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A Historical Periscope of Self Inflicted Socio-Political Predicaments of Nigerians

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Abstract- The problems of Nigeria have continued to stare at her very ominously and intermittently harassing her, both within and outside her shores. These have lingered on and have created a clog on the wheel of the country's economic progress, indeed dramatically stagnating, and to say the least, truncating the mainstay of the country's economy. Several interpretations, theories, analyses, syntheses and jingoistic conceptualization have been propagated, all producing the same result. From scientific to technological approach, religious to ritualist approach, political to social approach, the economy rather than moving is static and under some regimes it retarded. Academic contributions, especially ideas from the humanities and indeed the discipline of history are jettisoned, infact, quickly dusted into the waste bin. The concern of this paper is to attempt a historical throw back at the problems of Nigeria, identifying them with a view to proffering solutions, using the historical investigative theory of threw back. This study identifies Nigerians as the cause of her problems, who rather than face these seismic challenges head on, abandon them- a cowardly act, ending in futility and deeper chaos. It is hoped that if academic exercises are no longer mere, this input may create a turnaround in the economy of the Nigeria state.

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A Historical Periscope of Self Inflicted Socio-Political Predicaments of Nigerians

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Abstract- The problems of Nigeria have continued to stare at her very ominously and intermittently harassing her, both within and outside her shores. These have lingered on and have created a clog on the wheel of the country's economic progress, indeed dramatically stagnating, and to say the least, truncating the mainstay of the country's economy. Several interpretations, theories, analyses, syntheses and jingoistic conceptualization have been propagated, all producing the same result. From scientific to technological approach, religious to ritualist approach, political to social approach, the economy rather than moving is static and under some regimes it retarded. Academic contributions, especially ideas from the humanities and indeed the discipline of history are jettisoned, infact, quickly dusted into the waste bin. The concern of this paper is to attempt a historical throw back at the problems of Nigeria, identifying them with a view to proffering solutions, using the historical investigative theory of threw back. This study identifies Nigerians as the cause of her problems, who rather than face these seismic challenges head on, abandon them- a cowardly act, ending in futility and deeper chaos. It is hoped that if academic exercises are no longer mere, this input may create a turnaround in the economy of the Nigeria state.

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I. Introduction

The dust raised by the October 1st Independence celebration hardly settled when the killing that precipitated the dreadful Civil War came knocking. The post-Civil War arm robbery of the 1970s did not give Nigerians a breathing space before the austerity measures of the 1980s and the Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) that made life impossible for Nigerians to live. As if these were not enough, another decade (1990s) brought with it the Niger-Delta Crises, the Odua People's Congress (OPC), Egbesu, Massob culminating in Jos ethnic/religious crises, the Tiv/herdsmen crises and the infamous "medusa" Boko Haram bombing of today. Recently, a good number of devastating bomb attacks has taken place. Some of which include; the independent day bombing in eagle square October 2010, the bombing in Abacha barracks in Abuja December 2010. The police headquarter bombing of June 2011 and the UN headquarter bombing of 2011 just to mention but a few.

The Nigerian National Anthem clearly represents and contains the hopes and aspirations of Nigerian nationalists. The same is true of the Pledges. They vividly reveal that the nation was to depend on God in the actualization of her dreams and aspirations. In the light of the developments in Nigerian society, it will not be out of place to say that Nigerians have betrayed every line of the Anthem and Pledges. The turbulent situations that now stare us in the face on a daily basis are a reflection of this reprehensible betrayal.

The issues of peace, security and unity, which represent the fundamental principles that guarantee the progress and development of a nation, are such that should seriously concern all and sundry in Nigeria. There is need for the Nigerian government to rise up to the occasion of maintaining peace, ensuring security of lives and property and guaranteeing the unity and continuity of the nation as a single indivisible entity. To achieve this task, therefore, new approaches as well as strategies are needed with urgency. Peace cannot be achieved in isolation, it involves several factors. One of the approaches to lasting peace according to S. P. Agi (p. 51) should be the holistic perception, appreciation and consideration of peace and issues involved in achieving it. Granted that, insecurity, especially internal insecurity is not peculiar to Nigeria alone as other developed world face the challenges of insecurity within their borders on daily basis. The September 11th suicide terrorist attack of the World Trade Centre in the United States of America, and the London bombing in the United Kingdom in the days of Prime Minister Tony Blair readily come to mind. But the difference between them and Nigeria is how they have managed these threats, how prepared, reliable and knowledgeable their security forces are, how dependable are the sources of their information, how disciplined are their citizenry, etc. What therefore are the reasons behind the above?

