

PERSPECTIVES ON NATIONHOOD AND NATION BUILDING IN NIGERIA: ISSUES AND THREATS.

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ABSTRACT

Since the dawn of history, mankind and entities have tried and strived toward attaining true nationhood and one level of development or the other. This struggle has remained endless in Nigeria and other clans. Efforts aimed at this, i.e. bringing about peace, development, unity and progress as an indivisible entity has generated lots of policy formulations and implementations to some degree. Despite these efforts, the issue of true nationhood remains a mirage to Nigeria as an entity. This work relied on authoritative secondary sources aimed at bringing to fore issues in true nation hood and the struggles for national development which are in continuum, coupled with the struggle for true egalitarian society which has assured an endless phenomena in Nigeria. This could be traced to a number of factors. These factors act as actors of determinant to the “Nigeria question” and Nigeria’s way of emerging.

Key words – Nationhood, Nation Building, Entity, Development, Perspective.

INTRODUCTION

Since the dawn of history, mankind has made concerted efforts toward attaining and ensuring oneness, peaceful co-existence, development, national consciousness, unity and above all, remaining an indivisible entity, thereby forming a coordinated and strong force in international arena¹.

In Nigeria, this concept and its actualization has remained a mirage thereby foiling most efforts at attaining true nationhood. As an act of national conciseness by groups and individual in an entity, nation building aims at enhancing the capacity of state



institutions, building state-society relations and also external respects. This is done by constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state².

Accordingly, Harris Mylonas, opines, that it is an effort of unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run³. To achieve this, popular rule to majorities are targeted. Explaining nation building further, Andreas Wimmer noted that factors are responsible for fast tracking nationhood. These factors are “the early development of civil-society organizations, the rise of a state capable of providing public goods evenly across a territory, and the emergence of a shared medium of communication⁴. There is need to fully understand these factors, hence fast tracking true nationhood will not be possible if the roles of civil societies are undermined, neglected and buried. This is a result of their imperative role in building the nations especially in a democratic setting. More so, the attribute of state capable of providing public goods evenly across territory is an important ingredient. The ability of the state to provide the basic and fundamental needs of its citizenry engineers true nationhood and nation building. No community of people would feel the sense of “national” or feel beloved to his country in the face of abject lack, poverty, misery, high rate of mortality, insecurity in the country. So, to endear the people to their country is to make life bearable.

Furthermore, in principle, the need for a shared medium of communication is needful. Without effective communication across board in the nation, the question of true nationhood would remain a dilemma. To think of nation builders is to think of individuals who have taken initiatives toward developing national community through government program, military conscription, national orientation, mass schooling etc⁵.

Nation building includes the creation of national paraphernalia such as anthems, flags, national days, national stadiums, national language, common currency and national coat and myths⁵. Nation building is concerned with making efforts to cultivate a sense of love for a given nation and to accept their



commitment to a nation- State. This will lead to imbibing the spirit of love and admiration to one's nation. The feeling of "I can die-for-my- country. The feeling of pride of nationality transcends morally, ethical and consciousness of belonging to sure entity. This feeling makes none ashamed or does it reduce self esteem for identifying with one's nation. When all these feelings are harmonized, it creates inquisitiveness for national development. This inquisitiveness leads to problem solving by citizens through inventory (technological, scientific, arts and notable innovations) to confront problems facing the nation⁶.

Nigeria: The Journey of True Nationhood and Nation Building

The people that make up what is called "Nigeria" today has existed since the pre-historical era. The various groups had enjoyed distinct life style as a unique autonomous entity with peculiarities in speaking, trading, marrying, learning, and worship among others⁷. These entities are for example, the Ijaw people, the Igbo nation, Yoruba nation, Efik, Hausa nation, Idoma nation, Igala nation, Nupe nation, Ibibio nations among others.

These nations were separated from others either by natural boundaries, like rivers, mountains, caves, valleys, among others, language was distinct, religion and mode of worship, culture and tradition differentiation, food, among others were far from being common⁸.

In actual sense, among the separate and unique entities, nothing common that should suggest unionism, oneness and "nationhood" existed as they were so distinct in their own way. For example the Igbo nation has absolutely nothing in common with the Hausa nation both in history or common affiliation, likewise, other nations. In fact, the common history of these nations is the history of intergroup relations and European adventure in Africa⁹. Apart from intergroup relations which were in the form of international trade or relations in the modern sense, such does not suggest unification and an ingredient of brotherhood.



