

THOUGH TRIBE AND
TONGUE MAY DIFFER:
MANAGING DIVERSITY
IN NIGERIA

PRE-CONVOCAATION
LECTURE

Delivered at the

21st Convocation Ceremony
at the
University of Abuja,

February 24th, 2017

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On January 20th, 2017, the world literally stood still as the Americans re-enacted their ritual of swearing in a new President. Against the backdrop of a giant American flag draping in the background, an iconic metaphor of the intricate but seamless bond between faith and patriotism, a definitive pledge and allegiance of a people united under God, the new President, raises his right hand, clutches a Holy Bible and recites the pledge to the American people and to God. In that single moment, America and Americans celebrate the Pentecost marking the greatest expression of diversity known to the human race. In the pulsating vitality of that moment, the past, present and future all melt into a single special moment.

In faraway Gambia, on the same date, a farce was being enacted. Instead of sharing a place in the sun with the world's greatest Democracy, the new President of The Gambia was forced to take his oath in the country's embassy in another country. The tyrant within had decided that, like his counterparts elsewhere in Africa, he will defy the same process he had benefited from by staying on

in power. Happily, unlike his other demi gods, he was quickly intimidated into silence and had to crawl out silently with his tail between his legs. It was a metaphor of the nature of Africa's Democracy.

We in Nigeria have our own peculiar situation. Whereas Donald Trump will go down in history as the 45th American President, Nigeria suffers from an inability to chronicle its own leaders either by title or by numbers. We have had a Prime Minister, Heads of State, and Presidents. We have had a military President and one who ran the country but only as a Head of Interim Government, a title unknown in the history of Democracy!

Some like General Obasanjo and Buhari have governed as military men and proudly and happily returned as Democrats to save a country that they could not save while they were in uniform. Both Generals Gowon and Babangida have tried but failed in their attempt also to salvage the country as Democrats! General Abdulsalam is still young enough and who knows, he too could still be called upon to rescue the country someday.

So, after over 50 years, the history of Nigeria's Democracy has been the history of the size of the ambitions of the men in military uniform. In Nigeria, it is possible to earn retirement benefits as a military General, a former Head of State and a democratically elected President. With the Senate becoming a place of refuge for former Governors, one Nigerian earns retirement benefits as a former senior civil servant, a former Minister, Governor and perhaps, Senator. And he or she could go all the way depending on the size of their ambition.

Students of Presidential history in Nigeria would find the mutations quite curious and frustrating. For example, we have no common name for those who have governed us (whether we call them, Prime Minister, President, Head of State or Head of Interim Government). The Presidency of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was neither the same as that of Dr. Jonathan, nor that of General Babangida. Such is our state of confusion that even in the picture galleries of our former leaders, we still find the same man in different official attire appearing twice! We can locate part of the state of our confusion as a nation in the magnitude of the difference in tongue. But, let me turn my attention to the substance of my lecture today. I have decided to title this lecture, Though Tribe and Tongue may Differ. As all of us here already know, this is one of the stanzas in the first national anthem that was composed by Ms Lillian Jean Williams, a British woman. A second British woman, Frances Berda composed the music ahead of our independence in 1960. When we consider the fact that the country was given its name by another British woman, we can see how much gratitude we owe to these three British women! We sang this anthem right up to 1978 when the military for some reason decided that we needed a different anthem. This was one of the demonstrations of Nigeria's impatience and strange belief that change of anthem was necessarily a sign of change of direction in the administration of the country.

By definition, National Anthems are the highest expressions of the collective aspiration, vision, and dreams of a nation. They summon a nation to some form of secular worship; the words stir and strike the chord of patriotism in all citizens. The wordings of national anthems are often set against the backdrop of battle in which the nation seeks God's intervention in vanquishing an enemy or

enemies. The lines of a national anthem, often set in the tone of prayers, contain all their fears, hopes and aspirations. The words often ring out, summoning an entire people to a triumphant parade of patriotism and sacrifice. Almost all anthems appeal to God for victory and life is seen as a battle. To illustrate this point, let us look at a few anthems.

The British anthem, God Save the Queen, set against the backdrop of monarchy, prays: O Lord our God arise, Scatter her enemies, And make them fall: Confound their politics, Frustrate their knavish tricks, On Thee our hopes we fix: God save us all. The anthem of the United States of America titled, The Star Spangled Banner, written in 1814 by one Francis Scott Key, echoes the same sentiments. It pitches the country against its enemy and foe and prays for victory in the words: Their blood has wiped out their foul footsteps' pollution. No refuge could save the hireling and slave from the terror of flight, or the gloom of the grave: And the Star-Spangled Banner in triumph doth wave O'er the land of the free and the home of the brave. Freedom and bravery have come to define American life.