Ethnicity

An ethnic group according to Ukpo (1977) is a group of people having a common language and culture (p10). Otite (1975) defined Ethnicity as a contextual discrimination by members of one group against others on the basis of differentiated system of socio-cultural symbols. He added that Ethnicity has the properties of common group consciousness and identity, and also group exclusiveness on the basis of which social discrimination are made. On his part Patterson 1975:305) opined that ''ethnicity can only be understood in terms of a dynamic and contextual view of group allegiances; that what is critical about an ethnic group is

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not the particular set of symbolic objects which distinguishes it, but the social uses of these objects; and ethnic loyalties reflect, and are maintained by the underlying socio-economic interest of group members''. The problems posed by Ethnicity still defy solutions, it has put Nigeria in a situation in which the highly telescoped Nigerian oneness of society, culture and language according to Otite (1990), has been replaced by more recent though centuries-old heterogeneity with attendant exclusivity of symbolic organizations and the parochialization as well as the ethnicisation of government and politics. In Nigeria, ethnic groups are occasionally fused together by intermingling, assimilation and inter-marriages. Nigeria is a nation of an aggregation of several nationalities. It is a pluralistic and multi-faceted society, both in term of religion and composition. It has over 450 different ethnic groupings. Over 300 ethnic groups are minorities who do not comprise the majority in the region in which they live. These groups usually do not have a political voice, nor do they have access to resources or the technology needed to develop and modernize economically. They therefore, often consider themselves discriminated against, marginalized, neglected and oppressed. There are only three ethnic groups which have attained the status of ethnic majority in their respective regions. They are the Hausa-Fulani in the north, the Igbo in the south east and the Yoruba in the south west. According to Ukpo, "the ethnicity of Nigeria is so varied that there is no definition of a Nigerian beyond that of someone who lives within the borders of a country."(p.19) The boundaries of Nigeria were drawn by the British to serve commercial interest, largely without regard for the territorial claim for the indigenous people, Ukpo concluded. As a result, about 450 ethnic groups comprise the population of Nigeria: therefore the country's unity and orientation of nationhood have been constantly under siege. Many attempts at secession have been made between 1914 to date, the most conspicuous being the Biafra declaration. As said earlier, the Amalgamation of Nigeria was to serve the interest of Britain, without the consent of the various ethnic nationalities through a referendum or any other consensual procedure. As a result of this Nigeria has found it difficult to balance the allegiance and loyalty of its citizens with the multiplicity of these primordial groups (Nkolika, 2007) "Nigeria is a mere geographical expression, bound together by nothing except the coercive apparatus of the state." The artificiality of the creation of Nigeria intensifies ethnic tension and animosity and exacerbates inter-ethnic tension which increases suspicion in the country. Analysts believe that the seed of ethnic struggle for power was sown at that time. Since then there has been and unending struggle among the various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria over natural resources and political power and domination. Today, in Nigeria, there is serious rivalry among the major ethnic groups over issues such as power and resource sharing formula; there are many conflicts brewing in the country today for control over politics, religion and revenue sharing formula, just to mention a few. The struggle between the north and south, between the major ethnic nationalities on the one hand and the federal government of Nigeria against the Niger-Delta who desire to control their natural resources on the other hand, these have sparked crises over the years in the country.

a) Ethnic Politics

Politics, perhaps, represents the single most difficult aspect of Nigeria historical documentation. No other factor raises much interest as politics in Nigeria. The reason for this is not far-fetched. Ethnic proclivities dominate political platform and ideology. Right from the days of colonial administration, there has been ethnic based politics. Group struggle and ethnic hegemony started surfacing as early as the first half of the 1950s. From this time also, the question of continuity of the nation as a single entity superimposed by the British suzerainty, had started gaining different views. According to Ikime:

> It would be recalled that the Northern delegates at the Ibadan conference threatened to pull the North out of Nigeria unless they were granted exactly one half of the totals seats in the House of Representatives. This request was granted by the British.(p.41)

The import of the above excerpt is far reaching as it clearly brings to glare, the implication of ethnic sentiments in the issues of unity in Nigeria. This unfortunate development continued into the main stream of national politics and has variously manifested itself in unwholesome disagreement and rivalry, with their attendant devastating effects. Ethnicity in Nigerian politics has continued to distance the nation from near achievement of peace.

Suffice it to say that, Nigerians are yet to learn from American democracy which favours national interest against other consideration. The fact that Nigerians do not have a common cause for which they unanimously strive, is very well reflected in the ethnic based politics that has bedevilled the nation over the past five decades of her independence.

The centrality of ethnicity in Nigerian politics was again brought to the fore in 1959 independent election. Robert stock adequately captured the outcome of the polls this way:

None of the three main parties won a majority, (talking about the Northern based Nigeria People Congress, (NPC) the Eastern based National Council for Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) and the Western based Action Group (AG) but the NPC, thanks to the size of the region won the largest popularity. Tafawa Balewa heads the (NPC) and entered a coalition government with NCNC as Prime Minister.

