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## THE CHALLENGES OF NATION-BUILDING: A HISTORICAL ASSESSMENT OF THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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### Abstract

The challenge of nation-building in any discourse of this nature requires serious historical approach which confers appropriate empirical duty on the discussant in ex-raying the question of Nigeria's growth and development. Although it may be argued, as has often been done, that the knowledge of history does not simply make for an easy answer to the problems of our nation's circumstances, it at least makes possible a necessary distinction between those who are genuinely seeking solutions and those who are cynically engaging popular prejudices. Issues taken up in this paper are not new, but they are said with some level of aggressive tone as an emphasis on the need to sustain the debates required in fashioning the agenda for a people committed to development. This paper thus attempts a review of some of the major challenges to Nation-building efforts in Nigeria from a historical perspective with a view to offering possible suggestions, though not entirely new, for the sustenance of the corporate exercise of the Nigerian Federation.

*Keywords: Nation Building, Challenges and Nigerian experience*

### Background to the Study

Since independence, Nigeria has experienced several hiccups in its political, economic and social history largely as a result of the contradictions in the nation-state created by the advance of modernity in a state of multi-ethnic configuration within a peripheral region. Whichever direction one may want to view the "Nigerian Condition" it is veritably clear that all facets of the Nigerian dilemma remains undauntingly recurring. The debate has become most pervading as it has become visible that the task of building a political community and effective political integration has been more frustrating than rewarding<sup>1</sup>. As Akin Mabogunje noted, some few years back, there is overriding pervasive feeling of alienation among most Nigerians<sup>2</sup>, and this is orchestrated more by the negative sentiments often expressed by the apologists of our present dilemma.

The pervading debate is reflected in the people not being sure how they belong to the 'modern' post colonial Nigerian nation-state and whether they are expected to have any stake, commitment or obligations to the state. This uncertainty, as Mabogunje revealed, manifests itself in the mindless corruption and the insensitivity to social injustice among the bureaucrats and the political leadership as it is in the unconscionable vandalism and

wanton criminality of some of the citizens<sup>3</sup>. The implied arguments against effective and durable democracy in the country pursues extensively the thesis latched on the multi-ethnic nature of our polity, the impossibility of integrating what looked to people like a collection of disparate groups of people. Along with this debates are the manifestable domineering role, perceived or real, of the three principal ethnic groups: Hausa/Fulani, Igbo and Yoruba. Equally, attempting to drown the rest are the thundering agitation and persistent howlings of the minorities being suffocated within their political and economic environments. In all these the worrisome picture that flashes often is the indication that some do not even want the continued corporate, sovereign existence of Nigeria.

Consequently, the reasons for Nigeria's failure in the past are complex and varied so it could be misleading to attribute any of the setbacks to one single cause, one single regime or single government. However, as may be rightly observed, focusing on the failure is not an exercise in national self-flagellation or national self-depreciation but a warning to avoid the delusions and complacency that have all too often led nations to falter.

#### Objective of the Study

The objective of this paper is to review some of the major challenges to Nation-building efforts in Nigeria from a historical perspective with a view to offering possible suggestions, though not entirely new, for the sustenance of the corporate exercise of the Nigerian Federation.

#### Literature Review

We shall attempt a conceptual analysis of some critical issues relevant to this discussion in the context of national integration and unity. Nigeria is a nation that has been in search of stability since its political independence. The concept of a nation is applied here in the sense of the people of Nigeria as a state.

A nation, in its generic term, is derived from a Latin verb *nasie*, which means 'to be born', and it originally connotes a group of people born in the same place<sup>4</sup>. The Chambers Twentieth Century Dictionary defines a nation as "a body of people marked of common descent, language, culture or historical tradition". The term is used to identify a tribe or nationality in ethnocultural sense or to refer to the people of internationally sovereign state. In recent times a 'nation' is either synonymous with a state or its inhabitants or it denotes a human group bound together by common solidarity. In our usage here the term does not refer to a component state in a federation but rather primarily to signify a political body, united under one independent government, institutional ties and community of economic and cultural interest.

In the evolution of state, the attainment of statehood and nationhood are critical points to consider, especially in discussing the African condition since the 60s. Statehood, as Ali Mazrui notes, is about central command; it is ultimately a problem of structure, authority and control while nationhood is about collective empathy<sup>5</sup>. Nationhood is ultimately a problem of culture, identity and consciousness; it is about who is in control and who is a fellow compatriot. For example, as Mazrui points out, Somalia has been a nation without a state; the people combined to speak a substantial shared language, a shared religion, shared clan-culture and a shared sense of being Somalia. Conversely, a country like Ethiopia, until recently could be said to be a state without a nation while a place like Eritrea is in search of both nation hood and statehood<sup>6</sup>. For our purposes, Nigeria is a multi-national state and made up of ethnic groups who not only vary in size but also in the distribution of power, influence and resources. Admittedly, as Elaigwu notes, such a state is marked by aggressive ethnic nationalism as various groups push for the realization of their sub-national self-determination<sup>7</sup>. Their demands often challenge, directly, the centre's demand for national self-determination and integration. The talks of integration and state-building are usually more daunting in such state than in a polyethnic state. A polyethnic state, by the way, refers to the state which has many small ethnic groups, none of which lays claim to subnational autonomy enough to challenge the autonomy of the

centre by asserting its subnational self-determination<sup>8</sup>. No ethnic group in such a state regards itself as a nation. Although both types of states may call for different structures for the distribution of powers in response to their peculiar problems, it is observable that most polyethnic states adopt unitary system of government while multi-national states adopt federalism as a technique to manage their competing interests.

The federal system is most often a compromise solution in a multinational state, between two types of self-determination to maintain a supranational framework of government which guarantees security for the nation-state and the self-determination of component groups to retain their identities<sup>9</sup>. While this concept may be clear enough, the rationale behind its formation, as we shall see later in this paper, requires exploration because the problems associated with it are sufficiently complex. What we may note for now is that federalism attempts to reflect the diverse political, social, cultural and economic interests within the framework of a broader national unity and development.

