

## PATRIOTISM: A MEANS TO NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT.

BY

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**The** events of the last few days of the World Cup qualifying matches has sobered me considerably and has made me thoughtful and to weep a little for my country. The tears on the faces of Brazilian, English, German men and women at their defeat has touched me so much that I marvelled at them, I marvelled how deeply they felt about their nations, how a game of mere football has united a nation in grief and mourning at their defeat and joy and happiness at their success.

I cannot even mourn at the defeat of my country as they did not even qualify due to our usual general laissez-faire attitude and lack of patriotism. Nigeria rated by the World Football governing body FIFA as the 12<sup>th</sup> football nation on mother earth did not even qualify to go to Germany due to our lack of patriotism.

The Brazilian, Argentineans, Cameroonians, Ecuadoreans teams and Trinidad and Tobago that have players all over the world qualified for the world Cup tournament but the Super Eagles failed due to lack of patriotism and unity of purpose. Our foreign based players due to lack of zeal and patriotism refused to answer to national calls that necessitated the Nigerian Football Association NFA into sending sub-standard teams to the initial phase of the tournament which dealt us an irreparable blow. When defeat stared us on the face and everyone including foreign based players made a last gasp effort, it was too late. When my teenage son said 'dad, why is Nigeria not in Germany? But FIFA ranking said Nigeria is 12<sup>th</sup> in the world', I had no answer. What can one say or what could I have said? Tell him Nigerians are not patriotic hence we did not qualify. I was short for words.

The Nigerian lack of patriotism permeates all our daily lives. It accounts for our failure to meet the mark in our day to day undertaking as a nation. It affects the selection of the national team where all sorts of officers in government have a hand in the final selection process without leaving it to the experts thereby sentencing the Nigerian national team to perpetual mediocrity.

Lack of patriotism also affects our government and their policies and the party political process. It is only an uneducated that preaches rotation of presidency or any position on geopolitical areas or zones to the detriment of *the best* the Nigerian nation can provide. East or West, North or South it is the best the Nigerian nation can provide that should represent us on the football field, in the classroom and in government and it is only by doing that we can excel. In every country of the world, the most suited for any position is given that position and the people expect results. This account for the swift progress of some south Asian countries who gained Independence from colonial rule at about the same time as Nigeria,

have advanced not only politically but economically as well. The economic progress that has impacted on the nation during this present administration can be traced to having a square peg in a squared hole in Mrs Ngozi Okonjo- Iweala who has made a lot of difference in achieving progress on the winding road of economic emancipation of Nigeria as a nation, thanks to her patriotism and enthusiasm for her job.

Outside football, it is a common sight to see Nigerians donning other countries colours and winning laurels for their new nation during the Olympics and Commonwealth games for their own selfish gains. Where has honour gone? In Benin City we grew up to believe that money was not everything that honour surpasses all; that was why we fought for it in the classroom, on the sporting fields and even during recreation that made Bendel State number one in the late sixties and early seventies. You can count the number of Olympic and Commonwealth game's medals that Nigerians have won for other nations. It hurts to hear commentators deriding Nigeria that in spite of her size, population and oil wealth we have not made our marks in the world of sports or in fact in all spheres of human endeavours.

Sports is a money spinning sector of economy that nations do everything to bring major tournaments to their countries but in Nigeria we do not even try to win such hosting rites. With sports goes tourism and with tourism goes job creation and foreign exchange earning which we continue to lose due to our lack of patriotism and lukewarm attitude to everything.

Nigeria boasts of so many raw talents in all areas of human endeavours and the discovery of stars like Nwankwo Kanu, Jay Jay Okocha, Rashidi Yekini, Julius Aghahowa, Victor Ikpeba, Wilson Oruma, and Celestin Babayaro were all accidental. None of these stars were nurtured from youth. They were discovered and promoted to reach world stage. One can therefore imagine if there is an unadulterated systematic approach of grooming sporting stars from our teeming population, the sky will be our limit as a nation. Excellence in sports brings positive national image, goodwill, tourism and ultimately foreign exchange. It is an aspect of national development that our nation should explore. The Afuze miracle in the old Bendel State in the seventies comes to mind in what a good national policy on sports can achieve.

Part of being patriotic is the respect for the National anthem and being able to sing it, recite it, and live every word of it. It was disheartening to note that many nationals during the ongoing world cup competition could not sing their national anthem so carried their faces away from the camera due to embarrassment. This is an aspect of national life where our people may be found wanting. We should sing and recite the national anthem in schools, before meetings and at any function at local government, state and federal level. Frequent recitation concretises the meaning and subsequently its manifestation in our national life.

