



African Democracy and Disillusionment: the Nigerian Experience in Ola Rotimi's *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*

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ABSTRACT

The goal of this presentation is to underscore the fact that democracy has not developed in Africa especially Nigeria to an appreciable level. This is due to greed and selfishness of the politicians who see the ascension to power as easy way of enrichment. It is seen from this context that politics is "all and all" and a "do or die" affair which must be won at all cost no matter the consequences. In Nigeria, most people are disillusioned because the government has not delivered the dividends of democracy. So, it is imperative to emphasize that democracy as an administrative concept can not function effectively without the people's participation and contributions. It is observed that the basic infrastructures including water, power, shelter, food, health care, education, road, and other social amenities and economic empowerment be made available to benefit the people. Another observation is that information is very vital to the operations of a functional democracy which is based on transparency, accountability, commitment and diligence of the leaders to discharge their responsibilities. The paper concludes that democracy will develop to an acceptable level in Nigeria as well as other parts of Africa when the politicians place the interest of the people first before their personal quests.

I. INTRODUCTION

The concept of democracy is hinged on the government which derives its power from the people. In functional democracy, the collective will of the people prevails against the individual for the benefit of entire society. It should however, be noted that democracy is practised in varied forms in different parts of the world depending on the cultural experience of the people which enables

them to actualize their collective aspirations. This explains why the Western type of democracy as practised in many parts of Europe and America may not be fully applicable to some African countries due to the peculiarity of their cultural experiences. The above implies that each society should develop the form of democracy which satisfies their needs and gives meaning to their live. However, it has been observed that democracy has not thrived well in most parts of Africa for example Nigeria owing to the manipulative tendencies of many of the practitioners who see politics as a game in which the winner grabs all available resources for self aggrandizement and as the policy of the party in power.

Definition of Terms

It is important to clarify the key word democracy which forms the basis of this presentation. This is to provide guide and avoid unnecessary misinterpretation of the concept. Democracy is a form of government in which decisions are based on the opinion of the majority on a given situation. According to Edlyne Anugwom

Democracy can be perceived as government by the people, in which supreme power is retained and exercised by them, either directly, as in pure or absolute democracy of the Greek City states, or indirectly, as in representative democracy of modern times (68).

It follows from the above that democracy cannot function effectively without the people's participation since power is derived from them. On another sphere, 'Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English defines democracy as:

A system of government in which all the people of a country can vote to elect their



representatives. It is the fair and equal treatment of everyone in an organization and their right to take part in making decisions (388).

From the foregoing, it is clear that the people's participation in democratic governance is mandatory since they give meaning to its operations. Therefore, in democracy the expectations of the people are usually very high because they have hope that they will derive benefits from it as it is their own government and when it fails, they become disenchanted. So, disillusionment arises due to the failure of government to provide the basic infrastructures that will bring development to benefit the people. At this juncture, it is important to examine some of the factors which bring about instability and disillusionment among the people in a democracy as experienced in Nigeria.

Politics as a Game of “do or die”

To many politicians in Nigeria, politics is simply a game of manipulation in which they play to satisfy their selfish interest at the detriment of the society. It is either they win the elections or they set the country on fire and make it ungovernable for the winner. In some extreme situations, destruction of human lives and properties does not concern them as long as they remain in power and control the resources of the country. In Rotimi *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again*, the protagonist Lejoka Brown emphasizes the fact that politics has become everything one can think or aspire for in life. The fulfillment of life in terms of monetary acquisition and properties can best be realized from politics where one is given the opportunity to partake in the sharing of the national cake. This deception seems to have prompted Lejoka Brown to reiterate to his friend Okonkwo that:

Politics is the thing now in Nigeria, mate. You want to be famous? Politics. You want to chop life? – No, no – you want to chop a big slice of the National cake? – Na Politics (4).

In this same vein, his wife Sikira confirms Lejoka Brown's deep involvement in politics when she observes that not only is the master in love Madly in love with Politics, he sleeps with politics and dreams of... (23). The above scenario is seen in Nigeria and some other African countries where politicians who win elections automatically become kings and money barons due to the wealth they acquire from government through dubious means. Many of these afflicted politicians see politics as “all and all” and a game of “do or die”, which must favour them at all cost no matter the repercussions

of their actions. What matters most to them is to ensure that they win the election and remain in power at the detriment of the others. These types of “desperate and destitute” politicians are found in many African countries such as Nigeria and Mali where they are ready to cause havoc and even go to war to remain in power.

