

Kalu and Omoyele...two sides of a coin

Contributed by Jonathan Elendu
Friday, 20 May 2005
Last Updated Friday, 20 May 2005

A few weeks ago, I read Sowore Omoyele's piece in the NigeriaWorld, entitled: "OBASANJO IS A KILLER, HE'S VERY CORRUPT AND VINDICTIVE." This account is based on his interview with Orji Uzor Kalu, the governor of Abia State. It is a very fascinating story. Immediately, I made some calls to see if I could arrange an interview with Orji Uzor Kalu, the governor of Abia State, as I was under the impression that the Governor was still vacationing here in the United States.

The intriguing thing about the interview is that what the Governor is reported to have said is what many Nigerian politicians say in private about Nigerian President, Olusegun Obasanjo. I decided to interview Kalu when it dawned on me that the statements attributed to Kalu may be off the record comments. And if they were on the record, I wanted to hear them with my own ears and then follow up.

We could not arrange an interview here in the States before the Governor returned to Nigeria. Although I moved on to other topics, the Sowore Omoyele's story stayed on my mind. Those who have followed my writings on USAfrica Networks know my views about Kalu's antics when it comes to Obasanjo. No Nigerian politician in recent memory has challenged the President openly more than Gov. Kalu. Every time it appears Kalu has openly challenged the President, his popularity rating has gone up amongst Igbo youths. They see him as the savior of Ndiigbo. Yet, at every opportunity for him to carry his confrontation with the President to a logical conclusion, Kalu prevaricates. Some have argued that there is no ounce of core conviction in the man, Kalu.

In Omoyele's lead to the story, he says of Kalu, "I don't think he is an activist, he loves to make noise about issues like no state governor will do in Nigeria, but he seldom follows it to any logical conclusion before he moves to raise the next "alarm", to this end you can call Gov. Kalu an Alarmist!" Ouch! Although Gov. Kalu reportedly boasted to Omoyele that he, Kalu, is a "journalist's delight" I was astounded that he chose to open up so much to him. Omoyele's lead in to the Orji Kalu's interview also betrayed the former student leader's disdain for the person of Kalu and maybe, politicians in general. "One thing I can never deny is that I am a very pathological hater of oppressive power. If anybody exhibits such, I have no apologies to say that I go after them. I do not get paid to do that. I do it out of my conscience and out of my convictions as an activist," said Omoyele in an exclusive interview with us.

On the allegation that Omoyele was out to tarnish the image of the governor of Abia State, he dismissed it with the following, "The Governor doesn't have any image that I needed to tarnish. I was just speaking truth and reporting what he said. So I don't know about tarnishing his image."

Yet, questions remained and we sought answers from Gov. Orji Uzor Kalu. In our exclusive interview, he admitted granting Omoyele an interview. This contradicts his widely published denial. But Kalu maintained he did not call the President a killer. It is instructive that although he denied the interview with Omoyele in "its entirety" he spent a lot of ink in his denial trying to convince the President and

the world that he did not call the President a killer. So, does he admit that the President and his Administration are corrupt? "Corruption I don't know, but killer, I never called him," Kalu revealed during our interview.

On the issue of Kalu lacking core convictions, he responds thus: "You people don't understand. When they said in 2003 I called for an Igbo President, I didn't call it for myself. I called it for any capable Igbo man. My Party had a convention and elected a presidential candidate. Will I go to my village and die? What of those colleagues that supported in electing that candidate? I only joined as a good Party man to support the choice of my party. It is because I take rational and radical views that made people?the masses of Nigeria appreciate me. Come to a popularity contest with me on the streets of Nigeria. No matter the state, I am a very well received governor in any state of Nigeria."

We have exclusive interviews with the two main actors in the latest controversy in the continuous drama of democracy in Nigeria. These two young men, Gov. Orji Kalu, and Sowore Omoyele, are fascinating individuals. Although they appear to be very far apart in their convictions, both men's ideologies are symptomatic of a growing and troubled nation. Kalu is a very wealthy young man whose source of wealth is often a subject of controversy. He is seen as a product of the military misrule of Nigeria, yet he is a major player in Nigeria's nascent democracy. He is very much a part of the establishment, yet you sense that he would rather be on the other side.

Sowore Omoyele, on the other hand, is a former student leader who, on several occasions was tortured and jailed by the military. He is unashamedly fanatical about his convictions. To some extent he remains a victim and maybe a prisoner of the Nigerian establishment, even when he lives in freedom in the United States of America. As far as Omoyele is concerned the current political class in Nigeria cannot deliver the promises of democracy to the teeming masses on the streets of Nigeria. He sees his home country as being held hostage by kleptomaniacs. While this view may be popular with Nigerians, he refuses to participate in any kind of political enterprise that would not lead to total and radical revolution. Many Nigerians will find this attitude defeatist.

For Nigeria to take her rightful place in the world, the enterprise and business acumen of Orji Kalu is needed. Also, the conviction and dedication to country; the quest for equity, fairness, and justice that has consumed the young life of Sowore Omoyele is an essential vehicle that will propel us to our desired place of pride.