

The Conditional Nigerian Patriot

I have often been accused of being unpatriotic because of the number of years I have lived outside Nigeria. A good number of my accusers are fellow Nigerians who brag about being home-grown and home-bred. Within this group are men and women that have been consistently denied visas by several embassies. They usually start out very ambitiously, seeking entry into big name countries like France, Japan, Britain, Canada, Australia, Holland, the United States and Germany. Meeting with no success, they scale down on their quest and begin to make trips to the embassies of the not so big names that, nonetheless, are touted as promising. In this category are countries like United Arab Emirates, South Africa, India, Mexico, China, Brazil, Singapore, Serbia, Botswana, Mauritius, South Korea, Israel, Greece and Poland. The denials continue and frustration sets in, but the avid seeker of greener pastures abroad is undeterred. They scale down even further and are soon applying for visas that would take them to not so promising hopefuls like Senegal, Morocco, Jamaica, Rwanda, Gabon, Trinidad, Ghana, the Philippines and the Bahamas. Forced to scale down some more because the rejections are constant, frustration turns to outrage and despondence after the visa seeker is denied entry into countries like Equatorial Guinea, Haiti, Burundi, Papua New Guinea, Zimbabwe, Bangladesh, Malawi, Nepal, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Burkina Faso, Guinea Bissau, Sudan, Eritrea, Rwanda and Congo (DRC). They realize that they have nowhere else to go to and swiftly assume the status of uncompromising patriots who begin to spew grand slogans like, “East or west, home is best.” Then they go on to use invectives like “sell out” and “colonial mentality” to brand those who have been granted the visas that they tried so passionately but unsuccessfully to acquire.

Our larger-than-life bigwigs are also known to make lofty claims about their patriotism. They are not only sworn to “live, breathe and die Nigeria,” but are quick to point out that they have a God-given call to rescue Nigeria from its socio-political dilemma. Under no circumstance will they live anywhere else since they are not about to replace their noble traditional ways with alien cultures. It is not at all difficult to recognize these patriots. They are adamant supporters of Liverpool and Chelsea Football Clubs, drive

Japanese cars and occupy extravagant positions of authority introduced by *hated* colonial masters and their educational system. Their children attend schools in London, New York, Paris, Dublin, Toronto, Cape Town, Geneva and Sydney (it all depends on their spending power), and it is in such foreign cities that they stash away huge amounts of euros and dollars. When they fall sick, they know not to take chances with our deplorable hospitals and clinics; instead, they fly to Europe or America where they are guaranteed first class treatment. It is also very important that their children are citizens of the United States or a European country. So, once their wives are into their sixth month of pregnancy, they fly them out to the preferred country of citizenship to give birth.

These self-proclaimed patriots all share a common argument—that physical presence in a country is synonymous with loyalty. Going by this principle, the egocentric racists that once governed South Africa and Rhodesia (Zimbabwe) are model patriots. The military dictators that held Nigeria to ransom for many years would also qualify as great patriots. Evidently, patriotism comes in different forms and can either be sincere or conditional. The one is informed by selflessness while the other is a perverted person-to-country relationship that thrives on self-fulfillment.

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