

HISTORY AND HISTORICITY IN NATION BUILDING: THE NIGERIAN EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

The great Nigerian literary icon Chinua Achebe is well known to have popularized the Igbo assertion that the man who does not know where the rain began to beat him cannot say where he dried his body. The above aphorism aptly captures the vital role of history or knowledge of the past in the life of an individual or a group of people. This article, which approach is analytical, examines the role of history in nation building with a focus on the Nigerian situation. History, as knowledge of the past, not only serves as a communal memory that gives a form of identity to a given group of people but also saves human society from being lost in endless ocean of time. This partly underscores the vital function of history in nation building by capturing and interpreting the past. In a country with diverse cultures and heterogeneous population, a comparative study of the history of the different ethnic groups and their intersections is highly important for the integration of the ethnic nationalities. Furthermore, history illuminates the present as well as the future. To be able to play the above important role, there is a dire need for accuracy and guarantee of historical truth or veracity. This relates to historicity and calls for serious concern, especially in the present age where events that constitute historical data can easily be manipulated through the misuse of modern information and communication technology. Indeed, there is nothing as

bad as ‘bad history’. Considering the implication of history and historicity in nation building, this paper not only decries the chequered treatment of history and history education in Nigeria which has left the country bereft of the benefits of history but also advocates that greater attention to history and historicity in the process of nation building in Nigeria.

Keywords: history, historicity, Nigeria, nation building, national identity, illuminate.

Introduction

The present article examines the place of history and historicity in nation building with a focus on Nigeria. It is a popular saying that when history repeats itself, the penalty is doubled. This underscores the great significance of history or knowledge of history in human affairs. Notwithstanding the great importance of history in nation building, it is yet to be accorded the proper attention it deserves as a field of study in Nigeria especially on the part of our political leaders, policy makers and history teachers. There have been abysmal neglect, relegation and outright ban of history, at a particular time, with epileptic resuscitation of same in Nigeria. This ugly scenario is further exacerbated by inaccurate reporting and misinterpretation of historical facts and events, nay, problem of historicity. This calls for serious concern given that it takes extraordinary efforts to counter a bad history and in most cases great harm must have been done before the truth is eventually unraveled. It is therefore the goal of the present paper to explore the role of history in nation building and how best history and historicity can contribute towards building the Nigerian nation.

How best can Nigeria learn from her own history and the history of other nations to fecundate authentic nation building? Amidst cries of marginalization and current resurgence of ethnic nationalism that threaten the unity of Nigeria, there is a dire need to examine how we have fared as a nation. It is quite unfortunate that at sixty-three years of her independence in 2023, Nigeria still lacks the cohesion

and unity that behooves of a nation state. The fact that basic ingredients of a nation state are lacking is implied in the guiding theme for the 2023 Independence Day Celebration which reads: 'Nigeria @ 63: Renewed Hope for Unity and Prosperity'. This is to say that Nigeria is still in search of unity and proper nationalism. The country grapples with not only divisive conflicts but also dismal lack of sense of unity and nationhood that binds the different component ethnic groups and individuals together. In all these, there seem to have been abysmal eclipse of sense or consciousness of history and historicity. This is perpetuated through the actions and inactions of the government. To what extent, therefore, can knowledge of history and its application serve to fecundate proper nation building in Nigeria? This is the major engagement of the present paper.

The paper adopts the philosophical method of analysis. This involves not only the conceptual analysis of terms and propositions of the discourse but also the historical analysis of the lived experiences of the people. These are intended to provide new insights on the significance of history in the struggle or transformation from divisive conflicts to integral nationhood. Accordingly, the first section of the work examines the concept of nation building just as the second section reviews the Nigerian experience of nation building. While the concepts of history and historicity are explored in the third section, the fourth section explores the nexus or the intersection between historical memories, history and the society. The significance of history and historicity in the Nigerian experience of nation building proper is the engagement of the fifth section. The sixth section does the evaluation of the work and equally serves as the conclusion.

The Concept of Nation Building

The term nation-building has become a preponderant nomenclature in post-conflict discourses. It is often understood as a process of reconstructing or building a functional nationhood out of

dilapidated or non-functional one. The dilapidation could have been as a result of war, conflicts or other hazards. Here nation building involves post-conflict palliative and rehabilitative programs such as “the use of armed force in the aftermath of major combat to promote a transition to peace and democracy” (Seth G. Jones and James Dobbins 704). Though the above conception aptly squares with United Nations’ role in nation building missions and activities, it fails to capture properly the core issues in nation-building. According to Carolyn Stephenson,

The latest conceptualization is essentially that nation-building programs are those in which dysfunctional or unstable or "failed states" or economies are given assistance in the development of governmental infrastructure, civil society, dispute resolution mechanisms, as well as economic assistance, in order to increase stability. Nation-building generally assumes that someone or something is doing the building intentionally.

