



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)

*Being cheerful keeps you healthy. It is slow death to be gloomy all the time.*

- Proverbs 17:22

## The Love Of A Nigerian! by Ogigbah Esiri

Nigeria; home to over 190 million people, 250 ethnic groups and twice as many languages, is by far the most populated African nation. Naturally the diversity should engender disparity amongst Nigerians, but the reverse is the case as Nigerians have proved that truly there can be unity in diversity. In most big cities in Nigeria it is common to find people from all over the nation and even foreigners present and living together with no form of discrimination. This is perhaps more alarming considering the fact that Nigeria is going through what some would call a dark age, characterized by; a dwindling economy, genocides, increased mortality, rising crime rate, fraudulent activities and many more unfavorable realities. In the midst of the chaos, corruption and poverty, Nigerians have shown time and again that they are indeed a hospitable, patient and well meaning people. Even the somewhat lax security in the nation hasn't been able to stop the arrival of tourists and foreigners. What then is it that makes Nigeria welcoming? What is it that attracts many to this great nation? Surely, it is not the tourist attractions or employment opportunities, neither is it the standard of living in the nation, because many countries surpass Nigeria in these aspects. Then, it must be the people. What is it about Nigerians that makes them different? What genuinely makes Nigerians kind and cooperative? What makes Nigerians tolerant and well-meaning towards one another and humanity today?

There is a charity amongst Nigerians that breaks the boundaries of religion; it is not limited by cultural or ethnic differences, it even goes beyond family ties and relationships. Nigeria happens to be a very religious nation, perhaps the most religious country in Africa. This fact may lead some to conclude that religion is the reason behind the love of a Nigerian. Of a truth Nigeria is considered to be a religious nation and the vast majority of Nigerians are either Christians or they belong to the Islamic religion. These religions preach peace, kindness and love for humanity in general, although they have their differences in their beliefs, these virtues are encouraged no matter the religion. This argument seems plausible at first, but when you consider that it was not until the late nineteenth century that Christianity began to gain ground in Nigeria and that before now Islam was limited to only the northern part of Nigeria, then you may be forced to have a change of heart. It is obvious that even though religion has its part to play, there is still something unseen that makes a Nigerian.

It is said that charity begins at home. Family is the building block of society and the family is the basic institution for the socialization of children. Family is where the child first begins to learn and everyone was once a child. This education may not be formal but it is very effective and it sticks. It goes further to form the values, morals and beliefs of an individual. For example the choice of religion is as a result of the family you were born into, except for some rare cases. There is so much about the Nigerian family that influences the way we behave towards humanity in general. In the Nigerian home visitors are always welcome, not just during festive periods but all through the year. Entertainment is an integral part of every meeting and this practice is passed down from generation to generation, it is also seen in our cordial treatment of outsiders and natives alike. In Nigerian culture families are always extended in contrast to what is practiced in the western world. Even in our schools (secondary and tertiary), there is a level of cooperation that could make one think that everyone was somehow related. In these institutions it is very common to find people who have never known themselves before living as a family in homes and hostels. I believe this level of tolerance and cooperation was inculcated in the family system.

Nigeria has a rich cultural heritage, most practices and core values are common to all traditions, such as respect for elders, brotherly love and hospitality to strangers. Although there are many negative practices associated with many traditions in Nigeria, most of them have been abolished and we are left with these core values that have not been swallowed up by western civilization. The Nigerian culture is so rich that in some rural areas it is hard to tell who belongs to which family. The level of cooperation and togetherness is so high and it transcends to even those residing in the urban cities as once in a while everyone goes back to their roots. The average Nigerian will always greet an elder, even though both parties have never met prior to the exchange of greetings. In the Nigerian culture discipline is non-negotiable, as it can even be administered by those that are not your direct relative. This practice could be seen as abusive in some countries, but I believe it is a show of togetherness and unity and it is something that makes us different as Nigerians.

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