

The Metaphysical Implications of the Nigerian National Anthem and Pledge

Sunday Layi Oladipupo, PhD

Department of Philosophy, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria

Corresponding Author*

Sunday Layi Oladipupo

Article History

Received: 11.04.2021

Accepted: 20.04.2021

Published: 12.11.2021



Abstract: This discourse, using the analytical method of philosophical investigation, sets to examine the economic and socio-political implications of the Nigerian national anthem and pledge. In doing this, selected lines from the Nigerian national anthem and pledge were analyzed within the socio-political and developmental process that confronts Nigeria society. The paper, therefore, presents a metaphysical understanding of the life-style of the political elites and civil servants as it is being affected by the wordings of the anthem and pledge. The treatise adopts the meaning of anthem as a song that has special importance for a country, an organization or a particular group of people and is sung on special occasions while the pledge is conceived as a formal promise to be loyal often make by people standing in front of the flag with their right hand on their heart. The paper concludes with a meta-logical argument that the wordings of the anthem and pledge though look ordinary possesses far-reaching implications that could be positive or negative, despite the contemporary realities that suggested that the powers and significance of the words that constitute the anthem and pledge seem to have been lost.

Keywords: socio-political, Nigerian national anthem,

Introduction

Every nation of the world has its designed anthem and pledge. These two symbolically tell the citizens and individuals that dwell in such a nation what the nation stands for. Anthem is usually in a musical tone that is often sung during an important occasion that portends national pride, such as President's address, sporting events (football) in particular, school assemblies where it is often sung along with the national pledge, etc. While the pledge seldom in a poetic manner is often recited in a special gathering that attached meaning to the co-existence of the nation. The eleventh edition of the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* captured the meaning of the anthem as "a rousing song identified among a particular group or a cause." Nigeria as an independent nation has its own anthem and pledge. The wordings of the Nigerian anthem and pledge have their credence that presupposes loyalty and sacrifice of the hero's past and the need to sustain it both by the leaders and followers. However, despite the fact that everyone, young and old, leaders and followers utter these words at different fora, the irony of it lies in the fact that as soon as time passes, it's as if the words were never spoken.

The story in contemporary Nigeria society, however, is antithetical to what Nigeria's anthem and pledge resonate. This is not unconnected with the way and manner in which both the leaders and followers who have sung and pledge their loyalty to the nation have turned to be clogged in the wheel of its developmental agenda. This, is, because, the actions and inactions of the current Nigerians **put abeyance to** the struggle of the heroes past who laboured tirelessly to make the country better than they met it. It is, instructive therefore to argue that though, there were some identified differences in and among Nigerian heroes, yet, it could be said of them that they serve their fatherland with a high sense of unity and sense of duty to make Nigeria great without necessarily chanting the divisionary anthem of I and my tribe and/or a geopolitical amalgam of the current crop of leaders.

It is within this given, that this discourse sets to explore the metaphysical implications of the Nigerian National Anthem and Pledge with the view to demonstrating the relevance of humanities in our body politics. And, since philosophy as an academic discipline deals with the search for knowledge, where metaphysics as one of its traditional branches try to unravel the nature of ultimate reality with the understanding of philosophy as that enterprise that “studies the principles encoded in practice and thought systems” (Falola, 2016:90) justifies the essence of what follows in this piece and humanity in national development.

A Philosophical Analysis of Nigerian National Anthem and Pledge

The Nigerian national anthem and pledge look like a poem with three stanzas. The first and second stanzas are made up of nine lines while the third stanza, that is, the pledge contains six lines. The first stanza's message is directed to the citizens of the country. It is a charge, a clarion call to action. The first word “Arise” communicates volumes. Two composite sentences could be logically deduced from the first stanza, though put in a poetic manner where each line starts with a capital letter. This does not make each of the lines a complete thought but a clause that explains a meaningful call to service. Thus, the capital letter as used at the beginning of each line suggests the emphasis that each of the lines represents.

