

HISTORY AND THE ART OF NATION BUILDING IN AFRICA: THE NIGERIA EXPERIENCE SINCE 1960

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Abstract

This work focuses on history and the art of nation building in Africa, the Nigeria experience since independence in 1960. One of the biggest challenges African countries have faced since independence is that of nation building. After independence in 1960, the desire to build a just, peaceful, orderly and progressive society has been uppermost in the minds of Nigerian leaders. Unfortunately, over six decades after independence, the spate of crises and acrimony among the peoples have been provoking scholarly debates about the creation of the Nigerian entity. Nation building is viewed as a complex and open-ended process, but that does not mean that people should shy away from embracing the challenge. The paper finds out that, the discipline of history by its very nature and content emerges as the societal repertoire which undeniably preserves the trajectory of how any nation has developed and how nation building has taken place. The paper, thus argues that the story of the development of the nation is well captured through its history. Relying on rich secondary sources, this study further argues that the challenges of living together, of seeking solutions to the multifarious problems and challenges of nation building are not dealt with by denying the historical facts. This paper is



historical; hence, it adopts a qualitative method of analysis. Useful piece of information were obtained from important relevant documents, reports and array of secondary sources.

Key words: History, Nation Building, Africa, Nigeria, Independence.

Introduction

From the time of its attainment of political independence in October 1st, 1960, Nigeria held a lot of promise of becoming a leading nation in Africa. Both in terms of demographic strength, human and natural resources, it eminently qualified to become a model country in Africa. The economy of Nigeria before independence was viable and buoyant enough to sustain the economies of the federal and regional governments immediately after independence. However, the history of Nigeria since its independence had not followed an expected trajectory of continual growth and development in its political, economic, social and infrastructural development.

Since independence, Nigeria has witnessed some arguably unbelievable and unimaginable socio-political difficulties which have found full blown expression in an open call to question the idea of a one Nigeria nation. Specifically, there have been violent socio-political upheavals which have curiously bedevilled the country. The incongruities have manifested in so many ways and have shown themselves as having the potential of bringing to naught the very foundations on which the country is built. Several militant and disgruntled voices have emerged and gathered steam of non-negligible proportions highlighting frustrations about the way Nigeria is governed and especially the way its historic and component parts are held and live together as integral parts of the same nation. Open and dissenting voices have brought to the fore obstacles which beset and negatively



impact the process of structuring, constructing and consolidating the nation Nigeria.

The lessons of the past are priceless. They give a sense of direction. The aged or elderly in the society are revered for their knowledge of the past stemming from their experiences and the wisdom derived thereof. Invariably, what is meant is that the elderly through the lessons of the past are able to peer into the future. By implication, whoever acquires knowledge of the past (through the study of history) is equipped with the wisdom relevant in proffering solutions to present and future problems of individuals, businesses, organizations, nations and the human race. Robert V. Daniels aptly captures the nexus between history and nation-building in his definition of history thus:

History is the memory of human group experience. If it is forgotten or ignored, we cease in that measure to be human. Without history we have no knowledge of who we are or how we have come to be, like victims of collective amnesia groping in the dark for our identity. It is the events recorded in history that have generated all the emotions, the values, the ideals that make life meaningful, that have given men something to live for, struggle over, die for. Historical events have created all the basic human groupings – countries, religions, classes – and all the loyalties that attach to these.¹

In the same vein, Esedebe opines that all efforts at addressing the problems of nation-building in Nigeria must be done in the milieu of Nigerian history in particular and the universal experience of humanity in general.² Nigeria has a rich history that ought to have served as bedrock for the task of nation-building. Her pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial experiences if proficiently exploited should have been a veritable stepladder that will give a lift to Nigeria in the quest for national cohesion



and development.³ Unfortunately, little attention is being given to history. It is considered to be of no relevance in national planning and development. This is reflected in the stereotypical perception of history as mere ‘stories’ and historians as ‘story tellers’. This fallacy has dissuaded many students at all levels from studying history and left in them a vacuum of historical ignorance.