The South African national anthem, Nkosi sikelel Afrika, God Bless Africa, is an expression of the philosophy of the country itself, namely, welding together an amalgam of groups, cultures and faiths. The anthem therefore combines words from Xhosa, Zulu, Sesotho, Afrikaans and English, in keeping with the rainbow hopes of the nation. The second stanza of the anthem appeals to God to: Protect the nation by stopping wars and sufferings.

In other countries, almost every citizen from the cradle can sing their national anthem. Citizens also know a bit about the origins of the anthem, the composers and some aspects of a history of the

sentiments expressed. Not many countries have changed their anthems. The British still cling on to their anthem that was composed in 1745 by Thomas Arne; the Indians still sing their Jana Gana composed by their favourite son, Rabindranath Tagore who received the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1913. The anthem was first sung in 1911, celebrating India's pluralism, summoning the Himalayas and Ganges as witnesses. It acknowledges India's differences and concludes that, the salvation of all peoples is in God's hands, thou dispenser of India's destiny.

Today, if I ask all of us here, what the following have in common, say, Obasanjo, Buhari, Babangida or Gowon, we will all say, they were former soldiers who staged coups and became Heads of State or Presidents of Nigeria. If I ask, what do Nwankwo Kanu, Daniel Amokachi, Samson Siasia or Taribo West have in common, you will all say, they all played in the national team. But, let us stretch it further and ask what John A. Ileru, Eme Etim Akpan, B. A. Ogunnaikpe, Sotolu Omoigui and P.O. Aderibigbe have in common. Can anyone attempt an answer? We might be lucky that a curious school child may be able to answer this question, but I doubt that past and serving Presidents, Governors, Ministers, members of the National Assembly and those who claim to be educated can offer a correct answer.

They have only one thing in common: they wrote the final lyrics of our current National Anthem drawing from the submissions made by different individuals when the military for some inexplicable reason decided that we needed a new anthem. If I ask what anyone remembers about a certain Benedict Odiase, many might just say, from the name, he must be a Bini man. In reality, he set the music for our national anthem and directed the Police Band in 1978.

Sadly, with the nation no longer concerned with History, we can understand that nothing like this inspires us.

It is conceivable that when we decided on a new anthem, we had hoped that a new dawn awaited us. The old anthem had enjoined us to: stand in brotherhood even if tribe and tongue may differ and called on us to serve our motherland. We called upon God to help us to build a nation where no man is oppressed. The second anthem enjoined Nigerians to rise and obey the nation's call. It hoped that the labours of our heroes past, shall never be in vain. Notice that in the second anthem, fathers had taken over and Motherland had become Fatherland and with a stained banner and oppression everywhere (military coup, blood and civil war), we now only hope to build a nation where peace and justice reign.

Perhaps, for General Obasanjo and his Supreme Military Council, a new anthem and a new Constitution were part of the efforts at putting the past behind us and asserting our independence as a nation. Who would have imagined that barely five years into the new anthem in which we had been praying for God to guide our leaders right and begging Him to help our youth the truth to know, that the military would destroy the foundations of these dreams by a coup and set the nation back again? Today, Nigerians merely sing the national anthem but it would seem to have lost its flavour and appeal. The anthem is no longer a call to moral arms. Indeed, thanks to the Police bands and our children, as otherwise, most of our citizens from our Presidents, Professors, Bishops, Ambassadors, Senators, Governors cannot recite the words of our national anthem. It is a measure of how the milk of patriotism has been totally drained.

It is important to pose the question, where really did we take the wrong turn? At what point did we lose the compass? This is the subject of many books and I will not attempt to address the issues in a short lecture such as this. To address these issues, I will identify what and where I think we took wrong turns and why and how tribe and tongue became weapons of war rather than of brotherhood.

