

Nigeria on trial: The Ekweremadu saga and the Rule of Law

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by admin Sunday, May 7, 2023 - 03:11 0 comments

The court proceedings regarding sentencing of Senator Ekweremadu was live-streamed and subsequently shared on the web. Watching the full sentencing video, the significance and relevance of this whole saga to the declared outcome of the Nigeria February 2023 presidential elections was so striking.

Nigeria is on trial. What happened to the victim, referred to in the video as 'C' is perhaps akin to what numerous Nigerians experience on a daily basis. Senator Ekweremadu's encounter with truth and justice was unfortunately unprecedented but rather timely. Like his peers in the NASS, they have had little regard for the plight of common Nigerians. That explains why, after 40 years of so-called democracy, Nigeria is no further forward as a nation in many respects. Rather the pace of retrogression in various indices including provision of basic amenities and access to good and *affordable* healthcare is beyond alarming.

Sadly, Senator Ekweremadu is the product of a reprobate and degenerate society where only self-interest exists. A leadership that does nothing for the common good but will seek every opportunity to exploit even the little that should be for all. A leadership that acts with impunity and sabotages systems and structures meant for all to ensure only their needs are met. A leadership that lies to itself to justify their actions.

Nigeria is on trial and watching the British wheel of justice turn, slowly but surely, I see an unfolding scenario.

The 2023, 5th of May sentencing of another Nigeria politician in the UK, on the surface, may seem a coincidence. However viewed in perspective, it is more than a coincidence. The February 2023 *Presidential Election Petitions Tribunal* begins sitting on the 8th of May. Nigeria would be on trial.

There is little doubt about the independence of the UK judiciary as we see its effect, recently in Scotland where the spouse of Nicola Sturgeon, ex First Minister was arrested over allegations of financial impropriety of the SNP's accounts. Also Boris Johnson former UK Prime Minister, was similarly subjected to scrutiny and current Prime Minister Rishi Sunak had to let go of his deputy over allegations regarding their conduct.

The fact that Ekweremadu's hearing was live-streamed and is now available for the world to see is not unique to this case but again brings to focus on the world stage what Nigeria truly is like.

The Nigerian Information minister, Lai Mohammed aka 'Liar Mohammed' has his work cut out in the dying days of President Buhari's government.



Nigeria on trial!

The military since Buhari, through Babangida, then Abacha, and subsequent pseudo-democratic governments (other than Yaradua and Jonathan), have systemically emasculated the judiciary. Buhari's reincarnation as president has further destroyed any semblance of autonomy of the judiciary.

The precursors to his story remain with us. Like a runaway train, Nigeria is at the cusp of hurling itself over a precipice in a matter of days if the judiciary decides, like 'Mamood Yakubu' to wake up at 4.00am, and make a ruling on the true-winner of the 2023 presidential elections without due diligence.

Shortly after its inception and leading onto 2019 Presidential elections, former CJN Onnoghen was unceremoniously removed over ridiculous allegations. His replacement Ibrahim Tanko Muhammad, was a man of unknown substance or competence, transplanted into office for the sole purpose of midwifing the then approaching elections. The judiciary has since been nose-diving. It was no surprise that that same replacement recently 'left' office when he should have been sacked!

In Nigeria, the rules are different for different players on the pitch.

Nigerians, indeed, are on trial

The pretext that this is a democratic dispensation and it should be allowed to blunder its way into relevance without the necessary scrutiny can no longer be glossed over.

It's all out there, 'warts and all', as they say.

Here, we have a story of the Ekweremadu's now drawing sympathy as Nigerians are faced with the reality of what his situation represents. The failure of governance at all levels.

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Nigeria judiciary was historically acclaimed and sat amongst equals in the global stage. But this is a position long lost since President Buhari and his goons began degrading its structures.

Watching the judge in the referenced video speak, it was evident this was a truly troubling case. He spoke with regard to the person Ekweremadu was. Confused and bewildered, it seemed impossible to reconcile why a man of such repute and influence could not reason rationally when it became critical to protect and preserve the life of his family member. In essence, the eminent senator failing to have made provisions for the good of all, resorted to desperate measures. Perhaps, measures he was used to deploying when in similar straits. As a man thinketh so he is. The judge, however, stayed with the facts. He considered every aspect of the case deeply and broadly acknowledging the role each of the accused played in undermining the rights of 'C', a minor trafficked to the UK for the singular purpose of harvesting his kidney.

Like a Nollywood movie, which this story would certainly become, the viewer is torn between sympathy for 'C' the victim, Sonia, the intended recipient of the Kidney, and Sonia's parents, the Ekweremadu's. Dr. Obinna, also an accused, attracted the highest sentence of 10 years for his role. Again, here, one is further conflated on

learning how this doctor, apparently himself a transplant recipient, got to accept a practice that he knew could not stand the light of day.

The story is about Nigeria and Nigerians who, over the last 40 years or more, have been displaced, disenfranchised, dismembered, and disempowered. Many have died from similar organ trafficking (so-called ritualistic killings), and those lucky to be alive have been kidnapped, attacked, or molested. Police officers, legislators, and eminent persons in government have been implicated in major offences against the people of Nigeria. Ibori and other previous governors are well known to the British criminal justice system, having also done time at Her/His Majesty's Service.

It's so relevant what has unfolded in this saga. C, representing the poor and hapless common Nigerian. Dr. Obinna, the middle working class who had managed to 'Japa' (pronounced Jakpa), and the Ekweremadu's, representing the so-called-elite in leadership. Its irrelevant that they are all from the same region, as some readers may want to flag. Their story transcends culture or region. This could happen in any country where inhumanity thrives and the rule of law is disregarded.

Nigeria is at a crossroad

I shudder to think what the outcome of the election petition tribunal hearing would be rather than what it should be. Imagine a scenario where the petitioner and the petitioned are before a similar court where the rule of law was sacrosanct. It would be easier to predict the outcome.

2023 Election, despite all INEC promised it would be, only revealed the depth of the rot of the leadership and what it represents.

Nigeria is certainly not UK. However the experience of humanity is universal. When a nation seeks to affirm all that is part of nationhood, it sees itself in the other and seeks to uphold, protect and preserve the other, confident in the knowledge that in so doing, they too will be beneficiaries of that order.

Time to move on to true democratic dispensation. Enough of the deceptions of those who claim to be leaders but have no desire to be exemplary or excellent in their leadership.

This is really about Nigeria. Not one man. Not any party. May truth and justice prevail.

And to all Nigerians who have borne the brunt of a hapless and inept leadership it does look like another dark, dreary night. One can only hope we can wake up, free from another 'Mahmood Yakubu' moment.

A nation's history serves to reform, modulate and transform its prospects hopefully for the best. May that be our experience post 2023.

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