

BUILDING BRIDGES FOR A NEW NIGERIA

BY

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INTRODUCTION

This topic, “Building Bridges for a New Nigeria,” admits two things, namely, that **Nigeria has failed or is failing**; and there was an old Nigeria which was divided and that there is the need for a new Nigeria whose goal is to improve relationships among people who are very different, or do not like each other. So, this topic is about how to foster good relations among Nigerians.

Ethnicity, language and religion have divided and destroyed Nigeria. They drive our politics. Some Nigerians will vote for **a thief** provided he is from their tribe. Ethnicity, language and religion promote disunity, unhealthy rivalry and disenchantment. In this presentation, I will examine and probe the problems, and discern how bridge-building is the way forward for this nation. I particularly like the goals of **Nzuko Umunna (NU)**, which is a general platform for creating effective management of Igbo professionals, both at home and in the diaspora, uniting and bridging the gap between the various Igbo groups; and promoting cooperation, peace and good neighbourliness between Igbos and other ethnic groups in Nigeria. Through its handshake across the Niger and handshake across Nigeria programmes, **Nzuko Umunna** has demonstrated its love for, and belief in one healthy Nigeria. NU is therefore a metaphor for the average Igbo man and woman’s gregariousness to live anywhere with other Nigerians of whatever ethnicity, religion, language or culture. Highly Republican, extremely industrious, aggressively

innovative and painstakingly dedicated to a course they believe in, the Igbos constitute the second largest ethnic group after the indigenes in any part of Nigeria. No other ethnic group believes in

the unity, indivisibility and indissolubility of Nigeria as the Igbos. It is therefore a national embarrassment and shame when they are profiled for attacks, denigration; disrespect or disregard, and regarded as **a dot in the longer circle of Nigeria**. No! the Igbos are NOT A DOT. They are the pillars that hold the Nigerian project together. Of Prof Onigu Otite's 374 ethnic groups in Nigeria that speak over 350 languages, the Igbos constitute the main link that binds the beads of the other 373 ethnicities of Nigeria.

DEFINITIONS OF KEY CONCEPTS

BUILDING

“Building,” means the action or trade of constructing something.¹ It also means to put something together. A source defines it, inter alia, as “the process of creating or developing something”². It is in this sense that, the phrase ‘peace-building’ is used³. This deserves some elaboration, and that is precisely what we shall presently undertake.

BRIDGES

“Bridges” means something that provides a connection between two things.⁴ It means, inter alia, “Something that makes it easier to make a change from one situation to another”⁵. Another definition is “something that reduces or gets rid of the gap between two people or things”.⁶ Yet another one is (inter alia) “something that provides a connection between two things”⁷. Finally, the Britannica Dictionary⁸ and the Merriam-Webster Dictionary define it, inter alia, as “something that joins or connects different people or things” and, as “a time, place or means of connection or transition,” respectively⁹.

¹ <https://www.google.com/search?client=firefox-b-d&q=building+meaning>

² www.dictionary.cambridge.org

³ <https://study.com/peace-building-definition-and-strategies>.

⁴ Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (The Living Dictionary) at 181

⁵ <https://dictionary.cambridge.org>; Accessed on 24th April 2023

⁶ <https://collinsdictionary.com>; Accessed on 24th April 2023

⁷ www.ldoceonline.com; Accessed on 24th April 2023

⁸ www.brittanica.com; Accessed on 24th April 2023

⁹ www.merriam-webster; Accessed on 24th April 2023

BRIDGE-BUILDING

According to the **Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary**, Seventh Edition, at page 176, "**Bridge-building**" means "activities intended to make relations between two groups or more groups friendlier". It also means to "foster good relations".

NIGERIA, AN ARTIFICIAL CREATION

Nigeria's creation was fundamentally flawed with the British super-imposing Northern hegemony and dominance over Southern Nigeria. Nigeria is an artificial creation. Indeed, the name Nigeria was given to her by a young British journalist, **Miss Flora Louisa Shaw** (who later married Lord Lugard) on **8th January, 1897**. What is today known as Nigeria was ruled by the **Royal Niger Company** around **1886 to 1899**. Following the revocation of its character, the Royal Niger company sold its holdings in the territory which later became Nigeria to British for **£865,000**. This was the price for which Nigeria was purchased. (i.e., about **₦ 735. 2 Million** only). By **1900**, the Southern Nigeria Protectorate and Northern Nigeria Protectorate passed from the Royal Niger Company to Britain. By **1st January, 1914**, these two territories were amalgamated as the Colony and Protectorates of Southern and Northern Nigeria. The fusion of these two territories was done for political and commercial reasons without any consideration on the preferences of the inhabitants of these territories. These people already had their set ways of life – the Benin and Oyo Empires; Hausa City States; Igbo City States; Kanem Bornu, Ile-Ife civilization cradle of the Yoruba race. We already had great historical figure like Oba Ovonranmwun Nogbaisi of Benin Empire, King Nana of Itsekiri, King Jaja of Opobo, Queen Amina, Mal Idriss Aloomo, Queen Idia, etc.

THE INDEPENDENCE

Nnamdi Azikiwe, Ahmadu Bello, Obafemi Awolowo, Sir Tafawa Balewa, Chief Anthony Enahoro, Joseph Tarka, Chief Dennis Osadebe, Herbert Macaulay, etc., who fought, unarguably, for the flag independence of Nigeria from Britain, in reality, projected the ideas of their enclaves. For example, while people from the

Southern part of Nigeria craved for independence in the 50's, the people from Northern Nigeria felt the timing was wrong. Chief Anthony Enahoro's motion for Nigeria's Independence suffered setbacks in parliament on several occasions with the northern members of parliament staging a walkout as a consequence of the motion. However, in 1953, Enahoro initiated move to self-government through the motion he sponsored in the Western House of Assembly. This eventually led to Nigeria's independence on **1st October, 1960**. While it could be argued that the people currently occupying the territory called Nigeria were never consulted before the amalgamation of 1914, all of them lifted the Nigerian flag the moment the Union Jack was lowered in **October 1, 1960**.

THE FIRST COUP AND COUNTER COUP

Many who felt granting independence to Nigeria would usher in unprecedented growth, were surprised to see unprecedented corruption, looting of the nation's treasury and mismanagement of the country by the supposedly founding fathers of the Country. The military that came to salvage the problem on **15th January, 1966**, even compounded it by their lop-sided manner of cleansing the system. There is a conspiracy theory that the Igbos used the coup to pave way for General Aguiyi-Ironsi to be Head of State of Nigeria. The Northern members of the Nigerian Army did not hold back as they retaliated over the killing of Ahmadu Bello, Tafawa Balewa, Maimalar and others by also slaughtering many innocent Igbo soldiers and civilians through a genocidal ethnic-cleansing. This eventually led to the Nigerian Civil War. There have been many coup d'états in Nigeria since the 1966 coup d'état. However, since the year 1999, there has not been any coup. There have been different agitations springing up in some parts of the country.

THE OLD NIGERIA: DIVIDED BY ETHNICITY

Nigeria is a conglomeration or an aggregation of several nationalities which makes the country a pluralistic and multi-faceted society. The diversity of Languages, traditions, and customs contribute to the nation's vast cultural variety. By merging the numerous

ethnicities into what is now known as The Federal Republic of Nigeria, it is believed that Britain created Nigeria. This is Lord Frederick Lugard's fusion in 1914. The protectorate of Northern Nigeria, the colony of Lagos, and the protectorate of Southern Nigeria were amalgamated to form one nation. Without the approval of the numerous ethnic nationalities, this was carried out to serve the interests of Britain. The fight for power among the many ethnic groups in Nigeria began with this deed.

