

## **HISTORY AND NATION-BUILDING IN NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

The paper, “History and Nation-building in Nigeria” interrogates the significance of history in the Nigerian nation-building discourse. Since independence, there have been frantic efforts by successive governments in the nation-building discourse. Just as much motion is evident, there have been no meaningful movement to the desired coast. Thus, the relegation of History to the background, is one of the relics of colonialism that has run the nation aground. Using secondary sources and some personal experiences, the study demonstrates the pivotal role history plays in nation-building and contends that, the Nigerian project will succeed with the hindsight of history.

**Keywords:** History, Historian, Nation-building, Nigeria, National Development

### **Introduction**

Nation-building has been a major challenge to post-colonial African states arising from a myriad of militating factors harassing both the government and the governed. Nigeria is not an exception to this conundrum. Since independence, there has been the hue and cry for national integration given the colonial antecedence which has resulted in the national question. The state of affairs in Nigeria has continually triggered the debate on the role of History in national development, with many people putting the blame on the continuous attempts by leaders to dispense with history. The concept of nation-building gained currency in the 1950s and 1960s through the works of some American political scientists who have a bias in history namely, Karl Deutsch, Charles Tilly, and Reinhard Benix.<sup>1</sup> These earliest proponents were concerned with social mobilization and assimilation without considering the inherent ethnic diversities. This Deutschian perception of nation-building was debunked by Walker Conner’s “Nation-building or Nation-Destroying” stating that the “theoreticians of nation-building tended to totally ignore or superficially treat ethnic diversity or identities as minor impediment to effective state integration.”<sup>2</sup> These processes have to do with national integration and consolidation owing to the impossibility of having a homogeneous state. That is, to achieve nation-building, the variegated nationalities must move from their parochial identities to evolve a national identity. The heterogeneity of Nigeria with over 360 distinct ethnic identities makes the need to evolve a national identity sacrosanct.

It is ahistorical for any scholar to assert and give the impression that what later became a conglomerate Nigeria after the arrival of the British maintained a common historical and political cohesion.<sup>3</sup> Nigeria like other African nations is a product of colonialism and a victim of its divisive legacies. All sorts of colonial diatribes documented in literatures of varying volumes and subjects were directed towards actualizing a common mandate which was the

perpetual preponderance of the Europeans over Africans discovered from the refuse dump of history. This Eurocentric persuasion attracted dogged counter-assaults from indigenous intelligentsias. Cheikh Anta Diop's stout defence of Africa in his doctoral thesis, at Sorbonne, France, argues that Africa was not only the cradle of humanity and civilization but indicted Europe to have deliberately distorted African record.<sup>4</sup> There is every need for what Molefe Asante describes as a "wave of intellectual resistance" succeeding Diop's argument which "gained in respectability as the wall of ignorance established by decades of racist science came tumbling down."<sup>5</sup> This 'Racist Wall' that has caused ignorance to fester nationally can only be demolished with the study of History at all levels of education in African countries, especially Nigeria which is our focus in this discourse .

### **History: A Relegated Giant**

The subject matter of history, despite the deliberate down-playing of its study in Nigeria until recently, is quite interesting, in other climes and to those who are familiar with the store of knowledge and wisdom derivable from the *goldmine* of History.<sup>6</sup> History is globally recognized as a source of enlightenment. This provides an explanation for an assemblage of cerebral giants at their utmost to guarantee national development in climes where the importance of history is sacrosanct. The Hegelian thesis that, "History leads the wise and drags the fool" tallies with George Santayama's stern warning that those who fail to learn from their predecessors are destined to repeat their failures.<sup>7</sup> The disheartening events occurring in post-independent Nigeria makes Hegel and Santayama's admonishments apt. Walter Rodney's *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* was not intended to perennially make excuses for the continent's underdevelopment after several decades of indigenous rule. For instance, what justification has Nigeria, the *Giant of Africa* after several decades of political independence still groping in the wilderness of underdevelopment? What was the *raison d'être* for the struggle for independence? What explanation could be advanced for the intractable identity issue, corruption, and insecurity? The answer lies in the relegation of History by the government, policy-makers, and the lip-service of some supposedly professional historians.

