

# THE WHITE COLLAR

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## The Labour of Our Heroes Past

**A land without a people, for a people without a land**

Never before has one phrase represented the epitome of two sides of the same conflict. The poetry in the phrase is only matched by the deep and myriad conflict for which it has come to represent. This same phrase has been used to represent the very essence of the modern Zionist movement to establish an Israeli state of the late 19th century and the perfect refutation for the anti-zionist movement of Palestine that began in response to the Zionist movement. It is the pictorial equivalent of two warring states flying the same flag claiming it as the justification for their causes.

### An Inconceivable Longing

Irrespective of what side of the divide we perceive the conflict from, one fact is apparent, the phrase resonates the deep inconceivable longing of both sides for a land to call their own. C.S. Lewis in his book *"The Weight of Glory"* talks about this longing when he says *"In speaking of this desire for our own far off country, which we find in ourselves even now, I feel a certain shyness. I am almost committing an indecency...the secret we cannot hide and cannot tell, though we desire to do both. We cannot tell it because it is a desire for something that has never actually appeared in our experience. We cannot hide it because our experience is constantly suggesting it..."*

It is the description of a deep and powerful human sentiment which we feel and express as Nigerians too, although altogether in a different way, because while we may not be able to fully appreciate the longing for a geographic territory, as the Israeli and Palestinians do, we do appreciate what it means to fight for the myriad interests that are our "national ideals".

### A National Conversation

That is why (discounting those leaders that occupy office for their own personal gain) we fight, debate, and in the end accommodate other interests not wholly ours, in our struggle to achieve that perfect representation of a country of our own, which we yearn deeply for. It comes together in forums where we are afforded a national conversation, where as Nigerians we are heard and where leaders stand up as leaders, listen to their electorate and take decisions that acknowledge the plight and varying interests of the people while building a stronger collective for the future without whipping up deep sentiments that pander to religious intolerance or tribalism for their own gain.

### Lessons from the Ostrich ~ "Don't Stick Your Head in the Sand"

Of course that perfect representation of a country for some is not Nigeria. Since the Nigerian Civil War in the 1970s, where one million men, women and children tragically died, there has been a dark shadow that pervades our national existence, a part of Nigerian history less told. There is an unspoken subject, personified by the mystification of an instigation that does not support the ideal of one indissoluble Nigeria. The conversation about *'Biafra'* has recently been re-invigorated by one man and a rogue radio broadcast, but what the attention this conversation



draws tells us is that an unpalatable subject ignored can soon become an intolerable consequence.

There are real national deficiencies to be addressed, regional imbalance in some instances, some states contribute more to national revenue and yield little commensurate returns in terms of development. These are real issues that cannot be ignored because they affect our perception of our continued collective existence. And if we ignore them, there are many with more than a rogue radio broadcast waiting in the wings to use these ignored realities as fuel, manipulating our deepest sentiments for the inferno they would turn our ideals into and from those ashes build their demagogues.

### Making a Scapegoat a Martyr

Nnamdi Kanu the director of both radio station "Radio Biafra London" and "Biafra Television", and the self-proclaimed leader of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) was arrested on the 17th of October 2015 by the Department of State Security (DSS) when he entered Nigeria from the United Kingdom where he is reported to live. The DSS held Mr Kanu for another 60 days in disregard of a Magistrate Court Order granting him bail and on December 16 withdrew the charges against him in the Magistrates' Court in favour of new charges at the High Court with greater jurisdiction for the new offences charged.

The DSS' failure to act in accordance with the Rule of Law, i.e. an office of the state failing to comply with a legitimate order of Court- itself a manifestation of state authority, is an act that inadvertently compromises the very efficacy of the state's authority. It also served to garner up attention and support for a cause that was until then no more than an illegal broadcast in Nigeria, giving it the semblance of a fight for civil liberty against the state. Yes this broadcast and Mr Nnamdi Kanu appear to disregard the very essence of our ideals and stand as an affront

to our collective will with the message of derision they appear to represent, nonetheless we cannot make a man with a camera and a microphone into the hero that he is not, by denying him his rights as a Nigerian.

### The Debate- Liberty v. Sovereignty

I have read some discourse that in weighing up the balance of rights of enemies of the state and the right of the state to protect its sovereignty, trivialise or totally dismiss the rights of dissidents. Some do so with a sweeping approach, canvassing a "them-and-us" argument, the obvious reason being that they are enemies of the state, the very definition of "unlawful" and therefore should be regarded no courtesy of the state.