Since Nigeria gained political independence in 1960, there has been conflict between the country's numerous ethnic nations about who will dominate the political system and the country's natural riches. This conflict sparked the civil war that lasted from 1967 to 1970. Since the country's independence, ethnic politics have dominated Nigerian politics. The power struggle between the three major parties during the First Republic was characterized by instances of ethnic politics, particularly between the Action Group (AG) led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, with its base among the Yorubas of the Southwest, the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, with its base among the Igbos of the Southeast, and the Northern Peoples Congress (NPC) led by Sir Ahmadu Bello. In the Second Republic, the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), led by Chief Obafemi Awolowo, had control in the Southwest, causing this tripod equilibrium to echo once more. Most of its adherents had previously been Chief Obafemi Awolowo's students. The Yorubas were in charge of the party. The National Party of Nigeria (NPN), which had a more national orientation and represented the legacy of the defunct NPC, had its main support base in the North while the Nigeria People's Party (NPP), led by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, maintained power in the Igbo states of southeast Nigeria similar to the NCNC. It should be noted that these ethnic-based political groups were more of a revival of the First Republic's ethnic politics.

The National Republican Convention (NRC) and the Social Democracy Party (SDP) were the two main political parties of the

Third Republic, a failed military experiment under General Ibrahim Babangida, which aimed to eliminate the Nigerian political system's "triangle of parties." With the unfortunate annulment of the presidential election of **June 12, 1993**, which was largely considered to have been won by Bashorun M.K.O. Abiola of Yoruba descent from the Southwest, this strategy almost succeeded in ending ethnic undertones to party politics in Nigeria. It should be mentioned that the annulment sparked fierce ethnic, populist, and regional animosity, especially in the country's southwest.

The Action Congress of Nigeria (ACN), which is predominately Yoruba in the Southwest, the All Progressive Grand Alliance (APGA), which has a predominantly Igbo membership in the Southeast, and the Congress for Positive Change (CPC), which is predominately Hausa-Fulani in Northern Nigeria, are examples of ethnically oriented political organizations operating in the current Fourth Republic.

The 2023 general election conducted recently further showed how divided Nigeria is. While Bola Tinubu of the All Progressive Congress had massive support from the South-West, the candidate of Labour Party, Peter Obi, had massive support from the South-East and South-South. Alhaji Atiku Abubakar had massive support from most of the Northern States.

THE EFFECT OF ETHNIC POLITICS

The Igbo, Yoruba, and Hausa ethnic groupings have long dominated national politics among Nigeria's nearly 250 ethnic groups and the federating units. Perhaps this is due to their larger population, as well as their moderately active participation in the various governments since Nigeria gained colonial independence in 1960.

It has always irritated other minority ethnic groups. This feeling of exclusion from Nigeria's mainstream has led to distrust, dread, and a sense of pessimism among these minority groups, which invariably has an impact on their sense of patriotism as well as

their sense of national identity and psyche. There seems to be a growing sense of sub-nationalism among the smaller ethnic communities, as well as a need and desire for the groupings to control their own destiny. They doubt the idea of nationhood in the Nigerian system and display a callous attitude toward problems that concern them.

This battle for political and economic liberation is best exemplified by the people of the Niger Delta, which is located in the South-South geopolitical region of Nigeria. The locals are now in a state of despair as a result of oil exploration companies' years-long exploitation of the abundant natural resources in their area. Previous Niger Delta political and thought leaders have unsuccessfully attempted to raise awareness of the region's predicament worldwide. People's patience has now run out after years of broken promises from several Nigerian governments and oil firms active in the area. The Ijaw people in this area have now ascended. The fight for an independent Ijaw State, or an Ijaw State to be taken seriously inside a unified Nigeria, entered a new phase, one of armed conflict and kidnappings, which lasted until the government's amnesty program brought an end to them.

The minority ethnic groups from the Nigerian Niger Delta region, where the majority of the nation's wealth is created, desire urgent and immediate inclusion and being treated equally by the rest of the nation as stakeholders in the Nigerian project. The agony of their environmental degradation and social upheaval brought on by the exploitation of the natural resources in their area is what they anticipate as a fair and appropriate compensation for their contribution to the national economy.

The failure of the Nigerian government to satisfy these minority ethnic groups' aspirations has always manifested itself in agitation, which frequently results in wars. The agitation is expressed more fiercely the more strongly they perceive that the refusal to meet these demands is intentional and unjustifiable.

If there is one thing all Nigerians are agreed upon, it is the belief – fueled by disappointment and frustration - that have we have failed to fulfil our potential as a nation, we are a long way from living up to the dreams of our founding fathers. Right from our 21st year of independence (when we hypothetically came of age), till date, few issues have consistently featured in our national discourse (particularly in the media) as the “**National Debate**”. By this is meant the seeming past time of virtually every Nigerian to bemoan our experience as a nation. Simply put, Nigeria is a failed, and broken nation. Apply every conceivable yardstick, according to every knowledgeable (and not-so-knowledgeable) expert, the country is not just a disaster waiting to happen – IT MAY ALREADY HAPPENED.

THE UNIQUE PLACE OF THE IGBOS IN NIGERIA

Only on **Monday, 24th April, 2023, Mr. Allen Onyema**, CEO of Airpeace, pledged to evacuate Nigerians stranded in war-ravaged Sudan free of charge if the government can get them to a safe and secure airport in any of the neighbouring countries bordering Sudan. Noting that everything must not be left to the government alone, Onyema in a moving statement said, “It will be a privilege and honour of tremendous pride that we will out there to give every Nigerian stranded in Sudan a sense of pride and oneness in their country.”

“Any action that will promote national pride, national cohesion, peace and unity, we are for it. We have no apology for believing in our Nation and loving the Nation despite certain national challenges.” I did not hear the government or any Nigerian of other ethnic extractions reject Onyema’s gratuitous offer because he is an Igbo man.

When **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie** (Novelist and Harvard University’s Iconic W.E.B. Dubois Medal winner); when **Dr. Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala**, the first female and black Director-General of the

World Trade Organisation (WTO) and former Managing Director (Operations, World Bank) are doing Nigeria proud, I did not hear complaints from other Nigerians. When **J.J. Okocha, Dan Amokachi, Kanu Nwankwo, Mikel Obi, Uche Okechukwu, Vincent Enyema, Christian Chukwu, Emmanuel Okala, Onyekachi Apam, Francis Uzoho, Henry Nwosu**, et al, were burning local and foreign football fields, making Nigeria proud, I did not hear anyone raise eyebrows.

When **Chioma Ajunwa** (Atlanta, 1996 Gold medalist); **Emmanuel Ifeajuna** (first black African to win a Gold medal in an international sporting event, at the 1954 Vancouver Commonwealth games); **Francis Obikwelu** (100m record holder); **Michael Okpala**, a.k.a. “**Power Mike**” (undefeated world Heavyweight Champion); **Richard Ihetu (Dick Tiger)** – former World Boxing Middleweight Champion; **Olaudah Equiono** (whose works led to the abolition of the over 500-year Slave Trade); **Chinua Achebe** (the greatest ever novelist from the black world, and whose epic, “Things Fall Apart” has been translated into over 500 languages; and listed by Encyclopedia Britannica as one of the “12 Novels considered the ‘Greatest Book Ever Written’”, were putting Nigeria on the world map, no one complained.