Nation building is therefore a conscious human activity geared towards positive transformation and bettering of the society. It goes beyond mere post-conflict rehabilitative or palliative measures. In a special way, the concept of nation building rings a bell in the ears of most developing countries and newly independent ones that have just extricated themselves from the shackles of colonial and imperial powers that exert post-colonial influences. These countries inevitably face the onerous challenge of nation building. Taras Kuzio affirmed this opinion when he averred that “post-colonial “imperial transition” consists of four aspects—nation building, state and institution building and, in some cases, democratization and marketization” (250). The above submission echoes in Errol A. Henderson who categorically stated that, “fundamentally, postcolonial states were faced with the

simultaneous challenges of state and nation-building” (261). He further submitted that “state-building involves the creation of effective institutions of government and the development of societal infrastructure to provide, at minimum, coordination for the executive, legislative, judicial, and military functions of the state as well as the establishment of institutional channels for political development (261). Nigeria falls within the category of the post-colonial states and as such, is in a dire need of nation building.

National identity is one of the major factors in the discourse on nation building. Fundamentally, nation building can be said to be a transformational process that aims at achieving common sense of national identity that transcends but does not annihilate local or regional affiliation and cohesion among the divers population that make up a nation state. Attahiru Jega extols the vital place of national identity in these clear terms: “It is worthy of note, at the outset that, in the contemporary world, countries, which have successfully built a strong national identity, and are democratic, are also the most developed (2). National identity is thus an indispensable tool in nation building.

The process of nation building ought to harness the constituent cultural and ethnic groups in a heterogeneous nation state in order to create a shared or common sense of identity, values and purpose among the diverse populations. The above process can be less tedious in a country with a single or homogenous cultural cum linguistic group; but becomes more demanding in diverse or multicultural settings. The effort here is geared towards creating an integral nationhood out of the diverse conglomerating cultural and ethnic groups. It is on this note that Alberto Alesina and Bryony Reich submit that nation building is “a process which leads to the formation of countries in which the citizens feel a sufficient amount of commonality of interests, goals and preferences so that they do not wish to separate from each other” (3). The duo further make a distinction between nation building and state building:

“Recently, state-building and nation-building have sometimes been used interchangeably. However, state-building generally refers to the construction of state institutions for a functioning state, while nation-building the construction of a national identity, also for a functioning state” (3). This further harps on the significance of national identity in nation building. The national identity serves as a big umbrella that houses the diverse heterogeneous groups. Though values and ideals may seem to differ but there are most often commonalities such as truthfulness, sanctity of life, love and unity. These are immutable values.

Other core issues in nation building include not only national identity but also governmental structures (political and social and economic), and possibly territorial integrity. Nation building cannot be achieved without harnessing the political, cultural and institutional resources of the state. Civic-nation and state-institution building are equally central to nation building. These must be properly mobilized for growth and development of the nation and more so in such a way as to give the different groups sense of belonging. A successful process of nation building creates a nation out of an ethnic medley with sense of belongingness and sets the state on the path of progress. Some other factors that facilitates nation building are historical, language (national language), education et cetera. Interconnectivity of major cities via good railway and road networks are physical phenomena that enhance economic, cultural and political mutual interactions among the citizens. The metaphysical or the ontological foundation of nation building no doubt strengthens its praxis and theoretical background. Nation building is a transformational process. It therefore fundamentally anchors on the metaphysical categories of change and time. These derive from process ontology which perceives reality as a process, relational, dynamic, and imbued with the capacity to change from time to time. Process metaphysics perceives process and events as ontological categories, and as real

as physical observable things. This is contrary to static ontology. Meanwhile, time and change are metaphysical factors that are fundamental to nation building more especially in considering the nexus between nation building and history. As we shall see below, Martin Heidegger relates history and historicity to temporality (time, place and change). Similarly, process ontology harps on the inter-relatedness of realities. C. Robert Mesle (8) captures it in these clear words:

Process philosophy is an effort to think clearly and deeply about the obvious truth that our world and our lives are dynamic, interrelated processes and to challenge the apparently obvious, but fundamentally mistaken idea that the world (including ourselves) is made of *things* that exist independently of such relationships and that seem to endure unchanged through all the processes of change.

