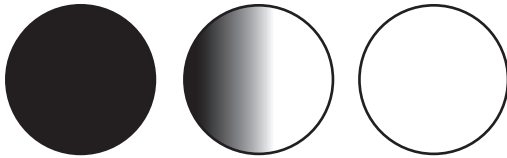


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GENIUS

For the Age of Reason

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The Genesis Project: Unleashing the potential of Nigerians to make Nigeria great.

Notice

Our mission is to bring light wherever there is darkness by providing our readers with the information that they need to understand events and developments in Nigeria. With this in mind:

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- Information provided must be verifiable within the limits of human knowledge.
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Freedom has always been an expensive thing

Martin Luther King Jr

”

The Age of Reason

Any Nigerian visiting any country in the West for the first time cannot but marvel at the potential of the human mind. The evidence of human ingenuity is all around you. If he were a thinking man, he would stop and wonder why it is that his own people have not produced such marvels.

A person from the West visiting Nigeria for the first time must, at some stage, whether he likes it or not, ask some awkward rhetorical questions. The first question which must be forced into his mind is whether it was an aeroplane or a space shuttle that he boarded on setting out on his journey. If he is satisfied that it is indeed the same planet earth that he is in, the next question that he is forced to grapple with is whether the people of Nigeria were created by the same God that created his own people or whether Nigerians are children of a lesser god.

Being a thinking man he will know that the difference between the people of Nigeria and his own people is only in the pigmentation of their skin and that the two peoples have fundamentally the same constitution: two arms, two legs, two eyes and two ears; a mouth, a nose and a body attached by a neck to a head.

Again, being a thinking man, he will soon enough arrive at the conclusion that the difference must lie in the content of the head. He will do so because he knows that it is within the head that lies the source of all human creativity and progress. When he follows the trail of enquiry further he will find that the heads, in nearly all cases, contain a brain and that the composition and size of the brain is broadly the same as that to be found in the heads of his own people.

Coming from a culture where questions must be pursued to their logical conclusion, our curious visitor will then sit and ponder upon this question: what is it that explains the state of development in

the West and the state of underdevelopment of Nigeria?

After staying in the country for a short while, our visitor from the West will find that the answer lies in what is imprinted on to the human brain in the course of the life of the Nigerian man. He would note that in his country much of the energy of the government is devoted to empowering the minds of the people so as to unleash their inner potential. From the earliest possible age all are told: “use your imagination”; “be original”; “think “outside the box””; “think the unthinkable”. He would see that in Nigeria, in contrast, from an early age children are made to keep their thoughts firmly “within the box” and preferably not to think at all: “obey your elders”; “learn our customs”, “leave everything to God”; “submit it to prayer”. So our visitor will very quickly come to the realisation that what divides the people of the developed world from the people of the undeveloped world is that the people of the developed society live in the Age of Reason while those in the undeveloped society live in the Age of Unreason. The people of the one society challenge and question and by so doing develop, while the people of the other society accept and believe and by so doing stagnate.

Still the government and the people of Nigeria want Nigeria to be developed like the West: the government even speaks of Nigeria becoming one of the top 20 developed countries by the year 2020. The question that the thinking man must ask is: do they really understand what this entails? Can a country be developed independently of the development of the minds of its people? Does a country become developed simply by its government using the proceeds of its natural resources to pay contractors from the developed world to build roads, bridges, airport terminals, ports, hospitals etc? If so, does this mean that Nigeria was a developed country under the British colonial administration which gave us some at least of these things? If so, how can a country that was once developed become un-developed? Isn't development supposed to be more enduring than the shelf life of a country's infrastructure? Isn't development supposed to be a one way road - like the transition from childhood to adolescence through to adulthood - rather than a roundabout? Many questions for the thinking man to reflect upon.

In our view real development is development that can be, and is, sustained after the administrators, contractors, project managers

and other show-us-how personalities from the developed world must have gone back to their own countries. This form of development, which is the hallmark of the 20 most developed countries, can only come about through the development of the minds of one's people and the minds of the people can only be developed by getting the people to think through what they read, question what they are told and challenge what they are asked to believe.