In federalism scholars note that the structure, that is, proportionality in the sizes of the federation is a fundamental element. A renowned scholar on federation, K. C. Wheare argued that :

The federating units should be such in size that no one unit should be so big and powerful as to overrule others and to bend the will of the federal government... the size of the units concerned, in wealth, area and population is... of prime importance. There must be some sort of reasonable balance which will ensure that all the units can maintain independence within the sphere allotted to them and that no one can dominate the others<sup>10</sup>.

Although, some scholars, while not agreeing fully with Wheare, suggested other elements for the success of a federation which include similarity of social and political traditions, leadership capacity to manage cultural differences, unity in diversity, involving persons, institutions and ideas of that society. It is clear from the opinion of some political actors that Nigeria's federal structure ignored some of these fundamental elements because it has not been able to appreciably represent any of the elements above.

The concept of leadership and power is reasonably important in the outcome of any political system. Leadership is central to organizations, groups and people. Leadership in simple terms, could be said to be a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and directs the organization in a way that makes it more cohesion and coherent. It may also be said to be the ability of influencing the activities and behaviour of an individual or group in an effort to attain a goal. However, the most encompassing of all social phenomena and the ultimate in state craft is power. According to Robert Dahl:

Nothing is more likely to lead to bad political strategies than to misunderstand power; to misperceive the power structure; for to be misled about power is to be misled about the prospects and means of stability, change and revolution. The graveyards of history are strewn with the corpses of reformers who failed, not only because of the forces arrayed against them, but because the picture in their minds about power and influence were simplistic and inaccurate<sup>11</sup>.

One appreciates this assertion from Dahl when colonial rule, Nigerian politics, military regimes are reviewed as the reproduced socio-economic and political consequences which have reflected the lessons of history and impeded the proper functioning of the federation, thereby stalling the overall development of the nation.

The domain of gauging some of these critical variables of development has to do with the political culture of a people. Political culture refers to those aspects of a culture which

have impact of some sort on political traditions, behaviour, political institutions and their operations. Roy Macridis defines it as “commonly shared goals and commonly accepted rules”<sup>12</sup>. This conception is in line with Lucian Pye's position which holds that the political culture of a people is:

The set of attitudes, beliefs and sentiments which give order and meaning to a political process and which provides the underlying assumptions and rules that govern behaviour in the political system. It encompasses both the political ideals and the operating norms of a polity<sup>13</sup>.

All these postulations indicate that political culture deals with the images, beliefs and values which provide people with the means for perceiving, interpreting and evaluating the physical and the social aspects of the political life of a nation. In essence, it is possible, through it, to see the nature of the society's orientation towards problem-solving, their orientation to collective action, orientation to the political system and orientation to other people<sup>14</sup>. Political culture is thus a set of attitudes towards a set of political objects and process, particular distribution of patterns of orientations or popular attitudes among a people and it involves, as noted above, political style, values, norms, emotions, beliefs and symbolic attachment that are dominant among a people. Political culture serves as a framework for perception and an orientation towards political life. It determines the standards, to be applied in judging political institutions as to whether they are good, just and rational, and it defines what is good government, what goals ought to be pursued by the community, including the standard of conduct appropriate for public officials, the rights and responsibility of citizens and the role of individual in the political process. Within the context of the aforementioned concepts are laced the current reference to matters of state-building and nation-building efforts of a country. The challenge of state-building or authority, as IsawaElaigwu puts it, refers to the problem of the political centre “penetrating” or controlling the periphery to make its presence felt and to maximize its authority<sup>15</sup>. Nation-building, as noted in the attention to nationhood above, is a progressive acceptance of members of the polity of the necessity and legitimacy of the central government and the identification with the central government as a symbol of the nation. This, as Elaigwu expatiates, is a vertical dimension of the nation-building<sup>16</sup>. At the horizontal level, it involves the acceptance of other members of the civic body as equal fellow members of a corporate nation. This engages the recognition of the right of other members to share a common history, resources, values and other relevant attributes of the state. Nation-building thus entails the moulding of a political unit out of a myriad of ethnic groups united by some elements of common tradition, culture and loyalty to one another. It is the wide spread acceptance of the process of state-building, the creation of a political community which has a self-integrative mechanism that gives a fuller meaning to the life of the state.

The concept of a political community inadvertently emerges within these conditions. A political community, according to James Skillen, is government accountable to citizens, and citizens under government<sup>17</sup>. Robert Nisbet however says it is a society centred in and dominated by the state<sup>18</sup>. In a simple term, it a community of humans with self regulating mechanisms; but people have different words to refer to the political orders in which they live. They could be called state, nation, country, republic, commonwealth, kingdom, etc but in some cases these political entities are defined by a constitution (basic law) which specifies the tasks and limits of government in the state.

The state is the only community that is inherently coercive, unlike the two leading human communities of the kinship (family) and religious. Because the state is a community with coercion, it must be diluted, emasculated and chained<sup>19</sup>. This is why the key demand of democratic movement has been for an end to arbitrary government by autocrats and for the establishment of credible limited and representative government. The purpose of a constitution, in the political community, is to mark off the boundaries of the political order and to specify the responsibilities of government and the people so that arbitrary

government can be eliminated.

The most worrisome issue, however, is the nature of the state and what its constitution should constitute. As James Skillen aptly noted, not many states have adequately answered what a constitution should constitute because they have mostly attempted two primary things, viz laying down electoral procedures and to distinguish the levels and/or branches of government; and secondly, that of listing a number of protected rights that the people hold independent of government<sup>20</sup>. What they have not done, according to Skillen, is to clarify the identity and purpose of the commonwealth itself because a constitutional state or republic needs more definition than simply a description of its government offices, a listing of prior individual rights and an articulation of some procedural rules for elections and conduct of government.

Citizens in a political community with a constitutional government make up a community that is quite different from communities of the family, education institution, organisations of employers, and employees but the key thing in the national political community is that its political order recognizes the right of government to monopolise the use of force for the purposes of enforcing its law on everyone within the territory over which it governs. A political community is within a single territory, with many kinds of organizations and responsibilities which co-exist but with only one authority that has the right to make territorial laws that are binding on all citizens regardless of other organisations and relationships to which they belong.

