Of course, Lagos, where I live, is not a city of saints. The fact is that Nigerians pay less attention to sordid corruption at levels lower than the federal government. The law hardly catches up with the sordid corruption by most Chief Executives and operatives at the state and local government levels. After all, the oil proceeds that make up the bulk of the wealth of Nigeria

are shared from Abuja. This fact has made political offices the most lucrative business ventures in Nigeria; a shortcut to immense accrued wealth without a sweat.

An election season like now is also a period when bags of money are moving around Abuja unhindered by aspirants within the “shifting alliances of thieves” called political parties in Nigeria. Selections of the highest bidders and investors euphemistically called elections are outrageously expensive, far beyond the reach of legitimate earnings but when in office, Nigerians later marvel when those “investors” steal billions in naira and/or dollars from public funds as their respective returns on “investment”. It is an abysmal case, of I must eat bountifully from where I have sown sparingly.

My good friend, Dr. Reuben Abati, in his piece titled “The Spiritual Side of Aso Villa”, shocked me when, with conviction, when he started explaining Nigeria’s national leadership deficit (showing itself in the making of faulty and retrogressive decisions), as spiritual problems. He conjured images of demons and spirits walking with their heads turned – upside down at Aso Villa, writing as a re-incarnation of our great Yoruba literary giant, D.O. Fagunwa, who entertained us with stories in “the forest of a thousand demons”.

Definitely, Dr. Abati was “shading the truth grey”. He was only trying to shift the blame for the incompetence at Aso Villa to the realm of the Spiritual. How can one, for instance, hold witches and wizards responsible for the corrupt, myopic, and retrogressive decisions like searching for the colonial cow era routes when cities have been built along those routes?

There are no spirits bewitching Nigeria other than leadership deficit and corruption. With this orientation of accountability avoidance in the ascendancy, corruption has been soaring, costing many lives, especially, since corruption is now a way of life, and people no longer abhor or express disdain for it. A pitiful Machiavellism of “the end justifies the means”.

This reality makes nonsense of President Muhammadu Buhari (PMB) being a harbinger of truth when he claimed he had the vision to bring change. He told his Nigerian compatriots a major truth when he said: “if we don’t kill corruption, corruption will kill us”. Even the African Union rewarded him for this campaign zeal by making him the champion for anti-corruption on the continent of Africa in January 2016.

But PMB is no longer pretending to be fighting corruption. He is at the commencement of his eighth year in office as President of Nigeria. The pertinent question is on how he has fared in his fight against corruption. On the basis of several accounts, successive reports by the anti-corruption watchdogs, including academic works I and others have done, there is no gainsaying the fact that PMB took an exit bow from the anti-corruption theatre as soon as he fulfilled his lifelong ambition in 2015 and granted corruption a free reign over Nigeria.

PMB once had policies that raised the hopes that his administration wanted to make a dent against corruption. In the beginning, the Ibrahim Magu led Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC), embarked on the punitive orientation and succeeded in getting jail terms on the ongoing as well as new cases of corruption. Among these were the clamping in jail of Governors Jolly Nyame and Joshua Dariye of Taraba and Plateau states respectively. Measures like the Treasury Single Account (TSA) and an initial zeal to implement the National Anti-Corruption Strategy (NACS) gave hope.

Though Ibrahim Magu was selective on which cases he prioritised for prosecution, he appeared to be wanting to make a dent before he crossed the path of the Attorney-General and was cut to size and side-lined, ostensibly as a result of a probe of his activities. After Magu, came a more seemingly proactive-looking young Abdulrasheed Bawa, who was appointed in February 2021 when Magu's suspension was still unresolved. Bawa recently noted that the commission secured the conviction of 978 persons within one year. However, the EFCC's records of conviction show that most of the persons convicted were mostly cybercrime criminals (also known as Yahoo Yahoo boys). The high and mighty, especially those close to the presidency tend to face foot-dragging by the EFCC and the Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offenses Commission (ICPC). This position was buoyed by a US Department of State report, titled, '2021 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices in Nigeria,' which corroborated The Civil Society Legislative Advocacy Centre (CISLAC), showing how the two major anti-corruption agencies, the EFCC and the ICPC, only target low and middle-level officials suspected of corruption. According to the report, despite the charges brought against some serving and former high-level officials by the EFCC and ICPC, the organisations focused more on low and middle-level corrupt officials in 2021. The people in EFCC, and ICPC are far too intelligent to not notice how critical it has become to investigate how political elites in Nigeria are leading Dubai real estate investments. There are a number of high-profile cases with billions of Naira and dollars that have been swallowed up in silence, as the Buhari-led administration continues in a self-deluding anti-corruption war.

