



Telephone: (+234) 09064503292  
Facebook: @thenigeriandiplomat

Editor-in-Chief: Toju Micheal Ogbe  
Website: [www.thenigeriandiplomat.com](http://www.thenigeriandiplomat.com)  
Email: [thenigeriandiplomat@gmail.com](mailto:thenigeriandiplomat@gmail.com)

Instagram: [PositiveNaija\\_1](https://www.instagram.com/PositiveNaija_1)  
Twitter: [@PositiveNaija\\_1](https://twitter.com/PositiveNaija_1)

*Those who trust in their riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.*

- Proverbs 11:28

## The Love Of A Nigerian! by Adu Michael Adeyemi

Very few countries are culturally and ethno-religiously as diverse as Nigeria. With over 190 million people divided across more than 250 ethnic groups, over 520 languages, and several religious beliefs and sects, the country is an exemplary sample of a multifarious nation. This is the complexity that many people perhaps fail to comprehend and put into writing.

In spite of the supposed differences still, *volksgeist*, the 'spirit' of the people is not lacking. One may see this diversity in many Nigerian families. A typical Nigerian family could have the parents from distinct ethnic group and separate religious beliefs – with the children, a blend of several cultures, choosing to go with either religion of their parents at their will.

Inter-ethnic and inter-religion marriage is common place. It is perhaps the fabric that has continued to keep the nation together. This has contributed in no small measure to the general religious understanding and tolerance in the country. The country's Constitution even has a provision to the effect that inter-marriage among persons from different places of origin, or of different religious, ethnic or linguistic association or ties must be encouraged.

With this inter-relation, places of worship can be seen sharing walls. Growing up, one would already be accustomed to hearing the resonant church bells and the sonorous voice of the Muezzin calling people to prayer. Each religion performs its services without interference of the other. On worship days, members of a family leave their homes and attend their separate service or *Assalatu*, and return to a dinner of Jollof Rice in the noon – each family mirroring what is obtainable in many families in the country.

The love of a Nigerian for fellow Nigerians and humanity at large is endearing. From the ever-busy streets of Lagos, to the beautiful creeks of the Niger-Delta, and the flourishing lands of Kano; from the places of worship and the market places where people of different climes converge, one can see this in the smiling faces of people who have chosen to be happy and kind even despite the burden that the hard economy may have put on them; one could see this in the unconditional compassion that the Nigerian offers to a complete stranger in the time of need.

Only a few months ago, as part of the UN World Happiness Day, the Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) released its annual World Happiness Index and named Nigerians as the 5th happiest people on earth. In a ranking where Generosity and Social Support were one of the six factors, this has continued to reinforce the notion that despite economic hardship or security challenges in some parts of the country, the populace are highly optimistic and have not lost their sense of humanity.

Since many Nigerians are a blend of many cultures themselves, it is quite an ordinary result that they take joy in welcoming foreigners. With open arms and a big smile, Nigerians are open to meeting new people and welcoming strangers. The populace takes pride in the culture of his or her neighbour and is excited to learn their language and converse with them. It is no wonder that the average Nigerian knows at least a few greeting words in the language of his or her friends. This well-meaning nature is one of the endearing features that many visitors and expatriates in the country speak wonderfully of.

Indeed, one can boast that Nigerians are generally people of peace wherever they are. Save undeniably for exceptional instances, Nigerians have continued to enjoy peaceful co-existence with their fellow citizens. Where a clamour for secession exists – as one may find in Biafra – it has been more for economic reasons than for any love lost.

One of the most optimistic people on earth, the people genuinely want the country to work. This indubitable love is experienced when we all come together and root for the country during international sport events – football especially – when entertainment brings us together, and even more so, the connection and sharing of ideas on Social media by millions of well-meaning Nigerians.

Nigerians are *sui generis* – a one of a kind people who are passionate, selfless, and committed to giving back to the society. The little acts of kindness and compassionate hand that we offer to our friends and neighbours who we see as kindred spirits tells of this.

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