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Such is the foundation upon which the politics in Nigeria is built. From the foregoing, it is already apparent that one cannot absorb the impacts of ethnic politics from the factors that foreground and entrenched chaos and unrest in Nigeria. By implication, it will amount to a mere waste of time and energy to attempt to engage the issue of peace and unity in the country without considerable recourse to issues in national politics. Today, while the term "unity in diversity" remains a slogan in the social lexicon of the people, the veracity of the statement, from the standpoint of the happenings in Nigeria, is held in serious doubt especially with regards to the contents of peace.

Some dimensions of ethnic impulses in the issues of peace, security and unity in Nigeria have already been pointed out. In addition, however, it is stressed here that though the different ethnic groups give the country a rich culture, they also pose major challenges to nation building. Ethnic strife has plagued Nigeria since she attained independence in 1960.

In Nigeria today, Muslim vis-a-vis Christians, including other diverse ethno-religious groups, no longer trust each other in matters of everyday life. Since each group lives in "a state of nature", how can we talk about national unity amidst perpetual conflict, bitterness and gross animosity between Muslims and Christians and among the ethnic groups? For this reason, Okafor observed that "The unhealthy ethnic politics and mutual distrust among various cultural linguistic and ethnic groups in Nigeria are the main causes of Nigeria's social and political upheavals" (Okafor, 1997). Ethnicity is held so sacrosanct that even the elite who would propel the activities of government, geared toward development, is so greatly influenced by political leaders and godfathers who would not allow these elites to develop greater loyalties to their nation and push aside ethnicity. It is explicit that Nigerians are more involved in ethnic power play than in the development of the nation (Oyediran, 1979).

b) Corruption

The Oxford English Dictionary defines corruption as dishonest or illegal behaviour of people in authority. Chinua Achebe, a famous Nigerian writer in books ''Man of The People 'said that it is easier to stop a goat from eating yam than to stop a Nigerian from receiving or collecting bribe. Corruption retards progress and has apparently eaten deep into the fabrics of the society. Nigerians are immune to this scourge. Money that should have been invested in the economy is looted without a didactic punishment. All over the country are 'secret cowards'. The idea of might is right has exterminated punitive measures. Whereas an average on the street is struggling to earn a dollar, one billion naira is exclusively devoted to feed the presidency. In the context of Nigeria, it is difficult to separate bribery from corruption; therefore it is important to look that the origin of these twin endemic civilisations are inter-woven. Before the advent of the Europeans, Africans and Nigeria in particular lived a communal life, they existed nothing like bribery. To get what you don't have, you traded on a system called trade by barter. In an interview with Okani Odey Ineji, (OHT;P.17) this researcher was informed that there was nothing in Africa as bribery before the advent of the Europeans; infect, he opined that it was the Europeans who introduced bribery to Africans when they brought items like mirror to entice African chiefs for slaves. He added that it was because Africans knew no bribery that most Africans languages had no word for it, where there is a word for bribery: such is only descriptive. For instance, in Yakurr, Boki and some ethnic groups in the Upper Cross Region, bribery is called Ngwu. Ngwu was the name borne by one warrant chief who was known for being corrupt. Bribery was therefore named after Ngwu. According to him, Africans "over do" what they borrow faster and even better than the owners; he cited an example of the case of religion where Africans borrowed from Europe, but today Africans export evangelists popularly known as "men of God". The view of many interviewed were very different from the above; others, believed, rather that bribery is as old as man and that it was not an alien culture. Whether or not this ideology is imported, may not be relevant now but what is important is the damage on the system.

In Nigeria, it is no longer news that until you are "connected" or you "belong", you will not be employed, admitted or recruited into any government-owned establishment. Also common in Nigeria is "Public Relation" fondly called "PR", after employment, admission or recruitment on "merit," there is always a provision for people that will buy either in cash or kind or for unqualified relations or to "settle" "godfathers". Infect the above exist in virtually all parastatals including football. To worsen the situation, not even the many churches and "men of God" could salvage the misfortune. But between the hours of 7am to 2pm on Sundays, the streets of Nigeria are empty as Churches, Prayer Houses; House Fellowships etc are fill to the brim with faithful. The government surrendered long ago as the situation has no solution. The only solution according to government action is privatization. A bureau for that purpose is even established as the only way out. Little wonder therefore, that in the midst of plenty, puppets, beggars, the homeless etc roam the streets in penury. The above situation compelled T M Aluko, a money economist in an interview with FM radio describe the Nigerian situation as a country "where the poor cannot sleep because they are hungry and the rich cannot sleep because the poor are awake". The situation has become so helpless that the rich, although not under attack, are perpetually unsafe in their own homeland. The concomitant effect is more extortion to protect themselves by buying bullet proof cars, building