The paper is divided into eight parts. The first part is introduction. This is followed by the conceptual clarification and definition of terms. The third is the theoretical framework on which the work derives its analysis. The fourth discusses the Nigeria in Historical perspective, while the fifth highlights some prevailing contemporary narratives about nation building in Nigeria. The sixth section examines the nature of nation building in Nigeria. The penultimate section is an analysis of the challenges of nation building in Nigeria. This section highlights several factors that bedevilled nation building process in Nigeria. The last part is the conclusion.

This work tends to suggest the difficulties of nation building in Nigeria from a historical perspective in order to stimulate discussion on how the appropriate use of history and historical knowledge can contribute towards understanding the challenges which the country is currently experiencing and thereby suggest the relevance of history and art of history for nation building. The work also focuses on the simple theoretical underpinnings of the subject matter of history and shows how historical concepts inform the basis of the question of nation building in Nigeria. This paper further argues that a better understanding and exploitation of the subject matter of history could provide salutary insights into this important question and bring about a more purposeful and rewarding experience in the arduous task of nation building.



Conceptual Clarification and Definition of Terms

Even though the focus of the discussion is on the way the use of historical knowledge can enhance nation building, there is a need to have a common understanding of the word “History” and nation building.

History

There abound many definitions of History, as there are many scholars of history. V.H. Galbraith, a Professor of History in the University of London and a Director of the Institute of Historical Research simply defines history thus: “History, I suppose, is the Past – so far as we know it.”⁴ Sir Charles Firth, a seventeenth-century English historian sees history as “the record of the life of societies of men, of the changes which those societies have gone through, of the ideas which have determined the actions of those societies and of the material conditions which have helped or hindered their development”.⁵ Professor Frederick Jackson Turner sees history as “the biography of society in all its departments.”⁶ A Prominent Archeologist, Thurstan Shaw views history as “the story of what happened at any time in the past, whether any one wrote down anything about it or not.”⁷ A more acceptable definition of history was given by E.H. Carr, a renowned Cambridge historian when he defined history as “a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past”.⁸ As Gideon Were further puts it, history is not only about the accumulation of hard facts; it is “a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past”.⁹ History is the study of the past particularly as it relates to human beings and their activities. History is about the human being in all the domains which affect or impact his existence and wellbeing. Arthur



Marwick succinctly elaborates on the nature of history and the necessity for studying it.¹⁰

To be accepted as history, any writing about the past must obey the canons of scientific scholarship. Though not in the nature of the physical or exact sciences, historical knowledge must be based on facts and verifiable evidence which has been studied and critically analysed using a clearly defined methodology. Approached from this perspective, sources are an inevitable requirement in the construction of any historical study. Such sources must be critically and carefully assessed, examined, analysed, cross checked and corroborated as far as possible. Like every scientific discipline, history would have no place if it did not contribute towards understanding issues plaguing society, or finding or providing solutions to the problems which “man” and society face. History studies the past in order to understand that past: the actions of man, the motivations and outcomes of man’s thoughts and deeds in order to appreciate, and valorise them for the purpose of understanding the past with a view to coping with contemporary challenges and also being “pro-active” in anticipating the future.¹¹

As the English philosopher and historian Robin George Collingwood stated “history is for human self-knowledge”.¹² To him, the only clue to what man can do is what man has done. The value of history is that it is a good teacher especially concerning what man has done. History is about the build up to what man is. Knowing oneself means knowing first what it is to be a person, secondly knowing what it is to be the kind of person you are and therefore being able to anticipate and possibly reflect on the challenges of the past as a basis for coping with the challenges that are susceptible to arise in the future. History enables man to understand his society and be the master and constructive builder of that society.