The unification of these nations into a single entity was orchestrated by the European nations. Many factors were responsible for these; first was the struggle for power (hegemony) in Europe. Great European nations, competing for supremacy in Europe at first were not so much interested in Africa's resources and land or obtaining colonial possessions as a symbol of imperial might, but the dynamism of local European politics as at that time changed the narratives. The powers which played the most aggressive role in this scramble for Africa included some which had no colonies in Africa before 1870's¹⁰.

France, Britain and Portugal were strong colonial masters with missionaries and adventurers deep into the interiors of Africa, as their explorers and businessmen were epitomatic to the eventual scramble, partition and colonialism.

Explorers, adventurers and missionaries, who had penetrated the interiors of Africa, Nigeria in particular before the scramble for land began, were mainly interested in exploration or tourism to cure their curiosity and to gain knowledge of the new continent, which they have just discovered. With the event of time and the from the local politics in Europe, these Explorers or adventurers gave exciting report about the African continent that helped to arouse sentiments favoring imperialism and colonization. With these exciting reports and other contingencies led to eventual occupation and colonization of the Africa ¹¹. In the "Nigerian" experience, shortage of personalities and environmental factors played a role in the amalgamation of the various "nations" into protectorates and subsequently into a country.

In 1900, the British declared effective occupation and eventually colonization of the nations called "Nigeria". This colonization brought another challenge to the British imperial masters, to solve these challenges owing to the vastness of the territory called "Nigeria", there came the need to merge the two protectorates in 1914. The merging of the southern protectorate and Northern protectorate was purely done for the purpose of



British profiteering and administrative conveniences and nothing more.

The British conquest of the various entities in “Nigeria” through various diplomatic and undiplomatic means triggered violence and apathy. The use of gun boat diplomacy as threat and the eventual use of force to coerce “Nigerian” territories was fundamental to British adventure in Africa. Nigerian kings and traditional rulers were tortured, held hostage, exiled and killed as a strategy of inflicting fear in the land ¹¹.

The forceful merger, colonization and imperialism in Nigeria are the genesis with the trouble with Nigeria. The Merger or amalgamation was a union of or marriage of strange bed mate, a union of unfortunate friends. The aftermath of this unholy marriage began to ensue. First with the Yoruba or Western crisis of 1960s, Northern crisis and massacre of the Igbo in 1964 in Kano, the election crisis, the census and population crisis, all these exploded in the 1966 civil war (Nigeria-Biafra war).¹²

From this time (1966) up wards, issues and policies in Nigeria were tribalized, regionalized or religiously underpinned, instead of being nationalistic, thereby bringing more puzzles to the issue of nationalism or true nationhood and nation building in Nigeria.

Consequent upon these, concerted efforts have been made to heal the wounds of tribal, religious, ethnical and geographical sentiments created by the British imperial ambitions.

Firstly, after the civil war in 1970, the Head of State Major Gen Yakubu Gowon, announced the 3R- Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation, all in a bid to promote unity, oneness, friendship and so on. This was followed by the creation of the NYSC in 1975, the hosting of festival of art and culture of African countries (FESTAC), the introduction of the national anthem, the coat of arms, the national flags, the hosting of national festival and sports, creation of unity schools, creation of federal character principle and the national orientation agency among others.¹³



Threat to Nationhood and Nation Building in Nigeria.

▪ **TRIBALISM**

The concept of tribe describes a group of people of the same customs, language, religion, and so on, living in a particular area and often led or attached to these affirmatives. In a large entity like Nigeria, there is no individual that does not belong to a particular tribe. These tribes serves as the identity of an individual, as one is easily recognized from the angle of tribe as mark of affiliation to a particular geographical enclave . Nigeria as a large entity has had to contend with the issue of tribes as an issue in nation building and its concomitant, tribalism. Tribalism is a behavioral sentimental attitude that is based on being loyal to a tribe or other serial group. It is the recognition of one as belonging to a tribe first before being a member of the larger entity. This sentiment is one of the troubles with Nigeria's way of emergence and the rekindling of the flame of tribal corporate consciousness, strengthening of the fraternal anthropological link as an indigene of a tribe or clan, has metamorphosed into so many issues in Nigeria's quest for true nationhood¹⁴.