Wole Soyinka bluntly lampooned Nigerians (Africans) who have become notorious for making excuses for backwardness, thus, "This is what others have done to us," is, frankly, less painful than "this is what we have done to ourselves"- worst still, "this is what we are still doing to ourselves."<sup>8</sup> We complain of colonial exploitation and agitate for indemnity, what will happen to our indigenous sovereigns erstwhile and incumbent who have milked what the colonialists left behind to develop European and other foreign economies? The unmitigated suffering of Nigerians is the direct consequence of the absence of an enduring sense of history. Worried by the state of the nation, Jacob Ade-Ajayi concluded that,

The nation suffers which has no sense of history. Its values remain superficial and ephemeral unless imbued with a deep sense of continuity and perception of success and achievement that transcends acquisition of temporary power or transient wealth. Such a nation cannot achieve a sense of purpose or direction or stability and without them the future is bleak.<sup>9</sup>

To avoid this collective bleakness, a doyen of History of Education in Nigeria, Bab Fafunwa argued that history is to a people what memory is to an individual. A people with no knowledge of their past would suffer from collective amnesia, groping blindly into the future without the guide post of precedence to shape their course.<sup>10</sup> Ade-Ajayi illuminated the nexus between the nation and history,

History interacts with the nation. For the nation is a product of history in the sense of historical circumstances and events; and therefore the nation cannot

escape from its past. At the same time, the nation is shaped by the effort of historians, among others, who try to establish the history of the nation, influence its group's memory and seek to define its nationality- that is, the essence of what binds its people together, what constitutes their destiny, what makes them a people distinct from other peoples.<sup>11</sup>

History therefore interacts with various groups in terms of their identities and points of unity. While this could be true, it's not comprehensive as the areas of differences are also worthy of the historian's attention because inter and intra-group relations are not free from difference or divergence.

Professionally, interest in Nigerian history started with the seminal work of Kenneth O. Dike in the 1950s on the Niger Delta region. Other scholars like Ade-Ajayi, Biobaku, and Ayandele followed this noble path of positioning Nigeria in historical perspectives in the 1950s and 1960s. During this early period, history was a delight to nationalists, statesmen, and students. In the schools it was a compulsory subject which sharpened the intellect and created critical and curious minds. Adiele Afigbo in his National Merit Award Lecture, relished the nostalgia of the number of educated Nigerians in the public life of this country who had grounding in history and concluded that listing them would stir jealousy even envy from other disciplines.<sup>12</sup> To this day, even a school dropout in his 60s and 70s still have memory of some topics and notable figures in African history, including Mansa Musa, El-Kanemi, Jaja of Opobo, Ovarenwem; which practically makes no meaning to the much younger generation. What happened later to history and its army of field marshals and generals? What happened to the enrolment figures which Afigbo modestly refrained from giving during his national award lecture in order not to spark up healthy competition from other disciplines?

Reminiscing in anguish on the neglect of history in preference for science and technology in the wake of nation-building, B. O. Oloruntimehin remarked,

To advocate that studies in the sciences and technology should be pursued to the relative neglect of the humanities and social sciences is to express appetite for the materialism which technology creates rapidly, but without required for the organic growth and stability. Every one of us including the scientist and technologist has to be a citizen. Without the socializing influence of training in the humanities (especially history), the aggregation that we represent as citizens cannot be properly called a nation. A nation that lacks clear self-identity and which is structurally incoherent cannot be strong whatever its wealth and amount of gadgetry at its disposal.<sup>13</sup>

Every government - civilian and military - in the last twenty years or so has made science and technology their priority with several national development plans and heavy budgetary allocation. The enrolment figure for the humanities has drastically dwindled ever since. Giving a graphical picture of the preference in admission into universities and polytechnics on the ratio of 60% for Sciences and 40% for Arts, Social Sciences and Education; in the Humanities, History comes last after Economics, Law, Modern Languages, Political Science, and Sociology.