The above treatise notwithstanding, it is important to remember that for history to achieve the objectives for which it is intended, the foundational basis of the discipline must be observed. To write credible history the sources used must be credible and incontrovertible. Historical facts and evidence are the most resilient and unavoidable characteristic features that the discipline has; when well researched, historical facts stand the test of time.

Whereas facts are always facts, and may live “forever”, they may be corrupted in the course of their collection, interpretation, analysis and use, but the facts are the facts. Many African nations today are colonial creations or colonial constructs which by their very construction carried along the seeds of uneasiness, and maybe trouble, because of the way they were built. Attempts to disregard, distort, falsify or obliterate some of the facts and realities which had existed and were an inevitable ingredient in the construction of the colonial edifice can only be anti-constructive.

History in the context of this discourse is therefore the knowledge of the past of man and his interaction with his environment. Man has always interacted with his physical and social environment in diverse ways. From hunting and gathering to industrialisation and from the family unit of organization to global integration, man has transformed the world through interaction with his environment.

Nation Building

Though widely used the term “nation building” remains imprecise and contested in much of the policy documentation, its meaning is assumed rather than defined.¹³ According to Chukwu, There is also a tendency to use the term ‘nation building’ interchangeably with that of ‘state building’ and ‘nation



building.¹⁴ Despite this, it should be noted that, while closely related, ‘state building’ and ‘nation building’ are distinct processes. ‘State building’ is seen as the task of building functioning state capable of fulfilling the essential attributes of modern statehood. ‘Nation building’ on the other hand, refers to more abstract process of development a shared sense of identity or community among the various groups making up the population of a particular state.

According to Nwabughuogu, nation building is a search for nationhood. It is a process of developing national consciousness among individuals and groups to cultivate a sense of love for a given nation and to accept their commitment to a nation state.¹⁵ It also involves the creation of a favourable environment that will sustain the sense of love developed by the individuals and groups for the nation state. Distinguished in this way, state building focuses on the practical task of building or strengthening state institutions, while nation building is more concerned with the character of relations between citizens and their state.

Mbapndah opines that, the difference in the way the concept is used is linked to the way nations came into being or about how the process took root, grew or developed.¹⁶ Thus when a nation was formed from initially disparate groupings of people without a clear history of prior togetherness, nation building therefore means the actions and initiatives which are taken to consolidate “the growth and togetherness in the overall interest of the entire component parts of the emerging new nation”.¹⁷ René Grotenhuis surmises that nation building is the process whereby a society of people with diverse origins, histories, languages, cultures and religions come together within the boundaries of a sovereign state with a unified constitutional and legal dispensation “to pursue a common agenda for the benefit of all its citizenry”.¹⁸



Nation building would therefore imply a process, involving the admission, acceptance and tolerance of heterogeneity and the facilitation of inclusion. In most of Africa, the fact of colonialism affected the process of nation building because colonial state formation which was the precursor of the contemporary nation started off with many inherent contradictions embedded in them. Amongst the most pronounced were the fact that colonial boundaries were arbitrarily carved out. The result was that what were to emerge as nations in Africa were replete with heterogeneity and diversity. Nation building would thus be perceived and rightly so as a continuous process of molding to contain and keep people from assorted backgrounds. It would be permanently ongoing with the objective of developing and forging greater bonds of mutual understanding, cooperation and mutual co-existence amongst the inhabitants of a country. To succeed in the nation building process, Sabastiano Rwengabo opines that the ability and effectiveness with which the leadership develops and implements policies that lay emphasis on inclusion and freedom is paramount.¹⁹ Consequently the more the people in a country feel a sense of belonging and inclusion, the more purposeful the nation building effort would be and the more prosperous the nation would flourish.