This is the metaphysics that undergirds nation building.

Nigeria and the Task of Nation Building

The task of nation building became the greatest challenge of the nascent nation Nigeria at her independence in 1960. In his speech of Nigerian independence declaration in October 1st, 1960, the First Prime Minister, Alhaji Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa expressed his confidence in the ability of the nascent Nigeria to embark on nation building by positing that: “But now we have acquired our rightful status, and I feel sure that history will show that the building of our nation proceeded at the wisest pace: it has been thorough, and Nigeria now stands well-built upon firm foundations.” Nation building was also the sole prayer and the core issue contained in the First National Anthem that heralded the Independence Day:

*O God of all creation,
Grant this our one request,
Help us to build a nation.*

Meanwhile, prior to the independence, the Prime Minister had as a prelude, made a clarion call for mutual understanding and respect, unity and harmony among the heterogeneous ethnic nations and cultures in Nigeria: "I appeal to all my countrymen and women to cooperate with me and my colleagues to create a better understanding among our peoples, to establish mutual respect, and trust, among all our tribal groups, and to unite in working together for the common cause, the cause for which no sacrifice will be too great." The Prime Minister understands well the vital role of unity in nation building.

A number of political and legal instruments were put in place to ensure equity among the different ethnic groups. The quota system which came into being prior to Nigeria's independence in 1960 and the Federal Character Principle which became officially recognized in the 1979 Constitution, are good examples. These policies aim at addressing the fragile issues of ethnic and zonal representation in the public sector. As boldly written on the website of the Federal Character Commission (FCC), for instance, the commission "is a Federal Executive body established by Act No 34 of 1996 to implement and enforce the Federal Character Principle of fairness and equity in the distribution of public posts and socio-economic infrastructures among the various federating units of the Federal Republic of Nigeria" (Federal Character Commission). After the unfortunate Nigerian-Biafran civil war came the establishment of National Youth Service Corps. The *raison d' être* can be stated below: "The NYSC scheme was created in a bid to reconstruct, reconcile and rebuild the country after the Nigerian Civil war" (National Youth Service Corps (NYSC)). The unfortunate antecedents in our national history gave impetus to the establishment of the National Youth Service Corps by decree No.24 of 22nd May 1973, "with a view to the proper encouragement and development of common ties among the youths of Nigeria and the promotion of national unity" (National Youth Service Corps

(NYSC). It remains to appraise and determine how effectively the above instruments have actually facilitated the task of nation building in Nigeria.

Such appraisal of the above and similar efforts shows that much still needs to be done. The search for integral nationhood in Nigeria has been quite elusive. The unity and common sense of identity needed to cement the conglomerating units are lacking. Core issues here as already mentioned are: national identity and national unity or cohesion among the heterogeneous population that make up the country, civil order and strong governmental institutions. While quota system is purported to guarantee equitable distribution, it sacrifices merits and competence thereby destroying the equity it intends to uphold. The principles of federal character are often violated or abysmally discarded in appointment to offices thus leading to problems of exclusion and marginalization. According to Seye Olumide, as reported in *Guardian Newspaper* (November 30, 2020), “a South West socio-political group Oodua Progressive Union (OPU) blamed the administration of Muhammad Buhari for gross nepotism, sectionalism and incompetence. The immediate past Presidential spokesman, Femi Adesina, as reported by Don Silas in *Daily Post Newspaper* (April 11, 2023), had stated while speaking on Channels Television’s Politics that, “the appointment of service chiefs is not subject to federal character principle and ethnic balancing.” This was in defense of his principal President Muhammadu Buhari who brazenly flouted the Federal Character principles in his appointment of service chiefs. Similarly, *Daily Trust Newspaper* (18 Sept. 2023) carried a report on how the Human Rights Writers Association of Nigeria (HURIWA), had accused President Bola Tinubu of nepotism, alleging that most of the key appointments in his government were allotted to Nigerians from his ethnic group. The civil society group specifically pointed that the appointments of the Governor of the Central Bank of Nigeria and the Chairman of the Federal Inland Revenue Service given to Yoruba people are an attestation. It is beyond the scope of

this paper to investigate whether the above accusation is justifiable or not since it will involve a cumulative analysis of the overall appointments made and the spread. However, what is certain is that flouting of the principles of the Federal Character Commission and similar acts of injustice ultimately militate against nation building.