Firstly, I will look at how and when we took the wrong turn. Secondly, I will look at how tribe and tongue began to differ, leading to the destruction of the foundation of our brotherhood and sisterhood. Thirdly, I will briefly look at diversity and pose the question as to whether the differences in tribe and tongue by themselves account for our tragic history. I will briefly illustrate how others have managed these differences. By way of Conclusion, I will try to look at what challenges the new generation of Nigerians who are graduating today may face

1: Nigeria and the Road Not Taken:

Let me start with the timeless poem, The Road Not Taken, by the famous American poet, Robert Frost (1874-1963). As almost every stanza speaks to our situation, please permit me to reproduce the words of the entire poem. It goes thus:

*Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;*

*Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim
Because it was grassy and wanted wear,*

*Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,*

*And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way
I doubted if I should ever come back.*

*I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference*

This poem has been subjected to different interpretations and this is not the place to subject it to further interrogation or criticism. The lessons in the poem serve us whether as individuals, families, communities or nations. First, life is about choices and these choices are never perfect. No one has the opportunity to see right up to the end of the road of his or her life. However, Frost was honest enough to know that faced with a choice of two roads, he could not travel both. He looked far and he saw where the road bent in the undergrowth. He was honest enough to know that although the roads did look alike, there might never be only one bend on the road. He knew that in the end, each road has to have a bend, a signpost of uncertainty.

Frost sensed that this would be a long journey because, as he said, way leads to way. Again, he is honest to know that as they say, you do not cross one river twice. So, he admits that much as he might dream, there is no guarantee that he would come back to the same

road again. He summons history, knowing that its judgment would happen, long after he and the choice he made are gone. So, yes, he took a risk and was ready to live with the consequences. It was decision based on courage, courage built on hope, and hope had faith as its foundation. It is not so much what history remembers, but for him, what is most important is that he took a decision and he took a turn.

What does this say to us today when we look back at Nigeria? We have lacked the courage to take some of the tough decisions that would have changed our country today. We found the discipline and demands of equality enshrined in our Democracy difficult to uphold and therefore we opted to cohabit with feudalism. The result is that we have constructed a rickety double-decker identity vehicle whereby we inhabit one section as citizens and another as subjects. Government is unable to secure the loyalty of its citizens who prefer to preserve their reverence and loyalties to their local communities. The consequences of our lack of clear choices now stare us in the face. We are unable to submit to a single loyalty code. The elites steal from government and return home to feather the local nest presided over by the local hegemon before whom they prostrate as favourite sons and daughters adorned with feathers of recognition and appreciation.

Today, our youth face an uncertain future, one that is marked by the debris of broken dreams, journeys started but not completed or disrupted. We often fear to do something new because it has never been done before. The real reason why we stagnate is because we tend to say, this is how it has always been done, and our ancestors did it this way. In the name of culture, our development has continued to stagnate. In the name of cultural preservation, we are

wearing beads we do not produce, turbans we do not weave, and pouring libation with cheap drinks we do not produce. It is of us that Gibran said: Pity that nation that wears a cloth it does not weave, eats a bread it does not harvest, and drinks a wine that flows not from its own winepress. The consequences of the road not taken are what we live with now. They have prepared the ground for why tribe and tongue now differ. It is to this that we shall now turn.

2: How Tribe and Tongue Began to Differ:

It is not uncommon to hear Nigerians describe themselves or their heroes as being de-tribalised Nigerians. Although this is supposed to be a measure of how reliable or fit for public office these people are, in reality, it says nothing about their character, patriotism or degree of honesty. We are supposed to assume that for these people, ethnicity does not matter in the decisions that they take. This truism is popular but false because it is built on shallow sand. In reality, very often, these so called detribalized Nigerians are people who have a rather wide social circle or network of friends who could also be partners in crime, depending on the nature of the interests they pursue!

So, there are detribalized politicians, businessmen and women as well as detribalized armed robbers and crooks in the system. For, when you probe them further, they are detribalized just because their drivers, cooks, stewards, mistresses, girlfriends cover this wide social circle. If they were detribalized, they would put the nation first and not their selfish pursuits. When next you hear about a detribalized Nigerian; probe a little deeper, because on Monday morning, that same man can wear the garb of bigotry.

The first mistake we may make is to assume that ethnicity, tribe and tongue do not matter. They all do. This has been the reality of human existence from the beginning of time. The challenge has been how to turn diversity into an asset, how to create a society where each citizen can have a sense of belonging and believe in fairness and justice. Cain and Abel were blood brothers and they spoke the same language, yet Cain murdered his brother. It is the institutions that we put on the ground and as we see in the case of Cain, he had to face God's punishment after his crime. If people do not feel a sense of equality before the law, then, differences become magnified.

