The Continued War Between Two Nigerias: The Oil and Oil-less

"Funk" that Oil Up

Some news reports say that the price of crude oil is dropping in Nigeria. True or not, I hope it doesn't only drop; I hope it all dries up. I'm not averse to the development that natural resources can generate. But, let's face it, crude oil has not advanced Nigeria on any significant scale; it has actually been more destructive that it has been productive. When I attended the University of Calabar in Nigeria, students of oil-producing states received scholarship money deceptively touted as a generous reward for being indigenes of these states. In the end, what we received was pittance compared to massive profits made by the relatively few but real beneficiaries of this resource—the political elite and their families, friends and cohorts, as well foreign multinational corporations and their governments. In the end, most Nigerians have gained little or nothing from the billions of dollars generated from the commercial exploration of oil since the 1950s, including those whose lands have been ravaged for this purpose.

Like a friend once said, the greatest resource that any society has is its human resource, which has the final say on the harvesting and utilization of its natural resources. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, one of the richest resource countries in the world with its abundance of cobalt, copper, diamond and columbite tantalite among others, remains one of the most wretched in terms of standard of living and poverty index, and has been embroiled in various stages of conflict since its existence as an independent country. While the Nigerian experience has not been as extreme, its steady decline in practically every sector over the years, including its crumbling infrastructure, further confirms that its alleged wealth in oil has been little more than a deodorized curse.

Apart from being more innovative and economically diversified before we became robotically mesmerized by the quick-rich culture introduced by the oil industry, our corrupt practices have escalated significantly since the famed "ten-percenter" debauchery that Major Chukwuwma Nzeogwu cited as part justification for his participation in Nigeria's first military coup of 1966. The truth, however, is that the "ten-percenters" of earlier years are like Mickey Mouse compared to the shameless and audacious modern-day "hundred-percenters," whether they adorn themselves in military or civilian outfits. At the root of this systemic and ingrained rot is the zealous vision by some to have unrestricted and insatiable access to unlimited oil wealth by securing economic, political and military control of the Niger Delta oil reserves. The Nigeria-Biafra (*un*)civil war stands as the highpoint of this wrangling.

But all of this will change if the oil ceases to generate the immense wealth for which so many have killed and died. Better still, how glorious it would be if it dries up or dribbles to nothing. Besides motivating us to be more creative, this will also put a huge dent on what renowned

musician Fela Kuti described as "authority stealing," a sarcastic reference to Nigeria's widespread and flagrant art of appropriation and embezzlement in high places. It will also finally debunk the ludicrous claim that our (*un*)civil war was in a bid to secure unity. What unity? Am I to believe Nigerians from the north, west and middle belt had so much love for us that they launched a brutal assault to make the point? This, of course, is a rhetorical question and a major reason why our oil wealth should steadily dissipate to a state of inconsequence. When (if) this happens, our self-styled agents of unity will no longer have an excuse to embark on bogus and destructive mission of keeping Nigeria one. They will not only leave us alone; they will actually permit us to secede or even encourage us to do so. Our alleged war of unity, after all, was really a war for oil, which is also why foreigners, and not the people of the Niger Delta, have controlled and profited from this resource since the war ended. To keep trumpeting the "One Nigeria" slogan as a basis for the war would be like evoking the phantom weapons of mass destruction that America used to justify its invasion of Iraq.

Irrelevance of Oil and the Implications for Unity

In the likely event that oil increasingly becomes inconsequential and ceases to create overnight millionaires, we will witness a grand evacuation out of the Niger Delta. The basis will no longer exist for many outsiders to "unify" with us, which has been access to and the plunder of our oil fields. But of course there are others who sincerely like us and, oil or no oil, may still choose to hang with us. The latter may be aware of a statement we commonly hear from ladies smitten by the prospects of love: "He's a nice guy but I don't really know him yet." Essentially, get to know us before you bond with us. This is an essential step in building relationships, and something we did when we (former Easterners) settled in large numbers in the west, middle belt and north.

I find it laughable when people who know little or nothing about us make bold claims about wanting to unite with us. You know why you don't know us? Because you care nothing about us. And you care nothing about us because you truly don't want to unite with us. Your cultural ignorance manifests in many ways. You think everybody from Cross River and Akwa Ibom States are "Calabar" people and you refer every northerner as a "Hausa" man or woman. You use terms like "Hausa-Fulani" that mean nothing, and you are clueless about the existence of varieties of the Yoruba language or the fact that there are marked linguistic differences between the people of Asaba and Aba. You certainly don't have to know everything about every ethnic group, but extensive knowledge of basic facts about diverse cultures opens up doors for recognition of the richness and dignity within societies that we may not be aware of, which in itself becomes a pathway to developing respect for and a desire to genuinely unite with other people.

Since Igbos were considered the evilest of all evil Biafrans, and the prime target for annihilation, it is befitting to use their experience as a source of enlightenment for those who remain ignorant of other cultures and who have had no meaningful interaction with people outside of their local governments (despite being crusaders for "One Nigeria"). I am not talking about having a romantic liaison with "a Calabar girl" or shaking hands with "a Jukun man" in church because

your pastor asked you to do so. I'm talking about something much deeper than that, something that Igbos have done for many years.

To date, there are few ethnic groups that have explored the Nigerian landscape and blended with other ethnicities (culturally, religiously, linguistically and professionally) like the Igbos. The Hausa and Fulani, for instance, can be found in significant numbers in cities like Enugu, Calabar, Port Harcourt and Uyo. But they customarily isolate and limit themselves to two predominant ventures—foreign exchange and the roast meat or "suya" business, and rarely learn the languages of these communities or marry into them. Socially and professionally, therefore, their collaborations are limited, which is much unlike the Igbos who engage in every conceivable business and industry wherever they settle. They are in the hospitals, schools and government offices. They own mechanic shops and supermarkets and operate as landlords and landladies. They habitually learn the language of their new communities and, except deterred by culture or religion, also marry into these communities.

Igbos, above and beyond any other ethnic group, still exist in large populations outside Igboland, even in the North where they periodically receive open threats demanding that they leave. Their penchant for business and enterprise may be appreciated and emulated by many, but this has also provoked envy and intolerance from others who continue to portray them as dominators and exploiters. They have therefore been victims of deportation campaigns from communities where they have settled and found new homes for years, be it Northern Nigeria or parts of modern Rivers State.

It is therefore ironic and insulting that Igbos have been widely and unfairly faulted as agents of disunity, whereas they have performed incomparably in their efforts at attaining one of the key components of unity, which is assimilation. Historically, their understanding of progress is that it is fully attainable through far-reaching interactions with other ethnic groups.

So, for those who still claim that they love and seek to unite with everything that made up former Biafra, you have a lot to learn from Igbos and their unparalleled immersion in other cultures and their vast intercultural exchanges. Don't use the method that you adopted in the past, which is to kill us, take control of our oil, starve us and chase us out of your communities. It didn't work then and it will not work now!