Given this can Nigeria ever become developed? Yes, of course it can, and more importantly, it will. Why? First, because Nigerians were created by the same God that created the peoples of the developed countries. Second, because the history of these countries shows that the reason why they became developed is that the governments developed the minds of their people, or because the people, in spite of the designs of their government to keep them undeveloped, resolved to free their minds from the prisons that their elders, leaders and pastors had conveniently kept them in.

It was by so doing that they made the transition out of the Age of Unreason into the Age of Reason - just as early man made the transition from the Stone Age to the Iron Age. It was after they did so that they began to fulfil God's will by releasing the imprisoned splendour of their minds, the produce of which is the object of the admiration of Nigerian visitors to these countries.

It is our firm belief that there are no other pathways to the development that the people of Nigeria so earnestly desire, and which their governments have been promising, other than through the greatest gift that God gave to man - that which distinguishes him from, and sets him above, the animal world - the power to think through one's condition of life.

With this we welcome you to this journal which is intended as a travelling companion for the thinking man as we move towards the Age of Reason. ☒

The GENESIS PROJECT

– an introduction

The fascination of history is that no state of affairs persists for ever and it is in its turning points that history's greatest moments are to be found: The points where events take a new direction.

The best known turning point is in the story of creation itself as recorded in the Bible in the book of Genesis 1:1: **“And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.”**

It was not that God abolished darkness altogether; for how can one appreciate light if one has never known darkness. All that was ordained was that darkness should not enjoy unrivalled control over the affairs of the earth.

Two critical things followed. First, God declared that of the two forces, darkness and light, “light” alone was good. Second, God separated light from darkness.

Light having been declared “good”, men seek for the light to shine on the good things that they do, whilst for the bad and evil deeds that they do men look for the cover of darkness.

Thus, from the earliest days of creation the eternal forces of darkness and light have co-existed and competed for domination over the lives of men and, at any given time and in any given era, one of the two forces is dominant.

Will the real Nigerians now please stand up

The true character of the people of Nigeria has been much misunderstood and misrepresented.

The truth is that the people of Nigeria are no different from the other peoples of the earth and our history is no different in terms of the eternal struggle between the forces of darkness and the forces of light. In common with the rest of the world, we have a mix of the good, the bad and the plain ugly. If anything we are

more good than bad which explains why we are more often sinned against than sinning. What cannot be denied, however, is that since independence in 1960, it is the forces of darkness that have been making the headlines for the rest of us and they have been growing from strength to strength.

Thus, even as the country has grown richer from the blessings of its natural resources, wealth and power have become more and more concentrated in fewer and fewer hands at the expense of more and more ordinary Nigerians. At the same time much of the human resources with which the country is endowed has been left either to waste at home or to flow out of the country to be used by the more developed countries. The gap between the richest and the poorest citizen has grown in gross disproportion to the industry and to the talent of both.

Reasons for the distortion of the image of Nigerians

This situation has been brought about because the operating system that the country has been running on is one configured by the forces of darkness: Foul play over fair play; patronage over competition; might over right; mediocrity over excellence and opportunism over integrity.

It is the value system according to which Nigeria should run that represents the fundamental divide within Nigeria: It is not left versus right or Christianity versus Islam or North versus South or one ethnic group versus another ethnic group because the forces of darkness and the forces of light are to be found on each side of these lesser divides. The great divide is between the forces of darkness and the forces of light. All the other divides are but shades of difference.

How things went wrong

If the real Nigerians are law abiding, honest and industrious people, where did things go wrong? How have Nigerians become so misrepresented and misunderstood to the point of self-hate?

The explanation is that since the ship of independence set sail in 1960, the steering and navigation has been controlled by the forces of darkness according to their value systems: corruption, patronage, greed, opportunism and violence. As befits their way of

operating the real manipulators of the system shy away from coming out into the open; instead they hide behind masks of friendship and patriotism that cover their true face.

