On fair-weather patriots

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It is a cruel jest that a nation in dire need of repair often turns to those who abandoned her at her most fragile hour, entrusting them with the mandate to redeem.  
  
It is hardly wise to appoint Nigerians who have ‘Japa’ to man public offices in the country. This is akin to luring the proverbial skunk from the wilderness into our royal chamber; if it doesn’t defile the quilted sheet with its faeces, it will ruin the palace with its stench.  
  
Those who had ‘Japa’ to escape the ‘hell’ Nigeria became should never be allowed to superintend our healing; ultimately because they lack the character and competence, native intelligence and maturity, selflessness and integrity, patience and sense of responsibility required to manage our healing process.  
  
It was disheartening to see a Governor’s recent appointee scoff at his fortune, stressing that he never needed the appointment, even though he barely survived as a canned fruit hawker cum cab driver who squatted with friends in the United Kingdom.  
  
He dismissed his new role as an “unsolicited appointment,” and something he accepted as “an act of charity,” flaunting his “lucrative businesses” overseas. Such disdain undermines the very dignity of public service. Governance is no playground for fair-weather patriots, who, when the tides turn, abandon ship, leaving chaos in their wake.  
  
Diasporan appointments often ignore a fundamental rule: the right person for a position must have prior experience or demonstrated expertise in that role. If we must invite a Diasporian Nigerian to serve as the country’s Petroleum Minister, one primary requirement should be his previous employment in a similar capacity. The same logic requires that only a seasoned General can become Nigeria’s Chief of Army Staff (COAS).  
  
That said, it is often ill-advised to appoint an overseas cab driver, who is contemptuous of Nigeria, as a federal minister or director of a public agency. When Nigeria needs cab drivers with international experience, we may recruit such individuals. Our public offices are best reserved for patriots who keep faith in the Nigerian enterprise. It’s about time we stopped appointing leeches to public office. When the going gets tough, they simply pack up and leave. Nigeria’s public office is not a rehabilitation camp for fair-weather patriots.  
  
Yet, the allure of foreign-trained technocrats often blinds decision-makers. We have seen governors appoint internet fraudsters and human traffickers as cabinet commissioners. We have also seen supposedly first-rate technocrats flaunting Ivy-League certificates, sully our public offices with corruption, arrogance and greed. Our public offices demand more than empty credentials; they require stewards who embody resilience, moral integrity, and an unyielding belief in the Nigerian dream.  
  
We have Nigerians doing well back home, despite the odds. They are the type that stay the course when the going gets tough. They do not bend and sway to every favourable draft nor pack up and leave at the onset of a storm. They stay back and withstand its flurry, surviving with tact, perseverance, faith, goodwill and native intelligence. They understand that only by salvaging what we have and who we are can we achieve our Nigerian dream. These are the ones deserving of public office.  
  
Still, it’s everyone’s prerogative to either stay or flee from perceived hostility in our homeland. But hostile politics and economies aren’t caused by phantoms or poltergeists. They are the result of our lack of humaneness and frantic avarice. The looters prowling our streets and corridors of power did not fall from outer space. They are the fruits of our mother’s wombs, sired with seeds from our fathers’ loins. They are the monsters we raised in our families.  
  
Modern Nigeria is a product of the joint efforts and inactions of our families, schools, worship houses, the streets and the media.  
  
Japa nomads taking the education or scholarship route eventually find that their admission into elite schools overseas was purely a business decision by the schools and their host countries. The benefits are ploughed back into their host society.  
  
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By the time they graduate, they are superbly conditioned for the drudgery of second or third-rate employment overseas. Some occasionally secure first-rate employment. But the very smart ones among them relocate back home to seek employment with Nigerian or multinational firms that prefer their foreign certificates.  
  
Many return to Nigeria as agents of metacolonialism. Hence, the preponderance of journalists, writers, teachers, economists, social workers, engineers, and health workers, to mention a few, who function as glorified stooges of the so-called developed nations of the world.  
  
At the heart of the Japa phenomenon lies a moral corruption not unlike that which fueled the transatlantic slave trade. It is a degeneracy rooted in faithlessness; lack of faith in Nigeria, her people, and the possibility of collective growth. To combat this, we must dismantle the social mechanisms that enable such disloyalty. And this can only be achieved through education. The Nigerian school must begin to impart more than money-making soundbites and status-conferring skills.  
  
Our schools must equally teach values and history with a didactic bent. If they do not, another transatlantic slave trade is possible; we have seen it happen in Libya, where Europe-bound Nigerian youths were bound and gagged, raped and murdered by African slave drivers cum human traffickers. It happens every day to thousands of Nigerians crossing to Europe through irregular migration routes from Agadez through Tripoli to the Mediterranean bight.  
  
President Bola Tinubu must understand that it is not enough to seek foreign investment and cooperation from abroad; such an initiative, while appreciable, could be doomed by a lack of quality personnel and citizenship required to nourish whatever benefits accrue from his nation-building enterprise.  
  
If Nigeria truly seeks sustainable socioeconomic growth in the long run, we must groom generations of men and women capable of nourishing and preserving the Greater Nigeria enterprise.  
  
The true purpose of education is to make minds, not careers, and as Deresiewicz writes, only a small minority have seen their education as part of a larger intellectual journey or have approached the work of the mind with a pilgrim soul.  
  
Nigeria must furnish an educational system driven by the sweat and exploits of such pilgrim souls. The country’s education curricula must be overhauled to impart a Nigeria-centred educational experience that could resonate with the progressive social re-engineering of the country.  
  
It doesn’t matter what quality of degrees are acquired if the recipients are furnished to operate like mindless robots, praise junkies, fortune hunters and crowd pleasers. William Hazlitt notes how European society violently wrenches and amputates its citizenry, thus making them unfit for intercourse with the world, something in the manner that beggars maim and mutilate their children, to prepare them for their future pigeonholes.  
  
This imagery of beggars maiming and mutilating children is discernible in the fate of the Nigerian kids born abroad; some are shipped overseas as regular or illegitimate migrants, purportedly to grant them access to a better life.  
  
The lure of Japa validates Bulhan’s theory of metacolonism. The syndrome has taken so much from us, including our loyalty, language, history, and the cultural values that bound our community together. All that is left is our sense of attachment and moral responsibility borne of nostalgia. Yet Japa has corrupted even that.  
  
The time has come to redefine patriotism, particularly in public service. It’s about time we prioritised those who believe in Project Nigeria and are ready to make the sacrifices required to achieve it. Anything less is a disservice to the nation and its people.