Theoretical Framework

The theory on which this work stands is Relative Deprivation Theory. Development of the concept of relative deprivation is often attributed to American sociologist Robert K. Merton, whose study of American soldiers during World War II revealed that soldiers in the Military Police were far less satisfied with their opportunities for promotion than regular GIs.²⁰ Relative deprivation is the lack of resources to sustain the diet, lifestyle, activities and amenities that an individual or group are accustomed to or that are widely encouraged or approved in the society to which they belong.²¹



Relative Deprivation Theory suggests that people who feel they are being deprived of something considered essential in their society (e.g. money, rights, political voice, status) will organise or join social movements dedicated to obtaining the things of which they feel deprived. In some cases, relative deprivation has been cited as a factor driving incidents of social disorder like rioting, looting, terrorism, and civil wars. In this nature, social movements and their associated disorderly acts can be attributed to the grievance of people who feel they are being denied resources to which they are entitled. Runciman also drew a distinction between “egoistic” and “fraternalistic” relative deprivation. According to Runciman, egoistic relative deprivation is driven by an individual’s feelings of being treated unfairly compared to others in the group.²² For example, an employee who feels he/she should have gotten a promotion that went to another employee may feel egoistically relatively deprived. Fraternalistic relative deprivation is more often associated with massive group social movements like Civil Rights Movement.

Relative Deprivation Theory applies to the situation in Nigeria because in identifying with a specific ethnic group, one will be associated with group members’ perceptions of the dramatic social changes in Nigeria. The lower their identification levels with their in-group, the more they will display a ‘stable’ group trajectory of relative deprivation and this will in turn result to more factors that hamper nation building.

Nigeria in Historical Perspective

There is no gainsaying that what is known today as Nigeria is a colonial creation. The thrust of nation building in Nigeria is firstly, the whipping up of nationalistic sentiments or the consciousness of unity among the diverse peoples of Nigeria; and secondly, on how to surmount the problems created by the



amalgamation of the peoples of Nigeria into one entity in 1914, the division of the country into three regions, North, East, and West, by Arthur Richard in 1946, and the question of ethnicity in the internal polity of Nigeria. Prior to the European partition of Africa and the setting up of European colonies in the continent, the territorial space known today as Nigeria was made up of so many independent socio-political and cultural entities. Organised around their leaders and, or rulers, these different entities held together people who had certain unifying characteristics. For example, they claimed their origins to a common ancestor, or had a common story of migration and settlement. Besides traditions of origin, migration and settlement, there were other binding factors such as language, religious and or ancestral beliefs, call it a common culture. The political, economic and socio-cultural foundations of these entities were not in doubt, except of course that each sought to preserve its independence as much as possible and as far as could be done.

Consolidated as they were at each point in history, these principalities rose and fell, expanded and retreated very much like in other political entities in Africa at the time. Their internal organizations were such as to enable the growth, expansion and consolidation of the states as well as the welfare of their respective citizenry. Of course there was also due regard for the existence of territorial neighbours. There were wars of expansion and conquest, but there were also acknowledged periods of growth and expansion when mutual recognition and respect cemented good neighbourliness and brought about prosperity.

The period of the implantation of colonial rule, European nations agreed to divide the vast African continental space amongst themselves in order to respond to the assorted demands and challenges of the industrial revolution in Europe through the creation of selfish economic, cultural and political spaces in



Africa and Nigeria in particular. The ensuing scramble and setting up of colonial states revealed the non-respect of any intelligible rules in the carving out of these European colonies in Africa. There was no consideration for prior or existing ethnic or cultural affinities. Colonial boundaries were set up without any regard for homogeneity or the respect of any pre-existing diversities. The result, as is well known, is that peoples of different ethnic or cultural backgrounds were amalgamated by European powers and thenceforth forced to live and develop in accordance with and under the influence of the administrative, economic and socio-political cultures of the colonising powers. At independence, colonial boundaries became the boundaries of the new nations of Africa and were accepted as such by the new emerging African nations themselves in accordance with the infamous decision dealing with the intangibility of frontiers.²³ The new African nations were “constructed around the concept of state rights as opposed to group or people’s rights”²⁴

