Building without Pillars: Nigeria and the Quagmire of Nation Building, 1966-1999

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Abstract

This paper adopts the historical and comparative approach. It depends significantly on the use of the primary and secondary sources. The paper explores the various institutional attempts at nation building in Nigeria since 1960. The basic aim of the paper is to discuss the principal factors that had defied the various governmental attempts at building a united Nigeria. The paper argues that, the various attempts at nation building particularly during the long years of military rule recorded only momentary success due to certain structural pitfalls. It further argues that some of the critical pillars that could have sustained the drive for the evolution of a stronger nation are yet to be prioritized as agents of nation building by the various administrations in the post-military era. The paper submits that for a meaningful evolution of a core sense of belonging to emerge among the various groups in Nigeria, certain pillars like the Military, Education, Language, and Security cannot be compromised. Thus, unless the aforementioned are given a core Nigerian colouration, Nation Building progresses in Nigeria will be a replica of a building without pillars.

Introduction

Nigeria is acountry consisting of over 200 different ethno-linguistic groups (Falola& Heaton, 2018:1)with episodes of ethnic antagonisms, divisions, hatred, unhealthy rivalry and pronounced disparity among the people (Adesina, 2015:12)partly due to the British colonial policies between 1900 and 1960,which had infused pathogens of instability into the evolution of Nigeria (Akinola, 2009:3). This is because British colonialism left deep gulfs between the various groups in Nigeria. With the amalgamation of 1914, the three dominant ethnic groups in Nigeria (the Hausa/Fulani; Yoruba and Igbo) and the minority groups (Ijaw, Bini, Kanuri, Ibibio, Efik, Tiv, Urhobo) became locked in an intriguing strives for relevance, recognition and attentions. The British created the most fertile ground for the tensions, which later developed between the North and South (Ikime, 1979:12).

The introduction of regionalism into Nigerian politics by the British led to tensionsin the north over the domination of southerners in the northern civil service,due to the rejection of Muslim education as not suitable for a career in the colonial civil service or the British-dominated mercantile houses (Ikime, 1979:12). This led to hatred and no-love-lost between the regions in Nigeria before independence,which later graduated from cloak in the dagger furtive to an open and unrestricted flaunting of hatred, malice, vendetta and vengeful zeitgeist in the political, socio-economic and religious landscape in postcolonial Nigeria (Gbinije, 2015).Thus, there had been a

general discontent among the disparate ethnic groups in the country since colonial times, mainly the vagaries of the colonial politics (Odoemene, 2011:91).

In addition, among the major ethnic groups in Nigeria, there existunprecedented tussle about the minorities within their territories. Over the years,British colonialism has been attributed to the disintegrative relationships among Nigerians during the colonial eon and in the postcolonial era (Obasanjo, 2015:1). This should not be mistaken for an attempt to exonerate the nationalists and postcolonial Nigerian leaders who refused to act differently from the erstwhile colonial officials for the disintegration that continued to trouble the spirit of nationhood.

In the 1940s, the nationalistsfrom different regions of the country acted disparately amid the call for independence (Nwolise, 2017:12).The report of the commission that was set up to investigate the Kano Riot of May, 1953, reported that the attacks were attributed to the clash of cultures, the disparities in economic and social development between Northerners and Southerners, the occupation of strategic posts in the administrative, technical and commercial sectors of the Northby Southerners and the impacts of Western religion and political ideologies on the North (Gbinije, 2015).This was further heightened by the idiolects and the political idiosyncrasies of the key personalities of the period (the 1940 to 1966), which defined the relationships between the North and the South far beyond the era.

Thepolitical elite had subsisted for long within the traditions of British colonialism, which had created a gulf between the regions. According to Adesina, it was believed that the geo-ethnic and religious contradictions in which the then emerging regional elites found themselves was historically rooted in the colonial policy of not only preserving tribal and regional authorities, but also strengthening them along separatist lines for political gains(Adesina, 1985:1). By the 1950s, regionalism, ethnicity, religion and primordial loyalties, which were all too easy to manipulate became the weapons used by the various elite power groups to advance their interests(Adesina, 2015:14).The early awareness that the ethnic group that captured state power would control the economic power made the rivalry between the groups to become extremely volatile.