The light, however, has a way of exposing even their darkest secrets. Thus we now know that the forces of darkness were manoeuvred into the driving seat at independence, at the expense of the real Nigerians, by the British Colonial Government by the rigging of the country's independence elections (hear the BBC Radio 4 broadcast: *Rigging Nigeria* at http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/history/document/document_20070730.shtml). It was a measure of the scale of this original dark deed that documents relating to the exercise were classified not to be released for 100 years i.e. until the year 2060 by which time, their calculation was, that the course that the forces of darkness had chartered for our people would be irreversible.

After so many years of discussions and reflections on the problem with Nigeria, to the point where many had come to believe that the country is cursed and can never progress, the truth is out and, with it, the people are now on course to be free at last.

The good news is that Nigerians now know that the problem is not with the Nigerian hardware - the country or its people - but with the operating software: A set of values that was programmed to keep the people away from the light and forever mired in darkness where the princes of darkness would reign supreme.

Another Way

It was God's will that where there is darkness there shall be light, and that the light shall separate itself from the darkness because the light is good. Now that the light has been shone on the darkest secret of all, it is time to heed the directive from Allah in Sura 14:5: **"Bring your people forth from utter darkness into the light"**

Our Mission

The Genesis Project is committed to changing Nigeria's operating software so as to bring all the people of Nigeria out of the reign of darkness and into the light. ☒

Electoral reforms: Change vs More of the Same

Sylva Nze Ifedigbo

One of the most keenly anticipated programmes of President Umaru Yar'Adua since his assumption of office in May 2007 is electoral reforms. Interestingly, it is one of the very conspicuous points on his seven-point agenda which formed the core of the manifesto on which he rode to office in the very controversial elections. With much of the seven points on that highly advertised agenda now gone awry, there has been an understandable increase in agitation for Electoral reform. This agitation is borne out of the need to enthrone transparency and prevent rigging at future polls.

Most Nigerians who are still perplexed by the inconsistencies of the last polls and who are daily confronted by the unfulfilled promises of the Government that it brought to power clamoured for the reforms. The President himself was sincere enough to have admitted that the process that brought him to power was fraught with anomalies. So when, in August 2007, the Federal Government set up the Electoral Reform Committee led by erstwhile Chief Justice of the Federation Muhammadu Uwais, many Nigerians were cautiously hopeful that the President was going to fulfil one of his promises after all. Caution was required in part because it was the same Chief Justice that had upheld Yar'Adua's claim to victory in the face of a legal challenge mounted by the opposition.

For seven months, the twenty-two man committee carried out its assignment. It held public hearings in several cities of the country and went through dozens of memoranda and recommendations submitted by Nigerians, and Nigerian groups, both at home and

in the Diaspora. Generally, Nigerians expected a good job from the Committee and the finished product was to signify “Change” for our electoral system.

The Committee has since submitted its report to the Federal Government. The Government’s actions, and inactions, since the widely published report was submitted has left many in doubt about just how sincere it is about the process. The Muhammadu Uwais Committee document has since undergone a series of dissections and re-dissection, which are essentially watering down processes that have left us with a document which is not much different from what we currently have, thus “More of the same”.

The processes initiated by the Federal Government on the Uwais document told a tale of desperation and of a conscious effort by the Government to maintain its grip on power by the extrusion of those recommendations that were sure to make it more difficult to rig future elections. First, a ministerial committee was set up to prepare the draft government review of the report. As if that was not enough, another committee was subsequently set up to develop the Report into a memo which the Federal Executive Council finally deliberated on to arrive at conclusions that have since left the polity heated up.

It is important to note here that not all of the original recommendations of the Uwais Report were thrown away. Some of them were cheerily accepted by Government. Some of such recommendations include:

- the unbundling of the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and the establishment, in its place, of two new bodies, one to be responsible for the registration and monitoring of Political parties and the other a tribunal to handle post - election offences. What is to be left as INEC was to concern itself strictly with the organization of elections. The membership of the new INEC was to be enlarged to include representatives from the media, civil society, the Nigeria Bar Association, women and labour groups.
- the introduction of independent candidacy.
- The readopting of open secret ballot system under which, votes are to be cast, counted and results countersigned by accredited party agents and the police. Such results are to be

announced right there at the polling station.

