

Nigeria's Black Gold and Black Market

Africa has often been referred to as a *black* continent. Allusively, it would be correct to refer to Nigeria as a *black* nation. A country with immense human and mineral resources, this great nation which is widely acclaimed to be the 'Giant of Africa' has great innate but latent potentials. Although, some have called it the 'Sleeping Giant', whether this giant called Nigeria is sleeping or not, it remains a giant. Unfortunately, because it is the giant of Africa, it naturally has giant problems and obstacles bedeviling it. Or how else can we explain the subsisting problems of poverty, political violence and politically motivated hired assassinations. I recall that a few days ago, the Ekiti State governor was almost assassinated. There remains also endemic to this country, the problem of fuel scarcity and the erratic fuel hikes by successive governments. And ofcourse we are already tired of talking about bad roads, NEPA and *blackouts*.

Some have posited that Africa's problem is genetic or traceable to the colour of our skin. That is, that we are *black*. Others have argued that the colour of one's skin has nothing to do with the success of a people. The strength of argument of those who claim that our problem is rooted in our colour is that it is difficult to point to any *black* country on earth that has successful and reckonable political, economical and social standing. The latter's point of argument is that we have had Africans and Nigerians in particular who have excelled *abroad* as computer scientists, medical doctors, footballers, economists, lawyers, and so forth.

Those who say that our problem can't be from our colour further cite South Africa as a very successful country and an emerging world power. Again, to puncture this argument, it has been said that South Africa is a white country with a *black* head. It is said not to be holistic racially and nationally.

We would resolve this argument later. But let's take a look at one of the giant problems of this sleeping giant, Nigeria. Fuel. Could the problem we have with fuel be also because we are *black* and that we cannot manage ourselves? Or is it because it is called

black gold that this God-given liquid is unmanageable? Unfortunately, as these questions beg for answers there is a market that is thriving very well amongst us called *black market* where this *black gold* is sold. This market has no particular location, because its ware, which is fuel the *black gold*, is locatable anywhere and everywhere and yet remains massively illusive to the masses. This *black market* although thriving, is stifling. It has defied all policies and policing and it scares the President himself.

The wholesalers of this *black gold* in the *black market* and their retailers have their meeting point. Their supply line is sustained in the *dark* that is, secretly, or literally speaking, when it is *dark* – at *night*. With their *black* gerricans of 25 and 50 litres, they measure fuel with pleasure as they leisurely plunge the nation into further chaos. The other day, last Saturday *night*, in the course of the NLC fuel strike, of course I had no *light* it was all very *dark* as usual (or did I hear you say *black*). Out of boredom and the need to fill my generator tank and my car to enable my family and I go to church on Sunday, I took a stroll to Ikorodu road in search of the *black gold* in the *black market*. I had patronised the *black merchants* two *nights* before, so I thought I'd be lucky this time around. While looking back and forth, I noticed in one Mobil filling station that their diesel generating set was switched on and yet everywhere was *dark* because there was no electricity. I waited long enough to confirm the joke. I was eventually convinced about the foul play when I noticed that an attendant manned one of the pumps. On moving closer to the *night attendant*, I realised he had two *black* 50 litres gerricans into which he filled petrol. He was inspired by his greed to rebuke my presence. He demanded that If I wanted petrol, that I should move close to the office and pay to the money collector. I moved swiftly only to discover that a lot of petrol hawkers, the *black marketers*, were paying to this particular collector and giving or entrusting their gallons to him who in turn sent them through a middle man to the *night attendant*.

Suddenly, a pickup patrol van quietly crawled by the station. The crowd suddenly evaporated. The gerricans immediately became orphans. The occupants of the pickup started flashing their torches in the *dark* to confirm their suspicion as they simultaneously disembarked their van and headed towards their attraction. These men were the Nigerian

policemen. They were dressed in their *black* uniforms. They did the expected; dispersed, harassed, confiscated, got their tank filled for free ofcourse, got bribed and then freaked off. To cut the long lonely story short I wasn't given any *gold*, I mean the *black* sort, because I was not *recognised* as a retailer, it was too *dark* for me to be *recognised*.

President Olusegun Obasanjo has not only failed to fuel Nigeria, he has also failed to keep Nigeria *lighted*. Nigerians have remained in the *dark* since he failed. At one time he headed and personally supervised the revamping of NEPA. He has failed so far in his 5th year in office. To make matters worst *ThisDay* newspapers edition of Sunday July 6, 2003 has on its head line "**NEPA Threatens Blackout, If...**" This threat was meaningless to me because I hadn't light for two weeks, it didn't make any difference. I know we have our pride as *blacks*. Some might consider this a derogatory polemic, but if we must underscore our appalling degradation in order to purge ourselves of obvious mess so be it. The President has also not appointed a Minister of Petroleum. He has headed that sector and has failed too. Yet Nigerians say that the devil we know should be allowed to stay rather than get a new devil.

How do we wake this giant? It is true that there are lots of Nigerians abroad who make us proud. Footballers like Austen Okocha and Nwakwo Kanu have sustained what remains of Nigeria's pride in football on the world map. Not too long ago someone told me about Dr. Louis Obyo Nelson's discovery on a possible cure for diabetes. I quickly jumped on my computer to make further search on the information on the Internet. But I found nothing. Gladly, a few weeks after, The Guardian of Thursday, July 3, 2003 did an editorial on Dr. Obyo's research and the Editor even quoted the patent number given to him by the US government. The Nigerian computer scientist who made a name for himself and the country in the US remains a proud reference by a lot of Nigerians.

These categories of Nigerians mentioned above are Africans and Nigerians and they are ofcourse *blacks*. They do not appear to me to be sleeping like their country Nigeria. So why is this giant called Nigeria sleeping? African leaders have been identified as the problem. The NEPA problem, grounded refineries, bad roads, illiteracy, poverty,

corruption and the ever ebbing Naira are giant problems and potential giant killers. Our leaders must get the blame for all of these. It is true that it is difficult to rule Nigerians. But I can tell you that it is not impossible. Nigerians can be led if they find leaders who are ready to lead them by examples. Why are these Nigerians excelling abroad and not at home? Could it be that our environment is hostile to them? We appear to have individual talents, which Nigeria's successive governments have failed to harness and encourage. In football our players are one of the most talented footballers in the world. But their talent is not collectively put to use. They have individual talents. Teamwork and team spirit is lacking. In the nation too, there is individual talent.

The Nigerians we gave as examples above are people who have gone solo. If their country won't move forward, they would move forward. Teamwork and team spirit is lacking. Every thing has its spirit or its essence. The national spirit is absent in Nigeria. We are possessed by another spirit, which is self-consciousness and self-centeredness. We must cast out these societal evils and embrace a national spirit – the will to be true Nigerians.

That our leaders have failed does not mean we too must fail with them. We must do two things. Have the will to collectively succeed and then pray to God to succeed. We must not only criticize our leaders (which we must do if we have to), we must also pray for them, ourselves, our nation and children.

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Statistics:

Words	-	1,495
Characters	-	7,087
Paragraphs	-	13
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