



Reflections On Patriotism and Nigerian Unity

✘ “Nigeria don spoil! Nigeria is a failed state! Nigeria na yeye! There is no hope for Nigeria! Nigeria has to break up! Nigeria and Nigerians cannot change! Nigeria cannot be united!

Nigeria as a united country is impossible! You can't change Nigeria! There's nothing like one Nigeria! You are a fool to think Nigeria can be better or progress or develop! Nigeria will break up one day! Nigeria is in a mess and nobody can change it!”

These are some of the things you hear and read these days in internet articles and media publications. The CIA even predicted Nigeria breaking up in less than 25 years time. These do not make for optimism at all, do they? But the question nobody will answer is: What will become of Nigeria if it breaks up, what will really happen to us all?

Whenever I come across all these negative thinking, opinions and prophecies, my heart bleeds. I become frustrated, I become disillusioned. I also become very angry. I try to weigh the evidence and they are, I must admit, very overwhelming and do not really give any room for optimism about the fate of the country, which we all seem to love to hate. But underneath, I detect some hidden agenda by some agents of doom and those who just never see anything good or positive with Nigeria. I see people who are bent on not making anything work; people who have been brainwashed into thinking negatively about their fatherland or maybe people who are simply giving up without putting up a fight. These same people have never really fought for anything in their life, so fighting to correct the system is beyond their intellectual capacity. On the other hand, these people want other people to fight their fight for them.

Well, consider the evidence: corruption everyday and everywhere, insincere political leaders and corrupt civil servants; stealing of oil called bunkering; no electricity and it's getting worse; no good roads or communication system; no healthcare service to write home about; lack of security of life and property; utter chaotic situations everywhere and in everything we do; tribalism of the most virulent kind; acute religious differences leading to mistrust and sometimes pogroms; problems in the Niger Delta associated with the inequitable distribution of the oil wealth; militancy, cultism and kidnappings in the Niger Delta, unrest in the Igbo states calling for the resuscitation of Biafra; politically motivated violence and killings; the unkempt state of most cities and towns in the country while the Governors eat and dine and laugh, like the proverbial Emperor Nero “who fiddles while Rome burns”; and other ills too numerous to mention.

I have myself seen evidence of all these. I have even been subjected to, or experienced first-



Reflections On Patriotism and Nigerian Unity

hand, a lot of them. Yet, I still love my country and have hope for it. In fact, I am desperate to go back home to my country more than ever. But even as I say these, some friends and family are urging me not to come back, while some are saying, please come back, we need people like you to help make a change. It is a dilemma.

It has been suggested to me that if I go back to Nigeria today, by the following day it is either that I will pack my bags and come back to my comfortable and relaxed abode in the United Kingdom, or that I will join the system and become corrupt in order to survive.

I have always reflected on this. One, I will never come back to live abroad once I decide to settle in Nigeria except to visit on holidays, or to do business or to visit my family and friends. Secondly, I will never join in the looting, raping and maiming of my country, because I am not greedy or mad, nor do I want to live in two houses at the same time, or drive three cars together, nor sit down in my living room counting millions or billions of Naira in my bank account, no matter what the peer pressure is on me to join the system of corruption. I do not need it, not at my stage of development, ethical and moral awareness. Indeed, I will help my people, and when I say my people, I mean Nigerians, not only my family, or my tribe or my friends.

This, I believe, is the only way I can justify my existence in this world, as a Nigerian, and do what God created me for, for I believe there must be a reason why I was created a Nigerian and not an American or a British or a South African for that matter.

One of the problems we have today is that our leaders, who normally forced or rigged themselves into power, thereby depriving true and purposeful leaders, do not realise or appreciate the fact that they were in power for a purpose, and that is mainly to help the weak. God knows everybody cannot be in power, so it is the duty of the strong to help the weak. Our leaders, despite their usual proclamation of religious piety, immediately abandon this doctrine and instead, serve their own pockets. God, who uses people to perform His miracles and wonders, will therefore not forgive them, because they have disobeyed Him.

On this note of lambasting everything Nigeria, it is therefore pertinent to say that, while a lot of us utter this nonsense about being patriotic, Nigerians are not, and this may be for good reasons. Patriotism denotes positive and supportive attitudes to a 'fatherland' by individuals and groups. The 'fatherland' (or 'motherland') can be a region or a city, but patriotism usually applies to a nation and/or nation-state. Patriotism covers such attitudes as: pride in its achievements and culture, the desire to preserve its character and the basis of the culture, and



Reflections On Patriotism and Nigerian Unity

identification with other members of the nation. Patriotism also implies that the individual should place the interests of the nation above their personal and group interests.

On this basis, taking the last sentence above into consideration, we could see that Nigerians are not patriotic to Nigeria, but rather, to either their personal interest or group – family, clan, tribal, regional, religious – interests or both. Herein lies our problem. Actually, it is indeed sad, that after almost 50 years of living together as a country, we have not been able to overcome this barrier to our existence as a nation. Of more sadness is the fact that even before all our tribes were amalgamated to form a single country, all these tribes have been living and trading and working and even intermarrying together relatively peacefully, save for intermittent wars, which is not particularly unique to us as a people. This had happened all over the world. The Europeans had their own wars even as recent as the last century, based on their ethnicity and mutual distrust of one another, and have guaranteed themselves that such wars will never happen again.