When **Philip Emeagwala** from Onitsha (a Computer Scientist whose seminar works brought about internet revolution, and described by CNN as the “Father of Internet”); when **Prof Barth Nnaji** pioneered robotics engineering and invented the E-Design concept in Engineering; when **Prof Chike Obi** (world acclaimed Mathematician and first African to bag a Ph.D in Mathematics, shook the world with his mathematical wizardry; when **Prof Gabriel Oyibo** blazed aircraft design, aerodynamics, aeroelasticity, etc; when **Prof Ben Enweonwu** was described as the greatest African Artist for his globally recognized pioneering works in Arts; when **Sir Louis Odumegwu Ojukwu**(father of Biafran Warlord, Dim Chukwuemeka Ojukwu) was acclaimed as the first Nigerian and West African billionaire, I did not hear the shrieks of “**Igboism**”. Why the “**Igbophobia**”?

How many of us know that the 5th President of Liberia was an Igbo man called **Edward James Roye**? That even the present President of Gabon, **Ali Bongo Ondiba**, argued to be of Igbo descent, who was adopted during the Nigerian Civil War? No one is shrieking Igbo invasion.

NNAMDI KANU

This was a man who was peacefully on bail in his ancestral home in Afaraukwu Ibeku, Umuahia, when between **10th** and **14th September, 2017**, especially **14th September, 2017**, Nigerian Security Agents **code-named “Operation Python Dance”** brutally invaded his father’s ancestral home, killing 28 innocent unarmed Nigerians in the process. Kanu who was the primary target managed to escape by providence, first to Israel, then to London. It was from London he travelled to Kenya where he was captured by agents of the FG.

We have not heard this FG use “Operation Python Dance” to confront and attack ravaging armed bandits, kidnappers, vicious Boko Haram that invade the farms and homes of innocent Nigerians, kill their men, rape their mothers, wives and daughters.

Curiously, this same country will forcibly kidnap and rendition Nnamdi Kanu from a foreign country, Kenya back to Nigeria, tortured, brutalized, blindfolded and subjected to inhuman and degrading treatment.

What is his offence? That he formed a non-violent, whistle-blowing, street-marching, beret-wearing IPOB (Indigenous People of Biafra) movement, whose advocacy is for self-determination – a right recognized by all international instruments such as Article 20 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, 1948; Articles 10, 11, and 20 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights, 1983; Article 1 and 22 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, 1976; Article 3 and 4 of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007.

I went to court on behalf of Nnamdi Kanu. The Federal High Court, Abuja, dismissed 8 of the 15-count charge. I appealed on the remaining 7 counts

On the **13th of October, 2022**, the Court of Appeal, Abuja Division, agreed with my submission and dismissed the remaining 7 counts. It held that, **“forcible extraordinary rendition to Nigeria, without being subjected to any extradition proceedings is a gross and egregious violation of extant international and local laws which are binding on the Appellant (Federal Government), and as such, divested the trial court or any other court in Nigeria, of the jurisdiction to entertain the hitherto retained 7 counts of the amended charge or any other charge”**. Wait for it. The Court of Appeal went ahead and made a telling and far-reaching order prohibiting Nnamdi Kanu from further being detained or tried for any offence howsoever by any court in Nigeria. As I speak to you, Kanu is still held in **solitary confinement** in the DSS gulag, upon a funny stay of execution order applied for and granted in favour of the same Federal Government. While America goes around the world scouting for, and defending every single citizen, Nigeria is staying execution of the fundamental rights of her own citizen in court. What a shame!

Note that the same FG had earlier rejected my **3rd October, 2022 36-page plea** for Kanu’s release, apart from the court proceedings.

Note also that the same FG has blatantly refused to release Kanu, inspite of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Right, **March, 2018** decision that the FG must **“fully comply with Nigeria’s obligations under the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights and other International human right treaties, including the right to life, the prohibition of arbitrary arrests and detention, the right to fair hearing, the prohibition of other cruel, inhuman and degrading penalties and treatment and the right to seek asylum.”**

To underscore the FG’s egregious disrespect for international opinion, the **UN Human Rights Working Group** on Arbitrary

Detention, had in a **16-page report** indicted both **Nigerian and Kenyan governments** for the arrest, torture and continuous detention of the IPOB leader. The Group in its judgement ordered the **“immediate release of Kanu unconditionally;”** and pay him **“adequate compensation for the arbitrary violation of his fundamental human rights”**. Till date, Nnamdi Kanu, guiltless, helpless and hapless, is kidnapped and held like a common prisoner of war by the FG, amidst his **deteriorating health condition**, without permission to access his personal physician, or hold a joint meeting with 2 of his Counsel at the same time; or allowed files and materials to prepare his defence in a criminal trial he has been discharged of and his further prosecution prohibited. What a country!

Yet, Nigerians and international bodies stood by and watch and remain transfixed like a deer watching the headlights of an oncoming vehicle; and like an insect rendered immobile by some powerful insecticides. What has the Igbo man done wrong? I do not know. Or, do you?

THIS IS URGING PRESIDENT MUHAMMADU BUHARI TO RELEASE NNAMDI KANU IMMEDIATELY WITHOUT ANY CONDITIONS. THIS MUST BE DONE BEFORE QUITTING OFFICE ON 29TH MAY, 2023. IT IS THE URGENCY OF NOW SIR. I beg you sir, on bended knees

THE 1966 COUP AND HISTORICAL REVISIONISM

The unfortunate **January 15, 1966** Coup d’etat was pinned wholly on the Igbo race. Historical revisionists, without capturing the true facts, have only mentioned the names of the Igbo Officers who participated in the coup, while suppressing the names of other officers from other Nigerian ethnic groups. The names of the Igbos often touted are Major Chukwuma Kaduna Nzeogwu (from Okpanam, near Asaba, Delta State), who led the bloody coup; Major Emanuel Ifeajuna; Major Chris Anuforo; Major Timothy Onwuatuwegwu; Major Humphrey Chukwuka; Major Don Okafor;

Captain Ben Gbulie; Captain Emmanuel Nwobosi and Captain Ogbu Oji. The narrative has always carefully suppressed the names of the following officers from the other tribes who fully participated in the said coup of **January 15, 1966**: Major Adewale Ademoyegun (Yoruba), author of “**Why We Struck**”; Captain G. Adeleke (Yoruba); Lt. Fola Oyewole (Yoruba), author of “**The Reluctant Rebel**”; Lt. R. Egbiko (Esan); Lt. Tijani Kastina (Hausa/Fulani); Lt. O. Olafemiyan (Yoruba); Captain Gibson Jalo (Bali, Taraba State); Captain Swanton Robert (Middle Belt); Lt. Hope Harris Eghagha (Urhobo); Lt. Dag Waribori (Ijaw); 2nd Lt. Saleh Dambo (Hausa); and 2nd Lt. John Atom Kpera (Tiv). Why the years of skewed narrative? What have the Igbos done? I do not know. Or, do you?

32-year-old bachelor, General Yakubu Gowon had miscalculated when in attempting to crush Odumegwu Ojukwu’s announcement of the break-away of the Republic of Biafra on **30th May, 1967**, launched what he termed a “**Police action**” to retake the declared independent territory.

Images of Biafran children malnourished and starving, assailed the sensibilities of the world community. Biafra claimed that the Nigerian Federal Government was using starvation and genocide to win the war. Historical figures put the casualties of the Igbo populace at over 3 million people.