The nine lines reduced to two sentences is simplified by the combination of the first four lines which give; Arise, O Compatriots, /Nigeria's call obey/To serve our Fatherland/With love and strength and faith. The second sentence, however, is comprised of the last five lines, that is; The labour of our heroes past/Shall never be in vain, /To serve with heart and might/One nation bound in freedom, /Peace and unity. These two formulated sentences from the first stanza of the Nigeria national anthem revealed the complex structure of the nation as both sentences under the rule of sentence formation qualified to be compound sentences which in a way shows the unarguable fact that Nigeria does not have a simple structure. This might have been responsible for the submission of some founding fathers of Nigeria nation such as Awolowo, Azikwe, Balewa, among others. A peep into their previous postulation(s) as to what constitutes Nigeria is relevant in this guise. For instance, Obafemi Awolowo according to Chinua Achebe (1983:11) states:

I was going to make myself formidable intellectually, morally invulnerable, to make all the money that is possible for a man with my brains and brawn to make Nigeria.

While Nnamdi Azikwe was quoted by Achebe (1983:11) states:

That henceforth I shall utilize my earned income to secure my enjoyment of a high standard of living and also to give a helping hand to the needy.

Achebe (1983:11) however, criticizes the duo by arguing that their thoughts are more likely to produce aggressive millionaires than selfless leaders of their people. Nevertheless, Achebe's position cannot holistically be taken because of the fact that Nigeria as merged together by the colonial masters did not receive the blessing of the Nigerians. In fact, what we have in Nigeria is a replica of the nation-state and not a nation in the real sense of it. No wonder Awolowo (1947:47-48) posits that:

Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense as there are 'English', 'Welsh', or 'French'. The word 'Nigerian' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not.

In the same vein, the former Prime Minister of Nigeria, Tafawa Balewa according to Akin Alao (2008:1) has this to say:

Since the amalgamation of Southern and Northern provinces in 1914, Nigeria has existed as one country only on paper; it is still far from being united. Nigerian unity is only a British intention for the country.

The last straw that broke the camel's back deducible from a philosophical analysis of the complex nature of Nigeria nation is the one echoed by late C. O. Ojukwu (1969:1) who asserts that:

Nigeria never was and can never be a united country. The very nature of Nigeria inevitably gave rise to political power groups, goaded by sectional rather than national interests.

In view of Ojukwu's position, Nigerians have to come together to discuss whether they still want to remain as a nation or not. If this is attained then some of the contradictions that marred Nigerian unity, peace, and progress, the bedrock on which Nigeria's national anthem and pledge are built could be minimized so that the essence of Nigeria's oneness could be meaningfully attained. This is nothing short of the calling for the restructuring of Nigeria.

When all these are done, then there would be a need to adopt the principle of nature-relatedness, most especially by the leaders. The principle of nature-relatedness, here, means the process by which the political leaders will take only that which they need from the nation's resources instead of siphoning, embezzling, and looting of the treasury. This position is well articulated by Awolowo (1977:209) who said that "it would be madness for anyone to possess too much of either perishable farm products or unwieldy cowries." As it is, only a mad and insane leader will take more than he or she needs from the treasury of Nigeria, despite the egoistic nature of man as championed by Thomas Hobbes and John Locke's concept of private property. For instance, Locke argues that as long as the individual can use his strength to acquire anything he should be allowed to do so. Yet, the contention is that, despite the egoistic nature of man and the idea of private property as articulated by Hobbes and Locke respectively, we need a sovereign who will impose this principle of nature relatedness on us, so that when the leaders are doing their best, the followers must be ready to assist in achieving a sustainable development. It is in this sense

that Collin Powell admonition as cited by Albright (2008:15) becomes imperative. He states that “we will need to work together because we have a great challenge before us. But it is not a challenge of survival. It is a challenge of leadership.”