- that only political parties that scored up to 5% of the total votes cast in an election were henceforth to be qualified for automatic grants from the Government.

That was the plus side. On the minus side, the Federal Governments rejected two recommendations that are considered to be the crux of whatever reform the Government planned to carry out: it affirmed the sole right of the President to appoint the Chairman of INEC and also rejected setting a limit to the period of litigation following electoral disputes.

Of the two negatives, the former seems to have generated more dust. So fundamental to our electoral system is the personality of whoever is at the helm of affairs at the Electoral Body. It is his integrity or lack of that colours the whole voting process. Such electoral umpires have always been appointed by the President and over the years, these umpires to the chagrin and persisting agony of the electorate have shown consistently, and beyond any iota of doubt, that loyalty to the one who appointed them ranks topmost in their duty schedule. From this it is clear that the litmus test of Government's sincerity in carrying out the much needed Electoral reforms is her ability to make a break from the past by granting true independence to the electoral body by keeping its hands off the appointment of its chair.

The original Uwais committee document gave a new idea to how an unbiased and generally acceptable Electoral umpire can be appointed. It suggested that the National Judicial Council (NJC) should henceforth handle this responsibility. The idea was that NJC would put out adverts for the office, screen the candidates, before short-listing three names from which the National Council of State would select one for recommendation to the Senate for Confirmation.

It is difficult to understand why a President who seizes every opportunity to talk about his desire to reform our electoral system should be uncomfortable with this wonderful new approach. The Minister of Information and Communication, Dora Akunyili said the Government took the decision because it was mindful of the doctrine of Separation of powers which it claims would have been violated if the Judiciary is asked to handle an executive duty. But

even this argument shows the Government up as being too-clever by half. Many commentators, including the Conference of Nigerian Political parties (CNPP), the Action Congress, and labour unions have rejected this argument in totality. The crux of the argument is that the so-called doctrine of “separation of powers” is subordinate to the Constitution of the country and that constitution (which can be reviewed by the collective will of the people as through the National Assembly) can also state that the NJC should henceforth take care of the appointment of the INEC chair. If that is what the people want, then it becomes law and by extension a modification to the “doctrine of separation of power”.

In many advanced democracies, the approach to the appointment of the chief electoral umpire is devoid of the level of suspicion and dubious practices as is seen in Nigeria. Common sense dictates that for electoral reforms to be meaningful, basic steps have to be taken to increase transparency in the appointment of the INEC Chairman. The insistence of President Yar'Adua on retaining the right of appointing the judge to his own case calls into serious doubt on his sincerity to in bringing about meaningful electoral reforms.

The rejection of the recommendation of time limits for disposing of electoral petitions by the courts is also cause for eyebrows to be raised. The Uwais report had recommended that all election petitions and appeals should be dispensed of within 90 days. The report also sought to shift the burden of proof onto INEC to show that the commission had indeed conducted a free and fair election. Crucially, the original committee report provided that no one shall be sworn into a disputed office if at the end of 90 days the dispute had not been resolved. A person only assumed office (after a disputed election) when it had been pronounced in the court that he is the rightful occupant of that office. The Federal Government disagrees.

In our current arrangement, we have witnessed election petitions taking over two years to be dealt with. We have also experienced rather embarrassing moments in which illegal governors have been made to vacate their seats after over two years in office by the Appeal court. This has affected the smooth running of Government business and created an atmosphere of uncertainty in many states. The existing protracted adjudication period has in fact proved to favour those who rig themselves into office as they are allowed

unhindered access to the public purse from where they scoop money to fight the necessary battles to keep them in office.

Furthermore, the electorate who voted in an election should not be kept in a state of protracted suspense as to who the bona fide occupant of an office is.

The need to resolve electoral disputes speedily can not be overemphasized. That the Federal government should be uncomfortable with a recommendation that shortens the time for such matters to be heard in preference to our current protracted litigation, shows clearly that the Government is voting for “More of the same”.

