

THE PURPOSE OF NIGERIA!

Judging from a cursory glance, it does not seem difficult for one to imagine Nigeria as a gallimaufry of sorts. After all, from nature to culture to religion, the country exhibits a wide range of variegations: its terrain stretches from vast, arid, savannah to lush forests teeming with wildlife; its peoples, Igbo, Hausa, Yoruba, Efik, and some hundreds more, exhibit a remarkable prodigiousness in language, belief systems, festivals, food, and values. In short, the socioeconomic amalgam that is Nigeria is composed of peoples whose origins differ as much as black does from blue. So, the question arises — Why? What is the purpose of Nigeria? Why unite us under a common polity? Why are we in this arduous race of nation-building? A brisk perusal through the books readily reveals the reasons why political entities in general are established: to maintain law and order, direct the affairs of the people, provide social amenities, and the like. This, apparently, does not satisfy the rapacious explorer. This question, stripped to its bones, is one that concerns the 'higher' purpose Nigeria fulfills; her uniqueness in society; and her relevance in the comity of nations.

To begin, we must quickly discard the thought that Nigeria is simply an amalgamation of North and South — the country has evolved from that paperweight contraption of 1914. Nigeria sits on a soil that has been watered by the sweat and blood of our ancestors, of the ones before us. She has navigated through several unwieldy waters: from an ab initio civil war, to bouts of coups and de facto military governance, to years of incompetence in delivering social infrastructure, somehow emerging in one piece. An analysis of these historic, albeit unpleasant, events tells us one major thing: that the democratic nation that Nigeria is today sits on the struggles of great compatriots, known and unknown. It tells us that Nigeria is a hard-fought treasure — a truth encapsulated in the fifth line of our National Anthem: 'The labours of our heroes past.'

Also, Nigeria has been a major exporter of Africa's culture and ideology, as well as the creativity, genius, and greatness of black people. In literature, names such as Soyinka, Achebe, Okigbo, Adichie, and Mabel Segun instantly reel off the tongue; all examples of the calibre of Nigerian and black greatness. In music, we have legends such as Fela, Tony Allen, and King Sunny Ade; artistes such as the Grammy-nominated Burna Boy, Wizkid, Davido, et cetera. It is no longer news that they regularly sell out shows in Europe and Western countries. Indigenous genres of music such as Apala, Juju, Fuji, and even more recently, Afrobeats provide examples of the originality and creativity of Nigerians. Art museums home and abroad are filled with original Nigerian pieces that depict the highly sophisticated ancient and contemporary artistry of Nigerians. In sports, we have produced people of the stature of Jay Jay Okocha, Kanu Nwankwo, Mikel Obi, Chioma Ajunwa, and more. Industry giants Glo and Dangote Plc are household names all over the continent — testament to Nigerian industry, grit, and ambition. One must not forget, and quite recently, the swift and pragmatic approach Nigeria employed in the

extermination of the 2014 Ebola crisis — so effective it elicited international applause. [1] The list of exploits continues; much more than I can include here for the sake of brevity. However, the message is clear and simple: Nigeria provides evidence that black people are great — and not merely by being a populous country, or by priding itself only on its natural resources, but by churning out creativity and excellence of a sublime quality.

Many may have forgotten this, but Nigeria was a major catalyst in securing the independence of several African countries during the colonial era. In fact, Tafawa Balewa's first speech on behalf of Nigeria to the United Nations, given a mere six days after Nigeria had been declared a sovereign state, devoted nineteen paragraphs to the then state of Africa! [2] Nigeria, clearly, took upon itself the heavy garment of responsibility quite early on, and never relented in this duty. As Jaja Wachuku, Nigeria's first indigenous Speaker of the House of Representatives, put it in 1960, "Our country is... not going to abdicate the position in which God Almighty has placed us. The whole black continent is looking up to this country to liberate it from thralldom." [3] The nearly six decades since then have seen Nigeria, time and again, fill these big shoes — and not only in the colonial era, but long after. From peacekeeping operations in Congo to its influence in ending South African apartheid to work in the Liberian crisis, as well as assuming a pivotal role in institutionalizing the ECOWAS and AU, Nigeria's work in Africa stands as irrefutable evidence of its importance. Without the roles Nigeria played in these cases, the African political landscape today would likely have been very different. In doing these, Nigeria has carried the torch of pan-Africanism and African unity, encouraging Africans to unite in order to achieve peace, progress and sustainable development.

Another beautiful thing about Nigeria is its diversity. Diversity, by definition, refers to a state where an entity is made up of components differing in one way or another. At least four hundred different languages are spoken in the country! Only very few countries can boast of having so many indigenous cultures and ethnicities. They say variety is the spice of life, and Nigeria is the archetype. From food to dance, dress, and festivals, Nigeria sports a colourful blend of cultures, traditions, and all; providing an endless array of sights and sounds to feast the eyes and ears on. Apart from this gaiety, however, exists a more subtle utility — different perspectives and different ideas, when fused, help devise holistic and efficacious approaches to development and growth. Now, although problems and friction tend to appear in unifying diverse peoples (and Nigeria has had a sizeable share), I must point out that diversity is a quality inherent in human nature. Hence, Nigeria, a multicultural society, is a grand scale celebration of humanity!

Ignoring the aspersions that have recently cast Nigeria in a negative light — thanks to a few unscrupulous individuals — there exists a strikingly upbeat quality about Nigerians. This quality is their belief, optimism, and spirit. By this, I refer to the faith we have that positive change is always possible. The popular Nigerian aphorism, 'No condition is permanent' affirms this statement. It is shown in the stoic stance of the average Nigerian, in the fact that Nigerians have once been dubbed the 'happiest people in the world.' [4] This resilience is almost natural to

every Nigerian. A Nigerian will find work for himself almost anywhere. We do not know what it means to stop pushing, to stop exerting effort. This force is ubiquitous: it is visible in the sparkle in the market woman's eyes; palpable from the vigour in the barber's coarse hands; and discernible from the enthusiasm in the trader's raspy demeanour. It is a voice, prodding us on; never relenting. A direct result of this is our irrepressible urge to thrive; to succeed. This is why Nigerians, all over the world, consistently break barriers in their fields. This spirit is the gear that turns the wheel of progress and growth. Visitors to the country are often left with awe at this intrinsic energy we possess in abundance. This energy — which I beg to term 'Nigerian energy' — is a kind the world sorely needs, especially in these plangent times.

The overarching statement?

Nigeria is our inheritance, and we, like true sons and daughters, must guard it jealously.

Nigeria, also, exists as a beacon for other African countries to look to; as a cynosure for all; and to promote the richness in diversity that makes us humans. The Nigerian brand, in its uniqueness, gives face to the beauty and unmatched heritage that exists within it. It is the launch pad for a cornucopian African greatness the world has yet to see. So, finally, is Nigeria an amalgam; a fusion of sorts? Yes; it is. Forged from the hardest of values, cultures, and history, it is a delectable fusion of blood, brotherhood, diversity, love, and spirit.

References:

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