

A MAN OF CONSCIENCE

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“Few men have virtue to withstand the Highest bidder”-anonymous.

Please don't call him names. Don't disparage him as a stooge, but please hail him as a man of conscience.

Fela Anikulapo-Kuti makes good copy any day. Ask “Newswatch” who just carried him on their cover a while ago, Newswatch will confirm that not so many copies of that edition were returned by the vendors. In the great Fela Saga the society continues getting more than a glimpse of the workings of the powers that be. We are not talking about the lyrics of his songs, songs like the “Unknown Soldier”, “I.T.T” (International Thief Thief), “Power Show”, “Army Arrangement”, “Coffin for Head of State” etc., which in themselves serve as a lampoon of the system, satirical commentary and blatant exposes of the machinations of those in whom we have entrusted so much to, sometimes our fate.

We are not talking of Fela role as a Neologist. For Fela ranks with the Mbadiwes of this world in the coinage of words, when he is not coining words and phrases he is creating new meanings and dimensions to existing ones, words like Yabis, power-show; Yellow-fever, authority stealing, Ikoyi/Mushin mentality, original suffer head, na kpoi, Zombi, are but a few I n the mélange of this neologism. Of course the phrase “Unknown Soldier” is automatically associated with Fela's burnt “Kalakuta Republic.

We are talking about Fela's PanAfricanism or his politics or his iconoclasm. WE are not focusing on his belief in traditional medicine, and “Dr. Hindu” his alter Ego.

WE are not celebrating the release from jail of this joymaker, for a N.P. Willis said “Blessed are the joymakers” Infact we are not celebrating Fela-Kuti, but we are celebrating the return of conscience. Yes we are celebration the real hero of the moment, Mr. Justicer Okoro-Idogu. And I intone with J.G. Hollar that “God give us men and a time like this demand”, Men of conscience. Men who repent and revisit their minds. Men of strength, Even if belated.

The Catholic Church would have expected him to go to his priest and confess. But Okoro-Idogu hearkened to Jesus-Christ, for alas he realized he had offended his borther, and he went to seek for forgiveness from the aggrieved brother. For as Fela wrote in his last published letter from prison to his brother Beko “the Judge done beg me”.

In the release announcing the retirement of Mr. Justice Okoro-Idogu from the Judiciary “with immediate effect” the government described the “circumstances surrounding” that Judge's visit to Fela as “improper and unethical”. Unless we know what the government meant by the “circumstances surrounding” and unethical”.

The call for less or none Executive interference in Judicial matters has become banal. But no matter how hackneyed this demand is, its importance will never diminish.

The guilt for the wrong imprisonment of Fela squarely falls on the shoulder of this objectionable interference by the Executive. In the past we have heard rumours about the pressure put on certain judges by the Executive. Today, Fela has shown that these rumours could be true.

Skeptics may be fast in blaming the good Judge for not throwing in the towel rather than succumb to such pressures certain, cynics have even hinted that Justice Okoro-Idogu's appointment to the Federal High Court may not be unconnected with his dancing to the Idiagbon tune in this Fela matter.

It is not this writer's intention to speculate on ifs. Okoro-Idogu is human, but no doubt he is a better man than most of us. Possible he is a happier man today than on that day when he read out the sentence to convict Fela. As an optimistic wit said. "The days that make us happy, make us wise". The same wit said "worry is the interest paid by those who borrow trouble", so if (pardon me Okoro Idogu as Idiagbon's instrument borrowed trouble, as he has now discharge his debt plus all interests. He has also luckier than Pontius Pilate, for at least rather than wash his hands off the case, he went and apologized to the man he wrongfully condemned something Pontius Pilate was not lucky enough to do. Lawyers and Judges may raise eyebrows at this recantation by Okoro Idogu, but that will amount to begging the question. What one expects them to do is to rise today and in one voice roundly condemn the Executive for shackling the judiciary, particularly with the Damocles Sword of retirement, and the Trojan Horse of appointment, the Executive should hold neither of these Achilles heel or Greek gift as the case may be.

The freedom of the Judiciary should not be an academic issue, it is too important to be a subject of campaign by the Executive it should be a reality. In the Okoro Idogu, Fela matter, the Executive is the Evil. And we must be very angry with the Evil, for he who cannot be angry at Evil, lacks enthusiasm for good.

As for D.W.Goji, whose role in the whole matter was that of a compassionate public officer also now and then a good messenger, I totally sympathise with him, for in a season when head must roll it could be unfortunate to have a head in that Clime.

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