A political community should exist not in order for the 'people' to use government to do any thing they want but rather so that citizens and government may establish and sustain a just public legal order which is upheld by laws that assure all citizens of fair treatment. This is because people are always more than simply citizens. They are people whose talents and vocations may involve many dimensions, the political, economic and social. Citizens living under government do constitute a real community defined as a public-legal community and all its members, who should be called citizens, should be called citizens, should have a right to share in the fruits and benefits of its commonwealth<sup>21</sup>.

The last of some of major conceptual matter we deem necessary hinges on the concept of 'indigene' and its corollary, 'settler'; a phenomena that has kept this nation of the precipice for decades. Who an indigene is in a particular area could be a different task to define, especially in the light of the mass movement of people over time and across cultures and space. This is also so because, it is common historical knowledge that only very few Nigerian ethnic groups could lay claim to being continuous sole residents of their current homelands for a period exceeding a millennium, including those with a tradition, indicating that they had sprang up from the ground in the environment they now occupy<sup>22</sup>.

However, as Adesoji and Alade noted in highlighting the varied positions on the controversial question of indigene and settler, the 'relative association of groups with different areas, a product of their settlement and the seeming dominance of their culture or perhaps the outcome of their ability to conquer and occupy a relatively virgin area, has resulted in situations whereby some came to identify themselves as the indigenes of a particular place'<sup>23</sup>. While a view like this could have some element of veracity, it is known that many states, societies and communities emerged all over the world from a blend of different layers of migrants, sometimes with the supposedly aborigine groups or even among themselves. The process of state formation among different Nigeria groups as we shall review shortly, bears clear testimony to this.

Despite the various arguments around the concept, an indigene, in the Nigerian circumstances, is simply seen as a person/persons who first settled in an area and have the right of claim over land, grazing field and other sites of historical and cultural importance, including chieftaincy rites of the area. The settler is then considered as a later

inhabitant of an area, who seemingly has a residency right but not customary and political rights, especially the right to claim land, chieftaincy, control over customs and traditions etc.

What this connotes is that the indigeneship of a particular society or group or region confers certain rights, which others should not enjoy by virtue of being settler or migrants or strangers. Those considered settlers have consistently maintained that having settled in a place for a long period it is not proper to refer to them as settlers but rather as indigenes and that while their "kiths and kins could be located elsewhere, they could not really trace their roots appropriately neither could they fit properly with the old society they or their forebears left several years ago"<sup>24</sup>. This is always, however, countered by the indigenes that no matter the number of years a settler had lived in a place, he or she still remains a settler because it is difficult for a settler to become a native. Analysts contend that the concept of indigene and settler will always remain contentious in Nigeria because it could be argued that the dividing line between indigene/settler is very thin, more so that an indigene somewhere could be a settler in another place. Equally, the settler/indigeneship question is not restricted or confined to or between ethnic groups because even ethnically 'homogenous' groups still refer and treat some members of the same groups as settlers within the same sub-ethnic identity groups.

In Nigeria, the indigene/settler syndrome is an age long problem and one that has drawn us closer to repeating the cliché 'is Nigeria a nation' in recent time, as the distinctions between autochthonous people and migrants even in ancient kingdoms and primordial communities attest, but unlike in the pre-colonial, this phenomenon has assumed a more serious dimension due to the obvious manipulation by individuals and groups in this sort of national political community that has emerged.

What makes the process of state and nation-building meaningful is the existence of credible democratic culture. This type of democracy, which we shall not get into details, underscores the plural nature of politics and invariably gives recognition to the diversity of social forces. Such a democracy has a core moral value approach to governance because authority is based on its acquisition from the people with institutionalization of the rule of law, the emphasis on the legitimacy of rules, the availability of choices and cherished values, accountability and transparency. Invariably, it must be understood that democracy cannot stand on its legs without proper democratic culture through political education and a stable civil society.

Political education, as revealed by Isawa Elaigwu, is a derivative of democratic culture<sup>25</sup>. He indicates that democratic culture is composed of the attitudes, beliefs, emotions and values of society that relate to democracy and democratic issues. Political education, in the context of democratic culture, is viewed as that sum total of training and instruction required of the entire citizenry of a state needed to ensure their adequate participation in the process of governmental policies and affairs. This ranges from civic education, civic participation, civic rights, responsibilities and obligations to the state. In this regard, as Elaigwu expatriates, a stable civic polity is an essential attribute of an effective democratic government. It entails, in his view, the functioning of democratic institutions, processes and procedures according to inherent characteristics of the democratic system<sup>26</sup>. At the root of the democratic faith is the locus of authority, which must emanate from the people. This centres around the issue of majority rule, rule of law, choice, accountability and constitutionalism.

The centrality of political education in all these processes cannot be overemphasized. As Thomas Jefferson once said:

"Every government degenerates when trusted to the rulers of the people alone. The people themselves are its only depositories. And to render even them safe, their minds must be improved upon to a certain degree"<sup>27</sup>.

To render the people safe, for improved minds, the following ought to be taken care of as part of the political education process of the people. These include: the issue of literacy of the people; the economic empowerment of the people, elected representative/constituency relations, the right to dissent and disobedience which must not be along ethnic, religious or gender basis. This is why Henry Thoreau, an American, posited that all men have the right of revolution, that is, the right to refuse allegiance to, and to resist the government when its tyranny or its inefficiency are great and unendurable<sup>28</sup>.

For Nigeria, the process of nation building has been arduous. Several attempts in public policies and national unity-targeted/initiatives have been experimented all in the name of achieving integration and unity. Rotimi Suberu identifies the nature and impact of such integrative public policies along four broad classes<sup>29</sup> which include what he terms re-organisational policies designed to promote national integration or cohesion through the restructuring of politico-administrative institutions and relationships such as state creation, new local government areas, boundary adjustment, relocation of federation administrative capital and creation of ethnic chiefdoms for minorities. The second integrative public policy, he analysed, is redistributive policies, which involves the allocation or reallocation of public resources among diverse ethnic or territorial constituencies; for instance, the issue of revenue sharing and federal character principle. A third of the integrative policies is that which Suberu considers as symbolic policies designed to promote national integration through political-cultural education, celebrations and exhortations such as creation of national symbols, the NYSC, establishment of unity schools and the national language policy.

