



CAN THE JUNE 12 ELECTION BE SAID TO BE TRULY FREE AND FAIR AS WIDELY CLAIMED?

-Debo Adeniran

To this question, my answer is no. While we bask in the euphoria of the aftermath of the June 12, 1993 election, it is good to note that the much celebrated contraption was soaked in series of anomalies that can neither make its conduct pass for free nor fair. The election that was perceived to have been won by the late business mogul was nothing but a charade and a visible mockery of the basic tenets of all known genuine democratic process.

To start with, the then military government, led by General Ibrahim Babangida, by his body languages, was not in a hurry to leave government. Even as global condemnation of military rule at that time was already gaining audible volume, Babangida chose to play games with his self-tailored transition-to-civilian rule programme. The dictator disallowed groups, movements and those he perceived to be in opposition to his evil rule from registering political parties and as such crippled opposition.

So what can be democratic about the muffled June 12, 1993 election?

First, the two available political parties, the SDP and the NRC, at that time were creations of the then military government. These political parties were designed, formed and ran by the Babangida administration. The right of association was as such stunted as only those that the agenda of the government of the day could accommodate, had field days. At that time, Abiola became the preferred candidate for majority of voters because the only alternative to him was a relatively unknown Bashir Tofa, who got the presidential ticket for the rival NRC.

In a situation like this, the people were faced with the presidential choice of either a Hausa or a Yoruba man. Sadly too, the much talked about Muslim/Muslim ticket of Abiola and his vice, Babagana Kingibe was a Hobson's choice as the other alternative for president in the alternate party, the NRC, is also a Muslim.

So, as it turned out, there was limited choice for the electorates by that selfish design of the military, which is at variance with every democratic norm where the right to chose from an array of political parties and candidates is hallmark.

For instance, an Ijaw man or Igbo, yearning for his kinsman to lead Nigeria, has no consideration under that 1993 election as the choice of Nigeria's leadership dangled between a Yoruba or an Hausa man in the persons of Abiola and Tofa respectively.

The unpalatable democratic hoodwink of the military of that time and the open

demonstration of ability to impose, when pushed to the wall, led to apathy among the electorates and its attendant non participation in the electoral process by a section of Nigerians.

So, it was a very harrowing democratic experience in which the people had to choose between the devil and the deep blue sea. And the truism of this perception presented itself in the fact that only a paltry 14 million voters turned out for the June 12, election.

Abiola, despite being an indiscriminate philanthropist, for the role he played in the presidential ambition of Chief Obafemi Awolowo, would have been a hard sell in the South West zone of the country where disciples of the late sage held sway in an atmosphere of open participatory democracy. But for his message of hope and abolition of poverty, despite his hitherto perceived capitalist and anti-masses' posture, Abiola was able to push through.

In this wise, an election in which opportunity to choose was limited, where the right to associate is confined, where franchise, the right to vote and be voted for is tied to the wish of the military government in power and where the choice of candidates is largely determined by the government of the day, can be nothing but democratic.

And to further bastardise democracy was the open ballot system of election (popularly known then as 'Option A4) adopted by the Dr Humphrey Nwosu-led electoral umpire, which abused voters right to privacy by compelling them to queue behind their candidates.

Surveys carried out led to the discovery that many voters were compelled to toe the line of their benefactors or leaders, against their wishes, for fear of pro election intimidation or and even attacks.

The popularity enjoyed by the June 12, 1993 election, is therefore not because the election was credible nor that the acclaimed winner of the election was the best Nigerians can have as president at that time. The annulment of the election was the major issue that brought out the beast in the people, sensing that the military was up to a game to perpetuate itself in power at all costs. That singular act was seen by many as a coup against the Nigerian people, and an act of brazen injustice.

To this effect, the people, in one accord, insisted on the validation of their votes. They called for military's exit and Abiola's declaration as winner of the election.

And on June 11, 1994, in what is now known as the Epetedo declaration, Chief MKO Abiola declared a Government of National Unity and asked for his mandate to be duly recognised. He was subsequently arrested for treasonable felony. But that only added fuel to the raging protests.

Abiola later died in custody on July 7, 1998, a month to the day, after General Sani Abacha, his traducer, died.

But the real outcome was that the military had been branded politically devilish, and the people would accept nothing but the end of military rule. This was the scenario that led to the return to democratic rule on May 29, 1999, and the specific choice of a political figure from the South West to assuage the expressed fears of the South West that the denial of MKO Abiola's mandate was an assault on the right of the South West.

HOW TO HONOUR MKO ABIOLA

There is no gain saying the fact that Chief MKO Abiola won the June 12, 1993 presidential election fair and square. The government of the day will be doing a great service to the people of Nigeria and indeed all the martyrs of the annulled election by revalidating and declaring the late business mogul the winner of the election and as President posthumously.

Professor Nwosu, in his book: "Laying Foundation for Nigeria's Democracy: My Account of June 12th Presidential Election and its Annulment," published in 2008, 15 years after, had declared MKO the authentic winner of the 1993 presidential election. All the government need do is to set up a panel of inquiry into the aborted election whose responsibility would be to invite the likes of Arthur Nzeribe, Abimbola Davies, of the Association for Better Nigeria, ABN, Justice Ikpeme and others that played roles in the conduct, annulment and the aftermath of the election, to explain the roles they played in truncating it.

What and who killed Abiola?

It is apparent that MKO Abiola didn't die a natural death.

The Federal Government should reopen books on what led to the yet to be ascertained sudden death of Chief MKO Abiola while in government custody. An inquest should be immediately carried out to unravel what led to his death at the point his release was being negotiated with a foreign representative.

It is when Chief Abiola is posthumously declared winner of that epochal election and the mystery surrounding his death unravelled that all frayed nerves would be assuaged and we can all say the toil, the battles and the pains of all the bruised , maimed and murdered in that struggle are not in vain.

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