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houses with brick walls and going out with paid security men and thugs. This brings Nigeria to a country with very few rich men and very many poor men, or put differently a country without a middle class but first class and others. The activities of this first class who also found themselves in the ruling class determine the rise and fall of the country. At present, Nigeria is ranked as one of the poorest countries in the world. This is because these leaders channel the recourses and wealth of the nation towards very few hands.

c) Greed

Greed according to the *Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary* is a strong desire for more wealth, possessions, power, etc than a person needs. The above definition is characteristic of third world countries, one of which is Nigeria. The least number of tenure for either a political officer holder is two of maybe three, four or five as the case may be. In some cases, some leaders ask for third term as in the case of President Olusegun Obasanjo of Nigeria or life presidency as the case of President Robert Mogabe of Zimbabwe. The main reason for this action is greed under the guise of Transformation Agenda, good governance, etc. Greed engendered tribalism, and tribalism has cost Nigeria a lot of retrogressive pains. Any country that is pervaded by tribal sentiment is bound for an unprecedented failure and absolute disaster. This sentiment is christened National Character; this sardonic circumstance has extirpated merit and embraced mediocrity. Appointments, employment, elections and admission into any government institution as said before are based on this malign sentiment. The consequences of this are mediocrity, failure, stagnation, civil unrest, insurgency, exemplied by the Niger Delta uprisingg, Boko Haram etc. In other words, best and qualified men who would have used the content of their brains to thrust Nigeria forward ahead of their contemporaries are denied opportunities in lieu of educated minors who are champions of lobbying and looting. It is immersed in every strand of the Nigerian society, in fact, even her political structure is held hostage by this scourge. The result of these practices is the election and appointment of inexperienced, corrupt and greedy leaders into power.

II. Indiscipline and 'The Nigeria Factor'

These refer to a set of negative attitude developed by Nigerians in Nigeria. An average Nigerian regards government properties as nobody properties. Hence it can be plundered by all and sundry; not even security operatives have the right to stop citizens from plundering the economy. Any special attention on government property by any person becomes a laughing stock. Questions like, 'Is it your father's property?' 'Are you the one here who loves Nigeria more than others?' And so on, are asked. Infect, bosses who attempt to query staff on account of the above are often nick- named or in some cases witch- hunted.

Furthermore, Nigerians do not take foreign movies for action on stage, but rather believe it is true stories hence they copy, hook, lain and sinker, all the actions therein. To dwell on the problems of Nigeria, we may require more than a seminar discussion; let us therefore attempt possible solutions.

Possible Solutions: For Nigeria to remain one indivisible country against the wish of many nations, the federal govt should be firm and courageous and develop a strong political will to prosecute any political office holder or any citizen indicted as a supporter or accomplice to the Boko Haram sect. She must stop paying lip-service to dealing with sacred cows. Incidentally, Nigerian leaders say the direct opposite of what they do. Until our leaders become responsive, determined and recognize their integrity, the paradise is still far.

The federal government should acknowledge the failure of security agencies and should also be decisive on issues that bother on security. They should therefore not hesitate in complete overhauling of security outfits in the country. Until these anomalies and distortions are corrected, it is not yet UHURU.

The electoral processes should also be addressed as this is the pivot of democracy. What we have been having are leaders handpicked and imposed on the people through the infamous theory of godfatherism. Nigeria and Nigerians must look beyond ethnic boundaries politically, if we must get to the promise land. It should be Nigeria first and not my region. But if it must be region, then Akintokunbo Adejumo regional request is best here. Adejumo opines that ....the way forward is for us to keep laying emphasis on the need for the evolution of six regions. The federation should stay but let every region grow at its own.'' (Culled from Radio Nigeria, politics today, 6th July 2018;8-9am).

III. Conclusion

The Nigerian situation can be compared to that of a child who urinates on its bed, rather than sleeping on the urine to probably dry it up, the child was rolling from one end of the bed to the other attempting to avoid the urine. The baby did not know that its mother had protected her mattress before laying him. The result was that as far the baby rolled, the impact of the urine moved on. While many Nigerians abandon their family to seek greener pasture overseas, others trade blames. And for many others it is the government of the day or the president at the time that is responsible. No person ever remembered that there have been many regimes and many presidents, yet the problems remain. It is pertinent to note here that until Nigerians accept collective responsibility for their problems the solutions

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are far away. Take the case of 'the Nigeria factor' for example, until Nigerians see what belong to the nation as belonging to themselves, as not belonging to 'nobody', we have a long way to go. Until we realise the uselessness of materialism, our destination far away. Until Nigerians discover that corruption is sin against oneself, we still have many rivers to cross. Until we realised that ethnic sentiment is like putting a knife on our own flesh since God did not create group along, we will never be counted in the committee of nations. Let us also remember that greed leaves our children and children's children hungry as the entire commonwealth will be carted away. And so help us, God.

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