Apart from enrolment in external examination, at the tertiary level enrolment has been abysmal until the garnishing of the course with Diplomatic Studies, International Relations/Studies, or Strategic Studies according to the preference of the university. A case in point at the College of Education, where 'traditional' History is taught is frustrating. In the Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa, students' enrolment figure in History from 100 level to 300

level was not up to 100.<sup>14</sup> Some of the lecturers had to take up education courses at the expense of History. In most Nigerian universities, students' enrolment into the Department of History had been very low until the addition of international studies/relations. This 'rebranding' (History and International Studies/Relations) has tremendously increased students' statistics. Albeit, the increased enrolment has not reversed the tide of "irrelevance." There are also, some students whose failure to secure admission into Law veered into History and International Studies Department, only to switch latter (as Transfer Students).<sup>15</sup>

Obaro Ikime aptly describes this drain as a result of the national planners not recognizing the importance of history for national development. A development caused partly by historians who have not "sufficiently informed the nation that we exist, and that our discipline does have role to play in national development."<sup>16</sup> Since no right-thinking citizen will undermine scientific and technological advancement, it should be noted too that these advancements must happen within the context of a nation. Ikime drew parallels from developed nations of the world which had first to attain true nationhood before they set their tracks for full technological advancement, daring to claim that,

History is a far more potent force in the nation-building process than science and technology: science and technology are excellent weapons for boosting the national ego, but, alas, they cannot on their own create a nation. We need a Nigeria that has meaning for its citizenry. It is that Nigeria that science and technology has to serve.<sup>17</sup>

The claim of the superiority of science and technology-based disciplines over others is a myth and overweening like the white man over the black. Mike Odey in his essay on "The Role of Arts and Humanities in Nigerian Universities" contended that a graduate of any core Arts/Humanities course is a clear leader with a philosophical and religious bent.<sup>18</sup> History is one of the disciplines in the Arts and Humanities and capable of stimulating the accumulation and utilization of knowledge for national development.

The deliberate policy of government through its hired policy-making experts to further the relegation of history got a boost as reported by the national dailies with the elevation of French as a compulsory subject from the primary school to the tertiary level. This policy was credited to the Buhari Administration's Minister of Education (State), Anthony Anwukah during a visit of the French Ambassador, Denys Gaver. The policy was justified based on necessity, having seven Franco-phone countries surrounding Nigeria and the resolve to make it a second national language to facilitate with these Franco-phone neighbours.<sup>19</sup> This is a clear indication of the furtherance of colonialism. This is a country at worst described as a typical example of the 'Tower of Babel' due to her numerous tongues and multiculturalism making it futile to adopt an indigenous language as a language for instruction, worship, and commerce. More debilitating is the threat of most mother-tongue extinction due to linguistic eclipse of the minority groups by the majority groups sharing cultural proximity and parental preference for English Language for their children. This has created a hybrid of people who are neither English nor indigenous Nigerians.

While lack of History teachers has been identified as one of the factors for the relegation, the Minister of Education (State), a Professor of Education, whose first degree was in English Language and Literature and former Vice Chancellor promised manpower development to actualize the *frenchification* of Nigeria. During his lecture on Nigeria's fiftieth independence, Eskor Toyo berated the Nigerian educational system vis-a-vis political power, noting that, "if political power had been handed over to the patriots, they would definitely have handled

education differently.”<sup>20</sup> Both public and private schools are starved of qualified manpower to teach History through denial of employment opportunities to History graduates. A staff in one of the State’s Ministry of Education joined the ever-growing army of antagonists to the discipline when he sarcastically asked a secondary school teacher of History, “Does such a subject like History still exist in schools today?”<sup>21</sup> If such a remark could be made at that level then it is most unfortunate and spells doom for the nation. Prospective foreign students from Nigeria to the US are compelled to study the US history and worrisome too, some Nigerian schools operating British curriculum, teach British history to pupils sitting for the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE).<sup>22</sup> How many foreign students are compelled to study Nigerian history when the subject has been relegated and rendered disinteresting to the citizenry?