Some Prevailing Contemporary Narratives about Nation Building in Nigeria

Some prevailing contemporary narratives about the foundational basis of the nation in Nigeria have (maybe inadvertently) been built on a premise that ignores or does not take into account the history of the origins of the country today. So far, the preceding explanations in this paper have attempted to highlight the fact that Nigeria is a colonial creation. Building on that premise, the Nigeria nation as it exists today is an amalgam of peoples who prior to the coming of colonial rule did not enjoy the observed socio-cultural, economic and or political togetherness that exists today. With the superimposition of colonial structures and boundaries, and the eventual emergence of today’s nation, so many diversities were brought together. The new nation in the post-independence period was clearly a mosaic whose strength



and cohesion could be strengthened by showcasing and respecting that diversity.

In contemporary Nigeria, a select number of historical narratives and discourses have very pompously brought to the fore some of the issues which this paper so far tried to highlight. One of these narratives speaks to the indivisibility of Nigeria. It states that Nigeria is “one and indivisible”. Without doubt, this is a politically motivated statement which is intended to forge a sense of unity and purpose in the country and avoid any irredentist intentions. The underlying premise is that from the time when the British amalgamated the Northern and Southern protectorate, the territory in contemporary Nigeria became one country. By this statement therefore, any attempts or intentions to sow seeds of discord or refer to the historical antecedence of Nigeria are discouraged in the interest of nation building and consolidation. A second saying which addresses the ethnic and linguistic composition of the country professes that “Nigeria is our father’s land”. Still a third states that “the labour of our heroes past shall never be in vain”.

The first of the above affirmations is reference to the ethnic origins and foundations of the peoples of the country, whilst the second and third are veiled attempts which seek to deny the incessant marginalisation and inhuman treatment meted on any section of the country. What emerged from these a-historical discourses undeniably suggests a high level of manipulation, falsification and distortion in the use of historical knowledge. If examined carefully and from a purely historical perspective, these positions smack of political rhetoric and demagoguery than history. By their very formulation, they exclude any possibility that the Nigeria nation had at any point during the process of its construction and reconstruction been made up of component parts that were different from one another. Here, political



aspirations and intentions are confused with history. This undoubtedly is a historical fallacy.

Moreover and as has been earlier stated, before the coming of Europeans and the putting in place of colonial boundaries, the geographical space which corresponds to present day Nigeria was inhabited by people belonging to different political, ethnic or cultural entities. The entities to which they belonged did not acknowledge any fact or act of belonging to anything that was or could be labeled Nigerian, since such did not exist.

The forceful superimposition of wider boundaries which became the boundaries of the colonial state was carried out without the consent of the various peoples. It is these boundaries which have become the boundaries of the new nation of Nigeria today. Attitudes towards the new entities were developed in an atmosphere of colonial fear and all attempts to challenge the colonial order met with violent and deadly repression and force. The various ethnic groups became Nigerian by colonial force and by dint of historical circumstances. It is true that when the might of the colonial forces became obvious, colonized peoples decidedly exploited what united them as Africans to build opposition platforms which led to their eventual emancipation and independence. Partnership and collaboration in the anti-colonial fight was cemented by the wish to overthrow the colonial yoke. It did not bring about any automatic suppression of primary relationships and loyalties. Loyalty and the acquiescence to belong to the new nations were then forged, nurtured and strengthened through admittedly inclusive policies that enhanced a sense of belonging.

