

Is Tinubu settling scores?

By Dr. Ugoji Egbujo

Tinubu has become an unabashed chauvinist. It's a hard watch. It doesn't bode well for national unity. Tinubu's critical appointments have become the most lopsided in the history of this country. A Yoruba is the police Inspector General. A Yoruba is the EFCC Chairman. A Yoruba is the Head of the DSS. A Yoruba is the Attorney General. A Yoruba is the Chief Justice of the Federation. And Tinubu, a Yoruba, is the President and overseer of all instruments of coercion. The entire criminal justice system is in the hands of one ethnic group. For so long, the Afenifere was the conscience of

There is now a feeling amongst many that Tinubu is settling scores. Otherwise, why is he so relentless? But what score could he possibly be settling? Obasanjo, his kinsman, was president a few years ago. The Yoruba have ruled the country longer than anyone else since the fourth republic. So why Tinubu's ethnic patriotism so feverish that after seizing all the important criminal justice system and handing it to the Yoruba, he has also handed nearly all the critical economic roles to the very same ethnic group. A Yoruba is the CBN governor. Another Yoruba is the



the Yoruba nation and Nigeria. It fought for good governance, against oppression, and against what was often pejoratively described as retrogressive and oppressive mediocrity-metastasizing Hausa Fulani hegemony. To enthrone social justice and inclusiveness and enhance freedom, the Afenifere sold the idea of a sovereign national conference as the recipe against internal colonization, disunity and marginalization. Those days are gone. Now Tinubu, an Afenifere apostle and NADECO evangelist is going full throttle installing an ethnic hegemony.

Minister of Finance. Yet another Yoruba is the Minister of Blue Economy. Then a Yoruba is the Minister of Digital Economy. And just two days ago, a Yoruba became the Minister of Trade, Industries and Investment. A Yoruba is the Head of the Bank of Industry. A Yoruba heads the National Social Insurance Trust Fund. A Yoruba is the Coordinating Minister of the Economy. A Yoruba is the Minister of Solid Minerals. A Yoruba is the Minister of Petroleum. At the height of the much talked about Hausa Fulani domination in the military era, no government came close to this. What is driving Tinubu's

ethnocentrism?

The country is reeling. It's crime and corruption ridden. It can't afford the distractions of corrosive suspicions of ethnic domination. It can't conduct decent elections. The perception that Tinubu Yorubanized the critical levers of state will only complicate the distrust. Our problems are huge. The Mo Ibrahim report is out. It says Nigeria is one of the worst-ruled countries in Africa over the last ten years. On the War Against Corruption, we scored a miserable 28%. In general leadership, we have fallen into the same category as Sudan and Somalia. So perhaps dwelling on issues like the ethnic coloration of appointments rather than health and education and security might be idiotic. But, one of the major problems Tinubu inherited was virulent ethnic division. National unity ought to be an urgent priority. Tinubu's devotion to rabid 'parapoism' is counterintuitive. Military juntas weren't this aloof. Tinubu ought to know that Nigerians are not cows. Taxi drivers and barbers on the street know the positions that define power in a multi-ethnic third world country. Beyond sloganeering, Tinubu should know that a shared sense of belonging across ethnic divides is the beginning of unity and peace, and of sustainable progress.

A Yoruba heads the Army. A Yoruba heads the Police. A Yoruba heads the Customs. A Yoruba heads the Immigration. Again add the DSS to that. It's staggering. The Yoruba are very intelligent. They are perhaps the most sophisticated ethnic group in Nigeria but the gap can't be this wide. The government isn't an Egbe Omo Oduduwa.

Many blame Tinubu's baffling tribalism on Buhari. But this is disingenuous. If anything, Tinubu should have learnt from Buhari's shortsightedness. Buhari was a little narrow-minded. But he didn't have the benefit of Tinubu's political lineage and exposure. A cursory look at Buhari's lopsided appointments will reveal that while he might have concentrated power in the north, it wasn't this brazen. Buhari didn't concentrate critical roles in his ethnic group or geo-political zone. Yet the country criticized Buhari heavily. Comparatively and by any scale, Tinubu's tribalism is utterly blind and stubbornly headlong. Yoruba have taken the head, taken the heart, taken the gizzard, taken the kidneys and liver. In the third world, people know ethnic domination when they see it. People are not cows.

But don't blame the Yoruba. Most of them are embarrassed by Tinubu's antediluvian antics. Indeed, the Yoruba are the most welcoming group in Nigeria. They are self-assured and empathetic. They are effervescent and warm. Culturally, their lives espouse harmony and freedom. They are the most religiously tolerant, too. They never seek the domination of no one. They are instinctively happy to compete on a level playing field. They have been the loudest and sincerest champions of equity and meritocracy. So this ethnic hegemony that Tinubu is weaving is patently not Yoruba. The Yoruba live

and let live. They didn't send Tinubu on this errand.

One reasonable inference is that Tinubu perhaps lost faith in One Nigeria while waiting to be president. Tinubu's loss of faith in One Nigeria is so stark that most of his personal aides are all Yoruba. No pretense at all. The bigoted Onanuga, who thinks the Igbo are second-class citizens in Lagos, is now his spokesman. Sunday Dare has been brought back as a Special Adviser and implanted into the Ministry of Information. Tinubu's Chief of Protocol is Yoruba. The Commander of the Brigade of Guards is Yoruba. The ADC is Yoruba. The Chief Security Officer is Yoruba.

For the first time, we have a consummate politician who prepared for the role for many years. Yet again, we have a president who trusts only his tribe. Tinubu became a prominent senator over 30 years ago. He has an enviable national reach. Yet he distributes appointments like Sunday Igboho. Tinubu's approach should have been distilled by the heat of the struggle to restore democracy. The clannishness we see today ought to have been purified by the fire of NADECO. His critics now say that having grabbed the coveted ultimate power, Tinubu has shed his cloak and is manifesting his truest colours.

Ordinarily, nobody would bother if Tinubu went for merit and chose only the people of Iragbiji or Isale Eko to fill the most important government positions. But Tinubu's morally flabby cabinet is full of chaff. After removing five ministers whom he deemed to have performed woefully, his cabinet is still peopled with some who lack integrity, retired governor who looted their states according to the EFCC and got promoted to national service to be cloaked with a dubious immunity against criminal prosecution. So Tinubu hasn't sabotaged the Federal Character spirit to drive prosperity and progress. On the contrary, many Yorubas believe Tinubu's 'parapoism' is aimed at building a private political dynasty.

Nigerians don't care if members of one family dominate the Super Eagles on merit. They want the best to represent the country. When Nigeria becomes truly one and we select players for government and politics as we do for sports, no president will approach governance with a Tinubu mindset. Nobody does that in the Super Eagles. That's why many feel that the federal character principle inadvertently makes our leaders village champions. If the next president after Tinubu emulates this parochialism the country may disintegrate from deepening of ethnic cleavages. Rotation of power is supposed to serve inclusiveness not further alienation.

President Tinubu knows that in a fractious multi-ethnic third world country, the concentration of the levers of the criminal justice system, economy and security, in the hands of one ethnic group will feed the system with disenchantment and paranoia and corrode cohesion. The Yoruba don't need this sleight of hand. So why is Tinubu hell bent on this primitivism?