But, before then, the Igbos had shown an uncanny survivalist spirit by refining their own petroleum (fuel, diesel and AGo) and manufacturing their own Ogbunigare launchers. Had Gowon respected the Aburi Accord reached between the FG, a represented Gowon and Biafra led by Ojukwu at the peace meeting convened between **4th and 5th January, 1967**, at Aburi, Ghana, by the Ghanaian Head of State, Lt-Gen. J. A. Ankrah, the 3-year bloody civil war would probably have been avoided.

When the Civil War ended on **15th January, 1970**, and **General Philip Effiong** handed over the surrender mantle on behalf of the Biafrans to **General Olusegun Obasanjo**, for the Nigerian Government, the then Head of State, **General Yakubu Gowon**,

enunciated the **3Rs (Reconciliation; Reconstruction and Rehabilitation)**. With the profiling, typification, and mental and physical siege placed on the Igbos in our nation, I do not know if they have been reconciled, rehabilitated or reconstructed. Or, do you?

NIGERIA'S ALLEGED INDIVISIBILITY AND INDISSOLUBILITY

I heartily guffaw at times when I hear Nigerian leaders mouth moral platitudes and ineffective liberal disquisitions about the indivisibility and indissolubility of Nigeria. Even the 1999 Constitution also tells that historical lie in **section 2 (1)**, when it imperiously declares that **“Nigeria shall be one indivisible and indissoluble sovereign State to be known by the name of the Federal Republic of Nigeria”**. Is that why successive leaderships take the unity, indivisibility and indissolubility of Nigeria for granted? I roar with laughter, because, old Russia made the same historical mistake. It was forced to dissolve on **December 26, 1991**, by **Declaration No. 142 – H** of the Soviet of the Republics of the Supreme Soviet. Fifteen independent and soviet States sprouted from the once unified behemoth and elephantine Republic, which at a time famously engaged powerful America in the cold war. The break-away Republics are Russia, Ukraine, Central Asia and Estonia, Latvia and Luthania (the three Baltic States; others are Armenia, Kyrgstan, Maldovia, Turkmenistan, Azerbailian and Georgia. Yet some others are Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

Ask Yugoslavia that broke up into six countries. Ask Sudan that broke up into Sudan and South Sudan on **July 9, 2011**. Sudan is still in war till date. Check out the **“nine nations”** of a seemingly monolithic 1.3 billion China, and you will understand my worries about Nigeria. But, the good news is that Nigeria has not always been in this sorry state of nadir, of bottomless quagmire.

Once upon a time in Nigeria, the motivating force that cut across political parties, was **“Nigeria first”**. This implied unity and indivisibility of Nigeria. Nigerian leaders of old; consciously arked on

crushing nepotism, tribalism and ethnicity. They did this for the progress of Nigeria. Recall also the agreement reached by the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), and Peoples Redemption Party (PRP), when they came together and made an accord to work for the good and survival of Nigeria. This agreement was later nick named **“Accord Concondiale”** by Dr K.O. Mbadiwe, **“the man of timber and calibre, caterpillar, Iroko and Obeche”**.

Renowned African writer, **Professor Chinua Achebe**, epically wrote this about Nigeria in 1983: **“the trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership...the Nigeria problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the responsibility, to the challenge of personal example, which are the hallmark of true leadership.”**

Hardly would any right thinking-Nigeria fault this notion. I have always maintained that there are three problems besetting Nigeria. The first problem is leadership. The second problem is leadership. And the third problem is leadership. Other problems and challenges are mere off-shoots of this leadership challenge. The most outstanding of these attendant challenges is followership-a weal, lily-livered civil society that turns a second cheek to be slapped when the first one has been slapped.

Key Issues/ Problems with Fixing Nigeria:

- Complex ethno-religious composition that gives rise to tribalism,
- High power distance culture that makes institutional leaders see themselves as ‘Lords’ that cannot be questioned rather than as servants of the people,
- Corruption on steroids,
- Weak institutions, and
- High illiteracy/poverty rate, that make it easier for the political elite to weaponise poverty.

I will add, state captured by elite buccaneers and weak followership/civil society.

As pointed out Ehi Braimah “**Bad planning, wrong choices/priorities, egregious greed and corruption are largely responsible for Nigeria’s fall from grace**”. By that, he was alluding to a time (in 1974), when Nigeria was reportedly so prosperous, that she lent money to the International Monetary Fund, the IMF. The source of that revelation, Alhaji’ Abubakar Alhaji, the then Permanent Secretary of the Federal Ministry of Finance, identified over-dependence on oil and the huge cost of governance at all levels as contributing to the comatose state of our economy.

A FUNNY COUNTRY: MISPLACED PRIORITIES

Naija & her ways

79,000 Nigerian muslims spent **\$5,000** each to go to Saudi Arabia to stone and kill the devil with stones. **\$395 Million** from a poor underdeveloped Country like Nigeria. Saudi economy is growing through Tourism. **50,000** Christians went to Israel to Kiss Jesus statue there and attach JP to their names. **\$250 Million ==\$645 Million** – (over Half a BILLION Dollars)... **\$1.3 billion**. Let’s not convert it to naira because some of us will not sleep, but let’s try. (782 billion naira, over half a Trillion naira.)

This amount can be used to fund fresh graduates who have innovative Ideas and in turn, create millions of Jobs. Since we have been traveling to Israel and Saudi Arabia, has our Economy improved? What is Government’s business with pilgrimages? What is wrong with us?

Africans (especially Nigerians) what is wrong with our logic?

THERE IS NO DEMOCRACY IN NIGERIA

Indeed, Nigeria, especially under the president Muhammadu Buhari administration, does not practise democracy at all. Rather, it

practises **electonocracy, judocracy, executocracy** and **legislatocracy**. I will explain these terms which I have personally coined from my personal lexical dictionary. That was what informed the aliases of **“Ozek baba”, “mobile dictionary”** and **“mobile Library”**, that my late legendary mentor, iconic Chief Gani Fawehinmi SAN, SAM, GCON, fondly called me whilst working with him, up to becoming his Deputy Head of Chambers in 1985.

ELECTIONACRACY

“ELECTIONACRACY ” is a system of government where elections are held as a ritual at intervals of 4 years in Nigeria, with the emergent elected or selected leaders, rather than giving the electors democracy dividends, merely stabilize themselves in power, commence primitive acquisition of wealth and forget the electorate that erected the leaders in the first place. They then begin another round of campaigns after pretending to work for 2 years. They are already looking forward to the next election when the electorate has not benefited from any democracy dividends from their first term.

JUDOCRACY

“JUDOCRACY” is a genre of government practised only in Nigeria, where Presidents, Governors, Legislators and LG Chairmen are thrown up as having **“won”** in an election. Their victory is immediately challenged. They get enmeshed in these legal callithenics for the next 2 to 3 years of their corruption-ridden governance. Then, suddenly, they are conceived, incubated and delivered in the hallowed Chambers and precincts of our law courts, rather than through the ballot box. The will of the people is thereby subsumed in the decision and judgement of courts of law, the non-representatives of the people.

EXECUTOCRACY

“EXECUTOCRACY ”, as practised in Nigeria, is an aberrant form of government, far removed from democracy, where the executive arm of government acts in torrерem of other arms of government. The Executive continually browbeat, intimidate, harass, marginalize and

subjugate the Legislature and the Judiciary. It is usually headed by a maximalist, autocratic, absolute and dictatorial head, who views himself as Louis XIV of France. Louis XIV was so intoxicated with the effect of liquor-inebriating power that in 1655, he proudly stood in front of parliament and declared **“L’etat, C’ est moi”** (I am the state). He said this to indicate his complete hold on power to the exclusion of all other lesser mortals.

