

TINUBU'S SELF-IMMORTALIZATION

By Dr. Ugo Egbujo

A leader with an eye on posterity won't have the appetite for the vanity of naming projects after himself. Because true immortality will be bestowed by history, not monuments that can be renamed. Tinubu needs to submit himself to some clear-eyed, sober reflection. This preoccupation with self-glorification and immortalization is a telltale sign. There is now a Tinubu Barracks in Abuja. It's a frenzy of self-immortalization. There is a Tinubu Airport in Minna. There is a Tinubu Polytechnic in Abuja. It was approved this week. There is a Tinubu Library at the National Assembly. The NASS wants to establish a Tinubu University of National Languages. All these naming ceremonies have happened in less than two years. Some say it's not Tinubu. But it's sleazy. The president can't watch his aides and subordinates outdo themselves in this sycophancy marathon. There is no virtue in it. Many say this idea of Oba of Nigeria matches Tinubu's ego. It's immoral for a leader to spend public funds to build a monument and allow his appointees to hang his name on it. Nigeria is not a Banana republic. Tinubu's men have defended the immorality. Their defence is that Tinubu didn't start it. Buhari named a university after himself. Yet that comical defence is shamelessly bold. They are effectively saying that Tinubu, who came to renew hope, is building on the ignoble foundation of a few former leaders. That mischievous defence doesn't bother to answer the question of propriety. With the rate at which Tinubu eternalization project is going, after 8 years, his name could be on the river Niger.

Azikiwe built the Federal University in Nsukka. He named it after Nigeria. He only got an airport named after him long after his death. Awolowo built universities. He named none after himself. He only got a university named after him when he joined his ancestors. Obasanjo presided over the affairs of the country twice. He didn't name a Federal University or an airport after himself. Tinubu needs a special adviser on ethics. Our people say we can know the faces from the fart. A leader committed to such brazen self-aggrandizement cannot save himself from other associated temptations. If a leader can't resist the urge to name projects after himself, if he lacks the discipline and decency to desist from childish self-immortalization, can he resist the urge to refrain from becoming synonymous with the state? Time will tell.

There is this joke about Idi Amin. Amin appropriated all the titles in Uganda and named himself the conqueror of the British Empire. The joke was that he flirted with the idea of renaming Uganda. He felt Idi Republic would be a better name. After all, he was Uganda. But he was only stopped when he was told that since the people of Cyprus were called Cypriots, if Uganda became Idi, then Ugandans could easily become Idiots. The joke doesn't quite capture all of Idi Amin's vanity. At some point during Mobutu's reign, his name was ubiquitous. The fawning by his aides had gone malignant. Worshipping Mobutu in public

became synonymous with patriotism. Before every News broadcast on TV, an image of Mobutu descending from the clouds would be aired to remind the people of his divine ancestry and mission. People were expected to stop all they were doing to clap. Mobutu was God sent. He was a messiah. He wasn't a mere mortal. Tinubu has to draw the line now. His apparent delight in this self-glorification is ruinous. It's a sign of moral laxity. It's a sign of ongoing conflation of public and private political interests. It's a sign of incipient and paralyzing delusions of grandeur. It's a thing the juvenile juntas in Niger or Mali should be doing. It will attract clowns to surround him.

One of the most significant deficits of Tinubu's government is its nonchalance to corruption. It doesn't feel so dirty. Tribalism, nepotism, cronyism, etc, are all rife and permissible. Corruption is the abuse of power for private gain. In this government, a minister can revoke the title of a plot of land and give it to his in-law. Nothing is scandalous. When people complained that



Tinubu was so brazenly concentrating power in the hands of the Yoruba, Tinubu heard the complaints and intensified the lopsidedness. Nigerians are resigning to that insensitivity; they no longer care. Their president is tone-deaf. When he chooses a course for personal or group advantage, he gives no damn about public sentiment or opinion. But the naming of barracks after living politicians is remarkably naive. Our military institutions must be protected from such flippancy. We must preserve the sacredness of certain institutions. We shouldn't make them subjects of cheap politics. A barrack could be named after a president who lived, died, and left inspiring military feats. Abacha still has a

barrack, too. So why is Tinubu enamored with his name on a barrack if it puts him in a fairly despicable company? So, should we expect more projects to be named after Tinubu? The Lagos Calabar road would fit and perhaps complete that preposterousness. It's the largest road project on the continent. It was awarded to a friend without due process. It could as well be named after the father of modern Lagos. Two other prestigious projects would be the universities of Ibadan and Lagos. Since those who built them and those who came after them didn't have the nerve, Tinubu could as well take them. Perhaps, when he reaches surfeit he will discover the folly of the adventure.

Tinubu might say he won't suffer the fate of Mobutu and Idi Amin. I agree with him. But he must remember Wike. When Wike was governor, he named a local government headquarters after himself. His statue was installed. Then, he installed his protégé as his successor. It all seemed perfectly immortalized. But soon after, he fell out with his godson. A few months ago, his statue was knocked down, and his name was deleted from the monument. If Tinubu understands the ephemerality of power and the abiding dislike of the masses for terribly presumptuous leaders, why is he setting himself up for a future desecration?