Today it is undeniable that most Nigerians are often parochial and prize allegiance and loyalty to ethnic affiliation more than the national. Rather than the intended national integration and shared identity, mutual suspicion, cries of marginalization, and lack of sense of belonging have been the order of the day. At the inception of each new government, there usually emerge sporadic and strongly self-centered individuals who are most times either elected or appointed, rather than strong governmental institutions. Of course, when these strongly self-centered individuals finally vacate their offices at the expiration of their tenure, the institutions begin to relapse or retrogress. Therefore, the idea, concept and hope for nation building remained moribund.

The Concepts of History and Historicity

There is no single generally accepted definition of history. It is often said that history is a record of past events; hence no event, no history. The above definition is clumsy and grossly deficient in many aspects. In the first place, it is not every event or occurrence that is re-captured as history. Mostly the focus is on those human and non-human (natural) occurrences that are of interest or significance to the people and the historians. Moreover, history does not constitute solely in events. This is to say that the above lay man's definition of history excludes a number of items that substantively constitute part and parcel of history such as arts, symbols, artifacts, etc. Here again, we easily recall the efforts of traditional cultural custodians whose works helps in preservation of history: traditional priests and doctors, folk singers and dancers, poets etc. Secondly and more importantly, records of past events do

not automatically translate to history. It is on this note that Anthony Ufearoh (19) averred that, “having an amorphous materials or sources of history is different from historiography which is critical examination and selection of relevant materials from the available right sources and fashioning a systematic narrative from same.” History transcends mere accumulation of sources or historical materials.

History is an interpretative activity on the facts of the past as substrate and distilling therefrom a co-ordinated and compelling narrative. To accomplish the above task, the historian employs certain categories which Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke have simplified into the "Five C's of historical thinking." According to the duo, “the concepts of change over time, causality, context, complexity, and contingency, we believe, together describe the shared foundations of our discipline [history]. They stand at the heart of the questions historians seek to answer, the arguments we make, and the debates in which we engage.” The above principles or categories synchronize with the core tenets of process philosophy and are as quite important to philosophers as to historians. History is not a stagnant phenomenon. It is rather dynamic.

The communal or social dimension of history cannot be over-emphasized. According to Paul Thompson, “history survives as social activity only because it has a meaning for people today. The voice of the past matters to the present” (vi). History embodies communal memory. We shall say more on the concept of communal memory and its intersection with history in the next section below. The experiences of the past tend to shape the present and can either cement the people together or put them asunder. Similarly, history explores the past in order to illuminate the present and future. A good and didactic history can serve to harmonize the people; thus leading to positive growth and development. On the contrary, a bad history or even a failure to

learn from history can lead to disharmony. This further calls for proper articulation and interpretation of historical facts so as to avoid wrong representations and interpretations. This is a problem of historicity.

Historicity refers to the actuality of events, places, persons or figures mentioned in history. This distinguishes history from myths, legends, fictions and similar imaginative fabrications that are often presented as real. @Bryan-kb6nx (0.1 - 0.57) succinctly explains historicity in these lines from *YouTube*:

Historicity refers to the quality or characteristic of being historical or relating to history. It pertains to the factuality, authenticity, and accuracy of events, persons, and places recorded in historical accounts or documents. The concept of historicity is essential in evaluating the reliability and truthfulness of historical narratives. It involves the critical examination of primary sources, secondary sources, and other relevant materials to determine the veracity of historical claims and to identify biases, inconsistencies, or gaps in the available evidence. Historicity also involves a recognition of the context and perspective of the historian or writer in interpreting and presenting historical information. It recognizes that historical accounts are not neutral or objective but are shaped by the cultural, social, political, and ideological factors of the time and place they were produced.

The degree of accuracy is a core issue in history. To what extent do historical accounts and their interpretations reflect the factuality? The concept of historicity can be likened to Aquinas' notion of truth as *adequatio rei et intellectus* (the correspondence of what is in the

intellect with reality out there), but in this case, one can say the correspondence of historical narrative with factuality. Indeed, in a way, the essence of history can be said to be *a dire le vrai* (to say the truth) about reality (le réel) or about the past. The historian however exists in a world and cultural milieu that are significantly different from those of the past. It is equally undeniable that different historical narratives have human imprint and possible prejudice on them. This implies that prejudice and the cultural gap between the past and present can pose some challenges in history. On this note, Thomas Andrews and Flannery Burke observed that, “students readily acknowledge that we employ and struggle with technologies unavailable to our forebears, that we live by different laws, and that we enjoy different cultural pursuits (n. p). Moreover, students also note that some aspects of life remain the same across time.” Added to the above challenge is the problem of prejudice in human affairs. For Hans Gadamer (369), “a person who imagines that they are free of prejudices, basing his knowledge on the objectivity of their procedures and denying that they are influenced by historical circumstances, experiences the power of the prejudices that unconsciously dominate them as a force acting from behind.” This is an inevitable human condition.

