

BOOK REVIEW

Echoes of Justice

Author: Gloria Mabeiam Ballason, ESQ.

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The author, Barr Gloria Ballason, employs the gift of words and style to articulate in the most beautiful fashion, the issues closest to her heart: the law, human rights, human dignity and our common humanity. Using poetry and journalistic skills, she is able to lucidly express herself and by presenting in the most simplest language possible, delicate legal terminologies to the comprehension of the average lay mind. The 336 page book is divided into seven (7) sections. Each of this section deals with topical and peculiar issues of interest.

Section one, discusses the question of the impotence of law and the need to have laws that reflect our cultural peculiarities. On page 9, she writes: 'We have become sound boards and replicators of foreign laws and therefore across African divides, the laws go one way while justice goes on the other. It is for that reason that law and justice in Africa are two streams whose waters do not mix'. Clearly, her first story, Law and beautiful nonsense, challenges her audience to evolve a thought process that provokes African scholars to expound on African jurisprudence rather than resigning to the skepticism and racism of African philosophy of law. Here, Barr. Mabeiam is of the opinion that for law to be meaningful, it must first be contextual. The author also, skillfully puts the question of the internally displaced persons (IDP's) on the front burner. She wonders how it is that the rights of the most vulnerable of our society get to be violated often times by the same people who should protect them. Section one is a clarion call for the strengthening of the law to be able to effectively serve as a shield to everyone especially the most vulnerable. Not done yet, she discusses issues of human rights as they relate to the military. Is the military able to respect human rights or violate them with impunity? Regrettably, she notes that abuse of human rights is widespread in the military and solicits for a constitution that is people oriented as opposed to the current lie we are operating as the ground norm.

In Section Two, the author painfully examines the question of gender and domestic violence as it affects both sexes, although females suffer more violence related crimes and suffer indignity. The author dispassionately treats the question of gender in a balanced way. For example, in her story, Widowhood: between a rock and a hard place, she cites heartbreaking examples of difficulties women go through. As a way out, she challenges us to address our thought process – the mind. From childhood, women are brought up to see themselves as subordinates to men, as persons whose relevance stem from the perceptions and dictates of men, as supporters and not major players in any sphere of life. The story of Mariam Aloma, the first female Justice appointed to the Supreme Court in 2012 inspires hope for the women. Justice Aloma succeeded in breaking the glass ceiling. Although a female, she was very courageous in the many dissenting judgments she gave in the Supreme Court. In drawing our attention to the question of gender imbalance, the author calls for a paradigm shift and the creation of level playing field for all sexes.

In section Three, Prose and Poetic Justice, the author discusses the thorny question of circumstantial evidence in adjudicating high profile cases ranging from paternity to the much talked about 'illegitimate children' particularly as it relates to inheritance. Citing some leading judgments to buttress her point, she posits that for a circumstantial evidence to be sufficient to support a conviction in a criminal trial, it must be cogent, complete, and unequivocal. It must be compelling and must lead to the irresistible conclusion that the accused and no one else is guilty. The facts must be incompatible with the innocence of the accused and incapable of explanation upon any other reasonable hypothesis than that of his guilt (Page 104). As far as circumstantial evidence is concerned, the *Lori v. State* judgment delivered in 1980 is enough light shed on the admissibility of circumstantial evidence. On the question of the often used derogatory term "illegitimate children", she avers: 'Considering that no child determined the circumstances of his/her birth, there is nothing legally or morally reprehensible in the equal share of estate by

both 'legitimate' and 'illegitimate' children of a man. Sadly, the term 'illegitimate' has stuck with many as the dominant status paving the path to far too many needless social stigmas. The author recommends the effective social reengineering of law that is fair, just and humane (Pg 119).

Section Four is dedicated to the question of justice, democracy and judiciary. The author examines these concepts vis-à-vis existential realities in the country. She rhetorically wonders what form of government is operational in the country. Is it monarchy, aristocracy, oligarchy, Theodicy or dictatorship? In her opinion, each of these strand is found in our nation space. Although we pretend to be a democracy, yet what obtains is merely a fusion of all of these elements. As a result of the absence of a truly democratic culture, today, Nigeria is gradually becoming failed state. Our educational systems don't work, thus the massive influx of Nigerian students into foreign universities. The cost of this influx to the families and to the nation is astronomical and naturally also tell on the nation's economy and image. So after nearly 20 years of practicing democracy, what do we have to show for it in terms of visible achievements and progress? Your guess is as good as the author's. Barr Gloria further discusses the nagging and sometimes embarrassing question of succession in the judiciary. The succession crisis is often mired in needless controversies that usually have political undertones. The author canvasses strict adherence to competence and professionalism as laid down by the national judicial council.