The dust generated by the butchering of the Uwais committee report by the Federal Government was still settling when the National Council of State proceeded to eminently sensible water down the provisions of the report even further. The Council which consists of State Governors and former Heads of State, rejected the recommendation that State Independent Electoral Commissions (SINEC) should be abolished. It is common knowledge that the State Governors (just like the President at the centre) have complete control of the SINEC. This is evident in the sweeping victories recorded by the party in power in each state at their local government polls. Abolishing the SINEC's would take away the power to manipulate local government Elections from the hands of the State Governors. However, the National Council of State did just as the President did: they too rejected the recommendation and voted a “More of the same”.

Of course, all the issues of electoral reform are, ultimately, tied to the amendment of the 1999 constitution by the National Assembly. Going by the past antecedents of the Assembly one is sure to witness a whole new drama session which will culminate in the final trashing of whatever is left of the original Uwais report whenever the Assembly comes to deliberate on the draft. The majority of senators and Honourable members being members of the ruling Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) are sure to follow the lead of the President and the Governors by opting to protect the fortunes of their party in future elections by ensuring that any clog to the wheel of rigging is done away with. Already, members of both chambers of the Assembly have passed a vote of confidence on the current INEC boss, Professor Maurice Iwu the very man who

has been urged to resign by Nigerians following his oversight of the worst elections in the history of the country. As if to add insult to the peoples' collective injury, one of the country's state universities recently conferred an honorary doctorate degree on the man.

Even more worrying is the fact that efforts to review the 1999 constitution by the National Assembly seem to have hit the rock over disagreements between the Senate and the House over the nomenclature of the Deputy Speaker of the house. The planned constitutional review seems dead at birth and portends a graver fate for the Electoral reforms.

Perhaps to avoid a total failure of the much trumpeted reforms due to the impasse in the National Assembly, the President on Thursday 30th April 2009, presented seven bills on Electoral Reforms to the National Assembly. In separate letters to the President of the Senate, Senator David Mark, and the Speaker of the House of Representatives, Hon. 'Dimeji Bankole, President Yar'Adua requested for the expeditious passage of these Bills on the basis of "their vital importance and in the larger national interest".

The bills included;

1. A Bill for an Act to amend the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) Act cap 15 LFN 2004 and other matters connected thereto;
2. A Bill for an Act to alter the provisions of the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1999 and for other matters connected thereto;
3. A Bill for an Act to establish the Electoral Offences Commission and for other matters connected thereto;
4. A Bill for an Act to establish the Centre for Democratic Studies and other matters;
5. A Bill for an Act to further amend the Police Act 1967 Cap P19 2004 LFN and for matters connected Thereto;
6. A Bill for an Act to establish the Political Parties Registration and Regulatory Commission and for other matters connected thereto; and
7. A Bill for an Act to amend the Independent National Electoral Commission Act cap 15 LFN 2004 and for other matters connected thereto.

In a statement, Mr. Olusegun Adeniyi, the Special Adviser to the President on Media and Publicity stated that the import of these Bills is to underscore the President's commitment to addressing the lapses and inadequacies which impinge on the quality and credibility of the electoral process in our country so as to ensure that future elections meet acceptable international standards of fairness and transparency and restore integrity to the ballot box. He also stated that the amendment proposed for the 1999 Constitution is to, among other things, provide for independent candidature, prohibit cross-carpeting by elected office holders and make the funding of INEC a first line charge on the Consolidated Revenue Fund. It will also provide additional sanctions for persons convicted of electoral offences by declaring such convicts unfit to stand for election for 10 years. There are many other far-reaching provisions in these Bills.

This latest move by the President comes on the heels of the re-run elections in a handful of wards in Ekiti State, Southwest Nigeria which left much to be desired. The re-run had been ordered by the Appeal Court following the long drawn out legal battle that followed the 2007 gubernatorial elections in the state. The two main actors in the re-run were Segun Oni of the PDP, who had been ousted by the court ruling, and Kayode Fayemi of the Action Congress. The events that surrounded the re-run and the eventual declaration, by the INEC Resident Electoral Commissioner for EKiti, of the PDP's Segun Oni as victor, provides another good reason to doubt the sincerity of the President's pledge to introduce electoral reforms and his commitment to free and fair elections in 2011.