The fourth and final categorization of the integrative policies is the regulatory policy which seeks to promote unity or stability through the repression or suppression of individuals, groups, processes that are perceived to endanger national unity; for instance, the suppression of Biafran secession, the proscription of sectional political associations, proscription and/or persuasion of key ethnic activities.

However, as Suberu perorates, these policies have been largely contradictory, ineffective, counter productive or repressive. He contends that their shortcomings reflect not only flaws within the Nigerian policy-making process and contradictions in the country's convoluted and violated federalism but also a wider and deeper failure in Nigeria to evolve or legitimize the political values of multi-culturalism.

#### The Realities of Our Experience

The 1914 Amalgamation of the Northern Protectorate, Southern Protectorate and the Colony of Lagos began the foot journey of the visible trend that has agitated Nigerians' mind over the decades. This merger came by the formal proclamation of January 1, 1914 by Sir Frederick Lugard in what read in part thus:

After a long and mature consideration, His majesty's government arrived sometime ago at the conclusion that it would be to the great advantage of the countries known as Southern and Northern Nigeria that they should be amalgamated into one government, conforming to one policy and mutually cooperating for the moral and material advancement of Nigeria as a whole<sup>30</sup>.

Ever since then there has been public and private commentaries along the thought pattern and mind set that the merger was a marriage of impossibilities that cannot endure. For the uninformed listener, as we shall argue later, this provided opportunities and apologies for our inability to integrate as a nation. As a matter of fact reactions to the Amalgamation began in its year of proclamation. The Nigerian Chronicle of January 13, 1914 said that "Union of name does not mean or involve a union of customs and manners"<sup>31</sup>. The Times of Nigeria followed suit on May 5, 1914 with a terse statement that

“The amalgamation of 1914 is broadly speaking the conquest and subjugation of southern Nigeria by northern Nigeria”<sup>32</sup>. Thirty-three years later, the misgivings were clearly spelt out in Obafemi Awolowo's Path to Nigerian Freedom where he stated that:

Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense as there are 'Englishmen' or 'French'. The word 'Nigeria' is merely a distributive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not<sup>33</sup>.

Ahmadu Bello, expressing some lack of identity with colonial federation of Nigeria viewed the amalgamation as the 'mistake of 1914'; while Tafawa Balewa referred to Nigerian attempt at unity (federalism) as “only British intention in Nigeria”<sup>34</sup>.

Explanations for the reactions to amalgamation have been attempted in several quarters. Much has to do with the influence of history and geography. C.M. Ngou states that:

The penetration of western influences into the south from across the Atlantic Ocean and the ancient orientation of the Northern path of the country towards the centres of Islamic civilization by 1914 yielded an overly of contrasting social patterns which provided ready logic for imperial pre-disposition<sup>35</sup>.

What followed the creation of Nigeria introduced a predominant education system with progressive social activities along western orientation. The benefit of modern communication brought by colonialism were profound but dichotomised. For instance, the first official news sheet in the North was established in 1931, nearly half a century after their appearance in the south. The first English language weekly in the North was in 1948 and the first English language daily in 1948<sup>36</sup>. Invariably, a higher level of communication had commenced among the southerners as a group than between them and northerners. The political system which evolved greatly manifested this visible division and there emerged parochial ethnic and regional competitions. The position that unfolded hinged on the view that Nigeria's federal structure ignored a fundamental element of federation. An elite mal-integration thus occurred in the process of building a nation-state with resultant failure to follow the basic rules of governing power ascendancy.

The argument being paraded, one which a reasonable number of Nigerians latch onto is that Nigeria is a multi-ethnic state, a commonwealth of separate and diverse autonomous nations, which will find genuine integration difficult. The negative aspects of Nigeria's ethnic character became the continuous subject of reference. It is this argument that sustained the force of impression that insists on the artificiality of the Nigeria and that not only does the artificiality of our creation continue to militate against efforts of achieving national unity, the very colonial experience which laid the foundation for the artificial creation left a heritage of ethnocentricity and divisiveness which constitute veritable obstacles in our search for national unity and stability<sup>37</sup>.

Taken thoughtfully, these arguments form part of the larger misconception which prevent us from knowing the real people with whom we must live and work. The ethnicity and tribalism generated has invariably inhabited effective national growth, inter-personal and inter-group relations. Nigerians have almost become contented to make do with stereotypes; a condition which strengthened ethnocentricism, consolidated the argument for the break up of the federation into independent units. It saw us into a terrible civil war which nearly snuffed life out of the federation. The consequences of our inability to soberly understand history has thus been horrendous. It led us into several confusion which creates doubts in the minds of many as to the depth of our claim to one nation, one people



This country has been ruled by the military for all but two decades since 1966 when the first wagon of democratic progress was derailed. It is believed that the military that took over the political leadership lacked the vision to use its dictatorship to stimulate industrial development of the country. We had, along the route, to contend with a devastating civil war; the nation has also entertained six violent changes of government; it has lived with sustained roguery and squandering of public funds by its leaders and we are each day dazzled, dismayingly, by communal conflicts; millions of youths are resentfully parading about; the communities are poor, indebted and riven by security breaches; factories are idle; the environment is ridden with waste and decay; schools are but glories of themselves and in the face of it all these there are catcalls for restructuring the federation along several lines.

