

Why Am I Doing This?

Abubakar Gimba

Abubakar Gimba, OFR, was born in Nassarawa, Lapai Local Government Area of Niger State, Nigeria on March 10, 1952. He attended Government College, Keffi and later, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Kaduna State from where he graduated with a B.Sc (Economics) in June 1974. In 1977, he obtained his M.A. (Economics) from the University of Cincinnati, USA.

Gimba has worked in both the private and the public sectors. He served in the Niger State Civil Service, rising to become a permanent secretary before departing for the banking industry where he was Executive Director of Union Bank of Nigeria Plc and United Bank for Africa Plc at different times before retiring in 1996.

He is the Chairman, Evaluation and Implementation Committee (EAIC) of IBB University, Lapai Niger State, a former national president of ABU Alumni Association and a past president of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA). He writes in virtually all the genres of literature and his works include *Trail of Sacrifice*, *Witnesses to Tears*, *Innocent Victims*, *Sunset for a Mandarin*, *Sacred Apples and Footprints* (all novels); *Inner Rumbblings and This Land of Ours* (poetry); *A Toast in the Cemetery* (short stories); *Letter to the Muslim Fundamentalist* and *Letters to My Children* (social dialogue) and a book of essays, *Once upon a Reed*. He has also been a columnist with some Nigerian newspapers, notably, the *Nigerian Tribune* and *Weekly Trust*.

Since his retirement, Gimba has lived in Minna, capital of Niger State.

There are many writers but a few crusaders. And there are yet a fewer number who can combine well the craft of writing with the mission of crusading. Gladly, however, Abubakar Gimba embodies both. He is writer (who is not obscure) and a crusader (who is not a bigot). Ever civil but firm, he nudges the reader towards the ideals of truth and justice which are the building blocks for a peaceful and prosperous society that all can be Proud of.

Why Am I Doing This? is Gimba's war of sorts against the moral decadence, corruption, political rascality and recklessness, and religious intolerance now hovering over the land like a pall. But his battlefield extends beyond the shores of Nigeria to the international arena where the US, with arrogance, sits as world prefect.

Why Am I doing This? is a call to leaders - political and religious- to live up to their calling; it is a call, too, to the youths and masses to 'grow up' and not let themselves be used as tools for the selfish interest of a few. The author asks tough questions of all in the hope that they will provoke the kind of deep and critical reflection necessary for us to understand and better relate with ourselves.

Why Am I doing This? is a study in urban reasoning and responsible journalism- a journalism devoid of mudslinging and trading in diatribes. It is a very welcome addition to the chorus of voices crooning for our leaders to toe the path of honour, truth and justice so that Nigeria can be on her way to the great destiny we all dream of.

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*For Jummai S. Sarki
A Lady of the House;
Abubakar Adamu Rasheed,
Ahmadu Babajo Kofa,
Aishah Ibrahim Jega
And my friends who
In spite of everything
Continue to keep faith*

Preface

Why Am I Doing This? is a collection of Abubakar Gimba's reflections in the "Notebook" column of the *Nigerian Tribune* between 2001 and 2003. And beginning at the title, he sets the reader thinking: Why do we do the things we do? Are we moved to do what we do merely to fulfil the call of duty and nothing more? Are we motivated by selfish interests? Do we act because it is popular to do so at that material time? Or, do higher motives undergird our actions?

The question title of the work also stirs the reader's curiosity: Why has Abubakar Gimba done *this*, that is, writing a column and, to boot, turning it into a book? Is it because it is the fad? There were and still are a thousand and one writers (columnists) doing *this* and quite competently too. Besides this is the current trend among politicians and public office-holders to have their speeches and 'monologues' (however hollow and boring) and the *seemingly* good side of their service years turned into books and then spectacularly launched. Is Gimba's case any different? What has he to offer that others before him have not given us?