Ekiti was the ultimate opportunity for the Government to demonstrate its democratic credentials and , perhaps even more importantly, for INEC to burnish its tainted image. However, the President, INEC and indeed the politicians themselves, failed the test. The election which came barely three days after South Africa, a country that emerged from apartheid not so long ago proved to the world that free and fair elections were possible in Africa, was a show of shame which made us a sad spectacle in the global arena and painted us as a people who still had a long way to go before we could lay serious claim to being a democracy.

Despite all this, the Presidential spokesperson, Olusegun Adeniyi, argues that while the President acknowledged the shortcomings of the Ekiti re-run, it was not enough reason for us to give up on the President's well thought out mission. He said:

"...But leaping from the unfortunate incident to conclude that electoral reform is doomed will be to strain logic. And throwing up our arms because we have been confronted with another inconvenient fact of our politics is defeatist and unproductive. A more useful approach would be to insist on a quick resolution of the crisis and speedy initiation of electoral reforms"

"...The situation in Ekiti has made an urgent case for putting in place a robust system that will rein in a desperate political culture that has been on full display in the lead-up to, during and after the Ekiti polls. This is the unfinished business of our politics. It will therefore only be fair to judge the President on his commitment to electoral reforms after they have been put in place and not before".

Few informed Nigerians currently share Mr. Adeniyi's enthusiasm about his boss's Electoral Reform agenda. Already, Labour and the Civil-society groups that are insisting on the implementation of the undiluted version of the original Electoral Reform Committee report have started a drive to collect twenty million signatures on a petition to the National Assembly to demand just that. The members of the National Assembly are, by law, the representatives of the people's wishes and are supposed to be bound by those wishes. Twenty million signatures of twenty million adult Nigerians signify a strong wish which ought not, in a civilized society, to be ignored.

The ball seems therefore to be in the court of the National Assembly to give Nigerians an electoral system that they yearn for. An electoral system through which they can exercise their right to vote and to be voted for and through which they can play their proper part in the charting of their destinies. Nigerians deserve nothing less. ❏

WORLD VIEW

A Citizens' Convention Will Revive Democracy

HELENA KENNEDY

The Chinese use two characters to represent crisis: one means danger and the other can be interpreted as meaning opportunity. Our parliamentary scandals present us with both. Members of the public feel such outrage about politicians taking them for a ride that there is the danger of a kneejerk reaction that takes some voters to extremes or convinces them there is no point in voting. The results for democracy are considerable because, as people withdraw from the political process, the public realm becomes smaller, governments have less legitimacy and the state's ability to do things that create a better society are decreased.

Healthy democracies need citizen engagement but that has been disappearing in Britain for years, with decreased voter turnout and no interest in joining political parties. We learnt from America the mathematical way of doing politics – concentrate on the few marginals that deliver victory and don't worry about the safe constituencies in the bag already. Our democracy has been hollowed out. People have had it with the political system as it is.

More people abstained at the last election than voted for the government. Yet people have not lost interest in politics or society: they marched against the war in Iraq and in favour of the countryside, they sign petitions and send money to good causes,

they sit as school governors and volunteer as prison visitors. People care about their country and democracy.

On the positive side, there is a new energy and desire for change. The political establishment has been shaken out of its complacency and is desperate to show it is willing to embrace reform. The core dilemma is that the people who are in a position to deliver reform have the most to lose if it is introduced. If you are David Cameron you can promise all manner of reform but if you arrive in Downing Street with enough of a majority there is no incentive to carry much of it through. We have only to remember Tony Blair on electoral reform. Equally, if you are Gordon Brown facing a potential loss of power, it is easy to reach for democratic reform, failing to explain why you did not deliver it before. Nick Clegg, of course, has the luxury of being the most radical because in the present system he can afford to be.

What is needed is a reforming parliament that introduces changes that will ignite a new and better form of politics, where the public is more engaged and has a greater say in the governance of the country.