The post-colonial nation being the successor of the colonial state, faithful to the tradition of force, persisted in forcefully developing attitudes towards the state. One of the ways to do so was to coin



and use slogans to elucidate bringing about the transmission of some historical inaccuracies. The fact that there are various ethnic groups and peoples in Nigeria does not impair the process of nation building. To deny that these ethnic groups existed prior to the development of the nation that is today is to run away from facts in history. The same can be said of the cultural and other differences which are the consequence of the colonial encounter. To be more concrete, mention should be made of the fact that the south eastern (Igbo) which are a part of Nigeria's post-independence cultural landscape are grounded in historical fact. To deny that they do not have the right to leadership and equal benefit of the natural resources is a political and historical fallacy. That Nigeria is one and indivisible is one of the inspirational aims of nation building. However it would appear to be inappropriate if the story of a nation's development is built on imagination or politically-influenced constructions than historical reality. To avoid telling the history of a country which openly admits and references the diverse origins and composition of the country is tantamount to playing the ostrich, and betraying the fundamental principles of the discipline of history.

Nation Building in Post-independence Nigeria

The place of history in nation building cannot be overemphasized. History as an academic discipline plays a large role in the promotion of Nation building. This is because, history is society centred. Implicit in this understanding is the fact that, history is more about man in society, than outside it; and more about society than individuals.²⁵

The effort at nation building in Nigeria during the colonial period was undeliberate and consequential. Although the colonialist's construction of roads, bridges and railways served as critical factors and infrastructures that facilitated Nation building, they were not constructed to serve nation building purposes but for



the effective exploitation of Nigerian resources. The amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914, which according to the colonialists was for the sake of Nation building, in practical sense encouraged the pitching of ethnic groups in the country against themselves. Practically, deliberate, planned, concerted, and constitutionalised nation building efforts in Nigeria can be traced to the post-colonial period. In post-colonial Nigeria, serious efforts at Nation building were embarked upon to strengthen the unity and sovereignty of the country after the political crises, military intervention in politics, and Civil War (1967-1970) that brought the emergent African nation to a state of near total collapse. These efforts included the promulgation of the 3R policy (Reconciliation, Rehabilitation and Reconstruction), the introduction of a national currency (the naira), establishment of the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC), de-regionalization of university education in the country through the establishment of federal universities across the federation: Universities of Ife, University of Nigeria Nsukka and Ahmadu Bello University Zaria were taken over by Federal Government, and Unity Colleges were established for this purpose; introduction of National Sports Festival, introduction of Federal Character Principle, and introduction of Joint Admission and Matriculation Board.²⁶

Following the discourse of nation building, it could be rightly asserted that Nigeria had been battling with the issues of nation building since independence in 1960, and the leaders of the country are still struggling to move the nation into nation building process, because of the prevalence and dominance of ethnic and regional chauvinism, and religious parochialism in the country; which have gained pre-eminence over national identity and nationalism.



Challenges of Nation Building in Nigeria

The numerous crises and agitations in Nigeria today are indications that the country is still crawling and struggling to gain its feet in the task of nation-building 63 years after independence. Issues ranging from the Niger-Delta militancy in the South-South, secessionist agitations in the South-East, Herdsmen/farmers clashes in the North-Central to the BokoHaram insurgency in the North-East and pockets of ethno-religious crises across the country are testaments of impaired national cohesion. There are several factors that have been impediments to the task of nation-building in Nigeria. They are quite inexhaustible. But it suffices to state that these factors are hinged on colonial legacy, religious and ethnic polarity, leadership dearth and mono-commodity economy.

Colonial Legacy

The prevailing schism in the country began with the creation and administration of the country as two distinct colonies – Northern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria. The preference for the North by the British colonial administrators favoured the territorial and political interests of the North at the expense of the South. In spite of the amalgamation of 1914, the North/South polarity continued with the attendant disparity in social and economic development resulting to mutual distrust and suspicions.²⁷

It is quite disconcerting to note that after over a century of amalgamation, the 1914 ‘matrimony’ is still faulted and cited as an alibi for national discord and conflicts. Sa’ad Abubakar aptly captured this view thus:

With regard to the 1914 amalgamation various groups both in the north and south, perceived it from different angles based on essentially on the premise of a purportedly fundamental dichotomy between the two merged entities each of which was inhabited by distinct