For example, it might be fair to say that the British did their best and left behind a structure and a bureaucracy that could have delivered on services and welfare. They laid the foundation for a pretty sound educational and economic base. Amidst the fears and anxieties of the Minority ethnic groups about the prospects of domination by the dominant ethnic groups in the country, they at least set up the Willinks Commission in 1958 to listen to the fears of various groups across the country. They laid the foundation for managing the differences arising from the religious worldviews in the northern region by sending out a delegation to explore the best ways of managing Sharia Law and the British common Law. They resolved this obvious conflict of laws by administering a Penal code for the northern region. Today, the crisis in the middle belt is a crisis of whether the successors wish to accept the equality and rights of other citizens in the country.

Imperfect as this may have been, it did succeed in managing the differences among the peoples. They left us a regional political arrangement that took cognizance of our geopolitical and cultural

differences by administering a provincial arrangement that has stood the test of time in almost every plural post-colonial state in Africa and Asia. While other nations of Africa and Asia have relatively held on to these boundaries till date, it is the military in Nigeria that destroyed them by creating states. Think back and count how many nations that emerged from British colonialism and transformed from Provinces to States. Each state boundary is a potential zone over the war over land or identity.

It can be argued that the failure of the competing elites to manage diversity, marked by both ethnicity and regionalism, led to the first military coup. Indeed, managing the fallout of the coup tested the commitment of the competing elites. Nigeria could have survived both the coup and the civil war and still recovered to build a strong nation had the military not made wrong choices. The first wrong choice in my view was the decision to create new states rather than carrying through the difficult negotiations from Aburi, no matter their consequences. For, as we know, rather than managing the challenges thrown up by the coup, the military government decided to create new states. The decision to create states was a reflex reaction to stop the ambitions of Col. Ojukwu. As we know, the decision did not stop the war and the rest is history.

Notwithstanding the coups of 1966 and 1967, and the three-year civil war, the decision of the military to stay on in power was one of the worst decisions. The military had embarked on a scare mongering culture of fear that deepened the hostilities among our people and led to the distrust of politics and politicians. The military itself which had the sole monopoly of violence and had used violence to secure power widened the gap of confidence between the people and their politicians. Politics lost its glamour

and politicians were projected as thieves and criminals while the military deceived the people by presenting themselves as heroes, redeemers and patriots.

As a result of this fear, politics and politicians were diminished as the military dug their heels into power. With limited maturity and experience, lacking training and proper understanding of the texture of the country, the military turned the nation into a huge laboratory for experiment. Patriotic politicians with sound ideas and brains like Alhaji Tafawa Balewa, Alhaji Ahmadu Bello, the Sarduna of Sokoto, who laid the foundation of our nation fell by the bullets. Those who survived like Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, Sam Ikoku, Bola Ige, Sam Mbakwe, Abubakar Rimi, Solomon Lar and a host of others were subdued through imprisonment, intimidation, detention, trials, blackmail and even murder. Politics became unattractive to men and women of honour and increasingly, the space became a theatre for those who could swim in its shark-infested waters.

Seduced by the aura of power, in the heat of the oil boom, the military appetite increased. Thus, it strengthened its grip on power while diminishing politics. Gradually, ethnic and regional politics began to destroy the cohesion of the military as an institution and ethnic and regional interests subordinated national interests. With the erosion of their so-called esprit de corps and a high culture of coups and counter coups, the myth of the military collapsed and the system occasionally threw up men of questionable integrity and patriotism. All one needs to do is to look at some of the coup speeches of the time to see the perception these people had of Nigeria. These speeches hurriedly written suggested that even some of the coup plotters had no plan and no idea what they wanted to do. Do you recall that after those warped speeches, the

last lines called on Nigerians to stay by their radios for further announcements. The bile, anger, frustration and hate in those speeches are evidence of troubled mind with too many demons to fight.

Rather than build up institutions to encourage cohesion and progress, the military regimes continued to parcel out the country into more states and Local Government Councils. Meanwhile, as the political space was opening up, the government had less and less resources to sustain the fiscal needs of new States and Local Government councils. States and Local government councils reproduced the same characteristic of state capture, prebendalism and clientelism as their masters and sponsors at the higher levels. This opening of the political space created a greater sense of ethno-regional and religious consciousness with each stage of local government creation marked by celebrations of independence. Yesterday's brothers and sisters became enemies, with the members of the new state or local government area celebrating their freedom from oppressive enemies. The new leaders of States and Local Governments often marked this independence by giving their kith and kin of yesterday short notice to pack and go. Allegations of domination versus marginalization filled the air as yesterday's oppressed became today's oppressors, thus renewing the circle of suspicion, fear, hatred, anxiety and heightened sense of difference.