How do we get it? The people, not politicians, should decide what kind of parliamentary reform they want and what kind of voting system should put their representatives there. The mechanism for this would be a citizens' convention, drawn from the electorate in much the same way that jurors are summoned for service in trials. A series of issues would be placed before them on which they would hear the arguments and counterarguments from experts and others and make recommendations. The new technologies make such processes inviting and the hearings could be followed by the rest of the public. ☒

This is an extract from a longer article that appeared in the Sunday Times of 31st May 2009

INSIGHTS:

OLIVER CROMWELL'S SPEECH on the Dissolution of the Long Parliament Given to the House of Commons on 20 April 1653

It is high time for me to put an end to your sitting in this place, which you have dishonored by your contempt of all virtue, and defiled by your practice of every vice; ye are a factious crew, and enemies to all good government; ye are a pack of mercenary wretches, and would like Esau sell your country for a mess of pottage, and like Judas betray your God for a few pieces of money.

Is there a single virtue now remaining amongst you? Is there one vice you do not possess? Ye have no more religion than my horse; gold is your God; which of you have not barter'd your conscience for bribes? Is there a man amongst you that has the least care for the good of the Commonwealth?

Ye sordid prostitutes have you not defil'd this sacred place, and turn'd the Lord's temple into a den of thieves, by your immoral principles and wicked practices? Ye are grown intolerably odious to the whole nation; you were deputed here by the people to get grievances redress'd, are yourselves gone! So! Take away that shining bauble there, and lock up the doors. In the name of God, go! ❏

BOOK REVIEW

AFRICA by Patrick Chabal, ZED BOOKS 2009, Paperback
ISBN 978-1-84277-909-5

Reviewed by

John Papworth

If you want to know why we are overwhelmed with political problems and why despite the fact that we have more professors of politics, more university departments and institutes devoted to the study of politics, than in the entire history of humankind and have yet failed to solve a single major political problem, you will find one reason in this turgid, pedantic and stupefyingly blinkered volume.

Professor Chabal is writing as a post-colonial colonialist who shares with almost the entire colonial era the same blind indifference to African realities, an indifference which marked both the colonial rule of power and the manner in which the rulers scuttled away from the mess they created.

African history is tribal history, it is the tribes which ruled the enormous continent from South Africa to the Sahara. It was the tribes which established the rules of law, the cultures, the social structures and the religions that dominated it for centuries before the colonial usurpers arrived. When they did arrive they proceeded to carve up the continent as though it were some private European possession. Ignoring tribal boundaries and institutions, sitting perhaps in oil-kit tents, Belgians, Portuguese, French, German, British and others drew straight lines on maps to mark out their territory.

Some tribes found themselves lumped together with several other tribes under one foreign invader government, others found they were split under two or even more different foreign rulers.

Nobody could pretend that under tribal rule all was sweetness and light. Politics is about power and, power is often a matter of

struggle and struggle often means war. Tribal Africa was often a matter of rival warring despotisms causing a due measure of human butchery and torment. But democracy is a universal human language and Africans have shown they are as capable of learning it as any other people.

But for a post-colonial generation they have been denied the chance; instead they have been saddled with the post-colonial colonial structures of their colonial masters, so that from one end of the continent to the other, and from East to West, the scene has been one of civic turmoil, civil war, bloodshed, dictatorship, oppression, corruption, starvation, economic collapse and human degradation on a massive scale as governments, elected, where at all, on the same dubious and unsustainable basis as inherited from their colonial masters, seek to rule in defiance of their democratic tribal realities.

And this political carnage continues to dominate the continent, as it will continue to do so until the realities of tribal cohesion, tribal rule, tribal suzerainty and tribal democracy is restored. All else on Africa is but words in the wind; the good Professor, with his interminably abstract chatter about citizenship, individualism, multi party elections, kinship and so forth, is simply helping to make confusion worse confounded. His barrage of academic claptrap touches none of the basic problems of modern Africa as it wordily spins out one irrelevant consideration after another to a dead end of futile inconsequence.

