

SEUN KUTI 'S UNCULTURED DISPLAY OF ARROGANCE

Ebun-Olu Adegboruwa

I watched with shock, disbelief, bewilderment, amazement and chagrin, a viral video where Afrobeat rising star, who should otherwise be the product of a rich heritage of revolutionary struggles, patriotism and selflessness, descended on a cultured policeman, assaulting him, provoking him and in that process also humiliating him and the agency that he represents. The barbarism of Seun Kuti's unprovoked attacks on that policeman is totally condemnable, undeserving, egregious and a blatant violation of one of the most noble institutions of democracy.

We cannot find any justification for that cruel and degrading treatment. Legally speaking, it constitutes grave assault on and a gross violation of section 34 of the 1999 Constitution, which states clearly that: (1) Every individual is entitled to respect for the dignity of his person, and accordingly – (b) No person shall be subject to torture or inhuman and degrading treatment."

Culturally, I do not know anywhere in Yorubaland, where the junior corrects and up raids the elder, to the shameful extent that Seun Kuti arrogated to himself an inexistent power of rebuke, of correction and of censoring a law enforcement officer on lawful duty. It is simply unacceptable. Where did Seun get the training that he is the one better placed to correct an elder? Is he tapping from any other source different from the one that our revered and polished Fela did? Is he not a student of history, to know that his father, Fela, was one of the most successful activists of all times, correcting the ills of the society, holding governments accountable and advocating for democracy and good governance through his music? Did Seun ever hear Femi Kuti or Yeni Kuti, ever desecrating the institutions of democracy? Or is it Nike or Lande, all whom have kept the good name and reputation of their family? Is this the way Seun wants to avenge the brutal murder and assassination of Madam Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, whose blood flows in government house till date? How many of the "unknown soldiers" would Seun be able to slap and beat up in this dastardly manner?

The Ransome-Kuti family has a place in the rich history of Nigeria, through the indelible contributions of their matriarch, Madam Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, the selfless sacrifices of Professor Olikoye Ransome-Kuti, the tireless struggles of Dr. Bekololari Ransome-Kuti and of course the inimitable Abami Eda himself, Fela Anikulapo-Kuti. They represented the best of nobility, excellence, patriotism and industry, which is why Nigerians hold them so dearly in their hearts. There is no place in that family for this malady. From all accounts, Seun is well read, having passed through the prestigious University of Lagos. He is also well traveled, as an international artiste who has performed in several countries of the world. He is deemed to be well organized and should know the value placed upon institutions and their personnel, himself being the leader of the famed Egypt 80 Band. So, he cannot claim not to know about civility and respect for the rule of law and due process.

Before now, Seun had portrayed himself as an activist, an advocate of good governance and a model for the young generation. What message then is he preaching to the same people and system that he has criticized so often? What was the basis of the #EndSars struggle for the eradication of all forms of human rights abuses by the police and other law enforcement agencies? Seun should be in the same age bracket with Mark Zuckerberg who is influencing the entire world positively. Without doubt, no form of gangsterism should be perpetrated or tolerated under the guise of youthful exorbitance or exuberance or else society will collapse and become unsafe for all lawful and peaceful persons who have no other "spirits" to depend upon like Seun, who has been busy promoting the uncensored consumption of weed and

alcohol, all in the name of some undefined social crusade.

The defence of Seun for this uncultured display of arrogance is that the policeman attempted to kill himself and his family. He was careful not to elaborate on the circumstances and facts of the alleged attempt. He claimed that he has the video of the attempt and that the policeman was wrong, has acknowledged his error and had even apologized to him in order to evade prosecution! What a world! Is Seun speaking to his fans in Kalakuta Republic/African Shrine? Or members of the Egypt 80 Band?

The video that I saw showed Seun launching unprovoked verbal assault on a policeman that was calm and respectful, it showed an unrestrained young man castigating, threatening and humiliating an officer of the Federal Republic in the name of defending himself. The video showed Seun pushing the policeman around, daring him to do his worst and refusing to be placated by other motorists who stopped to broker peace. And it was on the Third Mainland Bridge, with the attendant consequences of the dangers to motorists, traffic congestion and other distractions.

The other day, it was Burna Boy, who stormed a night club in Lagos and after his acts physically assaulted a police man. Then again it was recently the turn of one Portable, who also assaulted a policeman. Should it be the other way round, for any policeman to dare beat up or assault a celebrity then the heavens would have fallen. This unfortunate event brings into focus the value and virtue of stardom, which dictate humility, gentleness, moderation and respect for people and institutions. No positive lesson can be passed from the assault of Seun against the policeman and no defence can be offered to diminish the seriousness of the offence thus committed. And this is why the decision of the police to investigate this incidence is very laudable and encouraging. If found culpable, Seun should not walk away with this barbaric act. But beyond Seun, Burna Boy and Portable, this event has also brought into limelight the need for the improvement of the welfare and working conditions of police officers nationwide to avoid this ugly situation whereby they become vulnerable victims of servitude, abuses and debasement. We have heard of stories of police officers who were treated as maids by the VIPs to whom they were attached, the recent one being that of the policewoman in Ilorin who was beaten and battered for allegedly refusing to run menial errands for her mistress. Situations in which police officers have to beg, crow and scout for money to pay the school fees of their children, money to take care of their health or even to buy uniform and the basic implements of their trade are totally unacceptable. Nigeria does not have up to one million police personnel so why is it so difficult to cater for the ones we have, who are daily sacrificing their lives to keep us safe?

The rise to stardom should not and cannot be the justification for unbridled brigandage and infantile gangsterism such as we saw in the video circulating of and concerning Seun. Or else it would then mean that those in the entertainment world should take urgent steps to enact such rules of engagement that will guarantee respect for other members of the society that they interact with on a daily basis. Fame cannot be the reason for assaulting a policeman and those employed to defend us cannot suddenly become victims of youthful aggression. If we condemn police brutality, we must also dissociate ourselves from civilian rascality or blatant criminality. It is commendable that Seun has surrendered himself to the police as he promised. The nation eagerly awaits the outcome of the investigation of the police on this matter while commending the maturity of the policeman involved in this unfortunate incident.

Ebun-Olu Adegboruwa is a Senior Advocate of Nigeria (SAN).