We used to hear accounts of how the TSA was saving on corruption brigandage but, this is not so anymore. The NACS that came out of a UN convention was abandoned after the Attorney-General named an implementation committee in September 2018. Nothing was heard again on implementing strategic steps that could at least make a dent. However, did PMB and the APC ever want to make a dent in corruption? Did Buhari really apply the much expected zero tolerance and no-nonsense stands in his corruption fight, starting from those closest to members of his cabinet and powerful individuals?

Before the election for a new term in 2019, Adams Oshiomhole, the Chairman of the ruling party had stated that any sinner would have his/her sins forgiven if he/she joins the ruling party. Indeed, the ruling party and President Buhari started openly embracing people under investigation for corruption to join those whose corruption cases were shoved aside and made Ministers. PMB who had promised to avoid any person who was tainted asked Nigerians to show him the convictions of anyone he appointed!

The Attorney-General filed a Discontinuance of the trial (*nolle prosequi*) of the former Gombe State Governor, Senator Danjuma Goje. The former Governor ruled Gombe from 2003 to 2011. He and another had faced charges for selling 50 buses belonging to the state but the process was unceremoniously halted by a *nolle prosequi*. Of course, no explanations were needed under our corruption advancing the 1999 Constitution. The administration dilly-dallied as other cases were handled with kids' gloves until some became Governors in 2019 and automatically received immunities granted to serving Governors under the beleaguered 1999 Constitution.

Nothing demonstrates better that PMB has acquiesced that corruption can strangulate Nigeria more than the recent controversial pardons granted to Rev. Jolly Nyame, governor of Taraba state from 1999 to 2007 who was serving a term for having misappropriated public funds as well as Mr. Joshua Dariye who governed Plateau State from 1999 to 2007 and was serving a jail term for stealing two billion naira of public funds.

The trial of the two former governors was being touted as examples to teach lessons that no one is above the law etc. The cases had gone through a lot of court processes with their respective jail terms on appeals confirmed by the Supreme Court of Nigeria.

The EFCC recently arrested Alhaji Ahmed Idris, the Accountant General of the Federation for forensically raking unto himself 80 billion naira from national patrimony. As usual, a lot of popular brouhahas will go on for a while and reprieve will come from either a *nolle prosequi* or judicial release as cases are not properly prosecuted until everything fizzles out and everyone moves on.

The EFCC is yet to indicate if it would dig into the stories surrounding the alleged distribution of cars for gubernatorial elections in Kebbi state not to talk of how friends and groups were just coming up with 100 million naira to purchase presidential primary election forms for our presidential aspirant jokers in a country that reeks of so much poverty. Unfortunately, one of them will take over from President Buhari if he does not succeed himself as some are pleading that he should. This culture of stealing as much as you can and walking away is also fast being imbibed by Ponzi scammers, who steal billions of Naira from gullible and greedy Nigerians and simply walk away. They also play their version of the game of ripping Nigerians off like their counterparts in public offices.

The truth remains that under the PMB-led administration, corruption has been allowed to fester. If IBB was dubbed the grandfather of corruption, I wonder if history will resist finding a better adjectival title for PMB in any assessment of his years in office.

The statistician aspirant to the presidency boasted about how he would use technology to solve the problem of corruption but, I dare say that this proposal of a solution is a result of a misdiagnosis. Technology can help indeed but, in Nigeria, technology is already helping to identify thieves who are then idolised by society at large. We know them. Technology helped to name so many in the Panama and Paradise papers. How many have been questioned and brought before the courts? None. Then came Pandora papers giving more information on a number of our presidential aspirants and, what has happened? Nothing.

With impunity and the absence of rule of law, corruption will fester. The purposeful and sincere implementation of the NACS could help in making a dent in reducing corruption but those who should guide implementation are intentionally napping on duty. Of course, it is in their interest to frustrate the implementation of NACS in a country that does not bother about accountability. Rather than organise to press for genuine change, the wrong answer for Nigerians is to enter into nationwide prayers of intercessions, being led by accomplices of the corrupt order: prosperity preachers, who are also beneficiaries of the national decadence and rot.

It is a disappointing and sorry situation that will see corruption continue to fester until a purposeful organised critical mass of Nigerians move against the current order that makes nonsense of our sensibilities on propriety. Until the people cease to call corruption different pet names but stealing. The people need to stop worshipping ill-gotten wealth and quit rallying around politicians whose sources of wealth are questionable or clearly proceeds of corruption.

There must be a deliberate drawing of inspiration and values from how societies in the past ostracised thieves and their respective families. Today, Nigerians use binoculars to search out the children of the corrupt to marry. The UN convention, translated into NACS will not be enough. We must find modern means to face the corrupt whose actions are resulting in the untimely deaths of many and, for this to happen, we must address the wrong values of tolerance for stealing at the home, at school, and in society at large.