LEGISLOTACRACY

“LEGISLATOCRACY” is another peculiar genre of democracy as practised only in Nigeria. It is a fundamentally flawed legislative system where there is an overbloated and virtually jobless 360 members of the House of Representatives and 109 Senators, all of whom are not unsurprisingly permitted by the 1999 Constitution to sit for only 6 months out of 12 months in a calendar year of 12 months. This enables them to seamlessly engage in extra-legislative businesses and money-making ventures. These legislators, contrary to the clear provisions of the 1999 Constitution, legislate on EVERYTHING except making laws **“for the peace, order and good government of the federation”**.

The law makers carryout oversight functions under sections 88 and 89 of the constitution, not in furtherance of any public interest or any common good, but in pursuit of their private pockets after extorting money (during budget presentations) from ministries, MDA’s and other government establishments, both at the federal, state and LGA’s level.

Under **legislatocracy**, Mr President’s requests are sacrosanct and written on Hamurabi tablet of inviolability. So, like the agama lizard, the law makers can only nod their heads **“yes, yes, yes”**, to all presidential requests, however anti-people. Legislatocracy ensures free padding of budgets to accommodate their insatiable bacchanalina propensity to consume and indulge in primitive acquisition of vulgar wealth in a rentier economy.

Legislatocracy also ensures that rather than make laws, legislators fight over constituency projects. When given hundreds of millions to

execute these projects, they end up digging few boreholes, repairing village culverts; buying motor cycles, hair dryers, grinding machines and wheel barrows, to their hapless clapping peasants and thugs that were used during the last elections. Nigeria's peculiar legislatocratic system ensures that the law makers receive the highest pay amongst law makers across the globe, including older, tested and more established democracies of the world. They receive fat pays for part time work as provided for in the 1999 Constitution.

Meanwhile, an assortment of Non- State Actors - from armed serenaded bandits to kidnappers and terrorists - have laid vicious siege on large swathes of the country, holding hapless citizens hostage with their campaign of unremitting terror and brigandage. No one and nowhere is either safe or immune – including the capital city, Abuja, the President's home State (and home-town) of Kastina and Daura, respectively. Some of those abducted have remained in captivity for almost a decade (the Chibok and Dapchi hostages), Infrastructure such as prisons and trains/rail tracks are targeted seemingly at will – with little or no resistance from those paid to safeguard such assets and our very lives. With the next general elections half a year away, the political class has resumed their 4-yearly ritual of promise-making and mudslinging. Nigeria practices Electionocracy, plutocracy, gerotocracy, judocracy, Executocracy, and legistocracy but never democracy as defined by Abraham Lincoln in his **November, 19, 1863**, Gettysburg declaration of democracy being a government of the people, by the people and for the people.

THE ASIAN TIGERS: HOW THEY DID IT

I believe the answers to all these posers are self-evident, given the common history of backwardness and virtually complete non-industrialization (with the exception of Japan) which the so-called **Asian Tigers** shared with Nigeria at independence. This is because all the **Tigers – South Korea, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia and Indonesia** – were, like Nigeria, under prolonged periods of colonial and/or military rule. **Even Japan**, which was a relatively prosperous and industrialized society, prior to the Second World

War, had to start virtually from scratch afterwards, following its defeat in that conflict. Accordingly, these comparisons are in no way odious. The question, then is: how did these countries do it? In terms of strategy, it appears that the following are key to the seeming miracle achieved by these erstwhile developing countries:

- Investment in skills;
- Advancements in Technology;
- Engagement of specialized agencies;
- Establishment of pilot projects; and
- Involvement of International Agencies such as the U.N.
- developing, inter alia, efficient production techniques;
- Adaptation of foreign/imported technology;
- Massive investments in infrastructure and heavy manufacturing industries;
- Proper and prudent management of our natural resources (particularly oil and gas);
- A disciplined, relatively cheap, highly educated and skilled work-force, with reasonable wage demands;
- Targeting high literacy rate and high education standards;
- Private Sector-driven investment.

LESSONS FOR NIGERIA FROM THE ASIAN TIGERS

Scholars have suggested that Nigeria can benefit from the experience of the Asian Tigers in the following ways:

- Formulating and implementing deliberate government policies;
- Strengthening the development of agriculture;
- Encouraging industrial development;
- Developing small and medium scale enterprises (SMEs).
- Focus on exports;
- Human capital development;
- Creating a sound financial system;
- Maintenance of political, social as well as macroeconomic stability;
- Leadership that priorities citizens' welfare;

- Encouraging a savings culture;
- Developing export-oriented industries to produce;

NIGERIA'S EARLIER PANACEA VIDE TRUE FISCAL FEDERALISM

Before the **15th January, 1966** Military Coup led by Major Kaduna Nzeogwu Chukwuma from Okpanam, Nigeria operated true fiscal federalism amongst the then three regions-Western, Northern and Eastern Regions. They were later joined by the Midwest region which was excised out of Western region by popular Plebiscite and referendum on the **10th of August, 1963**. The Architects of that federalist feat were Dr Dennis Osadebay (later Prime Minister); Oba Akenzua II; Dr Christopher Okojie; Justice Kessington Momoh, Chief James Otokoh, Chief Humphrey Omo-Osagie; Chief Festus Okotie-Eboh (Omimi Ejoh) and Chief Jereton Mariere and Chief David Edebiri, the Esogban of Benin Kingdom.

Section 140 of the 1963 Republican Constitution which replicated section 134 of the 1960 Independence Constitution provided that 50% proceeds of royalty received by the Federation in respect of minerals extracted from a region, including any mining rents derived by the federation belonged to a Region. Effectively, this made the Regions which also had their separate regional Constitution (with a Federal one at the centre) to control their resources. Only 20% was paid to the Federation; and another 30% shared by all the Regions, including those that had already shared 50%.

In the Northern Region, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Northern Premier who had sent his NPC Deputy (Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa) to the centre to be Prime Minister, preferring to govern his people, utilized the resources of Northern Nigeria. With the famous Kano groundnut pyramid, cotton, Hides and skin, the imperious by cerebral Sardauna, who had valiantly fought for, but failed to become the Sultan of Sokoto at 29, losing to Sultan Siddiq Abubakar III, who reigned for 50 years till 1988. The great grandson of Uthman Dan

Fodio (of “Conscience is an open wound; only the truth can heal it” fame), built the Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) which stretched from Samaru, Zaria, to Funtua in the present day Katsina. He set up the Northern Nigeria Development Company (NNDC); built the Yankari Games Reserve; the Ahmadu Bello Stadium; and the Hamdala hotel, Kaduna.

In the Eastern Region, Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe (First Premier 1954-1959) and later Dr Michael Okpara, and his Governor, Dr Akanu Ibiom and others with Dr Mbonu Ojike embarked upon major organ on revolution; they built the Trans-Amadi Industrial Estates and Presidential hotels in Enugu and Portharcourt. They built the University of Enugu; the Obudu Cattle Ranch and Resort, the Eastern Nigeria Development Corporation (ENDC); Cement factory at Nkalagu, breweries, textile Mills and Enugu Stadium. They could do this because they controlled their palm produce. This was time fiscal federalism at work.

In western Region, the late Sage, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, used proceeds from the coca product to build the Western Nigeria Broadcasting Corporation, the first television station in Africa, (1957); introduced free universal primary education and free health service; The liberty stadium and Cocoa House in Ibadan and the University of Ife (now OAU) were built by him. Because he controlled the resources of the West.