Notwithstanding the great benefits of the advancement in information communication technology in the contemporary world, it poses a big challenge for history and historicity inasmuch as it can be negatively employed to manipulate data, facts, reports and figures with ease and disseminate same widely at the speed of light. Secondly, even with the most perfect modern gadgets, one is not ascetically immune to prejudice, emotion or sentiment. Regardless of the above facticity and other pessimistic dispositions such as Jonathan Friedman’s conviction about “false intellectual objectivism” and his claim that history can never be truly objective (837), a good historian as much as possible strives to be objective whereas a bad historian is beclouded by emotion, prejudice, biases or other sentiments in discharging his or her task. Whatever be the

case, a good historian sieves his or her facts and as much as possible remains ascetical in interpreting same so as not to be guilty of bad history. This is the ideal and the aspiration.

Martin Heidegger in his characteristic way turned the discourse on historicity that has been hitherto an epistemological issue into an ontological issue. According to Tahere Habibi et al, “He [Heidegger] turns the epistemological and methodological question of the historical sciences into an ontological question; that is, instead of asking, “under what circumstances can the objectivity of the historical knowledge be confirmed?” he asks, “what kind of existence *Dasein* have that allows him to care about himself and the world, and understand the meaning of his past? And how is there such a thing as history at all?” (57). Heidegger apparently links historicity to temporality. In other words, it is temporality that gives rise to history. All things have their place and time, and nothing past is outside of history. Authentic history for Heidegger calls for the historical awareness that recognizes this whole range (i.e., the “simultaneity” of past, present and future) in historical considerations.

The Nexus between Historical Memory, History, and the Society

There is an inextricable link between historical memory (often called communal, collective or popular memory), history and the society. Historical memory refers to the ways, in which a group perceives, constructs, and identifies with given historical narratives or accounts about particular periods or events. It is the collective recollection of experiences or events by a society or a group of people and transmitted to generations. Historical memory can be influenced by cultural, social and political factors, and may not always be in consonance with historical facts. Yet it perpetuates historical consciousness and thus saves the society from collective amnesia. In most cases, historical memories are foundational to

social and political identity construction and serve as cohesiveness of the people or nation. They are dynamic rather than static and are often reshaped in relation to the present cultural and historical-political milieu.

On the other hand, history is an interpretation of the historical memory. Historical memory serves to provide the substrate or fodder for history. Popular memory and history represent the past in different ways just as they differ in several ways. While memory is absolute and uncritical, history is relative, critical discourse and antithetical to spontaneous memory. History is always suspicious of memory. History gurgitates on memory to sieve out relevant facts and data.

As uncritical as historical memory may appear, it saves the society from collective amnesia. Furthermore, it influences or shapes the present societal configurations. This influence can sometimes be subtle. In fact, cultivation of shared memories is a prerequisite for cultural and collective identities. Anthony Smiths (3) interrogates: “Why is it that so many people remain so deeply attached to their ethnic communities and nations at the close of the second millennium? Why do the myths, memories, and symbols of the nation command such widespread loyalty and devotion? And why are so many people still prepared to make considerable sacrifices, even of life and limb, for their nations and cultures?” The power of shared memories partly account for these. But unlike historic memories, history *per se* not only interprets but also constantly appraises its positions and readjusts itself in the light of new evidences, discoveries and perspectives

History Scholarship in Nigeria

Notwithstanding the importance of history as a veritable tool in nation building, it is yet to be accorded its pride of place in Nigeria. The present section briefly examines the chequered treatment meted out to history in Nigeria. History scholarship in

Nigeria presents a unique case of abysmal neglect and outright onslaught. The problem of alien curriculum and outright excision of history from secondary school curriculum at a time by Nigerian authorities constitute the two major challenges in history scholarship in Nigeria. Firstly, history education during the colonial period and its twilight had to contend with foreign and predominantly westernized curriculum. Michael Owolewa, an emeritus Professor of history at University of Ibadan and life Patron of History of Education Society of Nigeria, in *Guardian Newspaper* (10th February, 2015) states that, “During the colonial period, the Education Ordinance made provision for the study of history, albeit English history. The early educated elite challenged the absence of African history in the curriculum.” This is to say that the young Nigerian students became somehow alienated from their indigenous African and Nigerian histories. Consequent to the above, “there was little passion for the teaching of history especially as European teachers complained that African students found the subjects remote” (Omolewa). This anomaly was to be remedied at the dawn of Nigerian Independence, first, at the University College, Ibadan and University of Ibadan, where a review of school curriculum was undertaken. Nigerian and African history having been introduced in the Department of History of the said university, all in collaboration with the then newly inaugurated West African Examination Council, history became an endeared subject it ought to have been. Meanwhile, this great achievement was to be short-lived.