The difference in educational development in Nigeria according to the colonial division into two- Muslim North and Christian South was a factor for the fate of history. In what later became northern Nigeria, Islamic education flourished with the activities of the Arabic traders and missionaries and the 19<sup>th</sup> century Jihad of Dan Fodio. In the south, Christian missionaries established western schools to provide manpower for colonial administration and the mission as clerks, catechists, and teachers. The dependence on certification following British conquest went a long way to undermine what existed in the north and gradually affected the kind of history taught and its subsequent relegation. The colonial administration was opposed to the Christian missionary curriculum which was to produce thinking men and women. Hence, considered too dangerous for mass education in the colonies.<sup>23</sup> Across the continent, majority of the nationalists attended these mission schools.

On why the government takes repressive measures on historical research, David Landes and Charles Tily argue that it was no coincidence that authoritarian regimes have typically found it desirable and even necessary to censor works of history and to rewrite the record of the past to their convenience and advantage.<sup>24</sup> There is an irony between Western-styled education and indigenous education. While the former has formal examination and certification the latter does not require all that, but does not make it inferior. Evidences abound to prove that indigenous education has endured because of its pragmatic orientation towards societal development- in terms of morality, values, and even productivity. The individual is educated from the cradle on his economic, political, and socio-cultural institutions that have endured overtime.

History as an academic discipline reached its zenith during the period of nationalism and even after independence. Indigenous governments accorded due recognition to the discipline due to its role in national development by making it compulsory in the primary and secondary schools and funded historical research projects such as the Yoruba Historical Research Scheme established by the Awolowo-led administration in the Western Region in 1955.<sup>25</sup> Where is the interest of government in sustaining the dreams of our heroes past? What is the premium placed on the Nigerian historians and teachers of history within the nation’s educational system? What happens to their research outputs and how are they preserved? Afigbo’s lamentation sums this up with;

What they say in the classroom, in public lectures and learned conferences, as well as what they write in their books and learned journals peccolate[sic] to Nigerians other than members of their class who at most number a few thousands in a population of about 120,000,000. How many copies of Professor Ajayi’s *History and the Nation* or Professor Ikime’s *Through Changing Scenes: Nigerian History Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow*, for instance were printed? Probably not

more than a few thousands. How many were sold, given away or stolen? How many of those sold, given away or stolen were read and how many of those who read understood what they read? How many of those who understood what they read were in a position to apply their knowledge to some aspect of the public affairs... to the management of our politics and administration, our economy, our culture and to the education and training of our youths?<sup>26</sup>

The poor reading culture among the rulers and the ruled pose a problem which Afigbo highlighted above. The intellectual indolence and lack of self-discipline were observed to have been inimical to national development since knowledge will forever govern ignorance. Moses Akin Makinde quoted from Awolowo thus,

I have never regarded myself as having a monopoly of wisdom. The trouble is that when most people in public life and in the position of leadership and rulership are spending whole days and nights carousing in clubs or in the company of men of shady character and women of easy virtue, I, like few others, am always at my post working hard at the country's problems and trying to find solutions to them.<sup>27</sup>

The founding fathers of Nigeria achieved and attained great feats because they savoured the richness of history packed in books which shaped their thoughts, words, and actions in the development of the country. Unlike their successors whose accession to public position is for everything but service; many are intellectually and morally deficit; and even the highly cerebral, knavish. Since the transition from the revered ivory towers to the corridors of power, how has Nigeria fared, especially in the Fourth Republic?