The second stanza also has nine lines. It presupposes a metaphysical call and/or a kind of invocation to the Divine, a petition to God for help. The call as enshrined in stanza two of the Nigeria national anthem is suggestive of the religiosity of the citizens of the nation. It is a way of showing their utmost belief that success and progress is often a product of one’s ability coupled with divine/metaphysical intervention of the divine being. It follows, therefore, from the stanza that as the opening line of stanza one made a clarion call on the citizens to arise, we must also reference the important role of the divine. This strong belief of the Nigerians is captured in the second stanza of the national anthem which reads:

O God of creation,
Direct our noble cause;
Guide our leaders right
Help our youths the truth to know,
In love and honesty to grow;
And living just and true;
Great lofty heights attain;
To build a nation
Where peace and justice shall reign.

The implication of this metaphysical call on the divine here is suggestive of the fact that given Nigerian religious attitude, it will be difficult to believe that the compatriots that are a call to arise in stanza one of the anthem will actually rise if they were not backed by God. This in a way suggests the strong belief of the Nigerians in the existence of an all-knowing God that could help them in times of trouble.

Ehiabhi (2015:82) seems to have the above clue when he observes that the “anthems from the structural perspective would show that anthem A is politically nationalistic while B is emotionally religious.” Ehiabhi’s view and understanding of the first stanza of the anthem seems to share the opinion of this discourse. However, his holistic reference to religious emotion attached to the second stanza does not tally with the whole essence of religiosity, because religiosity is not all about god. Therefore, his observation as regarded in the second stanza appears not to be all-encompassing. It could however be acceptable within the frame of this piece if religion in this sense is considered a metaphysical enterprise. If this is taken, then one necessarily see the metaphysical import of the notion of God and the strong affinity of transcendentalism as “O God of creation” portends a clarion call on a metaphysical being to “direct the nation’s noble cause, guide the leaders right and help the youths the truth to know; which could only be attained and sustained in love and honesty so as to experience growth while living in justice and truths from where a great lofty height that will promote peace and justice shall reign to build a virile nation.

The third stanza of the Nigeria national anthem is the pledge. It could be considered as a separate stanza, for its wording appears to be a response to the initial two stanzas. This possibility is an upshot of the content of the pledge which professes citizens allegiance to the wellbeing of the nation. On the other

hand, it could be seen as the concluding part of the national anthem. Thus, upon critical reflection, one could subsume that the first and second stanza is where Nigeria calls on her citizens and God to apportion what they need to do for the goodness and progress of the nation, while the third stanza is where Nigerians responded to the clarion call and pledge to uphold the dignity and honour of the land with an expectation that God, the divine, will help them as it is in the last line of the pledge “*So help me God*.” The six lines of the pledge, therefore, are suggestive of a total declaration of the citizens’ allegiance to Nigeria nation. The pledge reads:

I pledge to Nigeria my country,
To be faithful loyal and honest,
To serve Nigeria with all my strength,
To defend her unity,
And uphold her honour and glory,
So help me God.

Given the above analysis, it is enviable to expect the pragmatic effect of the Nigeria national anthem and pledge from the citizens. This expectation is onerous, but do Nigerians really have the pragmatic understanding of the nation’s anthem and pledge? This question, if answered in the affirmative leaves us with much to be desired by the activities of individuals, particularly those that are saddled with the responsibility of ensuring Nigeria unity, oneness, and progress. Hence, the urgent need for a total overhauling of the system within the ambient of the metaphysical connotations of the Nigerian national anthems and pledge.

The essence of this is to correct the erroneous stance of the anti-metaphysicians who are bent on empirical evidence to substantiate any claim. And also, to show that a critical understanding of the effect of metaphysics and how it operates could salvage the hypocritical attitude of Nigerian politicians and civil servants, who are bent on destroying the heritage and commonwealth of Nigeria, without paying their dues to the demand of the national anthem and pledge they often recite, despite the belief that the founding patriots of Nigeria “rested the political space of the nation on a religious foundation,” (Ehiabhi, 2015:82). Putting this in perspective, however, one understands that Ehiabhi purports to drive home the point that the Nigerian national anthem is not ordinary but an offertory that is meant to be guided religiously. This is evident in his reference to the fact that the founding patriots see beyond the physical by resting the political space of the nation on a religious foundation.

