

FAIRNESS, EQUITY IN AN ETHNOCENTRIC NIGERIA.

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The Nigerian Nation has the capacity and capability to create equality in healthcare delivery, social security, gainful employment, universal education and security of lives and property. We have not been able to attain these very achievable goals because we have not had purposeful leadership in the nation. This is also true of Edo State or any Nigerian State. Our leaders have all been so overwhelmed by the limitless power of state and resources at their disposal that they have charted the wrong course of amassing personal wealth for themselves and their immediate families and cronies, leaving the larger society to eat from the refuse dumps. There is so much for all that even the unemployed can be paid a stipend for their daily bread, living expenses, and affordable housing provided for our teeming population. Nigeria exports oil without sweat and accumulates foreign exchange easily. But regrettably, after nearly 50 years as a nation, she is still unable to provide basic healthcare for her citizens. Our President flies to Europe for the treatment of 'allergies and common cold'. Cuba, whose export depends only on sugar cane and cigarettes, is able to provide free healthcare for all its citizens. It is therefore unfair for our leaders to amass personal wealth without bothering about the Nigerian masses. Justice is therefore not served and neither is fairness enthroned. The problem with our leaders is neither lack of resources nor technical knowhow but the lack of will, their overwhelming personal greed and lack of a good loving heart, which make them to blatantly divert national resources for their personal and family uses.

Rigging in an election brings unfairness, injustice, disenfranchisement, chaos and class in a supposedly classless society. It places the wrong, unelectable and unelected individuals in positions of authority. Because the positions were obtained by fraud of rigging and the help of a short sighted godfather, they are therefore unaccountable to anybody including sometimes the godfather that facilitated their selection into these positions. With lack of accountability, they pursue programmes that are neither in the interest of the state nor the people they have sworn on oath to represent. The cycles of inequality, unfairness, social injustice have been perpetuated for a long time in our body politics that only a surgical extirpation can remove it from the Nigerian nation and in turn in Edo State.

Ethnocentricity is literally ethnic centeredness, views or actions that are dictated by one's ethnic origin or group; centered on a specific ethnic group, usually one's own. It could also mean overriding concern with race or belief that one's ethnic or tribal group is superior. The context ethnocentrism as used in this essay relates to ethnic centeredness.

We have written in the past about one godfather in Edo State giving all the choice posts to men and women of his ethnic origin to the disadvantage of the other ethnic groups. In the recent reshuffling of the president's cabinet, as revealed by a Nigerian daily newspaper captioned: "BEHOLD FEDERAL GOVERNMENT OF THE NORTH (F.G.N)!" it gave details that all the relevant Federal Government of Nigeria appointments have been selected in favour of the Nigerians from the northern half of the country. Is this not another form of ethnocentrism? In political relations, activists and politicians have used labels like ethnocentrism to criticize ethnic groups as being unbearably selfish — or at best, culturally biased, as shown in that publication.

Ethnocentrism is a natural result of the observation that most people are more comfortable with and prefer the company of people who are like themselves, sharing similar values like same religion, mode of dressing, similar language and behaving in similar ways. It is not unusual for a person to consider that whatever they believe is the most appropriate system of belief or that their behaviour is the most appropriate and natural behaviour. Ethnocentrism is akin to nationalism or religious fanaticism which appears normal for the practitioner without thought or regard for the feeling of other ethnic groups, or those with different religious belief systems. In Edo State, we have the saying that **“evbuomwan a ho namen ro yi” (it is in our place we hope for a rainfall)**. Technically speaking, ethnocentric attitudes or behaviour may not be very bad when viewed in this context. When viewed against the background of justice, fairness and social equality, we can see that one group is disadvantaged when ethnocentric attitude or behaviour is being exhibited to the disadvantage of any group in a supposedly classless society as in a federal republic and a secular nation like Nigeria or, nearer home, as in Edo State.

In Nigeria, the brothers, sisters, friends, family and kinsmen and women of the ethnocentric individual or politician see the ethnocentrist as a God- sent, some sort of Biblical Moses whereas the disadvantaged tribe, region or ethnic group sees the ethnocentric as biased, unfair, unjust, and practising social injustice and discrimination. His kinsmen and women will defend him with their last blood and would do anything and even lie to protect their kin sman. **With this background, can we ever have a fair, just and equitable society in a nation as diverse as Nigeria with so many interest groups?** Can the courts be fair if the judge is ethnocentric in disposition in a case involving his kinsmen?

Going beyond fairness and justice, how do we as a people account for or eliminate sheer wickedness. Sometime ago in the politicking before a gubernatorial election in Edo State, a local government chairman was gunned down in broad daylight and another “appointed” in his place without any voting . Last year, another politician was ostracized from his town, prevented from buying, selling, being visited or visiting any of his village folks because he dared to disobey his former godfather. There have been maiming, torturing, killing and punishment beating in a country with a penal code system and yet these offences go uninvestigated by the law enforcement agencies and in a few situations when it ever gets to the courts, justice goes to the highest bidder. Can these systems of greed by those at the helm of affairs and the envy and jealousy by those who are deprived be allowed to continue?

The most likely answer will be no. How do you redress a system when even those at the lowest rung of the ladder will protect their high-up tormentors with their own lives since they are ignorant of the true state and nature of affairs?

The time may be long, the manner may be unexpected, but one thing I am certain about is that there will be change. That change, that elusive change of this present ugly system, will come during our generation if we strongly desire it. If we can perceive it, we can have it. But it will not come if we fold our hands. It will not come if we keep mute. It will not come if we do nothing.

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