The preoccupation of nationalist leaders with political and cultural issues became the defining parameters for entrenching themselves on the political landscape. These were evident in their thoughts, works and pronouncements since nationalist agitations began in Nigeria. Their views matured over time and gave substance to the manner of Nigeria's development (Adesina, 2015:16).This left the Nigerian state with fractured inter-group relations at independence with the politics of seclusion and segregation as the standard.

The spirit of nationhood so much admired thus eluded the Nigerian state since independence as Nigerians hardly see themselves as the same, but as Igbo, Hausa/Fulani, Urhobo, Ijaw, Itsekiri, Edo,Yoruba,Igala, Idoma, etc. The anomie that has come to characterize the Nigerian state is palpable and represents not only a failure of the post-colonial state, but also the political elites (Adesina, 2015:12). Thus, generations of Nigerians have behaved in ways that had been conditioned by the leading influences of their age. The most popular of such influences are distrusts, antagonism, animosities and sometimes violent conflicts fueled by ethnic and

regional parochialism (Adesina, 2015:13).It is in this sense that Awolowo, dissatisfied with the contraption put together by the British, once described Nigeria as a mere "geographical expression."

A similar feeling of unease had been expressed by a northern nationalist,Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who later became the country's first prime minister. He observed that "...since the amalgamation of Southern and Northern provinces in 1914, Nigeria has existed as one country only on paper, it is still far from being united. Nigeria's unity is only a British intention for the country" (Awolowo, 1960:168). This expression continued to be echoed and reechoed within the Nigerian political landscape without redress. The first generation leaders of independent Nigeria did little or nothing to unite or ignite the spirit of nationhood amongst Nigerianssince the early years of independence. This was due to their preoccupation with ethno-political tussles for their personal benefits.

The Military and the Quagmire of Nation-Building

The nationalist leader that fought and won Nigerian independence opted to retain Nigeria's colonial structure. This however, led to the carryover of the colonial national issues into postcolonial Nigeria (Falola and Heaton, 2018:9). The inability of the post-independence leaders to promote stability and lead responsibly left the doors open for the military in Nigerian political life. Shortly after independencein 1960, Nigeria began to experience series of crises. For example, between 1960 and 1966, the fledging independent state experienced the Census Crisis, the Action Group Crisis, the Tiv Riot, the General Election Crisis, the Western Election Crisis and the January 15th coupd'état. The combinations of these crises threatened the foundation of the young nation. and Nigeria has since not been able to break out of this circle of crises as major conflicts after the other have characterized the task of nation building (Amuwo, 1992:9-11).

To historians and other concerned observers, the various issues and political calculations, actions and inactions that shaped the political crises in the early years of Nigerian independence were rooted in the years of British rule. However, it should be noted that the spillage of tensions and crises that bedeviled the First Republic, down to its later end were associated with the first crop of Nigerian leaders' occupation with ethnic cum regional politics at the expense of national unity (Forsyth, 1982:40). The failure of the civilian administration to address the various crisesled to the military intervention in Nigeria (Falola& Heaton 2018:9).

Prior to the first military coup *d'état* on 15th January, 1966, the military remained the only detribalized institution in Nigeria where true Nigerians were found (Emordi, 2007). This bound of one Nigeria, however, was dashed by the events of the January 15th and July 29th, 1966coup *d'état* which snow-balled into the Nigerian Civil War. The inability of the military to halt the fractionalization in the military along ethnic or regional divides and the killings in the North and South, after the July, 1966 coup, shattered the earlier confidence demonstrated in them by Nigerians. Soon, the military became politicized with their actions and inactions, defined by ethnic cleavages just like the ousted civilians.

Theend of the Nigerian Civil War provided the opportunity for integrative initiatives aimed atcreating sense of belonging among Nigerians, irrespective of their

backgrounds, firstly exemplified in the Reconciliation Reconstruction and Resettlement (the 3 Rs). This was followed by the establishment of the National Youth Service Corp, Unity Schools, and the National Sport festival. The National Youth Service Corps – a one year mandatory national service was devised for integrative purposes. The scheme was establishedthrough Decree No.24 of May, 1973 with the aim of integrating the country via graduate youths after the war. It was meant *inter alia* to encourage and develop proper ties among Nigerian youths and promote national unity.Thus, in order to achieve the principal aims of the scheme, Nigerian graduates were posted outside their domain to acculturate with other Nigerians in the course of the service. However, in the light of corruption and incessant conflicts across the country, some parents who may have been products of the schemenow influence the posting of their wards from the place of their original posting.