The recognition that one's loyalty lies in his or her tribe or clan ensures or endears such a person to his origin or tribe, thereby submitting obedience and cooperation to the same. While on the other hand, this tribal sentiment breeds civil disloyalty, disobedience, unfaithfulness, betrayal, compromise, switch of allegiance or nationality among others. These are partly responsible to the question of patriotism, development, unity, peace, corruption among others in Nigeria. These are obvious and traceable causes of the so many or cog in Nigeria's wheel of development. To trace this is to go back to history. The history of Nigeria and its contact with the Europeans which metamorphosed to the amalgamation and eventual colonization represents a focal point of investigation into the causes and problems of Nigeria even after years of physical disengagement. Among the effects of the 1914 amalgamation of the tribally differentiated entities in Nigeria is tribalism; people are so rooted to tribe, language, culture and tradition, that any effort aimed at surcharging them in guise of



other thing or nomenclature will attract resistance. This resistance has taken place via sabotage and unpatriotic acts such as diversion of resources, arms race and leakage of classified information. In addition, according to Chinweizu in his work, caliphate colonialism, cited;

....the new nation called Nigeria should be an estate of our great-grand father, Uthman Dan Foolio. We must ruthlessly prevent a change of power. We use the minorities of the north as willing fools and the south as a conquered territory and never allow them to rule over, and never allow them to have control over their future”.

This was a statement accredited to Sir Ahmadu Bello, leader of the NPC and Premier of Northern Nigeria (Parrot Newspaper, 12th Oct. 1960; republished on November 13, 2003, by the Tribune Newspaper, Ibadan). This is purely a tribalised statement that not only negate the unity of the country but also the sense and spirit of nationhood and an all inclusiveness of all tribe and region into the mainstream of national life for national development in the country called Nigeria ¹⁵.

Moving forward, to attain nationhood or nation building, tribalism as a factor must be first dealt with in ones sub consciousness as an individual and in ones national life. This will be achieved when all first considers themselves as citizens of the country before remembering their homeland or tribe. Every thought, plan, policy formulation and implementation will be to guarantee equal opportunities for every Nigerian, equality under the law; extermination of ethnic hegemony; dethronement of mediocrity wherever it exists. In the words of Chief Obafemi Awolowo;

“In order that Nigeria may achieve rapid economic progress, and establish an egalitarian, just, democratic and peaceful society.... We must resolutely pursue: equal opportunity for every Nigeria, equality under the law; extermination of ethnic hegemony; dethronement of mediocrity wherever it exists; guaranteeing for every



Nigerian no matter his place of birth or state of origin; equal access to the good things of life. Etc...with all other racial groups, and respectable economic strength for Nigerians within and international, Our dual aim is to achieve equality of status for Nigerians and the black people community....

We Can succeed... provided we allow ourselves to be guided by this great principle: "The glory of a ruler is the welfare of every one of his people". Nigerians especially the political elites".¹⁶

This statement should be re-echoed to everyone, monumentised and extolled. Most often this statement and declaration of patriotism, has only being made a political statement often times during electioneering era and in other political grounds and not deeply rooted in both the sub consciousness and the daily national lives of Nigerians. In recent time, the year 2015 precisely, during the presidential inauguration of the president elect, Muhammadu Buhari, announced, "I am for no body, I am for everybody". Justifying the debates on tribalism, ethnic bigotry, among others.

When Buhari needs a man or woman to fill a key position he looks at the nook and cranny of Daura, when he needs votes to win election he looks at the nook and cranny of Yoruba land, Ijaw, Igbo and the rest of the Southern part"... Bode George opined.

Tribalism and ethnicity kills nationhood and nation building as this negates the principles of inclusiveness, fairness, justice, equity, meritocracy, hard work and reward.

In summary, to be tribal is to be partial, ethnocentric, selfish and a builder of hatred, bridge of division and unpatriotism. To this end, for nationhood to stand the test of time and for development to be visible and evident, this cog must be killed completely.



Secession and Agitations

Among the very many concomitants of the Berlin conference of 1885 and the consequent scramble, partitions, colonization and imperialism in Nigeria are secessions, agitations and disputes among various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. Among the ills of the unfortunate amalgamation of the Southern and Northern protectorate for British administrative convenience and profiteering among others, is the great crack and leakages of national consciousness, patriotism and true nationhood. Today, the nation is faced with high level of agitations among subjugated, marginalized ethnic groups which are yearning and crying for self existence and secession from the British created entity called Nigeria.

The character, ideological and morally differentiated minority and major tribes or nations feels insecure and at the receiving end of the larger entity. Ideology, which is a powerful ingredient and a core determinant of most actions, stands strong in the “Nigeria question”. Southern Nigeria with its unique ideology and world views coupled with religion, culture, and tradition has no similarity with their Northern counter part comparatively. For example, the core north stands against secularism, liberalism and other Western principles. Right from the colonial to the post colonial, the entity called ‘Nigeria’ has been a haven of conflict, crisis and clashes which exploded fully to the civil war (Nigeria-Biafra war of 1966-1970)¹⁵. Despite all the post war efforts toward nation building and effectual true nationhood, minimal result has be witnessed; in fact, today, there are more secessionists groups than before, for example – MASSOB, Oduduwa, IPOB, AREWA, Afenifere, MEND, IJAW. Though some of these groups are originally ethnic based pressure groups but recently as a result of the aforementioned trends and issues in Nigeria’s history have metamorphosed to secessionists groups The quest to secede obviously remains a big draw back in Nigeria’s quest for true united, indivisible entity. To achieve this, in the words of Chief Obafemi Awolowo,



