

Let Democracy Breathe in Nigeria

By Promise Adiele

It is no longer a secret that the Emperor of our land and his gang are doing everything in the books to destroy democracy. The continued caricature of democracy in our land has reached a despicable crescendo and now demands new forms of pushback, no matter how subtle. It borders on contemptuous lawlessness intensified by a coterie of misguided social orchestra whose best hymn is “on your mandate we shall stand”. Shame has left the corridors of power. Honour, too, has receded into distant memory within the rank and file of our land's official political hierarchy. It is now common knowledge that there are determined, unconcealed, underhanded commitments to dislodge democracy in our land from its lofty heights. It is not a secret but an open reality acknowledged by the press, army, police, business and professional community, students, market women, other politicians, and the intelligentsia. Sadly, our Emperor's self-parodic public spectacles attest to his hollow democratic credentials. Nigerians are aware of this reality.



But for some inexplicable reason, everyone seems to be hit by a strange, mute paralysis as democracy is gradually pummeled and defaced beyond recognition in our land. It is more violating because Oga Emperor likes to regale the gullible with his democratic credentials. No, the current power procession in our land lacks democratic credentials. Our current Emperor possesses sadistic, self-deluding, inordinate, dictatorial credentials. But curiously, dictators in history end up tragically. Unfortunately, political leaders have refused to learn. Adolf Hitler of Nazi Germany, Joseph Stalin of Communist Russia, Benito Mussolini of Fascist Italy, Idi Amin Dada of Uganda, Arap Moi of Kenya, and our Sanni Abacha all ended up shamefully. In an essay I wrote in 2020, published in The Daily Times titled Shameful Death: The end of all dictators, I argued that dictators, haters of democracy, die in a particular shameful way in the following words. “Hitler reveled in racial ideology and was responsible for the genocide of about six million Jews, whom he considered subhuman beings. Hitler eventually died by suicide, and his body was cremated in a shameful way to the joy of the whole world. Although Joseph Stalin killed about 1.2 million people by direct execution, many more millions died of famine, disease,

and war due to his brutal, dictatorial policies. Eventually, the almighty Stalin died of cerebral hemorrhage and was spoon-fed before his shameful death. Benito Mussolini's Fascist policies accounted for the deaths of many people, including those he executed secretly for opposing his authority. He was executed while trying to escape to Spain, and his corpse was dumped in an open space where people spat on it. Later, the corpse was hung upside down, and people stoned it in Africa, the first names to confront you when dictatorship is mentioned are Idi Amin Dada of Uganda, Arap Moi of Kenya, and, of course, Sanni Abacha of Nigeria. These men, in different ways, plundered human existence and rivalled the devil in sadism, killing, stealing, and implementing various anti-people policies. Idi Amin died of kidney failure in a hospital in Saudi Arabia. Before his death, he defecated on his body, cried like a baby, writhing in pain, and asked for forgiveness from the people of Uganda. Arap Moi died of gastrointestinal hemorrhage, which led to organ failure. He wept like a baby before he was placed on life support. He died afterwards. The Nigerian demi-god, Sanni Abacha, died in circumstances shrouded in mystery. While some people believe he was killed through electromagnetic poisoning by an international conspiracy carried out through a handshake with Yasser Arafat, many people believe he died of a heart attack after eating apples from Indian prostitutes. Either way, Abacha died suddenly and shamefully at the height of his inglorious despotic regime”.

The men described above exercised power without caution and made democracy their worst enemy. They turned their countries into one-party states and dealt with any opposition. It started gradually with all pretentious piety, but eventually became a state policy. Disoriented, feeble-minded, ideologically deficient people stood on

the mandate of the above leaders while their country burned to ashes. Sanni Abacha broke all the rules in the books. But we could excuse him because he was a military officer and made no pretenses about possessing any democratic credentials. Many people stood on Abacha's military mandate. His emergence as the elected president of Nigeria was a foregone conclusion. The only thing that stood between Abacha and a democratic government was time. Yes, time, the indefatigable, patient phenomenon that will outlive human existence. Time is powerful. It took a combination of time and divine intervention to save Nigeria from the vicious grip of Sanni Abacha. Nigerians rejoiced. Some partied into the night while others declared personal holidays. With due respect to the Abacha family, Nigeria breathed a sigh of relief when he died. He answered to time as all mortals do. From hindsight, dictatorship or assault on democracy does not succeed in Nigeria. The evidence in history is choking. All the men who assaulted democracy and made the country their conquered fiefdom ended in a particular way. The trend will not change.

Currently, democracy in our land is under serious attack, although the attack is presented in extreme obliquity, squinted sideways by executive buffoonery and sycophancy in the corridors of power. There is a calculated resolve to vanquish democracy in our land. The signs are ominous. Everyone seems helpless as victims of demonic hypnosis. Opposition parties with the potential to challenge the status quo are being destroyed through the courts. The approach is simple but devious – plant a renegade in any opposition party, pay the fellow a humongous amount of money, ask him to challenge the leadership or registration of the party in court and of course, ask the court to do the needful.

This is the sorry, regrettable state of Nigeria's democracy. It thus means that democracy in Nigeria is only on paper. In practice, the current political machinery has barred its fangs, getting ready to organize a requiem for democracy in our land.

If the government of our land has done well, if it has pulled millions of people out of poverty, why is it afraid of

competition? If the government of our land has performed creditably well, if the government feels that the people are happy with it, why is it afraid of open, free and fair electoral competition? That the Emperor of our land and his gang are mortally afraid of competition in the 2027 election affirms his admission of utter failure in the last three years. Mortar and pestle, the ground upon which we all stand, can easily testify in heaven and on earth that our land has been plunged into an abyss and plundered by the current power machinery. Any submission to the contrary is simply political, and that is a great disservice to Nigerians. The beauty of democracy is competition. Remove healthy competition from any democratic culture, and it stops existing. The big question is – does democracy still exist in our land? It is more confounding because the power potentates in our land have all the state apparatus at their disposal. So what are they afraid of? Oga Emperor, kindly give democracy a chance to flourish in our land. If our people reject you at the polls in 2027, accept it as Goodluck Jonathan did. Nigeria must not collapse on the altar of your political ambition. You had the opportunity to make history and redeem Nigerians, even though many people believe Nigerians did not vote for you. But you got power and practically did nothing with it except to drag the country into the pit of socio-economic stasis.

The politicians of the First Republic desecrated democracy and paid dearly for it. Yakubu Gowon took over and refused to honour democracy. He was disgraced from power. Murtala Muhammed did not honour democracy enough, and he ended tragically. Olusegun Obasanjo honoured democracy and returned the country to civil rule in 1979. Shehu Shagari disrespected democracy and was booted out of office. Buhari did not recognize democracy as a military ruler and was hounded out of office. Babangida was chased out of office like a common criminal. Abdulsalami honoured democracy and lives in comfort today. Goodluck Jonathan honoured democracy and is a global icon. When Obasanjo became a civilian president, he wanted to disgrace democracy with a third-term gambit, but he did not succeed. Those who toy with democracy in Nigeria don't end well. As Nigeria prepares for the 2027 general elections, Oga Emperor, please respect and protect democracy. Let democracy breathe. You may think you have it all covered, but even the greatest of men fall victim to the proverbial blind spot. Julius Caesar was more “dangerous than danger”, he was “as constant as the northern star”, yet he fell brutally at the Capitol. King Lear thought his three daughters were his greatest asset. Yet he succumbed to public shame. Macbeth elevated himself to the realm of the gods. He fell spectacularly. Surely, democracy in Nigeria has always vindicated itself and will certainly do so now