Historical scholarship has adversely suffered because the government and its hirelings have failed to provide an enabling environment, the society has transferred its interest to other disciplines, and the historian is at the receiving end even with the realization that they have a role to play in nation-building. The 1969 National Curriculum Conference was indicted to have started the ebbing interest and final death of history in the school curricula. The confused, chaotic, and directionless Nigerian educational system stemmed from the curriculum conference. Bayo Olupohunda wondered aloud,

What manner of country allows private schools teach British history, American history, and Oriental history while it removes the learning of Nigerian history from its own public school system? What is our national educational goals? The philosophy of Nigerian educational system as captured in the National Policy of Education seeks to promote national cohesion, a free, just, and democratic society. But how do we achieve these without training the young ones the history of our nationhood.<sup>28</sup>

Okon Uya identified two militating factors on the roles of the historian in nation-building-being a citizen and a professional,

By training and disposition, the Nigerian historian finds it difficult to do this. Educated in the western tradition by European and American teachers, most Nigerian historians have accepted the idealistic approach to the study of history. They have accepted unattainable objectivity as an article of faith which invites the historians to be dispassionate, cold, unemotional and detached in their approach to their subject.<sup>29</sup>

Ayandele espoused his perspective on the failings of both the historians and the government. The historians were yet to be fully aware of their patriotic duties and social responsibilities expressed in their inability to reflect the Nigerian realities. The government should revise its conception of development to be more human-centred than naira-focused. To the Historical Society of Nigeria, efforts should be made to persuade the Federal Government to, “scrap the de-Nigerianising, psychically disorienting, exotic and imperialistic history syllabuses still operating in the primary and lower secondary schools in independent Nigeria.”<sup>30</sup>

The quest for historical objectivity enshrouded in illusion has severed most Nigerian historians from the realities of their calling. Does one cease to be a part of his society because he is a historian or scholar? What is the essence of scholarship when it robs one his identity and service to his people? For instance, some of Nigeria’s national ailments are that of identity, corruption, resource control, and terrorism/insurgency. Blinded by the indulgence of objectivity, the Nigerian historian armed with blazing sword of evidence will end up writing, “cold, emotionless, uninspiring but factually accurate and well researched history. Even when the evidence suggests conclusions which are nationalistic or pan-Africanist, they shy away from such conclusions for fear of being called propagandists.”<sup>31</sup> A more worrisome case is the disposition of some who vehemently query other works for unorthodoxy, because history cannot be advocacy. These orthodox historians are culpable of not practicing “Applied History” of Afigbo, because they either failed to identify a role or after identifying, failed to prosecute it,<sup>32</sup> a position Derridas described as “romantic illusion.”<sup>33</sup>

Parental pressure on career choices of their children and the dearth of employment opportunities for graduates of history affect how the discipline has fared in Nigeria. Naturally, most parents and sponsors normally ask their children/wards what they intend to study and more importantly the economic benefits accruable from such a course. There are some parents who desire continuity of their professions (Law, Medicine, Accounting, Engineering etc). Parental preference rather than children’s aptitude in career choice has adversely affected choice and performance of students in History and other disciplines. On this, Ikime contended that education goes beyond employment, because to a historian,

Education must also prepare the citizen for living, for relating properly to his environment, including the many different groups of people with whom, in our Nigerian context, he or she must relate. We submit that when it comes to preparing citizens to meet the challenges, History has more to offer than Science and Engineering.<sup>34</sup>

Tekena Tamuno recalled a disappointing experience with the Students Historical Society of the University of Ibadan in February 1973. These students, conscious of the harsh reality of graduates of history requested the erudite professor to deliver a lecture on job opportunities for historians in Nigeria.<sup>35</sup> The bleakness of graduates of history in the Nigerian labour is worst today with the high rate of unemployment in Nigeria.