The 1969 National Curriculum Conference and the later introduction of 6-3-3-4 System of Education in 1988 came with high expectation, but unfortunately and gradually it led to the decline of the study of history. Omolewa articulates the tragedy in these painful lines: “In the end, the curriculum reform which grew from that conference led to reduction of the status of history. Eventually, history was expunged, first from the primary and the

junior school curriculum, later at the senior school level.” Going further, history was removed from the Nigerian school curriculum in 2009 notwithstanding the hues and cries of well-meaning Nigerians. The devastating effect of the above miscalculated action has been enormous. As reported by Ibrahim Mustapha (*ThisDay Newspaper*, Dec. 1, 2022), Adamu Adamu (Minister of Education, 2015-2023), “expressed worry about the threat posed to national cohesion owing largely to lack of knowledge of Nigeria’s evolution following the removal of history from the basic education curriculum.” Though the federal government has rescinded its decision and reintroduced history as a stand-alone subject in the basic education curriculum in Nigeria thirteen years after its abolition, it’s undeniable that great harm has been done.

Today history scholarship in Nigeria continues to blossom in both secondary and tertiary institutions. There are a number of professional bodies with academic journals such as Historical Society of Nigeria and History of Education Society of Nigeria. Yet there is still room for improvement. On the kind of reading materials for the subject, History texts should be pragmatically tailored to serve unifying and harmonizing purpose amidst the diversified ethnic and cultural groups in Nigeria. This can be achieved by harping on the positive past encounters and mutual relations amongst the ethnic groups. For instance, the *Daily Post Newspaper* reported that the Ooni of Ife, Oba Adeyeye Ogunwusi recently made a revelation on the intersection between the origin of the Igbos and the Yoruba. He was able to trace the history of the Igbo race to Ile-Ife. Ooni disclosed that documented evidence has shown that the Igbo race migrated from Ile-Ife. He charged the academia to properly document the history of Yoruba race rather than relying on jaundiced history (qtd in *Daily Post Newspaper* by Seun Opejobi). It is the candid opinion of the present paper that a further exploration into the intersection between the Igbos and the Yoruba can yield fruitful results that could help fecundate more peaceful common relationship between the two nations.

Meanwhile the highly respected first class monarch, in his address to journalists ahead of an International Conference on ‘Ile-Ife and Yoruba Civilization: Nexus between Tradition and Modernity,’ at his palace in Ife, categorically stated:

We have good evidence to believe that Igbo race has its roots here in Ile-Ife. There is Ile-Igbo here in the palace which was not a recent creation but has been existing here for decades. For this and many other reasons, I believe we need proper documentation of our history. We are not involving government in this project so that we can just place all the facts together, we must write our history properly and put things right for the coming generations.

The above remark presents a case of unifying and harmonious historiography which, according to Ooni of Ife, Oba Adeyeye Ogunwusi, can “not only foster unity but reveal the ties across ethnic groups” (qtd in naijanews.com by Olugbenga Ige). *The Guardian Newspaper* similarly reports on the recent initiative by Ohanaeze Ndigbo who advised the Northern elders to revive or revert to the old alliance between them and the old Eastern Region for a formidable partnership. This is a clarion call to leverage on history to build a better future. These gestures resuscitate authentic historical narratives and employ same to fecundate harmonious and mutual co-existence among the diverse Nigerian populations. Conversely the above positive gestures sharply run contrary to the recent faulty and divisive history contained in Sola Akinyemi’s book entitled *Fundamentals of Civic Education*, for Basic 8 (JSS2), which was recently banned by the Minister of Education, Prof. Tahir Mamman. In the book, author had portrayed the Igbo people as aggressors, invaders and captors, but failed to give any history of war or contest between Ndigbo and the Yoruba, not to mention

the feigned one in the heart of Yoruba land” (*Vanguard online*). Akinyemi’s unfortunate case is that of bad history that lacks not only foundation in reality but also verifiable historicity. A jaundice history of this nature breeds nothing but conflict and division among the ethnic nationalities and should be shunned by all means. A unifying historiography harps on positive and harmonizing factors as cohesive of the diversified ethnic groups in Nigeria.