In the Mid west Region, Dr Dennis Osadebay spear headed the setting up of the Ughelli Glass Industry and the Okpella Cement Factory, amongst others. What has changed? Why do we now operate a Unitary System of government, with centralized powers, a behemoth Central federal government and beleaguered, subservient states as federating units. Commissioners for finance congregate at Abuja at the end of every month to take state allocations under section 162 of the 1999 Constitution. Nigeria can never grow that way.

A BRAND NEW OR AN AMENDED AND RE-ENACTED CONSTITUTION?

Many solutions have been suggested, with constitutional amendment or reenactment top of the list. The reason is obvious: it is a country's birth certificate; the foundation, basis or as we call it in law, the *grundnorm*. In this regard The 1999 Constitution is the product of the military led by General Abdusalami Alhaji Abubakar. The explanatory note to the said Constitution is worth considering as it explains the purport of the Constitution. The explanatory note to the 1999 Constitution (the subject matter of this article), states thus: "The Decree promulgates the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 199 into law and provides for the said Constitution to come into force on 29th May, 1999." The explanatory note above contains extra information to the effect that the explanatory: "...note does not form part of the above Decree but is intended to explain its purport." The term "promulgate" means to spread an idea, a belief, etc. among the people.¹⁰ Whose beliefs and ideas are the military spreading and at what point did this idea or belief come into force? It is pertinent to note that the 1999 Constitution divested the military over the governance of Nigeria and re-enforces the original ideas and beliefs of the people at the time they got independence.

This is the elephant in the room. Several commentators have called for scrapping the 1999 Constitution completely and replacing it with a brand new one. I have gone on record with just such a proposal. This is because, I believe it is the only credible option as opposed to the haphazard amendments or alterations which we have adopted so far, which - in my view - is little more than cosmetic patchwork, with respect. The present Constitution is simply fundamentally flawed, as it was handed down by military diktat, instead of evolving from the sovereign will of the Nigerian people. We ought to be allowed to produce a brand-new Constitution through our elected representatives in the National Assembly, as this is the only way of truly reflecting our sovereignty,

¹⁰Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary of current English, 7th edition at page 1164
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independence, and an expression of the popular will. It is the essence of democracy.

For obvious reason, when such a Constitution emerges, it will be the strongest and most durable and effective bridge of all. This is because it will reflect the myriad of our hopes and aspirations. Short of that, however, I believe the next best thing would be to amend the Fundamental Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy contained in Chapter 2 of the present Constitution, to make its provisions justiciable – as opposed to the present situation, where they are not. Those provisions are far-reaching, as they comprise Political Objectives, Economic Objectives, Social Objectives, Educational Objectives, Foreign Policy Objectives, Environmental Objectives, National Ethics, Duties of the Citizen, Obligations of the Mass Media, Foreign Policy Objectives, the Government and the People and the Fundamental Obligations of the Government.

THE NIGERIAN EXPERIMENT WITH CONSTITUTIONAL DEMOCRACY

THE COLONIAL ERA

Nigeria's Constitutional history can be broken into two main eras: the colonial and the post-independence eras. The colonial era commenced from 1914 when the colony and protectorate of southern Nigeria was merged with the protectorate of Northern Nigeria and ended in 1960 at independence.

COLONIAL CONSTITUTIONS

During this period, Constitution making was carried out by the colonial power acting by and through the British officials in Africa. In this era, we had the **Clifford Constitution of 1922**; the **Arthur Richard Constitution of 1946**; the McPherson Constitution of 1951; and the Federal Constitution (otherwise known as **the Littleton Constitution**) of 1954. That was before Independence in 1960. We then had **the 1960 independence Constitution** and

the 1963 Republican Constitutions. None of the Constitutional arrangements during the colonial era, including the Independence Constitution of 1960, derived from the popular or sovereign will of the peoples of Nigeria.¹¹

In the words of **Olu Ariwoola, J.S.C.**, as he held in the case of **UGBA v. SUSWAM (2014) All FWLR (Pt. 748) Page 825 @ 863**, ***“The Constitution is the heart and soul of the people. That explains why the Constitution commences (with the word) ‘We the people...’ all provisions in the Constitution were put in by the accredited representatives of the people.”***

Many Nigerians including most of the erudite constitutional law lawyers have expressed serious reservation about the process leading to the making of the 1999 Constitution and the resultant lack of popular acceptability occasioned by the process of its making. Again, **Chief Rotimi Williams, SAN**, a foremost Constitutional Law Lawyer described the 1999 Constitution as a “document that **tells lie against itself.**” **Professor Itse Sagay, SAN**, categorically described the Constitution as a “**fraud.**” The erudite constitutional law lawyer and a foremost Professor of Law, **Professor Ben Nwabueze, SAN**, described the Constitution as an “**illogicality**”. That the 1999 Constitution is a “**Unitary Constitution for a Federal System of Government.**”

The Constitution was **described as a fraud** and a document that lies against itself at a seminar on the new Constitution organized by the Nigerian Bar Association, Ikeja Branch, on the **18th of June, 2009**, because the Constitution purportedly stated in its opening recital that “**We the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria having firmly and solemnly resolved... do hereby make, enact**

¹¹**Jacob O. Arowosegbe**, in his article “**Revisiting the legitimacy question of the Nigerian 1999 Constitution**” Published online by Cambridge University Press: 13 September 2021

and give to ourselves the following Constitution.” Since the enactment of the 1999 Constitution, these pertinent questions have been asked repeatedly,

- a. “where and when did that resolution take place”?
- b. “How did the people of the Federal Republic of Nigeria arrive at that firm and solid resolution purportedly expressed in the recital to the 1999 Constitution.

It is worthy of note that since the 1999 Constitution came into force¹², attempts have been made by previous administrations to remedy the situation. Two national (Constitutional) conferences have at different times been held unsuccessfully. The first was by the Obasanjo administration in 2005 tagged the **National Political Reform Conference**,¹³ and the second was by the Jonathan administration in **2014**, simply known as the **2014 National Conference**.¹⁴ I was a participant at both Conferences, including the **Vision 2009 Conference**. Attempts have also been made (and continue to be made) to amend the Constitution. Some of the amendments were successful and some unsuccessful. In 2017 alone, 32 new amendments to the Constitution were proposed by the Senate. Only 5 succeeded at the end of the day. Till date, there are still various Bills pending before the National Assembly for amendment to different provisions of the Constitution.

THE DIRE NEED FOR A NEW CONSTITUTION

Nigeria needs a new people-driven Constitution. It is not rocket sign. It has been done before.

¹² The Constitution came into force on 29th May, 1999.

¹³National Political Reform Conference, Abuja 2005 (VOLUME TWO; FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF NIGERIA) Paperback – January 1, 2005
by NPRC (Author)

¹⁴The 2014 National Conference was inaugurated by the Nigerian President Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan on 17 March 2014 in Abuja, Nigeria. There were about 492 delegates that represented a cross-section of Nigerians including the professional bodies group. The Conference was headed by retired Chief Justice Idris Legbo Kutigi. Following a plenary session that lasted for weeks, the Conference was broken into 20 committees that included Public Finance and Revenue among others. Mr Johnson Oludeinde Oluata FCNA is among the delegates, he represents Association of National Accountants of Nigeria (ANAN) in the professional bodies group.

COUNTRIES THAT SUBJECTED THEIR NEW CONSTITUTIONS TO CITIZENS' REFERENDUM TO GAIN THEIR PEOPLE'S LEGITIMACY AND CREDIBILITY

IRAQ: The first Monarchical **Constitution of the Republic of Iraq** came into force in **1925** and existed till the **1958** Revolution which established a Republic. The current Constitution was adopted on **September 18, 2005**, by the Transitional National Assembly of Iraq, and confirmed by a **constitutional referendum**, held on **October 15, 2005**. It was published on **December 28, 2005**, in the Official Gazette of Iraq (**No. 4012**), in Arabic original, and thus came into force.

