

Pathway Conversation Series: Dancing Around Truth Won't Get Us Far

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Nigeria has struggled to achieve nationhood since its precarious inception. Its primary constituents have no affinities with each other. In fact, these constituents were independent, self-determined groups prior to amalgamation.

This reality was adequately recognized by the British handed down national anthem that was jettisoned in 1978 for the current one. That historical anthem can be used to assess Nigeria as a nation after 60 years. Its first stanza stated: "Though tribes and tongue may differ, in brotherhood we stand".

The second stanza was an aspiration that the flag of the territory will signify the reign of truth and justice. The first two stanzas were a mixture of facts and untruths. Indeed, tongue differs. But are we standing in brotherhood? Does the green, white, green flag signify truth and justice?

The final stanza prayed to God to grant an oppression-free nation, with the added blessings of peace and plenty. Do we have a nation where no man/woman is oppressed? Are we anywhere near peace and plenty?

Definitely not with the current insecurity all over Nigeria, staggering unemployment, country as the poverty capital of the world and the Nigerian government begging for vaccines paid for by other nations in order to ensure security of life from a pandemic.

Nigeria continues to lack the various affinities that aid strong inner essence for nationhood like culture, common tongue and shared history. It has been a failure on the possibility of building nation-state.

The age long failure to provide security for lives and properties has heightened in the past six years. This failure to meet the fundamental expectations of its citizens is pushing Nigeria towards a dusk. Insecurity is a symptom of government's failure to build a strong political entity that can aggregate and fairly address different interests.

The consequences are daily staring us in the face: the spate of kidnappings of school children and adults alike for ransom; terrorist attacks from within and without Nigeria; wanton destruction of lives and livelihoods in the herders/farmers conflicts shamelessly often not only euphemized but downplayed by the government and its failed and corrupt centralized police and security apparatuses that cannot combat these effects.

At the political level, a President that exists only to issue a few empty threats through half lettered spokesmen and an ineffective rubber stamp legislature has resulted in an inability to offer policy answers to the spate of restiveness especially on the lack of safety in Nigeria. The judiciary as the hope of the common man is a ruse. Recent accounts, including the study by the ICPC point at a situation of unbridled corruption within the hallowed temple of justice.

Beyond the Federal Government, a lot of decadence at the state and local government levels is depressing. Deinstitutionalizations and de-legitimations at these levels are equally important. The

imbroglio in the media on brigandage in some states and the jailing of a few governors as some escaped on technicalities all undermine the building of credible institutions of governance.

The deinstitutionalization of Nigeria's governance apparatuses accompanied by reckless looting of national patrimony, in exchange for insecurity is hastening the downward spiral of Nigeria. Under this distrust for governance and feeling of inequalities/marginalization, it is understandable that people Nigerians are reinforcing their respective loyalties to associations like Afenifere, Ohaneze, Arewa Consultative Forum etc.

A crop of political leadership from these associations are arising to give hope to people and are challenging potentates whose claim to power/authority are nothing but distribution of largesse after falsified elections. The nationalities' political leaders are filling a political void as militarized ethnic wings are understandably boldly taking a stand in defense of their respective peoples.

Warlordism, may appear helpful now but in the long run it is not the answer. If in doubt, a study on the evolution of this phenomenon and the destruction of the Somali state should be enough lesson.

Political parties are expected to play many strategic roles crucial among which is leadership recruitment. But in Nigeria, there are no political parties though we have shifting alliances of thieves. Buttressing this position, a former Chairman of the current ruling party stated that a thief would be laundered clean once he joins the ruling party.

With commonality in looting and no ideological differences, it is so easy for politicians to move from one party to the other in order to keep loots and even move into ministerial positions in order to loot some more. All these weaken the needed institutionalization and legitimation of political parties and the associational political process in the eye of the populace.

The Nigeria Labor Congress, the Nigerian Bar Association and the Academic Staff Union of Universities that strongly held sway in the first/second republics and against military rule are today shadows of their respective former vibrant selves: thanks to the Babangida administration that started their emasculation.

New civil society entities like SERAP and CISLAC are trying but they cannot measure up to those destroyed by the military. In effect, civil society lacks the capacity to arrest the downward spiral in Nigeria.

Nigeria has passed the stage of "restructuring" whatever that means. There are two options: either a sovereign dialogue towards a confederal constitution to eradicate the militarized centralist federalism that Nigeria romantically and emotionally holds on to or the dissolution of the mere geographical expression known as Nigeria into six (the geopolitical zones) or more sovereign entities.

In a confederal Nigeria, the centre will be concerned with administration of common affairs like embassies, some common defense and the de-emphasis of the spirit of sharing proceeds of natural resources as each confederal unit keeps what is on their lands and focus on production orientation thereby allowing each zone the opportunity to develop its economy from a comparative advantage

standpoint. The central authority becomes subservient and loyally serves the constituent units in exchange for subventions for the administration of common services.

In such a confederal Nigeria, people would be able to develop on the basis of their cultural ethos and at their pace. Those who want to join in the scramble for a technology-based life on planet earth and seek the conquest of the moon and mars as well as those who want to be searching for cattle routes for open grazing can fulfil their aspirations.

In such a situation, each constituent unit of a confederacy would have control on who can occupy its cities and forest reserves, after all, Nigerians are officially constantly reminded of their origins as they fill forms. Lawful opportunities to make money by persons from other constituent units of the confederation would be supported as is currently the case when a non-national comes to invest or live in Lagos or Abuja.

However, the confederal option does not give guarantees against the unbridled looting that is taking place all over Nigeria. There is no state or local government that can be held out as an anti-corruption model that uses all its resources towards the realization of human security and sustainable development goals.

There have always been pressures to dissolve Nigeria. However, the pervasive insecurity in the land, a symptom of leadership deficit resulting in politico-economic inefficiencies, the particular missing in action governance style of President Buhari, his administration's lack of political will to really fight corruption as witnessed in its inability or avoidance to bring many alleged looters to book as he actually made some of them ministers and approved nolle prosequi for one as well as his nepotistic appointments that throw merit and even the so-called Federal Character overboard have won more yearnings for the dissolution of Nigeria.

On the effect of nepotism on campaigns for Biafra, Oduduwa Republic etc., Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio, (as quoted by Col. Abubakar Dangiwa Umar (ret'd), in an open letter to President Buhari), remains very instructive: "One of the swiftest ways of destroying a kingdom is to give preference of one particular tribe over another or show favour to one group of people rather than another."

While the push for dissolution through dialogue is growing by the day in at least four out of six geopolitical zones, it is important to note that acquiring sovereignty through dissolution of an existing entity has never been easy in human history. With the exception of one or two cases, dissolutions tend to arise from traumatic experiences in the aftermath of hot or cold wars. Besides, it is an assumption that current ills in Nigeria would disappear once self-determination is realized by current constituent units.

If dissolution is a serious option, it should be through dialogue and not another civil war. Preference for pacific dissolution is not because the FGN cannot be defeated in war after all a united FGN could not break a stalemate in the Niger Delta. Furthermore, it is clear that the immediate past service chiefs failed in the ongoing fight against Boko Haram. The humanitarian problems that are bound to accompany another civil war will not only be traumatic but will be mind boggling for West Africa, at the least.

The current Nigerian state is not sustainable. Time is ripe for a sovereign national dialogue where decisions will not be subjected to the vested selfish and greedy interests of the current looters in government and society at large, but the will of the people, preferably at a referendum.

For how long can we persist in dancing around the truth, but continue to hope for an improved nation-state?