In 1966, Wole Soyinka described Nigeria as “the open sore of the continent”<sup>38</sup>. After a long spell of despotism and uncertainty and suspicion which is extremely destructive, Nigeria had no longer a tradition of democracy, nor effective governance<sup>39</sup>. Past military leaders, as observed by objective commentators, left the country so horribly broken that it would take a long time and skill to mend. To understand the scale of Nigeria's failure, it is helpful to compare it with a country like Indonesia. The two countries, as the *Economist* (January, 15 2000) notes, are superficially similar; huge, populous and ethnically diverse. They suffered military rule and at times terrible violence. Both began as poor state but both struck oil. Since the 1970s Nigeria has received some \$280 billion in oil revenue but “through foolish investments, graft and simple theft, the vast fortunes have been wholly squandered. In fact because successive Nigerian governments borrowed billions against future oil revenues and wasted that money too, it is fair to say that Nigeria blew more than its entire oil windfall”<sup>40</sup>. Indonesia, which has not always been a model of good governance either, as the *Economist* contended, turned oil income into productive investments<sup>41</sup>. It follows that oil alone cannot make one happy, the nation has to know how to manage it for productive results for the greater majority of its citizens.

The adverse conditions have produced a multiple of other fault lines for the democratic setting. The major areas of discomfort include the *Sharia* question and the ethnicity dilemma, along with calls for sovereign national conference or a confederation for the federation. The *Sharia* matter had been most cataclysmic. It began with the declaration on October 1999 by Zamfara State that it would henceforth be subject to *Sharia* (Islamic) law, citing Arabia as its model. The matter raised the blood level of the nation and it sparked an emotion-laden reaction from both sides of the religious denominations. Its crest bubbled over in the Kaduna riots, which bought untold anguish to this nation with the resultant effect that the existence of the nation-state of Nigeria was called to question. Men and women began to wonder if democracy at this stage could prop up such devastation and the suspicion it engineered.

Earlier, Nigeria had gone through the gory of destruction brought on the psyche of the nation by the rampaging O'dua People's Congress (OPC). Nigerians from several parts of the country wondered aloud if the concept of the nation meant violence and destruction. It was at a point difficult, in some of these violent reactions, to see the line between criminality and legitimate actions. Unfortunately, violence became the most ubiquitous defining expression of democratic Nigeria. Since the 1980s communal conflicts became more frequent, more widespread and more destructive of life and property as indications of failures to tackle and peacefully resolve manifestations of age-old problem of the relationship between public safety, identity, the boundaries of the community, the basis of citizenship rights and social, economic and political progress. Between 1980 and 2001, over 34 major communal and religious conflicts took place and the nature of some of the conflict shows that they are the results of calculations, planning, organisation and execution which, within the perspective of those involved, are rational and logical<sup>42</sup>. The latest riots and killings in Jos again represent the reality of the nation's tragedy.

In the midst of all these the ethnicity question has remained latent in virtually every Nigerian experience. On the pervert side, many Nigerians have labeled it tribalism, and “a cult of mediocrity” as Chinua Achebe describes it<sup>43</sup>. On positive side, diversity is the spice of life, a pool of native intelligence of the welter of ethnic groups should be resourceful enough to lift Nigeria up. But we are yet to experience the right direction of the enormous healthy energy that could be tapped from this resourcefulness. It is a known fact that democratization process, as OsagheEghosa indicates, by its very nature of mobilizing greater participation and placing the question of control and sharing or distribution of the power and resources on top of the political agenda, exacerbates ethnic conflicts and therefore makes their management a critical matter not only for the success of democratization but also for the survival of the state as a whole<sup>44</sup>. In an age where ideological distinctions and identities are fading and ethnic, national, religious and tribal loyalties are assuming new importance, the problem of defining a 'people' along with the benefits assumes new exclusion, about access to power, about the privileges that go with inclusion and the penalties that accompany exclusion<sup>45</sup>.

One of the greatest nemesis of this nation is the cesspool of corruption. Having been subdued through ruthless series of military dictatorship and misadventures of politicians, Nigerians have sadly succumbed to a state of unmitigated pillaging and plundering of the national treasury, the contamination of national ethos and the disarticulation of its values. What can a people do without credible values and righteous culture of development? What claims do a society lay to existence as a credible corporate entity when its values are gone? Values provide the individual member of the society the basis upon which he organizes his social life, as it creates norms which are rules of good, desirable and proper. The tragedy of the situation is that we have raised material things above that which constitutes the basic plants of humanity's existence. We also have the pedantic imagination that primitive accumulation or simply the availability of money constitutes the basis of development on its own.

The consequences are predictable because they offer several reasons for the general ineffectiveness of our democratic system. Most Nigerians have come to believe that the system is generally corrupt and that our electoral system does not make it possible for us to elect individuals who are equipped to give selfless and productive service to the people. The mindset is also that the greatest challenge to peace and democratic governance and our ability to remain as a sovereign, indissoluble nation in Nigeria is the political class who see democracy only in instrumental terms because they are not committed to it as an end as they have little sensitivity to the extent of democratic deficit created by their actions and activities<sup>46</sup>.

The other fault line in the nation-state of Nigeria brothers the matter of restructuring of the Nation. Some have asked for a Sovereign National Conference when Nigeria has a National Assembly and State Assemblies in place. The question is: will the SNC superimpose the executive and the legislature or shall we dissolve the existing government structure to have a *tabula rasa* for the functioning of the SNC. It is understandable that against the backdrop of the confusion and violence perpetrated in some parts of the country, many nationalities will spend most of their time posturing. But is not impossible for us to see the difficulty of a peaceful convention of nationalities in the reality of our situations. Some are amplifying and questioning the wisdom of our remaining together and they are clearly partisan, in a manner, which suggests a call for the dissolution of our federal union.

On this very important matter it is difficult not to agree with the discourse of the renowned historian, Yusuf Bala Usman<sup>47</sup>. He says “those who are advocating the restructuring of the Nigerian Federation into a federation of nationalities and ethnic groups have failed to grasp the substance of the historical process which has produced our ethnic groups and the Nigerian polity”. Yusuf Usman believes that they seem oblivious of the impossibility of democratizing the boundary between most of the ethnic groups of contemporary Nigeria

and their neighbours. The nationalities have no boundaries as they intermesh into one another at the level of language, culture, identify and territory. Any attempt to carve out the territories of Nigerian ethnic groups or even sub-ethnic groups, to create ethnically based federating units will lead to violent conflicts, and sustained border wars. The application of this ethnic principle, as Usman contends, for the practical and administrative organisation of the country will not stop at the boundaries of the new ethnic regional units. Whatever the amended constitution provides, the people will forcefully demand its application right down to the local levels<sup>48</sup>. The lesson being preached is that it is necessary to recognize that nations, nationalities and ethnic groups are never a monolithic, fixed and separate entities in the context of their historical development over the ages.