Employment of Military Tactics

Many politicians especially those with military orientation adopt unsuitable strategies in the administration of their country when they are elected or appointed to political office. They fail to understand or even put into consideration the fact that many of the military approaches to political issues may not be ideal in a civil society. This is because most of the citizenry are not familiar with martial laws and as such find it difficult to understand them. For example, in Rotimi *Our Husband...*, Lejoka Brown employs the use of army tactics which he refers to as “surprise and attack”. This tactic could best be applied in a war situation where the enemies are caught unaware. This is not the ideal approach in democracy because the electorates ought to be given information on the time of political campaign rallies based on scheduled dates and venues to enable them attend since they are expected to vote during the elections.

The incursion of the military into politics has been found to have dire consequences on Africa especially Nigeria where the retired officers influence decision affecting the entire country. Once the civilian government is overthrown, the military in power will then change the constitution and impose martial laws in form of decrees on the People to enable them treat everyone and any situation the way they want. In the above scenario, there is no regard to anyone or institution since the constitution that guides the society has been set aside. There are also the tendencies of human right abuses occasioned by the military when they suspend the constitution. Abraham Adesanya lends credence to the above when he emphasized that: “Nigerians must note that all the problems we have political, religious, ethnic and economic have their roots in the long years of military rule.... He goes further to observe that:

The pursuit of their self-perpetuation schemes led to the total bastardization of the political system. They banned credible and tested politicians, sponsored and encouraged their business partners to enter the political arena, promote the use of money in politics, created and dissolved political parties at will and generally turned politics into a



huge circus show of absurdities. Economically, the military brought Nigeria to its knees. (3)

The above is the situation which aptly describes the political landscape of Nigeria and some African countries still grappling with the enthronement of democracy in various shades.

Marriage as a Political Weapon

Naturally, marriage is a union between a man and a woman for the purpose of procreation to ensure the continuity of the human race. However, it has been observed that some go into marriage to achieve other goals such as economic, political, social and religious fulfillment. This is applicable to the case of Lejoka Brown who married Sikira to satisfy his political ambition. Sikira's mother Ajanaku is the President of Nigerian Union of Market Women and so he hopes to take advantage of her position to win the election. He hopes that through her mother he will gain the support and the votes of the market women to win the election. He does not care about Sikira's welfare except the votes he intends to win through her mother. According to Lejoka Brown:

Her marriage is for emergency, in order that...., that woman's case is only for necessity, anyway-temporary measure. We need women's votes, man if we must win the next elections. (10)

He confided in his friend Okonkwo the fact that he will settle Sikira after the elections by empowering her with large sum of money to set up her own business and possibly marry another man. He observes that:

Everything would have worked out according to plan once the elections were over. See? I give Sikira lump sum capital to go and trade and look for another man or something like that; Mama Rashida remains right in this house of my fathers; and I move into minister's quarters on Victoria Island. Liza joins me there. Everybody is happy. But now look at it. (10)

Sikira confirms the political undertone surrounding their marriage when she reiterated to Mama Rashida the fact that she was married for political reasons not love as is found common in ordinary marriages. She retorts as she mocks her position in the marriage thus:

In this house. Ha! A slave, that's what I am, did he marry me because he loves me, or because of his crazy politics? What do I care whether he wins politics or not? Shame indeed. (15)

Lejoka Brown complains that Liza is hurriedly coming to join him in Nigeria without waiting till the elections are over. The more the number of wives Lejoka Brown marries the more

the problems and burden he attracts to his political adventure. He was negatively affected by Liza's arrival and the adoption of Sikira as the presidential flag bearer of her party to challenge him. This finally brought to an end his political ambition which paved the way for his return to family life and cocoa business.

One easily observes that democracy cannot thrive in Lejoka Brown's domain because of the disorderliness and confusion he brought to his party by the adoption of unsuitable political strategy. This situation led to his frustration and eventual withdrawal from active politics which in turn brought disillusionment among the party members. Mallan Gaskiya and other concerned members of the National Liberation Party reject the military strategy proposed by Lejoka Brown as not feasible in a political campaign. He pointed the fact that:

.... the present leader of our party is so old-fashioned and autocratic about the risky of implementation of his whimsical strategy, this whole mumbo-jumbo about military exercise in a political set-up is a sham. (52)

Lejoka Brown does not see reasons why other members of his party like Gaskiya should be given the opportunity to make contributions to the campaign strategy that will enable the party win the elections. He believes that his political campaign strategy is the best and should be accepted.