Along with the national anthem is the national flag. Many nationals are so excited about their national flag that they display it in their homes, offices, in their cars and sew dresses in their national colours. The Nigerian national flags can only be seen in some public buildings and some state and federal government offices which should not be the case. I recall one of the military regimes banning the use of the national flags in cars some years ago; a judgement

which was made out of ignorance. Nigerians should be allowed to display their national colours at all events if they so please.

Lack of patriotism is not limited to sporting activities as it occurs in all spheres of national life. Any Nigerian that accepts ten percent incentive paid into a foreign account to facilitate an award of contract to foreign business companies is not only corrupt but unpatriotic. The same unpatriotic attitude goes for all those leaders who siphon the national wealth to foreign bank accounts to the detriment of the economic growth of the nation. This behaviour is not only callous, corrupt, selfish but absolutely unpatriotic. This single behaviour has stifled the national growth for so long that we are so far behind our peers who escaped colonial rule almost simultaneously with us.

The lack of patriotism exposes all of us to tribalism and ethnicity which is a cancer gradually eating away the very life of our nation. We can only counter tribalism and ethnicity with being patriotic Nigerian and having the same goal and aspirations as other Nigerians. National leaders must think out unifying factors for emphasis while de-emphasising tribe and ethnicity at the same time. The divide and rule method of some national leaders buttresses tribalism and ethnicity so also is the concentration of national establishments in a particular zone without equitable distribution of the national wealth. The concept of this is 'my brother' and as such he is entitled to a particular position even when not qualified academically, morally or by training and exposure exhorts mediocrity, it is retrogressive and a detriment of excellence which is unpatriotic.

We all complain of the high crime rate in our nation. Criminality is not confined to Nigeria alone but we lag behind other nations in our ability to fight crimes due to lack of patriotism. We all agree that the police cannot do the crime fighting alone without the help of all Nigerians. We live in the same community as the criminals but we lack the patriotism to flush these criminals out. It is not difficult to identify someone without a gainful employment, living affluently, driving hummer jeeps and SUVs without any legacy having been bequeathed on him by his ancestors. To have a crime-free society we have to be patriotically involved in fighting crimes and help the police and other law enforcement agencies to bringing the criminals to book.

Election rigging and wining by all means possible amongst our people smacks of lack of patriotism. Life is give and takes and good and patriotic Nigerians or any other national for that matter show total altruism with love and kindness according to our culture and tradition as Nigerians. The recent concept of the winner's takes all attitudes is not only new but alien to our culture as a people. Part of re-orientation of our people will be to actualise our culture which abhors criminality, but generous and kind, frowns at mediocrity but helpful, truthful and loyal to the community. It is in only by propagating those unifying factors rich in our culture and respecting and honouring achievements and prowess rather than glorifying ill-gotten wealth that we can move and make laudable progress in all spheres of our national life.

As a nation we can bring patriotism to our everyday life starting from our children at home by showing good examples by an unadulterated daily living as these children are very impressionable. The teachers can also impact patriotic attitude in the pupils by being patriotic themselves in punctuality and genuine work attitude in the classrooms instead of playing football pools in the presence of the pupils without due care of the effect of such behaviour on the fertile minds of our children.

Those in government should also show patriotism by paying salaries punctually and curtailing corrupt and sharp practices so as to prevent the teachers and other workers from directing their attention from their daily work to other sources of income to the detriment of their pupils and the civil service.

National leaders can be patriotic by their attitude for example the donning of made in Nigeria clothes as exhibited by Obasanjo and Ngozi OkonjoIweala during the last United Nation General Assembly meeting in New York and the her CNN interview in London respectively. Both of them wore African or Nigerian print thereby showcasing Nigerian made goods to the whole world.

Nigerian in Diaspora have shown by their recent response to the vilifying CNN documentary on how to rub a bank which projected a very poor image of Nigerians living in the United States of America and in fact Nigerians in general that they are patriotic. Considering the number of Nigerians in various countries of the world they can more than adequately represent the interest of Nigeria and Nigerians if they work in unity and show leadership and abhor actions that will bring disgrace to our nation. I hope other Diaspora Nigerians will emulate this shining example of Association of Nigerians in the Americas.

Sometimes there are questions we should ask ourselves which is what does it mean to be a Nigerian rather than what does it mean to be Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba or Edo? Until we can answer this question as a people we may continue to flounder on the path of economic progress, national unity and nation building.

The Nigerian patriot should be measured, well mannered and tempered, abhors corrupt practices, sees fellow Nigerians as brothers and sisters, aim at the best for himself and his nation in an altruistic and unifying manner, remembering always that there is an end to our sojourn on this phase of our existence and whatever we accumulate as an individual will be left behind when we answer to an inevitable call on our transition. Above all there is no other place on Mother earth we can call home apart from our country Nigeria so let us all show patriotism in our daily lives.

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