Yes, Nigerians, as we are presently constituted, hardly have anything to be patriotic about, but underneath, we all love the country and love being called Nigerians. Ask how many Nigerians who have dual nationality of other countries have actually thrown their Nigerian passports away. The Nigerian Embassies and High Commissions are always full of them renewing or applying for their passports, and applying for Nigerian citizenship for their children. What I am saying is that despite the fact that we need this important document to travel to our country, a lot of us are so comfortable abroad, with that salary, that comfortable, stable environment where you have power all the time, you have water all the time, that we can tell Nigeria to go to hell. Yet, we don't. We want to go and see family, we want to go and “experience” Nigeria; we want to go and do business in Nigeria, and we want to “go back home one day”. Said Obi Asika (obviously an Igbo man), an Eton-educated entrepreneur whose own record label sells albums through market traders and street sellers. “There are issues. It's not Valhalla. We're not in Milton's Paradise yet , but I believe in Nigeria, I'm positive about this country.”

Our elders used to say that “it is the country where you make your success that is your country”. Yet, most of us do not wish to die outside of Nigeria, and wish to see our children living or at least visiting Nigeria. (I say Amen for those who harbour this prayer) Even recent evidence suggests that international boundaries are breaking down all across the world, with, in the last three decades, so much migration that very soon, maybe in the next century, one can easily claim any country they wish to claim.



Reflections On Patriotism and Nigerian Unity

These days, everybody is talking about marginalization. The Niger Deltans are certainly not getting a good deal from the fact that they are the wealth of Nigeria; the Igbos are still moaning about Biafra and complaining that they nobody is giving them a shot at ruling the country; the Yorubas, never a united tribe, are moaning the loss of their influence in the governance of Nigeria; the Northerners feel they have always been marginalised and they have to get even with the rest of Nigeria by carting away all the oil wealth to develop their region (this is not even being done, as the money ends up in the hands of their elite and feudal lords); ask the “talakawas” of the North, or the ordinary Igbo, Ijaw, Kanuri, Efik, Nupe, Edo, Ogoni, Fufude, Idoma, Birom, Egun, Koroma, Ebira and Yoruba and they will tell you they don’t even know that money is coming from the Niger Delta, because they do not feel the benefit or see any change to their everyday life belaboured with poverty, disease and malnutrition.

As somebody wrote to me in a feedback to one of my previous articles, we spend an entire lifetime fighting one another instead of seeking a common ground to fight the common enemy – mad, greedy, corrupt leaders irrespective of their tribe or religion. Just go on Nigerian internet websites and chat forums and one will be shocked at the pure, unedited hatred for each other that are expressed on these sites. Any foreigner that reads them will think these people are at each other’s throat everyday. Yet, that is not true.

Compatriots. I am not advocating for a Nigeria which is inconvenient for the survival of any one. In fact, if it cannot work, then let everybody go their way. What I am saying is that we have never even given it a real chance to work. There are many reasons for this, and I don’t want to go into them in this essay, but we all know. Occasionally even if it seems we are on the right road, some groups of people scupper it. It is quite possible that a way for Nigeria to be ONE is by a confederation of states or regions, as we had before 1966. This is something some of us have been clamouring for, but which no Government wanted to consider.

It is my belief that Nigerians have interacted and lived together for so long that we are now very dependent on each other, and cannot afford or survive absolute separation. Where do you want me to put my Igbo nephew or my Hausa brother-in-law? Or where do you want me to classify my Igbo cousin and Bini sister-in-law? Can I point a gun at my Ijaw and Urhobo University roommate and shoot him because he is not Yoruba? It is very unfortunate, and has cost us very dearly, that a civil war and consequent reconciliation has done nothing to heal the wounds after so many years, but this is because of poor and failed leadership, as well as some other factors, not because of the people themselves. The oil wealth, for instance, has in no small measure, greatly



Reflections On Patriotism and Nigerian Unity

contributed to these divisions and disunity. I believe if Nigeria does not have oil, we will be probably more united than we are today. But then, we have oil, what do we do about it?

As the reader can surmise from my ramblings, I believe in ONE NIGERIA although with the view that we are yet to find a way to exorcise our demons and live together as a Union. Being a Union is different from being United, but both can be combined, for example, the United States of America is a union and is united in all sense of the word. It also comprises of diverse people. If Niger Delta should become a separate country today, their problems have just started. Having a Biafra will not solve the problems of the Igbo. The same goes for all the Southerners and Northerners, unless they have put structures in place to guarantee certain fundamentally principles of governance and human engineering. We have all tasted what it is to be Nigerians, even with the ups and downs, and really, deep in our hearts, do we want this association to be broken up?

These are just my thoughts. I may be wrong, I may be right, who knows? One thing for sure, I am still a Nigerian and I want to live in peace in Nigeria with everybody in a Nigeria that will guarantee equality, freedom, progress, development, good governance, etc to its people. There certainly is Unity in Diversity – and we tend to ignore this saying. We really need to work hard and honestly towards achieving this and no amount of words and rhetoric that we spew out will make a difference if we choose to sit back and watch others do it for us. It is an internal matter, and we have to deal with it whichever way we want.

I don't want to need to apply for a visa before I can travel to Enugu to see my friend, or to Yola to see my business associate. I do not want a situation where all the Igbos who own land and built houses in my hometown of Ibadan would have to give them all up with or without compensation, neither do I want all the Sabos in the South to be razed to the ground and their occupiers forced to move back North. And in the same vein, I do not want to see a forced and painful migration of Southerners from the North. We cannot afford this anymore.

Solutions? The solution is there in Nigeria; in our heart, in our way of perceiving Nigeria; in the way we fight for it. All we need is one more war – and this war is against the evil and corrupt cabal ruling us – irrespective of their tribe or religion. That should be our next war, not a tribal-induced war or conflict.

I say, let the truth be said always, only then can we survive as a nation and as a people.

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