It is noteworthy that in justifying his foray into journalism, Gimba does not appeal to his credentials – academic, administrative, economic and literary. He does not even lay claim to knowledge of the whole truth about the issues – local and global – which engage his intellectual powers. But he is courageous enough to affirm with passion and without equivocation the truth as he sees it from his own standpoint. Which is as it should be. He is not writing to please anybody or interest. And because he is writing for no one in particular, he is writing for all. His is a crusade for urbane reasoning and responsible journalism, a journalism bereft of mudslinging and trading in diatribes, in the hope that society would be more humane and the world a better place to live, dream and die in.

But in order to really appreciate the significance of what Gimba has done – the depth of his commitment to the ideals of truth and justice; the extent of his courage in the face of falsehood and a decaying morality; his composure in spite of the pervading insecurity and chaos in the land; and the strength of his faith in the presence of palpable fear and despair – we must not forget the context, the contests, the contradictions and crises that formed the backdrop

against which he wrote. For the years 2001 to 2003 marked a very low point in Nigeria's recent history. The period witnessed unresolved high-profile killings, ethnic and religious conflicts, the Sharia dilemma, constitutional crisis, a rise in ethnic militancy and threats of secession, energy crisis, a million and one labour disputes and strikes (*a la* NLC, ASUU), administrative ineptitude and irritations, political rascality, a near-comatose economy, continuing unbridled corruption in high places, phoney elections that conferred on us the image of circus clowns before the rest of the world; and on the international scene, the New York and Washington bombings (fondly called 9-11), the heightening of tension in the Middle East. Indeed, it was a most unstable period in the world and its ripples are yet with us several odd months after.

Gimba wrote at a time when many forces – overt and covert – threatened to blow into smithereens the entity called Nigeria. He wrote at a time when double-speak and outright falsehood were legal tender. He wrote at a time when it was unpopular, unprofitable and even dangerous to side with truth and justice. And he wrote with passion, with conviction and courage, he wrote with integrity, with style, humour and insight. The titles of many of the essays are food for thought. A few samples: "Wanted: True Statesmen!", "Enahoro's National Question, Tribal Answers", "A Playwright Called George Bush", "Gani Fawehinmi: A Crusader in a Cobweb", "Offshore Greed, Onshore Tragedy of Errors", "Lawlessness as Democracy", "NLC: Between Virtuous Words and Virulent Acts" among others.

Gimba's writings portray him as a fearless man, nay a prophet, who is willing and ready to take on any issue and any personage (including his kinsmen) but within the bounds of decency and propriety. He practises the kind of robust and responsible journalism which he preaches. He does not withhold praise where it is due just as he scoffs at hypocrisy and mediocrity as he does with the Jerry Gana's Information Ministry-organized media tour and awards for instance. Through conscientious analysis and exposition, he lays bare the lies and hypocrisy behind many traditional assumptions. For example, how international is the 'international community'? Why do investors continually flock Saudi Arabia even though it operates the Sharia legal code and yet for that same reason would not come to Nigeria? A case of leaving leprosy to treat ringworm? And between money and religion, which is really the opium of the masses?

In style and delivery, Gimba's writings are both revealing and entertaining. The anger that is common with writers who set

themselves such task as he does, is well tempered by good doses of humour and irony. We can think while laughing.

Why Am I Doing This? represents a search for those humane and humanizing values which are the concrete blocks for building a peaceful, prosperous and enduring society. Gimba's heart is big for justice, honesty, fairness, the oneness of Nigeria and peace between all peoples of the world. It is these ideals which have redeeming values for humanity, not religion, not race or tribe, not military might and, certainly, not wealth.

Gimba's reflections are presented here in the hope that they would inspire critical thinking and balanced judgement by this generation and even the next and so help to avoid the mistakes of the past. As he has done in several published works – poetry, prose, short stories – this is another effort at exploring the human condition, laying bare the soul of society, diagnosing her ailments and kick-starting the healing process.

Steve Shaba
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