The Metaphysical Effect of Nigerian Anthem and Pledge

Nigerians, especially the masses continue to suffer amidst plenty. The dichotomy between the ruling class and the ruled is outrageous. The ruling class who are saddled with the responsibilities of seeing to the welfare of the ruled have turned themselves into vampires, who delight in causing unending pains and agonies to the system at the detriment of the masses. Current discoveries in the political and public sectors of the nation attest to this. For instance, in the face of the assumed and claimed paucity of fund and economic doldrums that the country is confronted with, the national assembly and political office holders remain resolute to get themselves comfortable to the detriment of the working class whose salary

was not paid for months. They continually oppress the masses through the maladministration of the nation's commonwealth that could promote and better the affairs of the nation collectively.

The question, then, is that where is the place of the allegiance these political elites promised to uphold? Answering this question may be arduous; however probable response must be given. In a bid to answer the question, one needs to ponder on other questions such as; What does the National Anthem of Nigeria mean? Did Nigerians know it by heart? How about the National Pledge? Would it be beneficial to learn both by heart and teach them to our family members (children and all)? This plethora of questions is necessary since it is a preponderance fact that a nation is sustained with the patriotism of the citizenry; the National Anthem and Pledge are well focused to bind us together in unity. This must begin with our commitment to taking responsibility and ownership. For instance, the line of the national anthem that states *Bound in freedom, peace, and unity* admonish us to exercise our freedom in such a way that it will promote the peace and unity of the nation not by way of embroidering segregation because the anthem provides us with the essentiality of freedom.

The freedom as espoused here is restricted. While the bound is not negatively used but the attitude of the Nigerian political elites and public servants replicates negativity. If not, how will a leader who occupies an executive position as in the governor of a state who had pledged his loyalty to serve his father land faithfully indulges in not paying workers salary as at when due and yet expect the workers to be loyal and faithful in the discharge of their duties? This action of the executive has caused the nation a lot for the civil servant is no longer serving the nation with all their strength as contained in the national pledge. The negative impact of this negation of the status quo is worrisome and justice needs to be done for the Nigeria that is desirable is one where peace and justice shall reign. In the light of this, it becomes imperative to examine the metaphysical effect of the Nigeria national anthem and pledge on the politicians and civil servants.

By metaphysics, it is meant the study of the totality of reality as such. It is that branch of philosophy that studies the nature of reality in the real sense of what reality connotes. It transcends the physical, thus, metaphysics is beyond what can be comprehended and/or resolved with reference to physical phenomenon alone. Thus, metaphysics in the view of Quinton (1973:235) is an "attempt to arrive by rational means at a general picture of the world." By this, metaphysics tries to provide a broad-spectrum and precise account of the world as a whole, it is in this sense that (Wood, 1970:230) definition of metaphysics as "the search for the ultimate causes of things in existence" becomes relevant in the context of this discourse. Given, this understanding, therefore, it is arguable to suggest that the wordings of the Nigeria national anthem and pledge are not ordinary, though one may assume that it has no implication on those that flout the ethos of what it stands for. This thinking within the context of meta-logical reasoning seems unfounded. The reasoning is rested on the fact that words such as "faithful, loyal, honesty, truth, etc., as contained in the Nigeria national anthem and pledge are metaphysical concepts that have no object that represent them.

The Nigeria national anthem and pledge replicates a metaphysical construct explainable via the metaphysical nature of prayer. And just like the biblical injunction "work and pray," the first stanza suggests the work, that is, a call on the compatriot to obey the clarion call of serving the nation as evident

in stanza one of the national anthem while the second stanza represents a prayer that is metaphysically inclined. It is an action that needs the divine intervention of God, who is a metaphysical object of reference. It is apposite to support this line of reasoning with part of the second stanza of the anthem that says; O God of creation, Direct our noble cause; Guide our leaders right; Help our youths the truth to know, etc.” A critical examination of this wording takes the stanza outside the realm of the ordinary as it suggests the religiosity embedded in the national anthem. Therefore, the second stanza of the anthem is indicative of a metaphysical communication with God, a phenomenon that is beyond the physical realm.

