

Negotiating this Suffocation

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Growing up in the Nigeria of the late 1960's, I remember the War Cry on "Reddifusion": *"To keep Nigeria one is a task that must be done..."* followed by some words I never got to understand but became part of my childhood memories. Come Monday September 15, the Scots, a nation of mere five million people will gain the attention of the whole world! Reason, they will, in a free atmosphere, devoid of any threats or coercion, freely decide if their nearly three centuries of association with England and Wales should come to an end.

As a Yorubaman, locked up in a nation where prosperity and well-being diminish, common sense often put in abeyance, I envy the Scot. There are at least two reasons for this.

First, it is an empirical fact that the Scots are not even, at present, net contributors to the United Kingdom. They get more from the Center than they give. Yet, they are being begged, not threatened, to stay with Britannia! They already have ample representation in Parliament; are promised more if they stay; yet they are fully free to decide to remain or go it alone as a separate nation.

Second. The Scots are free to think about what they really want most: The economic benefits of belonging to a larger, more powerful country, or the emotional satisfaction of being ruled directly by their kins so to promote their cultural independence. Whether they choose well or ill, everybody agrees they are free to make their beds and sleep on it! “It is a fight over

the world of multicultural modernity that makes today's global economy possible, but also leaves many people with a deep hunger for the sense of national identity it obliterates.”

Of course, we all know that nations get more powerful, the larger they become. That China and the United States are so powerful today is incontrovertibly linked to their sizes. The EU is another power-block that show that large agglomerations can have beneficial results. While we may see the Chinese agglomeration and that of other non-Western unions as somewhat forced, the US is not so free either. Puerto Rican Nationalists and others that have tried to break away from the US know how far the “Land of the Free and the Home of the Brave” will tolerate any attempt to reduce its size. In fact, the US, historically pursued territorial expansion in its “Manifest Destiny” doctrine that would have eventually continued its annexation of Mexican territories of Texas, California, etc with more from Canada in the north had it not been checked by war! I am sufficiently

realistic to see that most nation states, Nigeria inclusive, usually have sufficient power blocks and interest groups that are sufficiently well armed and will try to prevent any attempt, justified or otherwise, to reduce its size.

The Scots are lucky people. The Sardinians of Italy, the Basques of Spain, and currently the Eastern Ukrainians are all Europeans that have sufficient desire to separate from larger nations but have not been allowed to do so. The Croats, Bosnians etc that remain after the dismembering of Yugoslavia have graves and scars of war to show for their present fortune. Separating from a large nation is not a cakewalk, even in Europe. The people of Hong Kong may not like some of the “anti-democratic” tendencies of mainland China, however, anyone of them that dreams of separation must be ready to fight nasty and bloody.

With this background, I can understand why many do not believe that taking, say, our Yoruba people, out of the present Nigeria is a viable option. In one word, many are still at the same point we were in 1966 when “To keep Nigeria one” was a task that must be continued.

But, does this remain true? Are there good reasons to think otherwise? Is the unity and oneness of Nigeria more important than the safety, health and well-being of the people that live here? Is this question inconsequential? What is the end and justification of unity aside from safety health and well-being?

Has Nigeria, in these past 100 years not failed to deliver in the things that give any nation the justification to coerce its constituents into a forced union? Should the keeping of Nigeria one remain desirable even if it can be proved that the wealth and well-being of the constituents are not thereby enhanced? Of course, the intolerance with which a nation such as China will

react to the breaking away of Tibet or Chengdu from the rest of the country can be justified by the fact that, on its own, it is highly unlikely that that province, would have been able to finance the magnetically levitated rail system they now enjoy. This is just one of the several signs of the economic benefits the nation of China has bestowed on its constituents in recent times. Some may not be happy about the unjust war-making and land grabbing that now makes Texas a part of US rather than Mexico to which it once belonged. Yet, the fact that some of those remaining in Mexico today are risking everything including their lives in a desperate effort to get into the US can be used as a justification for the overarching power that makes the status quo of geography into an “Indissoluble” union. The Scots are today having the best of all worlds. Stay in the UK they win. Leave the UK and form an independent nation, they win again! Lucky people!

According to Hobbes, “... governments exist to bring order to the chaotic state of nature that would prevail in their absence”. The size of the state is

ultimately a practical question. By definition, “to have a government at all is to relinquish some of the freedom we might have as individuals to some larger purpose, in hopes that with rule of law we will have a peaceful, more prosperous society. Give up some autonomy, but gain wealth and longevity.” The nation of the United Kingdom from which Scotland wants to break away can justify its existence, and coercion, if it were to be used to maintain the status quo, by these principles. It is a fact that the Scots may give the world a good reason, sans bullets and untimely graves – through the ballot box, that it is not a good thing to spoil the party while things are going mostly right. They will decide one way or another and history will judge.

But what rights do nations that are not only failing but constantly are constantly refusing to do what is reasonable to give its peoples a future, have to say to those who want to break away?

What, in particular do we have to say in response to Hobbes when the large size of a nation does the exact opposite of what a nation-state is supposed to do by reducing into chaos a once orderly state of existence, prosperity and well-being? Is it not even arguable that, Nigeria is too large for the managers of state? Is it electricity we can produce better than Nigeria's constituents were they to go alone? Is the larger agglomeration fighting insurgency better than Borno and Adamawa would have were they to be independent? If Lagos were a city-nation just like Singapore, would it not have prevented Ebola from entering in the first place? Would a Fashola presidency of such a nation not have been able to produce enough electricity for its population? Do will have people in power that have the capacity, dedication and will to grow the professionalism that can create and maintain wealth and well-being in the large? Can they do it better than smaller constituents could have done?

Is it not obvious that unless and until we can get people in power who have the capacity to think out a governing mechanism that can bring order to such a large state, that Nigeria, measured by the reduction of wealth and well-being in the midst of ample unexplored opportunities, does not qualify to be considered a nation that should exist in its present form?

I heard it as a toddler that “To keep Nigeria one, is a task that must be done”. In my twilight years, I no longer believe that. Successive managers of the Nigerian state have taught me two hard lessons in this life of mine:

1. They lack the will and capacity to create and expand wealth in a way that will bring order to the life of the teeming populations they govern.
2. We the un-governed are on the receiving end: We have no capacity to remove them from office. The succession of one mediocre

government by another in perpetuity seems to be the lot of Nigeria in its present arrangement.

They have no capacity to govern; we have no capacity to remove them! The sheer burden of daily living and survival in unviable states that even the recently concluded “National Conference” will only exacerbate takes any hope of a better future from my weak heart!

In 2015, please let us not talk about electing anybody. Let us negotiate this Suffocation! *To keep Nigeria one is a task that must be negotiated. To make Nigerians prosperous, safe and healthy, is a task that must be done!*

*John
11/9/14*