History and Historicity in Nation Building: The Nigerian Experience

Nation building as a process seeks to harness the human and institutional resources, past and present, in order to achieve a common identity as a people and an over-all development of the society. History interprets and reconstructs the past in view of illuminating the present and predicting the future. To what extent has history been employed to fecundate the process of nation building in Nigeria? In the first place, it has to be acknowledged that a conglomeration of micro and macro historical experiences and narratives cumulatively led to the emergence of the nation Nigeria. They served to create the present sense of identity and unity which today sustains the nation Nigeria; the fragility of the union notwithstanding. The British conquest and rule of Nigeria, the 1914 Amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates and the gaining of independence in 1960, for example, are macro historical experiences with undeniable historicity though various narratives may capture and present them differently. These and several other strategic events and their narratives, symbols and icons contributory to the emergence of Nigeria, serve to create sense of identity, unity and nationhood among Nigerians. They provided the justification and the impetus for the transition from parochial consciousness to a broader and national consciousness and ideology that are indispensable in birthing the then nascent nation Nigeria. This is in consonance with the opinion of Anthony Smith who averred that, “Nations are historical phenomena, not only in the generic sense that they are embedded in particular

collective pasts and emerge, sometimes over long time-spans, through specific historical processes, but also because, by definition, they embody shared memories, traditions, and hopes of the populations designated as parts of the nation (10). Nigeria is no exception.

Similarly, the above historical phenomena and experiences offer handy narratives and answers as to how, when and why, concerning Nigeria's origin and existence. In his book entitled *Without Bitterness* the Nigerian elder statesman Nwafor Orizu, as quoted by Michael Omolewa (in *Guardian Newspaper*, 10th February, 2015), asserted that, "Unless we know what we are and how we came about to be what we are, we shall certainly be unable to know where and how to go further." Underscoring the vital role of historical narratives, John Fea states that, "We use narratives to make sense of our world. It is how we bring order to our own human experiences and the human experiences of others" (no pg num). Historical narratives have done and continue to perform same function in Nigerian.

History plays significant role in the construction of our identity as Nigerians. The consciousness of our identity as Nigerians is a *conditio sine qua non* for nation building. Unfortunately, this collective consciousness as one Nigerian people seem to be activated only when Nigeria engages in an international sports or similar competitions; when ethnic consciousness becomes subsumed under the bigger umbrella of the ultimate Nigerian interest. The scenario becomes that of Nigeria as one united entity against a foreign competing nation or nations. From Kano to Lagos, from Enugu to Port-Harcourt, the common prayer and wish of the people is for the success of Nigeria. After the said event or competition, each person or group relapses to the original state where ethnic interest rather than national interest is prioritized. There is, therefore, the dire need for a stable national philosophy which can

serve to motivate and rally every Nigerian to live together as one united body with common purpose. This ideology can be called Nigerianism. The spirit of Nigerianism harbours and expresses the collective will; prioritizes the common good and collective success of the nation above personal or parochial interests. It builds bridges to unite the divergent ethnic groups. This spirit can be applied in every aspects of our national life.

Nation building in Nigeria goes beyond mere creation of sense of nationhood to maintaining sustainable national unity and integration as stated above. However, one can arguably say that, despite every effort, the unity of the conglomerating ethnic groups has ever remained shaky. Nigeria is bedevilled by inter-ethnic conflicts and mutual suspicion. The nation has also experienced civil war fought with the sole purpose of keeping a seceding part under one Nigeria. Hence the popular saying: “To keep Nigeria one and united is a task that must be done!” Yet primordial loyalty to ethnic groups, religious and parochial affiliations tend most times to supersede loyalty to the nation. This manifests in the form of nepotism and tribalism. These are socio-economic and political malaise that militates against competence and ultimately against authentic nation building. The cries of marginalization have become so loud. Nigeria has adopted several mechanisms to safeguard the national unity and to give each member and group sense of belonging such as: the Federal Character Principles and Quota System. These were meant to ensure inclusiveness.