### **The Significance of History**

Irrespective of the relegation of history to the point of anonymity in relation to nation-building, history over time earned an enviable place in national development. Historical consciousness can only be achieved through history. “History is about learning, research, search for knowledge of who we are, where we have come from and where we are headed.”<sup>36</sup> In order words, history is a deliberate search for knowledge and the transmission of such knowledge for the development of society. Afigbo like most of his contemporaries stoutly argued that sustainable development in Nigeria will be possible if only Nigerians are active participants in

the desired change found in historical consciousness. A historically conscious citizenry will appreciate the fact that over-reliance on wholesale borrowing from Europe and America of ideas in nauseating deviance to the inherent variables which makes such copy and paste attitude inimical. Experiments from the British parliamentary to the American presidential systems of government were catastrophic.<sup>37</sup> It is this consciousness that stimulated nationalistic tendencies in our national forebears. Patriotism is inculcated in the citizenry with a sense of personal worth and an improved self-image in the face of European commercialism.<sup>38</sup>

Nations are built by exemplary men and women and sustained by institutions that promote good governance and thus socio-economic development. Nation-building therefore is a product of conscious statecraft, not happenstance. Nation-building is always a work-in-progress; a dynamic process in constant need of nurturing and re-invention in the face of new challenges.<sup>39</sup> To achieve this, there is every need for the histories of real indigenous heroes and heroines from both the 'mega' and 'mini' nationalities to be accorded recognition in both the legendary and social media published in books and learned journals. This will balance the consciousness of Nigerians that beyond the conventional *WAZOBIA*, there are Nigerians whose past are worthy of studying for national development. In the Nigerian school system, the appalling state of history is a product of several policy summersaults, which have created more hybrids than Nigerians. This can be addressed following Uya's admonishment,

An African child fed on the diet of his Africanity and Nigerianness between the sensitive and impressionable ages of 6 and 16 will develop greater confidence in our cultural heritage than some of us have done. Our educational planners may wish to bear this in mind as they put together facets of the New Policy on Education for the country.<sup>40</sup>

History has equipped the country with capable manpower to drive national development. From the dogged nationalists to those currently in both the private and public sectors, most of them are products of history. And at sometimes they are the last resort during moments of trials. For instance, Okon Uya who replaced Humphrey Nwosu as Chairman of the electoral umpire in the twilight of the Babangida's Administration; and Mahmood Yakubu, the newly appointed INEC chairman. The legendary Kenneth Onwuka Dike, pathfinder of African History and pioneer indigenous Vice Chancellor of Nigeria's premier university, the University of Ibadan; Tekena Tamuno, Vice Chancellor, University of Ibadan and former President, Nigerian Academy of Letters; J. F. Ade-Ajayi, Vice Chancellor, University of Lagos; Emmanuel Ayandele, Vice Chancellor, University of Calabar; The quintessential Bolanle Awe, pioneer female Professor of History, Pro-Chancellor and Chairman of Council, University of Nigeria, Nsukka;<sup>41</sup> Yakubu Ochefu, Vice Chancellor, Kwara University, Wukari, Taraba State and seasoned entrepreneur. These giants in their respective rights have sustained mental decolonization and improved on service delivery.

Having a national history fills the void created by speculations and divisive commentaries by supposed patriots and statesmen. For instance, while Tekena Tamuno excused the Nigerian historian reluctance to "wade into the thorny field of the Nigerian civil war" on the ground of "academic restraints"<sup>42</sup> A.A. Ayida argues that,

The Civil War with its personal tragedies is over, but it is a matter for speculation whether or not we have all learnt the right lessons from its main causes and tragic consequences. In its effort to the peace, the Federal Government has maintained a studied silence over the events which led to the war and its aftermath. By the



same token, some of us who were privileged to serve the federal cause have refrained from placing on record all we know about what transpired on both sides of the wall that divided and may be, still divides the Nigerian nation.<sup>43</sup>

The above statement was made during the Nigerian Economic Summit in 1973, but its relevance given the prevailing Nigerian reality is very apt. Should Nigeria be faced with a plethora of secessionist agitation after the Civil War and the series of calls on national unity? In the 1960s it was majorly the discontented Igbo-Biafra secessionist agitations, today, over five decades after the Civil War, Nigeria is more divided than ever. The Oduduwa group of South-West Nigeria, Middle-Belt, South-South among others have advanced reasons to secede and the disposition of the Federal(?) Government and the political elite have not demonstrated any modicum of historical consciousness.