“In other that Nigeria may achieve rapid economic progress, and establish an egalitarian, just, democratic and peaceful society-----we-----must resolutely be determined to pursue, Equal opportunities for every Nigerian equality under the law, extermination of ethnic hegemony, dethronement of mediocrity wherever it exist, guaranteeing for every Nigerian no matter his place of birth or state of origin, equal access to the good things of life etc.....:”

From the above citation or quotation the missing links are quite obvious and such has endeared empathy against the state. The case of not having guarantee for equal opportunity to succeed, aspire, rule and yet suppressed and exploited clearly is responsible for the numerous secessionists movements especially from the economically advantaged regions.¹⁶

Furthermore, the lack of equal opportunity to strife in Nigeria has seen so many aspects of ‘brain’-flight’ or brain drain, Nigerian technocrats, medical personals, professional etc are scattered all over Europe and other continents and are doing wonderfully well to the disadvantage of Nigeria’s national development.

Insecurity and Insurgency in Nigeria

Insecurity remains a universal phenomenon. It represents a national issue of current discuss. The obvious state of the country points towards a nation in ruins, a nation in turmoil and panics, which calls for urgent check on its root. Historically, mankind has been associated with one form of aggressive conflict or the other. This aggressive conflicts and state of unpredictability has plagued mankind since the dawn of history, but has metamorphosed in dimension, magnitude, strategies, purpose, nature and importantly, in consequence and brutality.

Among the consequences of mal arranged entities that constituted what made up Nigeria are poor security and peaceful architecture. The absence of conscious or sincere plan or



modalities to promote equity, development, fairness, oneness, equality, merit and greater good for greater number has pitched the nation against itself. The unification of the heterogeneous societies into a single clan points to a future so bleak as its aftermath is counterproductive.

From the blast of decolonization, Nigeria began to witness so many forms of insecurity ranging from psychological, economical, material, political, social and physical insecurity. Insecurity is the lack of security, a feeling of uncertainty or the state of being subject to danger; vulnerability and unprotected¹⁷. This has also to do with the lack of freedom and environmental friendliness to showcase ones potentials as citizens of a state. The absence of the above clearly and adversely promotes instability, division and agitation.

Speaking insecurity and insurgency as critical perspective to nationhood and nation building, underscores a very crucial element of national life, which determines course for action or inaction. This proves that development and meaningful progress cannot be achieved in the atmosphere of panic, killings, destruction, hatred and diversion of public fund to servicing banditry, insurgency and kidnapping which are costly adventures.

Recently, since 2009, with the rise of an Islamic sect in the North Eastern part of the country, new dimensions to insecurity in Nigeria has been witnessed so different from the orthodox. Before now, it use to be the orthodox form of insecurity like stealing, touting, robbery, communal clashes among others. but recently with the rise of boko haram sect in the North east, terrorism was added to the insecurity dictionary of Nigeria¹⁸.

The escalation of Boko Haram bombing and attacks across the country, first on April 8,2011 at INEC office and at a Roman catholic church in Suleja, Niger State followed by the Maiduguri bombing and mass killings on 26th April 2011, Army barrack bombing in May 29,2011 in Bauchi state , the January 1, 2011 Army mammy market bombing at Abuja, June 16th 2011 Nigeria police force Headquarters bombing with the IG of police narrowly escaping death, the Nyanya Abuja twine bombing in 2014, all



remain monumental modern terrorists attacks in Nigeria. Monumental in the sense that the death toll [including the UN building in Abuja bombing, the multiple bombing in Kano state , Maiduguri, Adamawa, Kaduna, Borno state] from these recent bombings among other things, generated a refugee crisis in Nigeria. This crisis generated internal displacement of persons. The IDPs crisis became a national issue, as thousands and millions fled their homes in search of security ¹⁹.

More commentary is needed in the area of Kidnapping as an aspect of insecurity in Nigeria, as the country has witnessed massive abductions including the kidnapping of over 276 school girls from Chibok school in Borno state in April 2014, the Dapachy school abductions, the Kangara abduction with heavy ransom paid for their release are all symptomatic of the broken bridge of true nationhood and national building in Nigeria ²⁰.