When history is properly engaged, a people or nation is guided to make fewer mistakes. History thus becomes a light on the path to authentic nation building. Michael Omolewa was right to have categorically affirmed that “there has never been any controversy about the value of history for nation building or the development of an individual, his society or larger community” (Guardian Newspaper). Meanwhile, historical change or development is never of a linear nature. Most times it moves up-and-down; dropping at

one time and picking up the next time. The recent unearthing of the old Nigerian National Anthem, (*Nigeria We Hail thee*, 1960-1978) is a good example of a recourse to history (the past) in view of addressing present problem of conflicts and disintegration tendency among the ethnic groups in Nigeria. It is also a national-symbolic approach to nation-building given its significant role in shaping Nigeria's national identity and unity during the 1960s and late 1970s. The reversion to the old National Anthem has, however, triggered series of discussions among Nigerians with several voices being *pros*, and others *cons* the initiative. Senate Leader Opeyemi Bamidele is of the opinion that the anthem, “upon rendition, it inspired deep patriotism among Nigerians. Those who lived through that era recognize its crucial role in our nation's history, evoking nostalgia and fond memories of our early years” (qtd. in *channelstv.com* by Gloria Ume-Uzeoke). This opinion differs from that of Adegboyega Adeyemi who wrote On Facebook: “This is nothing but a backward integration. When will Nigeria be free from colonial mentality? Here, we are sacrificing a homegrown national anthem for a colonially imposed national anthem” (qtd. in *Punch Newspaper* by Debora Sanusi). Similarly, the recent quest for reversion to regional system of government which was for long abandoned is a good example of flashback to the past in order to glean from history positive elements to better the present. This is because, comparatively speaking, the era of regional form of government in Nigerian history is deemed to have recorded astronomical strides in multi-dimensional development than the present system. Indeed, it pays to have recourse to history.

Conclusion

This article has explored the significance of history and historicity in nation building with a focus on Nigeria. It analyzed the concept of nation building, its nuances and essential features. It harped on the significance of national identity and unity among diverse population that constitutes a heterogeneous nation like Nigeria.

Other key areas given attention as far as nation building is concerned include the state institutions, not excluding cultural, linguistic, and other factors that make for national integration. The article also x-rayed the ontological foundations of nation building and history which anchor on dynamic process metaphysics that prioritizes change and time. In exploring the concepts of history and historicity, Flannery Burke's "Five C's of Historical Thinking" was invoked to elucidate the critical and interpretative character of history. The communal dimension of history was explored while a brief allusion was made to Heideggerian understanding of historicity which not only links history to temporality but also emphasizes the connection between past, present and future. The work further explored the nexus between history, communal memory and the human society. Having surveyed the chequered history of history scholarship in Nigeria, the paper examined the significance of history and historicity in nation building in Nigeria.

From the above excursus, it is apparent that Nigerian history, backed by proper historicity saves Nigeria from communal amnesia. It sets the platform for configuring national identity. Indeed, it is history that configured us into what we are today as Nigerians for the fact that it serves as substrate for retrospection for the individuals, groups and the nation. An unexamined life is not worth living says the great ancient Greek philosopher Socrates. Indeed a national self-reflection has become imperative today in Nigeria so that we can determine the extent we have fared as a nation. According to Nwafor Orizu, "there are evolutionary stages in the life of any people. There is a stage of national childhood; there is a stage of national youth; there is a stage of national maturity" (20). Where does one place Nigeria using the above criterion? The above self-reflection ought to be marched with action. Humans are the makers of history! Given that "the shaping of human destiny, the creation of a new world, is within the almighty hands of human enterprise (Orizu 59)," Nigeria can always choose the best possible action to address a given situation

even if it means reverting to the past. Indeed, there is no doubt that the recent reversion to the old Nigerian National Anthem and the move to revert to regional system of government must have been informed by a comparative review of the past and present by the government of Nigeria.

Today that Nigeria is in a dire need of integration, more than ever before, as such the knowledge of history is indispensable so as to know the past, the present and avoid repeating past mistakes in the future. However, there is urgent need for further researches on the comparative history of the conglomerating ethnic and cultural groups in Nigeria. While so doing, areas of positive intersections should be highlighted and maximized for better integration. The different ethnic nations in Nigeria did not live in ascetic isolation from each other in the past; rather they had always interacted in one way or the other. Positive lessons from the past interactions can be gleaned. Nigerian history should not only be taught but also be given a significant priority. Our struggles as a nation, our successes and our failures need to be sufficiently highlighted. These will serve as big lessons for the present and future generations. Finally, in the present age of rapid globalization that tends to eclipse autochthonous cultures, values and boundaries, history can serve to remind us of our unique and aboriginal identity as Nigerians. The supportive elements for building stronger national identity and stronger Nigeria can always be gleaned from history.

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