



WHY WE ALL ARE ANGRY

Nov 13, 2020

OYO STATE -

Everyone in Nigeria is angry. The youths are angry. And the President who addressed Nigerians on Thursday, October 22, 2020 was visibly angry. Why are the youths angry? Why is the President angry? Why are we all angry. What protesters are saying is that we have been taken for granted by successive governments, and, by so speaking, those young Nigerians are speaking the minds of millions of Nigerians. But in order to hear and understand them, we must depersonalize issues. It is not the person of this President. It happened while some others were President before him.

At the root of the anger in the land is the unjust relationship between government and the citizen. It is about a constitution that has installed the absurdity of a political system in which government is more powerful than the citizen. It is about a tragic absence of a culture of listening in the relationship between government and the citizen. It is about insisting on a master-servant relationship between government and the citizen in a supposedly democratic polity.

At the root of our anger is a constitution that has given us a government whose functionaries insult, intimidate, and brutalize the citizen with impunity. Nigerians are crying for restructuring, that is, an urgent rectification of this unjust relationship. The call for restructuring is a call for right relationship in the polity. The anger in the land is symptom of

a relationship that calls for restructuring.

Young Nigerians came out to protest peacefully. Their protest was hijacked, things got violent, and they were gunned down in their prime. We saw how hungry Nigerians pillaged warehouses. Arson and looting can never be justified. But we must not lose sight of what this is all about.

On the morning of Tuesday, October 20, something reminded me of lyrics of the song “Johnny Was”, written by Rita Marley and song by Bob Marley and the Wailers. Later in the evening, shortly after sunset, a Dominican confrere showed me live video of young protesters being shot at by men dressed in the uniform of the Nigerian Army.

Calmly, these men in uniform walked towards defenceless protesters, protesters holding the Nigerian flag and singing the Nigerian national anthem. Unpatriotic persons would not do what they were doing. On the contrary, only unpatriotic persons would have gunned down young and peaceful Nigerian protesters at the Lekki toll gate in Lagos. Their murderers cocked their guns, fired some shots into the air, then directed some shots at protesters sitting on the road, carrying no stones, no guns, no sticks, nothing harmful. Some died, others were badly injured. Those who killed them tried to kill our hard-earned democracy.

What crime did those young Nigerians commit? They had been protesting because of agents of government—a so called Special Anti-Robbery Squad—had been killing and maiming. But that was no crime. They had been protesting because of a political oligarchy that has stolen their present and mortgaged their future. These young Nigerians spend years looking for admission into tertiary institutions, spend more than the required number of years trying to get a degree, and then end up unemployed. They protested because they were being killed, and they were killed for protesting.

October 20, 2020 will go down as another day in infamy in the bloody history of our beloved land Nigeria. As a little boy, I was aware of the killings before and during the Nigeria-Biafra War. I was in primary school when I read of the

murder of Kunle Adepeju on the campus of Nigeria's premier University of Ibadan during the Gowon regime. The Nigerian Police confronted students on a university campus with live ammunitions.

I was in secondary school in 1978 when Akintunde Ojo, a student at the University of Lagos, was killed by men in uniform during the Ali-Must-Go protests. It was during the first coming of Obasanjo.

I was studying for the priesthood when students were killed in Ife and in Zaria. It was during the era of Babangida. Fela Anikulapo Kuti sang about it in *Beasts of No Nations*: "no be outside dem kill dem students, for Soweto, Zaria and Ife. Na craze world be that, na animal world be dat o." I was a doctoral student when young Nigerians were gunned down on the streets of Lagos for resisting the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential election.

There are questions waiting to be answered, and we have a moral obligation to seek honest answers: who counselled government to mismanage peaceful protesters? Who ordered men in uniform to shoot at defenceless Nigerians holding our national flag and singing our national anthem as bullets were being pumped into their young frames? Who in the 21st century gave orders for such a barbaric act?

For years, well-meaning Nigerians have counselled successive governments on their deplorable conduct of treating Nigerians with contempt and insolence. Since these protests began, government has been counselled to handle the matter with maturity instead of sending government spokespersons to speak in the media in a tone that conveys a devil-may-care attitude. Instead of dialoguing with Nigerians who have legitimate concerns, government functionaries have chosen to be distant and insensitive, and that insensitivity attained a scandalous climax in the massacre of our children. But our political class holds the dangerously erroneous convictions that they monopolise patriotism and that a democratic polity can be governed by force. A state governor even threatened that peaceful protesters will face "the full wrath of the law".

It has to be stated loud and clear, in the spirit of soro soke, that those responsible for unleashing thugs on peaceful

demonstrators, and those who are directly or remotely responsible for the massacre in Lekki and elsewhere must be identified and prosecuted. Such persons are simply unfit for public office. Theirs was a treasonable offence. The present and the future of our country should not be in the hands who, though they are public servants, behave like landlords. Nigerians cannot be paying salaries of those who kill them.

I hummed the lyrics of "Johnny was" for hours after the massacre at the Lekki Tollgate.

Woman hold her head and cry,

'cause her son had been shot down in the street and died

from a stray bullet.

Woman hold her head and cry;

explaining to her was a passerby

who saw the woman cry

wondering how can she work it out.

Now she knows that the wages of sin is death, yeah!

Gift of Jah is life.

She cried: Ah-um, I - I know!

"Johnny was a good man," I - I know!

never did a thing wrong

"Johnny was a good, good, good, good, good, good, good, good,

good, good, good man",

Johnny was good man

she cried - she crie-ie-ie-ie-ie-ie-ied!

Wo-oo! Woman hold her head and cry,

as her son had been shot down in the street and died

just because of the system.

Woman hold her head and cry;

comforting her I was passing by.

She complained, then she cry:

Oh-oo-wo-ah, cry (ah-ah), yeah, I know now (ah-ah),

now I know, I know now: Johnny was a good man

Said I know, mm-mm-mm-mm-mm. Never did a thing wrong

Ah! Ah! Johnny was a good man

Can a woman tender care, she cried,

Cease towards the child she bear? Johnny was a good man.

Wo-ho-ho-ooh! Woman cry, woman - Never did a thing wrong

She cried, wo-oh! She cried, yeah! Johnny was a good man

Can a woman tender care

Cease towards the child she bear? Never did a thing wrong

Woman cry! Johnny was a good man.

Gracious God, banish insecurity from our country. Banish the shedding of innocent blood. Banish oppression. Banish the greed that has made of us impoverished inhabitants of a land of riches. Banish wickedness from our hearts. Banish the wickedness that makes us violate the rights of the weak. Banish the suspicion that makes us deny our common humanity. Bring an end to impunity, an end to police and military brutality, an end to theft of our common wealth.

Open our eyes to see the beauty of our ethnic diversity, the beauty you yourself have willed. May your peace and justice reign in our hearts, in our homes and in our cities, in our country and in our world. Provide for those who have lost their belongings during these protests. Grant peace to the young souls killed at Lekki and elsewhere since these protests began. May their families be consoled. Inspire us and our leaders to build the type of nation you want us to be— “one nation bound in freedom, peace and unity”, “a nation where peace and justice shall reign”.