Another serious mistake that engendered a negative sense of difference in tribe and tongue was in the area of Education. With power falling increasingly into the hands of armed men and their political counterparts, a culture of banditry and state capture destroyed the foundations of education; pillaging the resources of state became the end game. Military expenditure dwarfed

expenditure in Education and with the intellectual class posing a serious threat; Education took a lower rung in the ladder. Teaching became an exercise in drudgery and it attracted only those who had nowhere else to turn or were too old to compete elsewhere. Appointments of Vice Chancellors became an extension of state patronage with Vice Chancellors and Rectors becoming largely stooges to those in power. Despite the slight changes today, the Universities are no longer seen as pivotal institutions for national development.

Over the years, a culture of the establishment of State Universities has emerged to serve two purposes. First, in some cases, State Universities were set up as a way of asserting independence from the Federal Government or addressing perceived federal neglect. Governors wanted to show how anxious they were to generate local manpower, often undermining the sense of national cohesion. Sadly, again, most of these State Universities have reproduced the same contradictions faced by the federal universities. They have too often become theatres and battlegrounds for the local elite to angle for positions and appointments.

Today, both Federal and State Universities have gradually become hostages to the forces of ethnic, regional and religious politics and power play. Our Universities now have very little time and interest in serious academic activities and research. Cultism among students is merely a mirror reflection of the dirty power play at the higher levels of administration. Most federal universities, rather than reflect the aspiration of the nation have become incubators of the worst form of ethnic or religious politics. Discrimination based on religion, ethnicity and even political loyalties and other cleavages are rife in our Universities.

In 2014, I delivered the convocation Lecture in the University of Uyo titled, To Heal a Fractured Nation. In it, I argued that the federal government laid the foundation for the emergence of this distortion of our national identity when it decided to name federal Universities after their local heroes. In their heydays, University of Ibadan, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Ahmadu Bello University, University of Calabar, Lagos, Port Harcourt among others were the theatres of intellectual excellence, attracting some of the best brains from across the world. I pointed out that it was a grave mistake for the federal government to have named Universities in Ife, Kano, Sokoto, or Awka after such favourite sons as Obafemi Awolowo, Ado Bayero, Usman dan Fodio, and Nnamdi Azikiwe. \

An imaginative government anxious for national cohesion could for example have distributed these great names across the country and enabled them to be celebrated and appreciated outside their immediate areas of birth. Imagine if Ahmadu Bello University had been in Ife, Obafemi Awolowo in Zaria, or Nnamdi Azikiwe in Kano, and so on. Now, it is too late because a grievous and divisive wound has been inflicted. It is a measure of how bad things have become that this would be an unthinkable thought today.

Today, this narrow mindedness is being exploited because these universities have been turned into fiefdoms, placing the interests of the local communities over and above those of the nation and other citizens. Only favourite sons and daughters often hold key Management positions in these Universities with little attention paid to qualifications and quality. The National Universities Commission must look beyond regulating academic standards and turn attention to how much these Universities reflect the aspirations of our nation and how much they create a sense of

belonging to all citizens. In some of these federal Universities, local customs trump national, constitutional rights in such areas as freedom of worship and religion. Despite federal funding, today, Christians are flatly denied places of worship in most federal Universities in northern Nigeria despite the ubiquity of mosques. If Universities that should be the platform for preparing leaders of tomorrow exhibit this bigotry, what do we expect in Abuja?

The final mistake that has exacerbated the difference between tribe and tongue is in the area of the operations of the Nigerian bureaucracy. Successive military regimes sought to create the bureaucracy in the image and likeness of their visions. Over the years, as corruption buried its teeth into the entire fabric of the nation, the bureaucracy became consumed in corruption. Promotions in the bureaucracy became the stuff of politics and merit gave way to patronage often based on ethnic, religious or even political affiliations. Promotion based on ethnicity or religion was common depending on the affiliations of those in power. Today, public officers pride themselves on how much they have recruited persons from their clans, communities, or faiths. Lift the veil after a senior officer has left his or her post today and you will see how an entire system has become domesticated to meet the narrow needs.