Furthermore, the case of banditry and herdsmen clashes with farmers and communities represent more trouble for Nigeria. The numerous cases of banditry and herdsmen clashes that wrecked havoc on innocent communities stands as a cancer to her quest for the true nationhood and national development. Among the various havoc experienced from herdsmen across the country (Southern Kaduna, Benue, Enugu, Imo, among others), the Ogun state experience is noticeable. The people of Iselu town in Yewa North local government Area of Ogun state witnessed barbaric acts of destruction on their farmland by the herdsmen who unleash terror and laid siege and wrecked havoc in the kingdom. The town, like others at the fringe of Nigeria- Benin border, has been at the mercy of rampaging herdsmen, as they destroyed acres of farmlands, raped women, and killed scores of people, especially farmers ²¹. Apart from the wanton destruction of farmlands by the armed- to- the –teeth herdsmen, streams which were the sources of water for the people, were taken over by cows and polluted for human consumption²². Now, dimensionally, the issue of armament or arms proliferation has become an important issue in Nigeria. The proliferation of small and medium arms across some ethnic groups remains a serious worry. Arms



proliferation overtly instigates warfare and serves as embers of danger across board, as a result pose alarming catastrophic scenario to Nigeria's existence as a nation and more also to her growth.

In other to proffer solution to this anathema, it is logically time to revisit the national confab and other national dialogues on issues of regionalization and state security. With the recent security threats across the regions, the agitations on regional security system as a panacea to enduring peace and security remains germane in national discourse. Security as a tool to true nationhood and national integration and development in the main, justifies the state or role it places across various part of the country. Recently, with the rise of Amotekun Security System in the South Western Nigeria and the Eastern Security Network (E.S.N) in the Eastern part of the country, security clashes among different interest groups remains an anathema to national cohesion and oneness²³. More still, the blockage of food supplies to South East and other southern regions in Nigeria by their northern counterpart has further fueled speculations on dismemberment of this fragile entity as likely retaliations in form of oil blockage or others remains a course for concern. In addition, and worthy of note is the politization of Nigeria security issue and the partisanship of the military which has resulted to military sabotage and leakage of security policies, strategies and intelligent operations in Nigeria.

CONCLUSION

It has been proven and noted that despite Nigeria's years of decolonization and consequent independence, the question of true nationhood and nation building still remains a puzzle. These are as a result of factors inherent in its conjugation and history. If the problem is historical, then history should have the solution. As a matter of fact, if the lessons of history are ignored, the consequence of history repeats itself.

Finally, the core issues discussed here are threats to nationhood and nation building, among others and remains



indispensable in the quest for true federation and as such should be given prime attention urgently.

RECOMMENDATIONS

No nation can rise or develop above the level of its patriotism and nationalism of its citizen. This is because these two critical elements are pivotal in nation building and true nationhood. It is the oil that lubricates the hub of development, peace and progress. In view of the above the followings are recommended:

- The very foundation of Nigeria' existence as an entity has been shaken, cracked and weakened by the obvious factors stated hitherto, therefore any repair or rebuilding must be foundation based in form of real reorientation and conscious, sincere and pragmatic effort towards the same.
- There are historical issues and questions which generates answers and solution to the entity that looks fragile, these questions borders on the genuine essence of 1914 amalgamation beyond colonial expenditure and profiteering. If the sole essence of amalgamation is for British hegemony and imperialism, the question remains now that the amalgamators are not here again physically, shouldn't there be reconsiderations?
- Peace and compromises remains a panacea to national integration and development, therefore, the urgency in pursuit of the same must be genuinely sort, pursued and implemented. This is possible if the factors that breed and sponsor crisis, agitation and marginalization are tackled headlong
- So many approaches have been pursued in time past to ameliorate the dwindling nature of Nigerian's corporate existence to no avail. Approaches such as the Aburi Accord of 1964, the national CONFAB etc were urgent issues and steps that can trigger national cohesion, mitigate so many issues and crises that confront the nation. Issues such as true federalism, regionalism, confederation, resource control, state police or state security among others. If these recommendations can be



visited, implemented, the question of true nationhood in Nigeria will be a settled matter.

- There are so many factors affecting Nation building in Nigeria, factors such as unemployment, corruption, ethnocentrism, poverty and favoritism among others. These cases are like stones in the kidney. Corruption which is responsible to hardship, suffering, and underdevelopment of Nigeria for years remain a critical element that need pure attention. Eradicating corruption in Nigeria is like eradicating misery and suffering in Nigeria which will perfectly have a multiplier effect nationally and internationally. Corruption in Nigeria is endemic, multi faceted and dimensional, and as a result weaken virtually every aspect of her national life.



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