It follows, therefore, that the Nigeria anthem and pledge, though, poetic in nature, is more of oath-taking than poetic recitation. Thus, it implies that whenever any leader, be it in the political, public, or civil service is reciting the anthem and the pledge, it should be down on the individual that he/she is taking an oath of allegiance which have repercussions. The repercussions might be positive or negative. It could be positive if the reciter obey and fulfill his/her part as expected of someone under oath and/or prayer that is done in abstract but manifest in the physical and negative if the reciter fails to abide and fulfil his/her due. A similar experience for an adherent believer in the efficacy of prayer who refused to live by the tenets of religious faith that could facilitate the answer to his prayer.

One is not ignorant of the fact that oath-taking is often done with some object while no object is involved in reciting either the national anthem or the pledge. Nevertheless, the raising of the hand and the salutation during the recitation of either of the anthem and the pledge is sufficient enough as an object. This reality is captured by Bascom (1969:40) who espoused the nitty-gritty of the process and essence of oath-taking. He observed that “a plaintiff may be made to answer to *Ogun*, the god of iron, touching his tongue on an iron object while asking to die if he is not telling the truth, or to drink from the ground at the *Ogboni* house while swearing on the earth.” The plaintiff here is taken to be anybody reciting the national anthem or the pledge and while in the normal oath-taking the plaintiff is expected to say nothing but the truth, the same is expected of whosoever is reciting the national anthem and the pledge. This conforms with Alao’s (2009:20) reference to Sandra Barnes and John Pemberton III that “apart from the use of sanctions and religious symbols to induce the truth, oath-taking was considered a necessary part of encouraging people to say the truth in their dispositions.” Thus, it may be meta-logical to argue that the wordings of the national anthem and the pledge are symbolic to prompt a positive discharge of individual duties by both the leaders and followers. This premonition in a way suggests the fact that oath, as ascribed to Nigeria national anthem and pledge places great moral and metaphysical obligations that have implications on the citizens that are bounded with such Dukor (2007:61), seems to have captured this:

Oaths place great moral and mystical obligations upon the parties concerned and any breach of the covenant is feared to bring about misfortunes. The belief behind oath is that God or some power higher than the individual man will punish the person who breaks the requirement of the oath or covenant ... thus traditional oath-taking is no respecter of persons because every person is ontologically equal in the eyes of the gods.

Placing Dukor's submission within the ambit of the traditional understanding of the metaphysical effect of oath-taking on wrongdoers is sufficient enough to explain the aftermath of those that negatively enriched themselves with the Nigerian commonwealth at the detriment of the nation. This is well-articulated with reference to the Yoruba popular saying *Ile olorelu n pada di ahoro kehin ni* – the household of a politician ends in desolate, *Ohun ti a ba jiya fun ki i pe lowo eni, ohun ti a ba fi ara sise fun ni i pe lowo eni* –

This metaphysical implication as suggested in the above saying is not only applicable to the reciter and/or the politicians but to his household at large, because it is believed that such oath is effective and efficient and cannot but fulfill its mandate. If the reciter then fails to do the needful, the effect will definitely affect him and his household, this is nothing sort of the manifestation of *egun ajogunba* which literally means inherited curse in Yoruba worldview.

Taking the recitation of the Nigeria national anthem and pledge as oath to tutelary deity, therefore, is suggestive of it having metaphysical implications as it is believed that whenever this is done the spirit of the founding fathers and heroes' past is being invoked. The deities here personified the founding father and heroes of Nigeria. It is their labour of love and unity that needs not to go in vain. The agonies and pains that the failure to key into the metaphysical understanding of the wordings of the anthem and the pledge have been causing Nigerians and the nation as a whole is reflective in what often bedeviled those that are saddled with Nigeria commonwealth. They take over such responsibilities by pledging their loyalty to serve the nation in truth, faith, honesty to ensure that peace, unity, and justice reign in the nation.