Participation in Party Politics

In terms of Party Politics, Sikira suggests to Liza that all women should form a political party to fight for their freedom and liberate themselves from oppression. She believes that through party politics housewives, house maids and other women will gain their freedom from their oppressive husbands. It is her hope that all women who are subjected to all forms of oppression will be liberated through active participation in politics. She encourages Liza and other women to join party politics to be able to initiate the struggle for their liberation. Although Lejoka Brown sees her warming up for politics, he does not take her seriously as he believes that women will never make the difference in politics more than men especially "himself". To Lejoka Brown, politics should be concentrated on men like him who have the will and power to manipulate others to achieve their selfish goal. He asks Liza to explain what she knows about politics which she seems to be using in educating Sikira. Lejoka Brown retorts and asks Liza: What basic? What do you know about politics? I mean, hard-borne politics...what basics?



Liza replies by stating the reasons thus:

Why, fundamental human rights-irrespective of race, sex or creed. Oh, no, nothing wrong, at all, Mr Lejoka-Brown! Particularly, where the "students" involved in the acquisition of such knowledge happens to be the wives of a freedom fighting hero on the national scene (56)

Lejoka Brown believes he is the only person who has the monopoly of political knowledge and that the women do not know anything about politics. According to him, they should not even talk or attempt to participate in party politics since they do not possess the knowledge.

From every indication democracy can not function well in Lejoka Brown's domain since the others including his household and party members do not have the freedom to contribute ideas and participate freely in political activities. This form of political intolerance is typical of many African politicians particularly those from Nigeria with military training struggling for the enthronement of democracy values in their countries.

Lack of Managerial Ability

Lejoka Brown's inability to manage his wives, casts doubt on his presidential aspiration to the extent that Sikira as well as Mama Rashida parked out of his house. He quarrels with his wives and this affects his political career. Additionally, Liza's entrance into the executive meeting of Lejoka Brown's party in bathing suit-bikini shows the level of disorderliness which exists in his house. His inability to stop the wife Liza from walking across "half nude" in full view of the party members and even the press shows how ineffective he will be when he becomes the president. The wife does not care for decency and family values which require that an educated and married lady like her should dress properly before meeting the public especially the press.

Based on the above events, one can see that Lejoka Brown's family is in disarray and his inability to control his household especially the wives will have serious negative implications on the nation if elected the president. He will not be able to manage the human and material resources available in the country. There will be leadership crisis which will in turn affect the operations of democracy negatively because it thrives more in a peaceful environment.

Moreover, Lejoka Brown's use of machete and gun to harass party members and the press is barbaric and uncalled for since no one is there for war. He ordered them to kneel and later charged

them to lie face down so that they will not be able to see Liza in her "half nakedness". This ugly incident is unfortunate and unbecoming of party leader who hopes to be the president of his country. He is encouraging the citizenry to go about the streets with machetes and guns ready to strike at the slightest provocation. Thus, this development can lead to anarchy and makes the operation of democracy difficult as well as dangerous since no one will be free to move about.

Disillusionment

Disappointed and frustrated, Lejoka Brown decides to quit politics to save his life and return to cocoa business after he was voted out of office by his party. He reflects on the events that brought him to this far and apologizes to Liza thus:

...Elizabeth, I'm really very sorry for everything that has happened. I'll go back to the cocoa business. No more money politics for me. But first I'll build you the clinic I promised (75).

Lejoka Brown and the other party members are disillusioned due to dashed hopes and unfulfilled promises.

II. CONCLUSION

From the above, it observed that the electorates who have great hopes and expectations that democracy will usher good governance and bring better condition are disappointed as well as disenchanted. This is because many of their elected representatives have abused the trust reposed on them by misappropriating the funds meant to be used in developing their society. They are disappointed to the point that they neither trust their representatives nor the government in power. To the masses of Africa and indeed Nigerians, democracy has not yielded the desired result. They are still expecting the dividends of democracy and not disillusionment.

Democracy is anchored on the rule of law and leadership by the majority. This means that the people should be given the opportunity to vote to elect their leaders. Transparency is very fundamental to the success of any democratic experiment. This is necessary because information has to be made available to the people to create awareness on the programmes of the government. Transparency implies that the mandate of the People should be respected and results of elections released on time. In relation to the above, the government has to be accountable to the electorates. A democratic government should be responsible to the people and work to entrench those values that will benefit the



society. It is also believed that democracy can only succeed in Nigeria and Africa when the basic infrastructures such as power, food, shelter, education, road, health services and other social and economic facilities are made available to benefit the people.

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