KENYA: There were three versions of the Kenya Constitution; with the most recent being the **2010 redraft**. This replaced the 1963 Independence Constitution. This version of 2010 was presented to the Attorney-General of Kenya on **7th April, 2010**, officially published on **6th May, 2010**, and was subjected to Referendum of the Kenya people on **4th August, 2010**. It was voted for and approved by 67% of Kenya citizens. It was then promulgated on **27th August, 2010**.

ERITREA: The Eritrea's Proclamation **55/1994** established a **Constitutional Commission** which organized popular participation in the process of a new Constitution. The Commission members and more than four hundred specially trained teachers instructed the public on constitutional issues and related political and social questions using local vernaculars. The process took three years to solicit the views of a **broad cross section of Eritreans**. The participation of a majority of **Eritreans gave the people a "sense of ownership of the Constitution"**.

SOUTH AFRICA: After the elections of **1994**, the new Parliament - working as the **Constitutional Assembly** (CA) - began writing the final Constitution of South Africa. On **May 8, 1996**, the

Constitutional Assembly completed two years of work on a draft of a **final Constitution**, replaced the **interim Constitution of 1993 by the year 1999**. The objective to submit the draft to the Constitution court was to ensure that the final Constitution **was legitimate, credible and accepted by all South Africans**. The process of drafting involved many South Africans in the **largest public participation programme ever carried out**. Nearly two years later, representatives of political parties **negotiated** the formulations contained in the final draft and ignited an **integration of ideas from ordinary citizens, civil society and political parties represented in and outside of the Constitutional Assembly**. The Constitution therefore represents the **collective wisdom** and will of the South African people because it was arrived at by **general agreement and consent of all South Africans**.

IRAN: A proposed new Constitution which would make Iran an Islamic Republic, introduce direct elections for the presidency, create a unicameral parliament and require any constitutional changes to go a referendum was proposed by the Iranian Government. To bring this about, a **constitutional referendum** was held in Iran on **2nd and 3rd December, 1979**. The new Islamic constitution was approved by **99.5% of voters** at the Referendum.

BANGLADESH: A **constitutional referendum** was held in Bangladesh on **15th September, 1991**. Voters were asked "**Should or not the President assent to the Constitution (Twelfth Amendment) Bill, 1991 of the People's Republic of Bangladesh?**" The amendments altered the existing Constitution and reintroduced of Parliamentary system of government. It also abolished the position of Vice-President and provided that the President be elected by Parliament. **83.6%** of Bangladeshis voted in the referendum, with a turnout of **35.2%**.

MOROCCO: A **referendum on constitutional reforms** was held in Morocco on **1st July, 2011**. It was called in response to a series of protests that spread across Morocco which had begun on **20th**

February, 2011, when over ten thousand Moroccans took to the streets in massive demonstrations demanding **democratic reforms**. A Commission was set up to draft proposals by **June, 2011**. A draft was released on **17th June, 2011**, which brought about fundamental changes upon people's referendum.

EGYPT: In **October, 2012**, the Egyptian Constituent Assembly announced that its first draft of a new Constitution and launched a public awareness campaign called "**Know your Constitution**", to educate the public. On **November 29, 2012**, the Egyptian Constituent Assembly finalized the drafting process of a new Egyptian Constitution. One week later, on **December 8, 2012**, Egyptian President Mohamed Morsi issued a new constitutional declaration announcing that the constitutional draft would be voted on in a **national referendum**. In accordance with article 60 of the Transitional Constitutional Declaration of **March 2011**, a special Judicial Commission was formed to supervise the referendum process and monitor vote counting. The referendum took place in two rounds on two different dates: **December 15 and 22, 2012**. The majority of Egyptians thus voted in favour of the newly drafted Constitution in a popular National Referendum, a Constitution that brought about profound reforms.

TUNISIA: Tunisia's first modern Constitution was the fundamental pact of **1857**. This was followed by the Constitution of **1861**, which was replaced in **1956**, after the departure of French administrators in 1956. It was adopted on **1st June, 1959** and amended in **1999** and **2002**, after the Tunisian Constitutional Referendum of **2002**. Following the revolution and months of protests, a Constituent Assembly drafted a new Constitution in 2014, adopted on **26th January, 2014** after a referendum.

THE AMERICAN EXPERIENCE OF A PEOPLE'S CONSTITUTION

As a great contrast to the 1999 Nigerian experience, when America became independent from Britain in **1776**, it held a Constitutional

Convention under the leadership of George Washington, between **May 14 and September 17, 1776**, in **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**. **55 delegates** represented the **autonomous Confederates**, with a view to creating a **“more perfect union”**. Broad outlines of a new union were proposed and hotly debated. This was how the American people achieved a **federal system of Government, separation of powers among three branches of Government (Legislative, Executive and Judicial); bicameral, legislature; an Executive presidency; and Judicial Review**. The Constitutional draft was signed by **39 of the 55** delegates on **September 17, 1787**; and thereafter released to the States and the American people to debate and ratify. It was this people’s Constitution that threw up great founders, such as **George Washington (first president); Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay (the Federalists), Thomas Jefferson, etc.**

The 1999 Constitution lacks these. It is not autochthonous or indigenous. Being imposed, it worsened the unitary nature of government, and concentrated enormous powers at the centre. While the 1787 Constitution had 67 items on the exclusive legislative list, and 12 items on the concurrent list, the 1999 Constitution increase this to 68 on the exclusive list, but retained only 12 items on the concurrent list. This indicates an unacceptable unbearably strong centre and very weak federating units.

CONCLUSION

The crux of the matter which is at the heart of the National Debate or the National Question is what sort of bridges do we need to build in order to surmount the different barriers which confront us as a nation? To the extent that those barriers are characterised as challenges, to what extent can those bridges enable us to overcome those challenges? We shall presently attempt a few answers.

BRIDGE-BUILDING AS A SOLUTION TO SECURITY CHALLENGES.

Peace-building, an aspect of Bridge-building, has been defined as “a process intended to resolve current conflicts and prevent future conflicts by addressing the causes of the problem and building a comprehensive strategy to encourage lasting peace”¹⁵. The following have been identified as key to this strategy¹⁶:

- Recognizing the burdens of long-term violence;
- Eliciting plans from locals;
- Conflict transformation;
- Insider-outsider links;
- Dealing with spoilers;
- Identifying obstacles to strategic peace building
- Elicit, evaluate, elicit, evaluate . . .

The foregoing factors are complimented by the following, which, in the opinion of International Alert¹⁷ contribute to achieving what it describes as ‘positive peace’, namely:

- Everyone lives in safety without fear or threat of violence, and no form of violence is tolerated in law or in practice.
- Everyone is equal before the law, the systems for justice are trusted, and fair and effective laws protect peoples’ rights.
- Everyone is able to participate in shaping political decisions and the government is accountable to the people.
- Everyone has fair and equal access to the basic needs for their well-being - such as food, clean water, shelter, education, healthcare, and a decent living environment.
- Everyone has equal opportunity to work and make a living, regardless of gender, ethnicity, or any other aspect of identity.