Others proffer a finer more delicate argument- the protection of constitutional rights are premised on a social contract between the individual and the state, it goes without saying therefore, that those who persecute the state have impliedly relinquished any rights to its protections. Nevertheless the question that readily comes up is this- Is the State defined by the dissident acts of its citizens or does the state endure and supervene the life of these individuals, standing sovereign and indissoluble? Does the Nigerian Republic cease to be the Nigerian Republic because another state or individual refuses to act with propriety? No it most certainly does not, and in like manner the state ought to operate in conformity with the Rule of Law irrespective of how deplorable or unforgivable an affront to it an act may appear.

### An Identity Beyond the Present, Surpassing the Past and Greater than the Future

The State remains sovereign and indissoluble irrespective of what I, or any other citizen of this deep multifaceted and beautifully multi-cultural nation say, because its origins and foundations go deeper, and stronger, forged in the labours of our fathers, in the blood of our compatriots gone before us and in the deep, strong, perfect ideals we choose to bestow on our children to come. These cannot be defined completely, not even our best efforts in our most revered Constitution fully encompass the deep privilege of what it is to be Nigerian. We must therefore continue to be our better selves irrespective of what those who do not share these same ideals- we are *the people*, they simply are not.

The virtue of any true leader is in what they are able to evoke in the people that listen and follow them, not in the power or benefits they are able to derive in spite of them. True leaders are known by their self-sacrificing nature, the collective will and interest of the many before the self-interest of the few, no real leader weighs the cost of glory in the blood of the men and women that follow them, and if they do they put their own on the line first before they ask anyone else to. They do not use the sentiments of the people, the suffering of many as a means to popularity, before anything they do something to help the people. Before contemplating unrest they weigh the consequences and come to that conclusion only as a final unavoidable resort. We are also reminded that we are a people with a land and a land with a people, a fact that we should treasure. So with that in mind the next time someone with a megaphone, a camera and some cash in hand, comes along asking you to come and fight for them, ask yourself who's fight is this, theirs or ours?

## Law and the Downing of Russian Jet Near Turkish and Syrian Border

Gbenga Odutan

The storms of a dark era in international relations are gathering. The speed at which one extraordinary event follows another in the international system calls for an urgent re-evaluation of the pertinent principles of international law that constitute the groundnorm of international order.

The facts as we know it are as follows: over the last three years some NATO states principally led by a permanent member of the UN Security Council, the US, are desirous of regime change in Syria. To achieve this they have openly armed both moderate and extremist groups of terrorists and rebels against the government of this independent UN member state. Although the strategies of regime change have failed a most unusual course of events have witnessed the creation of a very dangerous militant group -ISIS which has styled itself as a new

state with stated and actual capabilities to plant itself over and above existing states within the region. As a result and upon the invitation of the Syrian government recognised by the United Nations, Russia another UN Security Council member has begun bombing targets identified as problematic to the safety of the Syrian government and its people. NATO and the West find this unpalatable and Turkey repeatedly alleges that its airspace was violated in the process of entry and or egress from Syria by Russian military aircraft. In the ensuing political melee, Turkey a NATO member has shot down a Russian military jet and the Russian state has threatened that there will be serious consequences for the Turkish action.

The first thing to note about this set of facts is that much less extraordinary events have led to World Wars. Two shots from a man previously thought unfit for military service into the body of a bumbling Archduke, Franz Ferdinand at Sarajevo on 28 June 1914, led to the First World War that took the lives of up to 17 million people. In essence the international fallouts from the

latest events portend extremely dangerous consequences for the world. A few years ago this conclusion would have been thought to be exaggerated because any analyst will simply point at the sophistication of the post-world war two systems of international affairs and regulations under the United Nations Charter. But the UN is no longer effective. It has all but been replaced by the rule of the mob. Fast changing coalitions and very opaque decision making by groups of states has replaced the safety and deliberate diplomacy of the UN. In a sense it even appears frivolous to still reckon with international law since international power and politics reigns in excelsis.

Yet in the fog of politics and high power intrigues we must search for the lighthouses of international law, treaties and the UN Charter. We can only attempt to indicate a few of the coordinates that can help us not only to survive the current storm and rocky situation but to reach the shore of safety over

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