Finally, the most dangerous area where the difference between tribe and tongue has been exacerbated is in the area of religion. Since the end of colonial rule, no single President of Nigeria has demonstrated a clear commitment to address the issue of the real role of religion in public life. Not one. In northern Nigeria, the government has continued to confuse feudalism with religion with successive governments merely adopting the attitudes of appeasement. The gains made by the late Sardauna of Sokoto in

collaboration with the colonial government in the area of defining the role and place of law and religion in Nigeria have been squandered. The vacuum has now been exploited by politicians who continue to manipulate the religion of Islam as a platform for political power while keeping millions of their people impoverished and ignorant.

For example, the so-called debate over the status of Sharia law remains an issue whenever northern politicians feel that their power base is threatened. Defending religion has become the task of civil servants and public officials who angle for power. The federal and state governments on the other hand have come to see state patronage of religion through the sponsorship of Pilgrimages as a form of collaboration. The real role of traditional rulers in northern Nigeria remains confused with religion. This has only further deepened our problems and sense of division as citizens. Today, we all see ourselves as Christians and Muslims and not citizens of one nation. The list of confusion is long, but we must bring this conversation to a close. By way of conclusion, what does the future look like and how is the new generation expected to face these challenges? What lessons can we draw from the experience of others?

4: Summary and Conclusion: Managing Tribe and Tongue:

One of the greatest American spiritual writers and public speakers of all time, the late Bishop Fulton Sheen, once stated that in life we have only two choices: “Never forget that there are only two philosophies to rule your life: the one of the cross, which starts with the fast and ends with the feast. The other, of Satan, which starts with the feast and ends with the headache.” Basically he is telling us that either we Fast now and have the Feast later, or we have the Feast now and the Fast later. These choices are not different from

the choices put before us by the poet, Robert Frost above. If we follow Archbishop Sheen's analogy, it seems safe to say that the Nigerian political elite chose the Feast rather than the Fast. The facts now stare us in the face: a country in total decay and disarray, a nation with no moral compass and no clear navigational aids, a people severely fractured and disoriented. Nigeria shows no sign of direction in any shape or form. Everywhere you turn, the faces are forlorn with citizens looking as if they are on their way back from a funeral.

Hundreds of billions of naira and dollars and over fifty years later, the nation barely hovers around 3,000 megawatt of power. Hundreds of billions and over fifty years later, there are no federal highways, no railways, no water, no food. Everywhere you turn, shame stares us in the face. Does this look like a nation that can fight and win a war against corruption? I am not sure because the lack of all the above listed items is corruption in capital letters.

President Buhari was right when he said: If we do not kill corruption, corruption will kill us. The APC government has continued to lament about corruption, but playing politics and rejecting history. We are told that the corruption we face now is a product of the last 16 years of the malfeasance of the PDP. No one doubts that the PDP did a lot of horrible things and not many of them have stopped though. But up till three years ago, didn't most of the key actors today cut their teeth in the PDP? But can we really speak of corruption in Nigeria without a sense of history and how the military by its culture of coup and counter coups, sowed the seeds for what we are reaping today? The immobility in the fight against corruption has made a pantomime.

Technically, the war against corruption is unwinnable if we imagine

that one day we shall have a corrupt free society. Corruption is another word for poverty, injustice, insecurity, nepotism, a culture of might is right, a feeling of emptiness and helplessness. Corruption is not a disease from which we can be cured. Corruption can only be contained by development, strong institutions that serve as vehicles of restraint against human greed and infringement. President Buhari should have been more honest in admitting that he and his fellow military men laid the foundation for the tragedy that has befallen the nation. The PDP may have become a willing undertaker, but the patient was poisoned a long time ago. Fighting corruption is beyond politics.

Like fighting drugs, fighting corruption is not measured by the enthusiasm or patriotism. Like our President, President Rodrigo Duterte, seeming mentally unstable came with guns blazing to fight drugs in the Phillipines. He adopted the most unorthodox methods and when the Catholic Church called his attention to his thuggish methods, he resorted to abuse and insults. He arrested, tortured and murdered thousands of his citizens. In less than one year, he has become exhausted and suspended the war, he himself coming down with a disease resulting from his years of smoking. He has suddenly discovered his problem is the Police not the drug barons. Now, he has decided to take up the Police. The former President of Colombia, the haven of drug barons himself warned Mr. Duterte that he could never win the drug war if he treated it as merely a law and order matter. The drug problem like corruption, he argued is a social problem requiring social solutions. There is a clear lesson here for those who boast about a war against corruption in Nigeria but applying the wrong diagnosis of seeing it as a law and order matter.