To many, history is primarily concerned with the past. The historian is the custodian of the collective past of Nigerians by keeping a “fuller inventory of our national, cultural and intellectual property.”<sup>44</sup> Through historical researches, what constituted the past of the disparate groups is reconstructed in defence of the jaundiced writings by the Europeans. The recourse to oral tradition exhumed evidences of indigenous ingenuities in all spheres of human endeavours. Educative and historical dramas like *Akassa Yo Mi* by Ola Rotimi, depict an early example of resource control agitation by the Niger Deltans using the Nembe-Ijo typology who lost their resource to the British in 1895; and the *Odum* (African Python) masquerade by the Rivers State Council of Arts and Culture depicting the mammoth water extravaganza at Okrika.<sup>45</sup> Also, biographical studies have been carried out by historians to debunk European biases on the one hand and other indigenous biases on indigenous personalities. For instance, the activities of merchant princes (Jaja of Opobo and Nana of Itsekiri) in the creeks of the Niger Delta which threatened European commercial concerns got them branded villains to justify British invasion. This the Nigerian historian has been fulfilling. Erim O. Erim’s inaugural lecture at the University of Calabar commented on the kind of history Nigeria needs when he canvassed for a multidimensional study of history,

For while in my judgement, the history of Nigeria should not be seen permanently as that of over-sized heroes or traditional and educated elites; the fact remains that rulers have in all ages quite often played a decisive role in the shaping of events. Political, cultural, and religious leaders are veritable symbols of the national will whose ideas, thought patterns and activities should be chronicled and projected for the education of the masses.<sup>46</sup>

History has also proven through research that the various Nigerian groups were not in splendid isolations from one another due to variations in geographical distributions, socio-economic and political factors. The dangerous assertion of war and disunity among Nigerians has been debunked with extensive inter and intra group relations facilitated rather than hindered by the rivers, forest and montane terrain. The truth remains that the groups that later became Nigerians were neither salvages nor lived in isolation. War was a form of interaction just as trade, socio-cultural exchanges like marriages. The frequency of war and rate of destruction increased frighteningly with European commercialism which incited wars of attrition to weaken concerted opposition and justify intervention.

## **Conclusion**

History has played pivotal roles in nation-building since the 1950s in Nigeria. The relevance of this discipline waned to the detriment of the nation when the country's rulers failed to learn from other developed climes or better still, with hindsight, inquire into the source of our strength during the days of our national forebears. To get it right again, the Nigerian historians need to be assertive by recognizing their roles and rising up to statecraft as was the case in the periods before and immediately after independence. This is in line with the Ayandele's charge to historians to "consciously begin to write what is sometimes ridiculed when it comes to African<sup>1</sup> historiography as national history."<sup>47</sup> It is sheer double standard on the part of the protagonists of objectivity mostly of western origin who are flyers of their country's flag in their writings and at the same time cajole African historians into accepting hook, line and sinker the illusive ideas of historical objectivity.

The government should reverse the policy that phased history out of the school system by making it compulsory at all school levels as against the practice of subsuming a minute fraction of Nigerian history in Social Studies/Civil Education and Government. A comprehensive overhaul of the history curriculum to reflect the Nigerian realities and the employment of qualified manpower to teach the subject will restore the attraction of history to students. The government and university authorities should provide research grants and scholarships to deserving researchers as a way of expanding the horizon of historical scholarship. It is observed that Nigeria has been making a lot of motion devoid of any movement. This appalling state of inertia results from misplaced priorities in the drive for nation-building. How can a nation be built without patriots? How can science and technology transform a people without a past? Which society is history going to serve? These questions can only be answered through historical studies documented in books that will be read by both the government and the governed.

## **Endnotes**

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<sup>1</sup> David L. Imbua, Sandy O. Onor, and Patrick O. Odey. *A Companion to African History in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*. (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2017), 271.

<sup>2</sup> Walker Conner. "Nation-Building or Nation-Destroying" *World Politics*. Vol. 24, No. 3, April 1972, 319.