He has nothing of relevance to say over the ever increasing torment of the Congo tribes, of the irresolvable Nigerian tribal imbroglio, of the Lozi predicament of its split between Zambia and The Congo, or the prospects of any peace between the tribes of Zimbabwe, to mention but three examples from a multitude. The world is waiting for a book which gives a clear picture of the African predicament, one which can give people hope and confidence for a decent future, but this volume is not remotely concerned to fill such need.

As Africa's former colonial masters use local proxy yesmen to continue to rob it of its oil and mineral wealth, as they continue to strip it of its forest cover and destroy its traditional family farms with factory farm systems geared to exotic out of season tastes of

European markets, the continent continues to sink into an abyss of violence, lawlessness, fratricide, starvation, disease and unrelieved misery,

The reason why a professor can presume to write about Africa whilst not betraying the ghost of an insight into its political realities may stem from the fact that he appears to lack any understanding of the realities of his own. He refers repeatedly to morality, democracy, and welfare concerns such as sick-care or unemployment, as though these are up and running aspects of his own London background. In assuming that the vocabulary and the mindframe of modern European mass societies are an acceptable standard of political reference there is not a glimmer of a suggestion that democracy in different European countries, such as it ever was, has largely been emasculated by a boardroom ploy to create a potential continental war-machine based on Brussels. It has done so in defiance of peoples' wishes, nor does he indicate any awareness that the ever-developing centralised state bureaucracies, coupled with mass media mischief, have robbed people of the ability to exercise any political influence except that of concurrence, yielding the result that people today have less control over their lives than before they had the vote; nor that the economies of an industrial lifestyle have engendered a global economic collapse which gathers momentum for an irreversible breakdown as these words are written.

The fact is that anyone who can presume to write about Africa as though abstract ideas of polity have no relationship with the brutal realities of violence and war that increasingly consume African life, largely as a result of the play of power as exercised in his own colonialist culture and lifestyle, is simply playing possum to forces his moral sense ought to be urging him to challenge. The people who published this volume should be ashamed of its moral opacity and the author should be ashamed to have written it. ☒

DISINGENUOUS

- A Manchester United fan, Daniel Chibuzor, rammed his truck into celebrating Barcelona fans in Port Harcourt after the Spanish champion's 2:0 victory over the champions of England, killing 6 of his countrymen in the process.
- A group of Nigerian women in Ekiti State bared their breasts in protest over the government's rigging of their State elections.
- The government of Sri Lanka was cleared of any wrongdoing by the UN Human Rights Council despite reports that more than 20,000 civilians were killed in the state's final military offensive to defeat the Tamil's war of liberation.
- The Catholic Church in Ireland is to compensate thousands of Irish men and women who suffered physical and sexual abuse as children at the hands of Catholic nuns, priests and monks inside Catholic run children's schools.
- Six expectant mothers suffer miscarriage after the Nigerian army's bombing of Gbaramatu kingdom in the Niger Delta.
- The Independent National Electoral Commission has administered oaths of secrecy to staff amidst allegations of a N250million bribe scam
- Aide to Anambra Governor caught with N250 million in cash. Governors' spokesman says the man is not an aide to the Governor but a contractor.
- The Federal Executive Council approves yet another N25.3billion for Power on top of the N20 billion that Obasanjo spent with little to show.
- Angry youths have set Safayrna village in Ardokola Local Government Area of Taraba State ablaze following a clash between the Mumuye and Fulani Speaking ethnic groups.
- Jail break in Enugu prison. 150 awaiting trial inmates escape.
- Panel to audit the staff of the 17 LGA's in Plateau state uncovers more than 8,886 Ghost workers in the employment of the state. Ogun state police prosecute two over transfer of N400million of Ogun state Government funds.
- Colin Powell says he warned Abacha in 1993 against taking over Government.

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In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. *Holy Bible:Genesis 1:1*

Certainly We sent Moses with Our communications, saying: "Bring your people forth from utter darkness into the light and recount to them the days of Allah; most surely there are signs in this for every patient, grateful one".

Holy Koran:Sura 14:5

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