One day I accidentally stumbled on some information about, The Ten Best, Worst, Most Educated and the Least Educated Leaders in Africa. To my greatest surprise, Nigeria did not feature in any of the lists. On the scale of leadership, sadly we have never produced the best and happily, we have not produced the worst. However, it is clear that education is necessary; but not a sufficient condition for leadership.

Against the backdrop of this gloomy picture, you might ask, where is the hope? Well, some of my critics have said that when I speak, I leave the windows open and that I do not draw lessons or conclusions and that I do not tell people what to do. Whenever I hear these criticisms, I am actually happy because that is what I want to convey; namely, the fact that I am also a foreign traveler searching for knowledge. My job is to offer you a fruit and not to masticate it for you. After all, I am just lucky to have this platform. Most of you here are far better qualified than me to speak to the issues here.

However, what should we say to young people as they step into public life today in Nigeria? Sadly but understandably, young people do not see much to be enthusiastic about. There are stories of many young men and women who have finished the National Youth Service and decided they would rather repeat it. Those leaders ahead of them have either continued to change their ages, refusing to retire, or have filled up the spaces with their kith and kin. But is all lost? No! Amidst the circling gloom, there is hope in the air.

I do not believe that the problem with our country is necessarily

about bad leadership or that too many bad people have governed us. It is fair to say that we have had some really fine gentlemen and gentlewomen at the helm of affairs in our country, men and women who truly loved the country and wanted to do good. The problem is that their good intentions were not enough because nations do not run on good intentions or claims of patriotism. The most important thing that has been missing is the lack of a clear programme of recruitment to public life. Too many people stumbled into power by accident and quick fixes. A coup culture has continued to trail our politics which is expressed in the constant subversion of due process by those seeking public office. The nation has lacked men and women seeking power by the most decent means. Political platforms founded on deceit and bereft of moral standards cannot produce leaders with high moral standards. It is a culture of military coups that sowed volatility into the polity.

Diversity can and should be a great national asset if, like an orchestra, a country has visionary leaders who can harmonize the gifts and talents of its people into a beautiful music of unity. Diversity will remain a liability if every citizen, perhaps frustrated by poor leadership, decides to do his or her own thing, or survive on their own devices, whims and caprices as it is the case now. It is institutions that regulate and ensure the proper management of diversity. Such institutions include effective Constitutions, a culture of discipline and submission to the rule of law, and a deliberate pursuit of the common good of each citizen. No matter the range of talents, no team can succeed if every player decides to rely on his or her own skills. Victory is the result of co-ordination, co-operation and collaboration of all the members of the team. This is the stuff of leadership.

A system with no succession plan is bound to suffer the malfunction that the Nigerian state has been subjected to. A situation where Presidents and Governors, not the electorate, decide who will succeed them is an abuse of Democracy and process. It is a reflex of the inferiority complex that our so called elected officials suffer. They fear an open process that will allow our people to freely choose. Today, as the late Professor Claude Ake said, our people are merely voting without choosing their leaders.

Although we have such bodies as the National Human Rights Commission, Public Complaints Commission and the National Legal Aid Council, the lofty ideals of these institutions have been weighed down by bureaucratization, lack of adequate funding and government interference. They have become subject to state interference, cronyism and patronage. Advocacy must become a tool for civil society groups, faith communities and other platform to confront the state. Here, there is almost no substitute to judicial activism.

For example, it was the Supreme Court of the United States that opened the gates of opportunity for black people through the landmark, epoch-making ruling that came to be known as Brown vs. Board of Education in 1954. The inspiring efforts of Presidents John Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson would finally find expression in the signing of the Civil Liberties Act in 1964. Most of these opportunities became possible through the sacrifices of people like Justice Thurgood Marshall, Rev. Martin Luther King, Malcolm X, Rosa Parks, and a host of others. Institutions like the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, NAACP, and the Southern Baptist Leadership Convention, SBLC, among others. These individuals used these platforms to help America come to

terms with laying the foundation for the management of diversity. It is on their shoulders that people like Barack Obama rode to the historic Presidency.