<sup>3</sup> Timothy Ogbang Ellah, James Ajang Aboh and Patrick O. Odey. "Management of ethnic diversities as a panacea for nation building: The Nigerian example, 1960-2017" *Humanus Discourse* Vol. 2, No. 2, 2022, 1.

<sup>4</sup> Molefi Kete Asante, *The History of Africa, The Quest for Eternal Harmony* (New York: Routledge; 2007), 7

<sup>5</sup> Asante, 7.

<sup>6</sup> Mike Odey. *Principles & Practices of Research Methodology in History & the Humanities for Supervisors and Students*. (Makurdi: Aboki Publishers, 2021), xix.

<sup>7</sup> Onwuka Njoku N., *Economic History of Nigeria 19<sup>th</sup>-20<sup>th</sup> Centuries* (Second Edition). (Nsukka: Great AP Express Publishers Ltd; 2014), xi.

<sup>8</sup>Wole Soyinka, *Forget the Past, Forget the Future* (Zaria: The Ahmadu Bello University Press Ltd.; 2006), 15.

<sup>9</sup>Samuel Olusoji Oyeranmi, "Teaching History and National Development in the Third World: The Nigerian Experience" [www.worldhistoryconnected.press](http://www.worldhistoryconnected.press) Accessed January 27, 2016.

<sup>10</sup>Babatunde Fafunwa, *The Punch* October 30, 1990 qtd. in Samuel Olusoji Oyeranmi, "Teaching History..."

<sup>11</sup>Oyeranmi, "Teaching History..."

<sup>12</sup>Adiele E. Afigbo, *History as Statecraft* (Okigwe: Whytem Publishers Nigeria; 1999), 18-19

<sup>13</sup>B. O. Oloruntimehin, *History and Society* (University of Ife Inaugural Lecture Series, 1976), 10

<sup>14</sup>Patrick Odey, personal experience as student of Cross River State College of Education, Akamkpa, from 1999-2002.

<sup>15</sup>Patrick Odey, personal experience as a Lecturer in the Department of History, University of Calabar.

<sup>16</sup>Obaro Ikime, *History, the Historian and the Nation: The Voice of a Nigerian Historian* (Ibadan: HEBN Publishers Plc; 2006), 43.

<sup>17</sup>Ikime, 44.

<sup>18</sup>Mike Odey, "The Role of Arts and Humanities in Nigerian Universities" *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* Vol. 1, No. 2, 2005, 41.

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<sup>26</sup>Afigbo, *History as Statecraft*, 17.

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<sup>28</sup>Bayo Olupohunda, “Bring Back History as Subject to our Schools” *Opinion Nigeria* www.opinionnigeria.com November 6, 2015. Accessed January 24, 2016.

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<sup>31</sup>Imbua et.al(Eds.), 113.

<sup>32</sup>Imbua et.al(Eds.), 112.

<sup>33</sup> E. J. Alagoa, *Festac Remembered: Cultural Intolerance in the Nigerian Nation* (Lagos: Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization Public Lecture; 2007), 12.

<sup>34</sup>Ikime, *History, the Historian and the Nation*, xv.

<sup>35</sup>Tekena N. Tamuno. *History and History-Makers in Modern Nigeria*. Inaugural Lectures 1973-1974. (Ibadan: University Press, 1973), 14.

<sup>36</sup>Ebiegberi Joe Alagoa. *Nigeria in History: Lifting the Burdens, Learning Lessons*. Award Writers’ Lecture, August 20, 2019, Lagos, 15.

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<sup>38</sup> David Imbua et.al(Eds.), 113.

<sup>39</sup> Ibrahim A. Gambari, “The Challenges of Nation-Building: The Case of Nigeria” First Year Anniversary Lecture, Mustapha Akambi Foundation, Sheraton Hotel, Abuja, Nigeria, February 7, 2008. www.mafng.org. Accessed January 24, 2016

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<sup>45</sup>Alagoa, *Festac Remembered*, 3.

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