Section Five is a mixed grill. The author takes on the worrying question of violence arising from the activities of non state actors. Today we are grappling with all manners of vitriolic attacks perpetrated against very many innocent Nigerians and the state. Very many states today are under the onslaught of violent extremists. The North East is devastated by Boko Haram. The North Central is devastated by Fulani Herdsmen Militia. The North West is being ravaged by armed bandits. There is hardly any part of this country that has not yet been visited by one form of calamity or the other. The author takes her attention to children who are usually the worst hit. She asks the nagging question, 'what guarantee can we give our children that their safety and security will be catered for and that their dreams of becoming future leaders is not a ruse? (p. 182). The author suggests that we need to work out measures that ensure that Nigerian child is insulated from radical ideologies. We can achieve this by making evil less convincing and less attractive or rewarding and demonstrating why it is so. We have to work hard at stopping the next recruits for insurgents and the next batch of victims seeking revenge (Pp 182-183). Barr Gloria tasks government to walk towards the frontlines of detection and prevention in order to identify the underlying issues as well as the radical rabble rousers and after they have made their findings, combine coercive measures with soft political approach that will undercut the ideas of those unleashing terror on the Nigerian state. She adds that protecting and preserving the nation is a shared responsibility and everyone needs to contribute their bit by securing their personal space (p 183).

Section Six focuses attention on those who, rather than provide healing for the sick, end up sending them to their early graves. The author dedicated this section to examining medical negligence and how health care providers give treatments that fall below the acceptable standard of practice in the medical community thereby hiking the death toll and plummeting life expectancy in Nigeria. She regrets that medical errors have become so common that they are now becoming the accepted standard of practice. The author here advocates for the strengthening of laws to be able to prosecute medical health care providers who have turned clinics and hospitals into killing fields and doctors who have killed due to negligence must face prosecution for homicide.

Barr Gloria makes a case for the disabled in Section Seven. She recounts the moving stories of people with disabilities who have become renowned and excelled in their chosen areas of endeavors. She advocates for laws that will protect those with disabilities in other to thrive and excel. She recommends as a starting point, that the same treatment be given them as able bodied and that the disabled need not be stigmatized on account of their disability. The author takes the challenge to the doorsteps of elected representatives who must review the constitution in order to factor in our brothers and sisters who through no fault of theirs, found themselves with disabilities. On the same section, the author allays the fears of those who may have morbid fears

for will writing. She strongly advocates that we all need to clearly write our Wills. In her words, our Wills become our speech when we die. Coming from an African background where controversies become second nature, especially as it pertains to women's rights, there is the need to have our will clearly written to avert possible controversies in the event of death. In this chapter still, she takes on the issue of abuses perpetrated against young women who throng to worship centers in search of waters from the living spring to quench their spiritual thirst. A phenomenon now widespread regrettably, has caught the fancy of the author who has dedicated a sub section to look at the question of God, the worshiper and the worshipped. Since I have seen that the author intends to discuss in greater detail in her presentation, I will skip this and move to the last section.

Section Eight, being the last, analyses the Nigerian state especially under the current administration. The author examines the case of the Senate President, Bukola Saraki and the many ordeals he went through in the court of conduct tribunal. She is worried at the needless distraction this trial may pose to the nation and also worries about its cost. While she ruminates on this debacle, she however sees in it a window of opportunity for which Nigerians can now have a fresh debate with regards to requirements for public office. The author ended her book with a cautious optimism where she imagined a crime free Nigeria and charged her audience to lead in the campaign for the actualization of the kind of change we want to see.

What I have done in my review is to tease out the salient issues by highlighting them. Of course, to have a better gist of the thought of the author, you will have to get a copy for yourselves and have them autographed by the author. At your quiet moment, I guarantee you, when you sink in your teeth in this book, chances are that you will never drop it until you get to the last sentence. As with every other book review, I have only succeeded in teasing out the salient points so that we can all interrogate the issues as they affect us and our society. How can we all extrapolate the ideas of Barr Gloria and export same into current happenings in the country? This for me is the most pertinent question and reason for which this book is reviewed. In reviewing a book, it is natural to point at the strengths and weaknesses inherent in the book under review. I will attempt to point at a few:

Strengths:

1. Style of writing is appealing as it comes in story form, stimulating the appetite to keep on reading. She didn't resort to verbose use of words and wrote in a manner that anyone with an average education can readily comprehend the argument.
2. The font is good and conforms to modern style of writing. The finishing is superb and the binding excellent.
3. The issues raised are germane and topical and the author helped to put to the front burner for discussion, matters as they affect us.

Weaknesses:

1. A few typographical errors are spotted in pages 150 & 155.
2. Some of the stories in earlier chapters are similar to others in later chapters. For example, the stories on pages 305-312 would have been accommodated in the first chapter.

The author, Barr Gloria deserves our commendation and praise. The book, *Echoes of Justice* is a must read and one that should be found on the shelves of those who seek knowledge. No better way to end my review than reading a quotation credited to Luther King Jnr: "We need leaders not in love with money but in love with Justice. Not in love with publicity but in love with humanity". This is the challenge Barr Gloria Ballason is throwing to all of us today.

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