The myriads of our developmental problems, which have visibly challenged the nation's claim to survival, have attracted a terribly worrisome qualification of Nigeria as a possible 'failed state' candidate. A failed state has several attributes, but common indicators include<sup>49</sup>

1. a state whose central government is so weak or ineffective that it has little practical control over much of its territory
2. non-provision of public services
3. widespread corruption and criminality
4. refugees and involuntary movement of population
5. sharp economic decline

The 2010 Fund for Peace report, using twelve factors to determine the rating for each nation, including security treats, placed Nigeria on the *Alert List*. Of the 37 countries on this Alert category Nigeria ranked 14 with Somalia on top of the list, followed by Chad and Sudan<sup>50</sup>.

The Corruption Reception Index consolidated Nigeria's poor rating in the world. Since 1995 Transparency International has published an annual Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), ordering the countries of the world according to "the degree" to which corruption is perceived to exist among public officials and politicians<sup>51</sup>. TI also defines corruption as "the abuse of entrusted power for private gains". In the 2009 ranking, Nigeria had 2.5 (out of 10) at the 130<sup>th</sup> position out of the 180 countries surveyed<sup>52</sup>. Botswana and Mauritius ranked 5.6 and 5.4 respectively. Equally in the Democracy Index (DI), which examined the state of democracy in 167 countries with focus on five general categories (electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, functioning of government, political participation and political culture) Nigeria in the 2008 regime type was classified under authoritarian democracy<sup>53</sup>. Four regime types were identified: full democracies, flawed democracy, hybrid regimes and authoritarian regimes. Nigeria was categorized in the same group as Mauritania, Cameroon, Morocco, Egypt, Burkina Faso, Rwanda, Niger, Angola, Algeria, Gabon, Zimbabwe, Chad etc.

When some Nigerians add all these indexes together they come up with the verdict that Nigeria is a failed state. In essence, on the Nigerian condition, one could agree almost totality with what Mahatma Ghandi listed as the seven social sins of a society<sup>54</sup>. These are:

1. wealth without work
2. commerce without morality
3. pleasure without conscience
4. education without character
5. science without humanity
6. worship without sacrifice
7. politics without purpose.

#### Safeguarding Nigeria's Corporate Existence

One major question we have to address in our state and nation-building effort is the issue of our acceptance of each other as members of the same polity. It has to do with our

Concept of Nigeria because, at the drop of the hat, in the face any national problem, some Nigerians will raise the voice that this is not a nation and we cannot live together; that the pretensions since 1960 are enough. There are too much apologists for the obvious forces that work against our being one.

These apologists, at the risk of repetition and banality, wonder aloud that not only does the artificiality of Nigeria's creation by Britain, continues to militate against efforts at achieving national unity, but that the colonial experience which engineered the artificability has left a heritage of ethnocentricity and divisiveness which constitute a veritable obstacle to our search national unity. The argument paraded, as ObaroIkime rightly observed<sup>55</sup> are that Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation-state, a commonwealth of separate and diverse autonomous ethnic nations; that Nigeria is an artificial creation of imperialists, a 'mere geographical expression'. These facts of our existence are not only mentioned but most often amplified with unrelenting vociferosity, especially by a section of this country which has developed a self-righteous spirit of 'only helping the others to sustain the polity'. Such arguments refuse to situate Nigeria in the context of local, regional and world history. How many nations of the world are mono-ethnic?; which nation of the world is not artificial in the sense in which modern Nigeria is being classified and how many nations of the world escaped colonialism in one form or the other? P. delaPradelle, an international scholar of law, once remarked that 'all boundaries are by their nature artificial and can only be viewed as an intervention of the human mind'<sup>56</sup>. While reality is boundless at one level, as Asiwaju indicated, at another it admits of certain forms of boundary otherwise it will be difficult to comprehend the infinite varieties of individual forms, shapes, roles and functions in national phenomena<sup>57</sup>. The question again is whether a cultural heterogeneity, against the backdrop of world history, ordinarily prevents the evolution of a national identity? It is quickly pointed out that a country like the United States of America has one of the most fascinating cultural diversity in the world but the people have remained binding in one name-United States. In that country immigrants were able to exploit the similarity of their pre-America historical experience to forge an effective integration.

Europe, as Adejo admits, also poses challenges to our society<sup>58</sup>. Much of the nations of Europe were colonized in one form or the other. The speed with European integration now progresses devolved greatly on its history. Europe, historically speaking, is a cultural expression; its conception, concerning social life, government, region and arts and science, have underneath all the differences a certain resemblance which may be difficult to define but which appears unquestionable when they are compared with the ideas of the old civilizations. This basis of common nationality, for the people of Europe are many and some are widely removed from others. It is the result of the historical development of European lands<sup>59</sup>. For Nigeria, a more than casual approach to the study of its past will convince us that there is a basis for Nigeria's unity. It is clear that ignorance and stereotypes are principal factors hindering unity in this country. In history, the traditions of origin, migration and settlement of our people point to the fact that our peoples were not isolated as often orchestrated. If we study, for instance, the Bayijida legend, the story of migration of Oduduwa, the relationship between Benin and Yoruba; the evolution of Kwararafa Confederation as it relates to Idoma, Jukun and Igala settlements, we discover that the dynamics of social, political and economic interactions leading to conflict and cooperation and formulation of larger conglomerates were immanent. Perhaps, as Ibrahim Gambari admitted, colonialism hastened the process<sup>60</sup>, because it represented, at the time, a much more inclusive and economically productive social and political order.