By establishing the Commission for Racial Equality in 1976, the British Government sought to address issues of racial injustice that still existed among the citizens. The government knew that mere declarations of good intentions were not enough to ensure justice and equity. Thus, for the lofty prayers in our national anthems to be answered or for the letter and spirits of our Constitutions to become real, governments must ensure that these institutions work for the benefit of the weak in society. Citizens must also develop the courage to stand together in solidarity but there is no substitute for judicial activism and a dynamic civil society teaming up with members of the faith community to celebrate our common humanity.

To our new graduates who are stepping into public life, prepare for both the best and the worst. I read somewhere that the Obamas had a peculiar way of bringing up their children. According to Mrs. Obama, she and her husband asked their children what sports they loved or hated the most. While they encouraged them to engage in the sports they loved, they also insisted that they learn the sports they hated. In their innocence, when the children asked why, the parents told them that life will never always offer you only what you want. Wherever you find yourself, know that God has put you there. I often tell the mostly Christian and southern Youth Corpers sent to Sokoto to get to know the language, make friends, love the people and never seek an easy way out. You never know what the future will bring and whom you will need to rely on. I can tell because it has worked very well for me.

As for managing tribe and tongue, the first thing to acknowledge is that tribe and tongue are a gift of God. Like all gifts, it can be subject to abuse. What we face in Nigeria today is a series of consequences of wrong turns and wrong choices whose negative impact has accumulated over the years. Rather than see diversity as an obstacle to development, what we need to aspire to and help to create is an environment where the energies of our diverse peoples can be properly channeled. This is a task to which each and every one must commit. It is difficult to imagine how we might mend these broken tongues. But, with the right leadership and the right courage and vision, our tribe and tongue will continue to differ, but they will not necessarily become such deadly weapons of war. Things might get progressively worse if Nigeria does not take a turn earlier than later.

As you step into the future, remember that your life is a gift from God with a purpose and a mission. Happiness will not lie in what you acquire, what positions you hold or how much money you make. True happiness will lie in discovering your mission, your vocation in life and fulfilling it. Happiness will depend on your understanding that God has written your name in the palm of His hand and that He is with you. I read a strange story in the Daily Trust Newspaper of February 15th, 2017. A young lady, Jane Park won the sum of one million pounds (some N382m) with her first ticket in 2013. Today, barely three years later, she says she feels empty. According to her: At times, I feel like winning the lottery has ruined my life. I thought it would make it ten times better but it has made it ten times worse. I have material things but apart from that, my life is empty.

Money is good and without it life could be miserable. However, it is

not everything. What are most important are the choices we make in life. One of Mahatma Gandhi's friends, to taunt him asked: If you saw two bags, one full of money and the other full of wisdom, which would you choose? Gandhi said: I would take the money of course. Knowing him for his disciplined and frugal life, his friend was shocked and derided him saying, Personally, I would take the bag of wisdom. But, Gandhi said to him; Each one should take only what he does not have. Do you know what you do not have? Ask God to help you to choose well.

Finally, the challenges envisioned by those who composed our first national anthem are still with us but they are indeed worthy aspirations. We must seek to mend the fractures in our society by looking out for the other. All our religions and cultures teach us about the need to stand together in love. Life is hard, but we cannot surrender to selfishness. Learning to stand in solidarity and seeing God in one another is the essence of our being human. We all have opportunities every day to live out these realities. We are all where we are today because we stood on the shoulders of others. Let us not hesitate to offer others a shoulder to lean on.

I want to leave you with something that I stumbled on some time ago. I do not remember even where I found it but it is a very useful lesson for you as you step into the future. It is titled, It is In Your Hands: It goes thus:

A tennis racket is useless in my hands. But a tennis racket in Ms. Serena William's hands is worth billions of Naira. Remember:

It depends whose hands it is in.

A rod in my hands will keep an angry dog away. But a rod in Moses' hands parted the mighty Red Sea.

Remember: It depends whose hands it is in.

A catapult in my hand is a toy and it might manage to kill a bird.
But a catapult in David's hand was a mighty weapon that fell the
all mighty Goliath.

Remember: It depends whose hands it is in.

Two fishes and 5 loaves of bread in my hand are just enough for
breakfast for my family.

But two fishes and 5 loaves of bread in
my Lord Jesus' hands fed thousands.

Remember: It depends whose hands it is in.

A certificate from this University is a stepping stone to greatness.

Remember: It depends whose hands it is in.

My dear friends the choice is yours. The keys to the doors of your
future are in your hands. Please make the right choices and may
God accompany you. Thank you for your patience.