Evident abound that presupposes that, majority, if not all that have in one time or the other trusted with Nigeria's commonwealth and who had pledged their loyalty to promote the peace and unity of the nation but failed in living up to the expectations end their lives miserably. Those that are able to scale through and were saved by the cold hands of death were not remembered for good while those that tried to pursue the peace and unity of the nation have their memories linger in the annals of Nigeria's history. For instance, apart from history's sake, when last has these names Akintola, Ahmadu Bello, M.K.O Abiola, Sanni Abacha mentioned in Nigeria politics? The likes of Awolowo, Bola Ige, Tafawa Balewa who seem to be relevant are gradually going into extinction as none of their family appears to be relevant in the annals of Nigeria state of today. Even, those still alive who have once recited the national anthem and pledge to uphold the unity and peace of Nigeria are dying in salience, for instance as corny and *maradonic* Ibrahim Babangida was when he was at the helms of affair in this nation when last was he seen in the public? Do you think these happenings are ordinary? These questions, in my own view, are beyond human imagination and defile any physical explanation within the ambit of philosophical discourse. And I suggest that answers to them can only be located within the purview of metaphysical analysis. This is because *won ti forigbape*, that is, they have been cursed.

Conclusion

The foregoing narrative here suggested the metaphysical implications of the Nigerian national anthem and pledge. It revealed the reality that every nation has her anthem and pledge to which Nigeria is not an exception, thus, it equated the anthem and the pledge with an oath. The paper relied on the analysis of

the wordings of the Nigerian anthem and pledges to further its argument with a clarion call on the government of the day to live to its expectation if peace and justice shall reign in the nation. It is, therefore, concluded that until the leaders and the followers do the needful in keeping faith with the wordings of the anthem and pledge they suppose desire of self-perpetuation can only last for a while. That is, history has a way of repeating itself, such that the memories of those that failed to live to the dictate of the anthem and pledge fades away with time while those that respect the tenets of the and anthem and pledge linger on.

References

1. Achebe, C. (1983). *The Trouble with Nigeria*, London: Heinemann.
2. Alao, A. (2008). *The Evolutionary Travail of the Nigerian State and Political System, 1914-1999*, Akure: God's Time Printers Limited.
3. Alao, A. (2009). Judicial Process in Pre-Literate Yorùbá Societies of Southwestern Nigeria. In A. Ajayi, & S. I. Fabarebo, *Oral Traditions in Black and African Culture* (pp. 3 - 26), Palmgrove: Concept Publications Limited.
4. Albright, M. (2008). *Memo to the President*, New York: Harper Collins Publishers.
5. Awolowo, O. (1947). *Path to Nigerian Freedom*, London: Faber and Faber.
6. Awolowo, O. (1977). *The People's Republic*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press.
7. Bascom, W. (1965). *The Yorùbá of Southwestern Nigeria*, New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston.
8. Dukor, M. (2007). The Concept of Justice in African Philosophy. In O. Ike, (Ed.), *Perspectives On African Communalism* (pp. 54 - 72). Canada: Trafford Publishing.
9. Ehiabhi, O. S. (2015). The Nigerian Political Space and the Question of Christian Morality: A Historical Perspective. *ANSU: Journal of Arts & Social Sciences*, 4(I), 81 - 97.
10. Falola, T. (2016). *The Humanities in Africa*, Austin TX: Pan-African University Press.
11. Ojukwu, C. O. (1969). *Biafra: Selected Speeches of C. Odumegwu Ojukwu*, New York: Perennial Library.
12. Quinton, A. (1973). *The Nature of Things*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
13. Wood, R. E. (1970). *The Future of Metaphysics*. Chicago: Quadrangle Books.