It is pertinent to ask, what is so inherently impossible about today's hybrid peoples of Nigeria developing into new Nigerians, united in certain common goals and philosophies? We must point out that there is no Pure tribe in Nigeria and none of the ethnic nationalities can truly hold on to the concept of race. Even if race is not a social construction, as we attempt to disregard the postulation of neo-Darwinism, there is no empirical evidence to support that there existed, for example, a race like a 'Yoruba race, or any other race

constituting an ethnic nationality in Nigeria<sup>61</sup>. The truth is that human progress at all levels is inseparable from immigration and the inter-mixing of different group to form new group.

In essence, the assumption of Nigeria as a unviable nation-state because it is an artificial amalgam of incompatible and antagonistic racial groups who have virtually nothing in common, has no scientific basis. For instance, language which is one of the most important single basis of identity of an ethnic group, has never been fixed, immutable and unchanging. Language transform and proto-languages even sometimes die out or are transformed from what they originally were<sup>62</sup>. Ethnic groups, nations and nationality are therefore not natural or biological fixed entitles but historical formations which undergo changes by historical processes.

Genetic evidence has also been advanced to show how baseless the view on our complete separation has been. Peter UcheIsichie noted clearly that:<sup>63</sup>

A cursory look at the provisional genetic map of Nigeria constructed from the available data shows that there is some similarity in the genetic constitution of most of Nigeria's people. So it is possible that the original people in the area now regarded as Nigeria were descended from the same ancestral stock and that the difference in the genetic paths within the country may be due to bombardment by external genes... Nigeria's people are probably descended from quite small Stone Age population living pretty much within the country's present boundaries.

A corollation of this fundamental matter has to do with the question of ethnicity based on ignorance and stereoetypism. Ethnic politics has no time for democracy. You are either with your people or you are with the enemies. BalaUsman describes this as fascist and it is observed in violence and the threat of violence. However, this phenomenon does not erupt out of the blue. It is the product of prejudice and stereotypes, which are the offsprings of ignorance. The apologies of our inability to forge credible national unity and integration rest their case on superficial evidence on the ground. If we must grow beyond this ignorance, we must diligently seek knowledge about Nigeria's multifarious people. If other nations that have the same ethnicity question and near experience as our have managed to achieve national cohesion, Nigeria can as well do same<sup>64</sup>.

For a nation welded together under colonial instruments the ethnic factor in Nigeria is understandable. However, nearly a century after amalgamation and fifty years of independence, the political, economic relationships seemed not to have evolved beyond the stage of conflict and competition as ethnic factor continues to be a major consideration in decision-making. The real culprit in managing inter-ethnic relations in Nigeria, is not the diversity but the elite manipulation of ethnicity and the failure to define and agree on national rules of the game on which to base our political and economic processes. We must learn and begin by accepting the reality that our present condition cannot be blamed and infinitum on our colonial past, on the civil war, the oil doom or military rule alone. We must, in the words of Ibrahim Gambari, face up to the individual and collective responsibility for the dire economic, social quagmire in which we are in for Nigeria to fulfill its destiny<sup>65</sup>.

National unity has not always been a child of natural growth but a product of history. Unity is an attribute that requires to be deliberately cultivated and rooted strongly in the context of the people's history and culture. In this regard the learning and teaching of history at all levels of our education is highly recommended. Countries that know the indispensability of it adequately plan such educational curriculum. History is the summarized experience of the society and experience is the condensed history of the individual. Without experience the individual is as lost as a baby without a parent<sup>66</sup>. A

careful and thoughtful experience of human events show that history takes its revenge on nations and individuals which have neglected it. Nigeria's political life clearly gives evidence or testimony to this. We should then appease history by employing the wisdom of acknowledging our inadequacies and setting a new agenda for unity and progress through the study of our history.

Nigeria has no choice but to sustain democracy it has to exist because it remains critical to meaningful development as a system of government which meets some conditions that allow for peace and meaningful participation. The signposts of this democracy include:

1. The right to choice and freedom from ignorance and poverty;
2. Empowerment of the citizenry;
3. Rule of law and equality before the law,
4. Viable governance institutions,
5. Constitutional guarantee of rights of people,
6. Sustained political communication to create trust and confidence
7. Accountability and probity
8. Decentralization of political power and authority
9. Periodic free and fair election

Democracy, it must be stressed, does not intend to have as its end results, its ultimate goal, only popular participation. Popular participation in democracy should be a means towards the continuing attainment of improved quality of life for the people. Yusuf Maitama Sule once noted that at independence, people did not live in paradise but the condition was fairly decent and tolerable and most Nigerians could afford three square meals a day. What obtains today is Poverty, Hunger, and Disease (PHD).

We must have the courage to state that Nigerian politics, though not different from some others, could be bewildering for some obvious reasons. Its defining boundary from other things is not clear, especially in the deployment of state resources; it is an activity but who exactly counts as a political actor is also unclear; its language can be frustratingly contentious and it seems to require an understanding of so much more than just politics. Imagine the current noise over zoning as Nigeria heads towards 2011 elections. The danger, as one commentator noted, is that a diversion has been elevated to a great issue of the day. Diversion as a political tool, as Chidi Amuta perorates, has its issues. He opines that in a situation where the political actors may not all be ready to address issues in a serious manner, it becomes more lucrative to fuel a diversionary debate with great intensity until it takes on a life of its own<sup>67</sup>. Rather than come off with historical *tour de force* as arguments, in the views of critical columnist, Sam Omatseye of The Nation newspaper (August 16, 2010), "they raked up narratives of the past that will not enoble us", failing to address the issue of zoning as an important feature of a democracy in a multi-ethnic society. Democracy should be seen as a system of consensus and as such it faces special challenges in a society as ours. The argument for zoning, which some have elevated to the level of using it for calling for the break up of the polity, may appear to favour a specific region today but in the long run it will favour everyone, especially the minority ethnic groups. One of our biggest headaches, as Adams Aliyu Oshiomole noted in 2002, is that Nigerian politicians hardly sleep and that is why they do not dream; and whoever does not dream does not have vision for action. We need national leadership which involves a core elite group which must develop the vision and authority to act.

