

THE WHITE COLLAR

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The Case for Nigeria

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There was once a country whose people learnt to work hard to produce and trade with their neighbours. They were humble, industrious and by that virtue gradually became rich by selling what they produced.

They used what they earned to buy what they did not have, they brought educators to teach their children, they bought technology to improve their efficiency and they continued to produce and sell to their neighbours. Soon their children grew up rich with culture, intelligent in the ways of both their home and the world, with dreams of building a great nation in the heart of the African continent. The people recognised those who could build their country, they identified them by their knowledge, foresight and a plan for the future. Parents knew their children were capable of leading because they had a vision for that humble nation.

They measured their children as bronze, silver and gold is valued- they chose the golden children, those who showed excellence in their training to lead, the silver children to follow in the lead of the excellence and the bronze children to build the nation. They overcame the challenges facing them together because they saw a future they could not reach without each other.

Now while an excerpt from our history will always have nostalgic appeal, this look at the origin of Nigeria's early success is more than a mere tug at the heart strings of those old enough to have known it and those young enough to long for it again. Instead, it sets the backdrop of the conversation about a possible Referendum on the continued existence of Africa's most populous nation in the 21st century.

Brexit and the Copy and Paste Inclinations

On Thursday 23rd June 2016 the United Kingdom, in an open non-binding Referendum on whether the UK should 'Leave' the European Union, voted 51.9% in favour of leaving the EU and 48.1% to 'Remain' in the EU. The Referendum, although non-binding and therefore without legal enforceability of its result in the real sense, was a rare poll open to the people of the UK on a question of some political significance. However it did not exist in a vacuum, it was occasioned by the European Union Referendum Act 2015 passed by the UK Parliament.

It is well known that unlike Nigeria's, the UK's constitution is an unwritten body of long standing rules, regulations and conventions which in many instances place great emphasis on historical practices and political collateral. From this we also know that legally the Act does not give room for the enforcement of the result of the Referendum, notwithstanding that the effect of failing to give legal mandate to what the British people so openly voted for would be political suicide.

In this sense, the UK is different from Nigeria because whereas great weight is placed on political credibility in Britain, shame is a commodity too expensive for most of our politicians who wave away a lifetime of their

professed fundamental beliefs and principles in one farcical act, "Cross-Carpeting" as often as the music stops in a game of musical chairs. Another, more fundamental difference with our Nigerian Constitution however is the issue of sovereignty and the principle of Indivisibility. Whereas the UK has a sovereign monarch who historically had been the embodiment of political power, later then passed to and exercised by Parliament as "Queen in Parliament" -(the concept that only elected representatives can make and enforce laws), we in Nigeria have a written Constitution, which is the grundnorm of our laws.

Because the Nigerian Constitution represents the very embodiment of Nigerian political will, a sort of "Nigeria in Parliament" if you will, it directs all Nigerian laws and dictates their legality based on their consistency with it. That Constitution in its very preamble states:

"Having firmly and solemnly resolve, to live in unity and harmony as one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign nation under God..."

and again in section 2 (1):

"Nigeria is one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign state..."

therefore, unlike the UK, no law may be passed by the National Assembly which is inconsistent with the principle of Nigeria's sovereign indivisibility.

The Problem

But let us be honest and move away from the mere letter of the law since what is written today is not set in stone forever. The truth is the root of this issue goes down further and deeper than the legalistic concept of what can and cannot be made into law; it goes to our very identity as Nigerians. There was a time when this question had a simple answer, but today we are first South-West, Middle Belt, East or Northern before we are Nigerian. We are now our denomination or religion before we are our brother's keepers. We are our problems before we are our solutions. And it is because of the people we choose as our leaders, they have quickly carved us up into factions, groups, and geo-political zones for their benefits rather than for ours, but we ask no questions.

Of course there are real fundamental problems to be solved, State Generation of Revenue and greater State Responsibility for their growth and development. Inter-Tribal Conflicts, Resource Control, and Derivation. State Security and Environmental Degradation in the Niger Delta. Infrastructural Deficits and bad planning. These are real pressing issues that should have been canvassed decades ago even. There are deep, jagged scars of hurt and betrayal, impassioned matters of sorrow and pain everyday in the life of our nation, injustices that we see and are enraged by. We suffer them everyday... but we cannot let false prophets come and take our indignation and use it as fuel to destroy what hope of a better tomorrow we have, only to rise on those ashes to wealth and fame.

The Great Heart of Africa - The Case for Nigeria

These demagogues constantly remind us that our problems are real, and they are. But what they never tell us is that there is also strength and

good that we have achieved together.