‘supposedly monolithic’ ethnic groups that had been in existence for several millenia. The amalgam of the two, it was said, portended serious conflicts and competition, because of hypothetical antipathy between the North and South and between Muslims and Christians.²⁸

Although Abubakar agreed that the amalgamation was “a unilateral act by a colonial power to serve its interest, no more, no less”, he held the view that the amalgamation was not a ‘mistake’ as declared by Ahmadu Bello. He further expressed that the problem is that Nigerians have not been able to exploit the opportunities presented by the amalgamation. Abubakar expressed this thus, ...while for the British the amalgamation was certainly not a mistake, for Nigerians perhaps the mistake is to the extent that the opportunities amalgamation provided for us to build a strong virile and united black nation had never been seized upon to make it a reality, nearly a century later.²⁹

Even after over six decades of independence, it is worrisome that Nigeria is still grappling with the problems of nation-building. The people of Nigeria see themselves more as Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Ibibio, Efik, Nupe and so on than citizens of Nigeria. In other words, ethnic and regional identity comes first before national identity in Nigeria. Perhaps, the regionalism introduced by the 1951 constitution, and the ensuing regional party politics that characterised pre and post-independence Nigeria were cataclysmic to nation-building. The constitution created three regions; North, East and West. These regions were dominated by Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba respectively. The struggle for political control in the regions and the centre conceivably sowed the seeds of discord that has grown wild among Nigerians today.³⁰



Religious and Ethnic Polarity

Religious and ethnic polarity is also a fundamental challenge to nation-building in Nigeria. Religious and ethnic crisis has led to colossal destruction of lives and properties over the years. It has equally led to an unprecedented division and mutual distrust among the people of Nigeria. Among these crises are the “Islam only” demonstration in Zaria (May 1980), the “Maitatsine riot” in Kano (December 1980), the Kala-Kata and “Maitatsine” demonstrations in Bullum-Kutu, Maiduguri (October 1982), the “Maitatsine” uprising in Rigassa, Kaduna (October 1982). Others are the uprisings in Gombe and Jemata, Yola (March 1984), the “Militant Muslim” clash on “Palm Sunday” in Ilorin (1986) and “Muslim Riot” in Kafanchan (March 1987), the Bauchi crisis (1988), the Tafawa Balewa conflict (1991), the Bonke Muslim protest of Kano (1991). They also include the Jalingo, the Zango Kataf riot and the Katsina North unrest (1992), the religious riot in Jigawa (April, 1993), the bloody riot by the Shiites in Kafanchan, Kaduna and Zaria (September, 1996) and Muslims riot in Dambola town, Borno (March, 2000).³¹

It is equally worthy to recall that the pogrom meted on the Igbo in Northern Nigeria after the counter coup of July 29th, 1966 in collaboration with Hausa-Fulani army culminated to the civil war (1967-1970).³² This led to the death of over a million people. The conflicts between the Tiv and Jukun in Benue and Taraba States lingered for long and led to the destruction of lives and properties.³³ The incessant ethnic conflicts across Nigeria and the insincerity of the government to nip these conflicts in the bud has incubated a number of ethnic militias – nonstate actors that have influenced the task of nation-building negatively.

Leadership Dearth

Lack of leadership is one of the major problems that have been thwarting the task of nationbuilding in Nigeria. G.A. Akinola held



this opinion when he stressed that: Discounting the problems and tendencies created by colonial rule, perhaps no other factor is as implicated in the human condition and the generally deplorable state of affairs in postcolonial Nigeria as the failure, or indeed the lack, of leadership.³⁴ With her wealth in mineral and human resources, Nigeria deserves a place among the top economic giants of the world.³⁵

But bad leadership has made the foregoing seem an illusion. Leadership has been a major challenge in Nigeria since independence. In expressing this opinion, Abubakar asserted that:

*The new country, it was also alleged, inherited an inexperienced leadership who lacked national consciousness and constituency and were more turned to subverted indigenous ethos of government and culture...So by 1960 most of those who took over the reigns of power from Britain had very short experience in democratic governance while those in the North had also only a modicum of western education.*³⁶

The first military coup of January, 1966 and subsequent coups cited disunity, corruption and bad leadership as justifications. However, time proved the military bankrupt of the requirements of restoring unity or providing the necessary leadership needed to further the course of nation-building.³⁷

Mono-Commodity Economy

Following the discovery of crude oil in 1956 at Oloibiri in present day Bayelsa State, several foundations of the non-petroleum sectors within Nigeria became ruined or abandoned. ShellBP, the sole concessionaire at the time made the discovery and Nigeria became a part of oil producers in 1958 when its first oil field began operations producing 5,100 bpd. Crude oil production in Nigeria reached a level of over 2 million barrels per day by the



late sixties and early seventies. Following the economic slump in the eighties, production declined. However, production increased once more to a record level of 2.5 million barrels per day in 2004. Consequent on the rise in oil price in the global market around 1970, Nigeria incurred enormous riches from its oil production.³⁸ Oil and gas became a major source of foreign direct investment (FDI) to Nigeria. Petroleum production and export play a dominant role in Nigeria's economy and account for about 90% of her gross earnings. This dominant role has led to the neglect of agriculture (the customary mainstay of the economy) and other emerging industries.³⁹ Duncan Clarke aptly captures this in a broader context of African oil economy when he asserts that: Oil affected economic growth rates, current accounts, the balance of payments, foreign exchange and fiscal receipts. It is to this that some economist apply the term "oil curse". Realities are less prosaic. The independent African state milieu after 1965 was far more mono-commodity dependent (in this case on petroleum) than ever before.⁴⁰

The modern scramble for Nigerian oil became more and more focused on hydrocarbon nexus, with clashes over oil patrimony becoming a common occurrence. Oil revenues became a major source of financing state budgets, presidential and ministerial interests in oil became apparent.⁴¹

Africa and Nigeria particularly became the foremost exploration and development target for global players. It is the world's greatest frontier in oil exploration. This spectacular change gave impetus to continuing and incessant struggles within Nigeria for control and ownership of the oil bounty. The conflict over oil is not new. In spite of improvement on the state of affairs in Nigeria after the civil war (a conflict over politics, ethnicity and oil), serious mayhem erupted in 1993. Socio-political and economic stability became frail and deteriorating due to variety of pooled



circumstances: onshore conflicts, threats to the offshore, social conflict with corporate oil, ethnic dissections, and Muslim/Christian divides.⁴²

Conclusion

The discipline of history by its very nature and content emerges as the societal repertoire which undeniably preserves the trajectory of how any nation for that matter has developed and how nation building has taken place. It emerges that the story of the development of the nation is well captured through its history. From wandering hordes to the discovery of fire and the development of civilization, through conquests and the consolidation of nation states, history preserves the facts. Interestingly, in the writing and use of history, a-historical voices and forces attempt to twist or deform or hide or falsify the process of growth. One result is that the history that is handed down is filled with inaccuracies. Force and selfish motives underlie the drive or the urge to falsify history mostly in the interest of anything but history.

The challenges of living together, of seeking solutions to the multifarious problems and challenges of nation building are not dealt with by denying the historical facts, rather it is by admitting them that more profound reflection can begin and bring about the more purposeful exploitation of difference to overcome the challenges of nation building. Admitting the facts of history is to recognise the presence and relevance of various component parts in a national equation. History remains very well placed to provide evidence-based sign posts which remind historical actors of what man has done, why and how it was done and with what results. Through an objective consideration and use of historical facts and evidence, nation building could be a more enjoyable and less strenuous experience. The relevance of the discipline of history for understanding and appreciating the process of nation



building is nowhere more demonstrably amplified than in the study of nation building in Nigeria.

End notes

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