In the opinion of International Alert, these strategies “ultimately work to ensure that people are safe from harm, have access to law and justice, are included in the political decisions that affect them,

¹⁵ <https://study.com>; Accessed on 24th April 2023

¹⁶ Ibid

¹⁷ www.international-alert.org/what-ispeacebuilding? Accessed on 24th April 2023

have access to better economic opportunities, and enjoy better livelihoods”¹⁸. The organisation suggests the following ways in which these goals can be achieved,¹⁹ viz:

- Bringing different groups together to build trust and promote reconciliation.
- Engaging in various forms of diplomacy and support for formal peace processes.
- Strengthening democracy and inclusive politics (e.g., inclusion of marginalized groups active citizenship initiatives, etc);
- Improving justice systems (e.g. anti-competition activities, constitutional reforms, access to justice initiatives, truth commissions, etc);
- Working to improve community security and shape the behaviour of security forces.
- Working together with business and trade to create sustainable jobs or improve employment practices;
- Improving infrastructure and urban and regional planning;
- Creating free and inclusive media;
- Making development programmes in conflict areas more sensitive to conflict dynamics so that they deliberately contribute to peace.”

The organization concludes that²⁰: “peace building is done collaboratively at local, national, regional, and international levels. Individuals, communities, civil society organisations, governments, regional bodies and the private sections all play a role in building peace. I couldn’t agree more. This is because their prescriptions are an excellent template which fits perfectly into the Nigerian situation. It can be seen that peace building is an all-embracing, all-encompassing concept, whose components include every possible strand of the challenges which presently confront us, and

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

which are likely to remain with us unless the appropriate strategies are deployed to tackle them.

In this regard (at the risk of digressing), it appears that the well-known concept of 'soft power' is actually another means of describing 'bridge building'. Both mean essentially the same thing, as they de-emphasise confrontation and aggressiveness as deliberate strategies for resolving challenges²¹. Even though 'soft power' is usually associated with international relations,²² I believe that its central theme is equally applicable within local, communal, and national levels, in resolving conflicts or averting them: in other words, in building bridges or peace building.

The unity, development and peaceful co-existence of Nigeria as a country are currently imperial. Our diversities in area of culture language, tribe, and religion, must be seen by all as a Dolly Parton's Coat of Many Colours, blessing and not a curse, because variety they say, is the spice of life. Concerted effort must be put in place by formulation of policies and reforms that would help promote national integration and peaceful co-existence. However, one of the strategies that must be pursued to ensure a far-reaching national integration and peaceful co-existence are to create a meeting point that would ensure and enhance integration between one ethnic national or tribe and another. One of the ways by which this noble idea can be achieved is by putting up a strong advocacy and support for inter-tribal and inter-religious marriage.

HOW TO BUILD THESE BRIDGES FOR A NEW NIGERIA?

1. Purposeful and deliberate leadership.

The first step to getting things right is by electing someone that is detribalized: someone well-read and that has the capacity to manage diversity and in fostering kinship among variegated people. Nation building cannot be left to chance or to the whim of anyone. There must be purposive plans and actions towards

²¹ <https://softpower30.com;whatissoftpower?> Accessed on 24th April 2023

²² Ibid.

uniting the people. We cannot ignore the importance of unity, especially at this time. For Nigeria, it has remained a pipe dream and an elusive quest. We long for it, or rather argue about it, but we haven't actually put any effort into tearing down the walls of race and religion. Leadership goes beyond words. It is about carrying everyone along regardless of our religious/tribal differences. Political, leaders and religious leaders must do the difficult work of educating their followers about the need to live together. It is the elites, leaders that will do the onerous job of ensuring unity in our communities.

The United States of America we all want to go to have purposeful leaders. That is why things always work for them. The country is built in such a way that any person (a migrant inclusive) can become a president. We saw that in the life of Barak Obama. Though it is a capitalist state, every American knows that in moments of difficulties, his nation will come to his or her aid. So, leadership is not about occupying an office. It is about providing or building institutions that can cater for everyone, irrespective of their differences. It is about affecting lives. On the contrary, most of the past leaders in Nigeria have made our lives worse for Nigerians than it was before they got to the seat of power. We are retrogressing and if we do not change, we might have a failed state.

2. Respect for Human Rights and the Rule of Law

Without Human Rights, and the Rule of Law being respected, no Nation can grow or develop. No international investor can come to do business in Nigeria. Such a country is doomed.

3. We must stop burning bridges

Since the start of the current democratic era, the Igbo in the South East have been alleging marginalization, particularly in relation to the country's leadership. However, we cannot blame this current administration alone given the fact that when Buhari chose his running mate twice from the South-East, in his bid to be the president of Nigeria, the South-East people still

voted massively against him. And even after Buhari became the president in 2015, the people of the South-East continued to distance themselves from him. In view of this, it has been submitted in some quarters that the Igbos do not know how to build bridges. In the just concluded Presidential Election, the Igbos rejected APC and PDP massively. In other geopolitical zones, these parties got at least one state. The implication of this is that if either of these political parties gets hold of the seat of power, the Igbos have virtually nothing connecting them to the Federal Government.

4. IGBOS can be President.

After the short stint of General J.T.U. Aguiyi Ironsi as Military Head of State between **16th January, 1966**, and **29th July, 1966** when he was assassinated in the counter coup led by Major Murtala Mohammed, no Igbo man or woman has been found worthy of being president of Nigeria. The nearest was Dr Alex Ekwueme being Vice President to President Shehu Shagari between 1979 and 1983. Why can't the Igbo man or woman become president? We must all work on this major challenge assiduously.

5. The place for followership.

There cannot be purposeful leadership without purposeful followership. Nigerians from all social strata must participate in unifying Nigeria. In actuality, it is a blatant pursuit of illusion to believe that any one leader can bring Nigerians together without the equal contributions of the general populace. A detribalized leader alone without a detribalized followership cannot effect any change in our polity. The change we want begins with us. If we let go of everything that divides us and embrace unity, Nigeria will become a better place to live.

6. Implementation of the Federal Character Principle.

The Federal Character Principle enshrined in sections 14 and 15 of the 1999 Constitution has been honoured more in breach than in observance. Where is the place of the Igbos in the present Government? I do not know. Or, do you?

7. Tolerance and acceptance.

Another way of building-bridges is by practicing a culture of tolerance, and acceptance of people of all cultures and creeds. There is unity to be found even in the face of many differences. We don't need to always agree with each other to live together. Rather we can and should tolerate the existence of those we disagree with. The challenge we have in Nigeria is that we have not accepted our uniqueness. Living together should not be seen as a competition or a desire to dominate others. We must deliberately maintain and cultivate peace, unity, good neighbourliness. Our diversity is a thing of beauty – Dolly Parton's **“Coat of Many Colours”**.

8. The Facilitators

In this call to arms, none is excluded. However, as ever, the decisive actors (those who can make a difference) that instigate our strategy are officialdom – at all levels: executive legislative and judicial. Equally critical, however, are semi-official actors such as the **NYSC, National Peace Committee, the National Human Rights Commission, the Legal Aid Council, National Council on Women's Societies, National youth Council** and the **Nigerian Council on Inter-Religious Affairs**, etc. All must be on-boarded to sensitize their constituents to the imperative of regarding themselves first as Nigerians before anything else. We should not recognize that bond only when our male senior National Soccer team is playing.

9. Fairness, Equity, Social Justice

Without fairness, equity, egalitarianism, and good conscience, Nigeria cannot move forward. She will continue to suffer the fate

of Barbers Chair of Perpetual Motion on its axis, but without progress.

FINAL WORD

We must rejig and reengineer our weak fabric of a tottering, wobbling, groggy, dawdling, fumbling and crumbling country. Like Naaman the leper, we must dip ourselves 7 times in the political, social, and economic River Jordan. The alternative is to separate peacefully.