If life is to be meaningful to Nigerians, the social sector must critically be looked into. Advance countries did not remove subsidies on public services in the early stages of their development as they are now forcing development countries to do. Public health measures in our country receive sloganeering commitment. Whatever must be done to improve the economy without destroying the capacity of Nigerians to believe in the nation must be pursued. In sponsoring the market economic system, people must be able to show, as a proof, that aggregate welfare will be improved through the operation of a voluntary market-based exchange system. It should, as S. Usman insisted<sup>68</sup>, be further

shown that allocative efficiency and therefore aggregate welfare, is higher under such a market system than any contrived, administrative system, no matter how sophisticated. This superiority of the market system, however, critically depends on a number of simple but basic and fundamental assumptions, the most important of which are:-

1. That property rights are properly defined,
2. That the rights and responsibilities of all citizens are clearly established,
3. That there are effective policing and judicial system to protect such rights and to procure justice when rights are violated, as well as to provide adjudication in case of dispute.

Where these conditions are absent, S. Usman concluded, the stealing strategy will predominate. As we conclude, it is important to emphasize that for democratic institutions to be built, it is essential that national political parties, trade unions, business organizations, farmers organization etc are built, forged and strengthened with recognizable powerful roles in the system. It is only then that corruption can be adequately addressed. Although government seems determined to clean up this mess called corruption but having sacked a few powerful thieves is not enough. Along the punitive line been adopted only the biggest offenders can be prosecuted because punishing everyone who took bribes in the past would mean sacking virtually the entire civil service. For a sane socio-economic and political atmosphere, our system must be changed because the set up encourages corruption. Public servants should be adequately catered for and the political class have their righteous entitlement so that they will not be tempted to look unduly into the tills.

Some of the most deafening noise we hear as a result of some of the issues raised above are direct products of our constitution making process. The history of constitution making in Nigeria shows that some wise men are appointed to write a constitution for the country. The persistence of the numerous crises and spate of ethnic and religious violence threatening Nigeria's democracy confirm the single fact that the constitutions have defects and cannot provide the solution. The language of the constitutions have remained elitist and only possible for decoding by the legal mind because constitution making have been more or less a secret affair dominated and directed by political elites, especially conservative lawyers and politicians<sup>69</sup>. The present clamour for the review of the 1999 constitution so as to have an autochthonous product must be sustained and the constitution review process should be guided by the principles of inclusively, diversity, participation, transparency and openness, autonomy, accountability and litgimacy<sup>70</sup>. There are also some critical things that this nation must take a definite constitutional stand on: the sustenance of one single federal police service (a no state police); the critical issue of citizenship; the right of people at whatever regional or national level to form political associations and parties of their ideological conviction, making basic social and economic rights to be justiceable and cheap access to justice by all.

The real challenge to nation building, as one analyst remarked, is how to make the state people friendly<sup>71</sup>. The issue of economic empowerment of the citizenry must be top priority. The economy exists for the people and not the other way round. It took several ASUU strikes before some basic welfare packages were conceded; it also took a strike by the Nigerian Police Force to retrieve their pay and allowances. The poor are vulnerable and are easy target for cynical manipulation by rich politicians. The raving poverty in the country must be addressed because, as stated above, if Nigerians remain poor, the pursuit of moral balance will be a mirage and they will remain instruments of deceit in the hands of our pervert elites who masquerade as harbingers of good news<sup>72</sup>.

Finally, the proper alignment of statism versus nationalism must be confirmed. If the first generation of political leaders are fondly remembered as nationalist, why do we not take pride in being labeled otherwise? There then must be re-education of all classes. Along with this is the need to also re-educate the Nigerian press on its approach to and attitudes towards issue of grave national importance. To achieve this we have to strengthen all our

national institutions, especially the domain of education. Too much lip service has been paid to this sector at the expense of national development. There have been levels of ignorance, inconsistencies and illogical display by our political leaders on this matter. The cost of illiteracy and ignorance has been too horrendous to this nation so we must wisely make a u-turn by investing appropriately in education.

### Conclusion

Over the decades Nigeria has continuously struggled to tackle the issue of existing as a nation-state and it has been more frustrating than cheerful. Over these years the policies of the state have tended to support the preservation of the existing division of the society and this is why we clearly see the difficulties in the area of wealth generation, distribution and management. However, there has been an appreciable degree of remaining as one nation, irrespective of the obvious hues and cries, internally and externally.

Whether we call Nigeria a mere geographical expression or whatever name, we know that all the achievements recorded and collective and individual efforts in international outings were not done as a mere geographical expression. During some national events, like soccer tournaments involving our team, we dissolve into one, not as Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa, Fulani, Idoma, Tiv, Jukun etc. We have been able to erect strong loyalties around the concept of region, which is even a colonial creation, states and local government areas that some people could go to war to defend their boundaries. Can Nigeria not equally arouse in us such strong sentiments? We have the men, the women and the resources to achieve greatness. In line with the thought of Rev. Fr. Matthew Hassan Kuka, this nation has suffered so much in seeking to satisfy the greed of too few at the expense of both the nation and the majority. We need to attain moral balance but it is only on the return to economic prosperity. "If Nigerians remain poor, the pursuit of this moral balance will be a mirage because they will remain instruments of deceit in the hands of the many crooks who masquerade as harbingers of good news"<sup>73</sup>.

For a sustainable democratic polity Nigerians must imbibe a democratic culture of tolerance and accommodation, hard work and enshrine the values of justice, fairness and equity as guides for all our activities. The urgency to realise that it is not size or constitution that makes or mars a federation is important; but it is the ability, the capacity to harmonise and politically organize with success the unity and diversity inherent in a federal system, taking into account the basic needs requirements of individuals. It is also important to instruct that the declining state of this country can only be saved by a reversal of human relations to a standard which places spiritual and mental values ahead of material values. That is why Achebe once noted that:

"Nigeria is a nation favoured by providence. I believe there are individuals and nations who on account of particular gifts and circumstances are commended by history to facilitate mankind's advancement. Nigeria is such a nation".

This nation has gone beyond a 'mere geographical expression'; it has a life that is concretely livable. Despite the series of quarrels, we have been able to remain a sovereign, indissoluble federation and it has to be.

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