We are Africa's largest nation and while many people will tell you that is a problem, it is only because they cannot understand why it is a strength and what the future can offer us. We are the market buyer's dream, we are adept, informed and productive. Producers we are also creative, innovative and competitive. We take nothing for granted, make little into more and our voice is strong in the world. When we say make better products, more available variety, when we negotiate with the world super powers they must listen because we are the heart of Africa.

We have been here for centuries. Some would say the British brought us together, I would say check history, what country was not brought together by some circumstance or some other political power? Spain, the US, even Great Britain were all results of political powers consolidating, Nigeria is no different. What separates those who succeed from those who fail is the ability to take what we have and make it into more- and as Nigerians we know better than most how to do that. And the added benefit is that we can stand shoulder to shoulder with any nation and say we have been there in history to take our place at the table of men, at the great moments in history we have not shirked our responsibility, we have stood in Africa together with our brothers, we have fought in the wars for the freedoms of mankind. We are not a nation of few years, which cannot be said about the propositions made by those who advocate cessation. Imagine a small new nation, say an "Ooduwa People's Federation" or a "Biafra" borne out of strife attempting to negotiate diplomacy at the UN against the interest of Russia or China? There will be no contest. But see how far we have come representing Africa at the UN.

See our great sports men and women, our poets, our scientists, even those under other national colours, see the children of Nigerian heritage claimed by other nations, see how they thrive under adversity, and then imagine that one day we have leaders that build bridges to bring them home and consolidate our global strength. See how strong we are now, and imagine how strong we could be. Yes we have problems, but see how we come together when we have a common cause, see our pride when we see our colours waving in the wind at the Olympics.

An Answer is Always Greater than A Problem

Those who say the only way forward is to split Nigeria conveniently forget that "a rock broken into three pieces is still only more rocks". If the problem exists in Nigeria, the problem will not by divine ordination disappear from whatever units are formed from Nigeria. If there are corrupt politicians in Nigeria there will be as many more corrupt politicians in the new nations as there are new nations formed. And if people are denied their entitlement in Nigeria, people will still be denied their entitlement in whatever nations come from Nigeria. This is because the problem is in what we have come to accept for ourselves, in us as a people and not in the name "Nigeria". Therefore we must come together to solve the problem as a

people since that is the true means to progress.

By Their Fruits You Know Them

We cannot lie to ourselves and ignore the obvious, a real conversation needs to happen about our future, however we cannot let the men and women who seek their own interests over our greater good, those who are first prepared to take from us than to give and those who have no plan for our good to lead that conversation. We need to put aside sentiments and choose those who truly have a vision for Nigeria, not those who have enough money to campaign, not those "who have been there long so it is their turn", not those from a region because "it is their turn". It is time to choose those we believe in and those we know can take us to the future we want as a nation.

We Choose to Succeed

Look at successful nations and we will see that where there is progress and growth these lines of division begin to blur. The United States has more than 322, 000,000 people. Some would say they all speak the same language but if you visit New Orleans or Mississippi in the Southern region or Texas in the West, or Boston in the East I dare you to say that it is indeed one "American English" that they all speak. Their dialects of English are so distinct that they can be separate languages. They have diverse cultures as different from each region as we do in our tribes here in Nigeria. They have different religious and political beliefs, they are on display every four years to see as they elect their leaders, but what holds them together is not these beliefs, it is not their religion or even their culture- what holds them together is the sheer determination to succeed... nothing more. They have built their nation together, they have fought to grow it and they fight to protect it.

The difference between their success and what some call our "failure" is not the price of petrol today (they pay N237 per litre in the US by the way), it is not how strong your economy was years before, or how well your social welfare system will be tomorrow, it is in your mind and mine- how much do you want to succeed? How much determination are we teaching our children to approach their future with? How far are we pushing our children to become the gold, silver and bronze of their generation?

We started out this discussion realising that... there was once a country. We saw that this country grew because it was humble and produced what it could trade with and perhaps that is what we have lost? Maybe we have become the entitled "giant of Africa" with a thirst for oil that beclouds our judgment and deceives us into believing that there is money somewhere just waiting to be taken? I dare to remind us that success and progress are not promised to anyone, it is the man who works that earns, grows and becomes greater tomorrow than he was yesterday. So ask yourself two questions- "Am I working for my tomorrow?" and pertinently "Are the people I voted for working for our tomorrow?" if they aren't mark them well because come another 3 years they will be back and then you must act.