Additional Unity Schools were establishment across the states in Nigeria with the Motto – *Pro Unitate* (For Unity) (Okunfolami, 2017). Prior to the emergence of General Yakubu Gowon as Military Head of State, there were four Unity Schools in Nigeria (Ndagi, 2018). The Federal Government Colleges were designed as melting points for Nigerian students in their formative years from different parts of the country, to live together in boarding secondary schools in order to obliterate stereotyped bias or cultural suspicion or creed (Okunfolami, 2017). With the Unity Schools, government provided the platform to inculcate the spirit of a single indivisible Nigeria in the mindsof young Nigerians (Atueyi, 2016).

Today there are about 104 Unity Schools in Nigeria, although with diminishing status and loss of the original principle and spirit (Ndagi, 2018). This was made known by Malam AdamuAdamu, the Minister of Education who disclosed the number of candidates seeking admission into Unity Schools in the country has greatly reduced. For example, in April, 2018 the Minister of Education confirmed that during the 2018 National Common Entrance Examination (NCEE)only 28 candidates from Zamfara state registered for the examinations, while 950candidates registered from Taraba state and 50 candidates from Kebbi state (Ndagi, 2018). Currently, most of the Unity Schools are like state-owned schools where students' population are more homogeneous than heterogeneous (Ndagi, 2018). This was occasioned by the concomitant distrust and the divisive nature of the country today.

The National Sports Festivalalso began in 1973 with the aim of promoting unity among the ethnic groups in the country after the Civil War, as well as to discover sport talents that can be harnessed and groomed to represent the country at international competitions (Amuze, 2012).The first and second edition of the games were hosted by the Federal Government in Lagos in 1973 and 1975 (Adeolu, 2018). Several athletes like Peter Okodogbe, Charlton Ehizuelen, Esther Ogbuji, Gloria Ojukwu, Janet Omorogbe, Felix Imadiyi, Hamid Adio, Rotimi Peters, Late Dele Udo, A.J Jampido, Henry Anike, Yusuf Ali, the Late Oluyemi Kayode, Ezinwa brothers, Innocent Egbunike, ChidiImoh, Mary Onyali, Falilat Ogunkoya, Faith Idehen, Beatrice Utondu, Patience Itanyi, Tina Iheagwam, Emmanuel Igbinosa, Gabriel Gold, Patrick Okena, SuleMohammend, Palmer Okundaye, Bashiru Mohammed, Alfred Ilekhuoba, Osaze Owen, Friday Noruwa, Babatunde Obisanya, Atanda Musa, Sunday Eboh, Kudirat Owolabi, Funke Oshonaike, SegunToriola, Jerry Okorodudu,

Peter Koyengwachi, Monday Omoruyi, Christopher Ossai, Sabo Mohammed had all emerged through the National Sports Festival and brought honours to Nigeria from across the globe (Amuze, 2012). Forty-five years after the establishment of the Festival, its aims and aspirationsappear to have been lost.

The Sustainable Pillars of Nation Building

Despite Nigeria's huge population, manpower and natural resources as well as oil revenue over the years, they were not translated into quality health care, security, sound education and economic development due to the failure of the post-colonial political class to transform themselves into statesmen, bridge and nation-builders, ready and capable to stand up with integrity for Nigeria (Nwolise, 2017:12). The post-colonial leaders like their colonial counterparts remained local champions and emperors in their ethnic enclaves, manipulating and deepening the pluralistic variables to enable them remain in power with impunity (Nwolise, 2017:12). Nigerian leaders, both the military and civilian regimes are yet to demonstrate commitment to nation-building, rather they are preoccupied with personal aggrandizement.

Aside from been a prerequisite for development, security forms one of the principal factors to be considered before moving from one environment to another in pursuit of political, social, and economic interests (Udo, 1980:1). Despite the heterogeneous nature of theNetherlands,and the influx of migrants,the country has been able to profit from the services of migrants and institute high level of integration amongst the citizens and the migrants, irrespective of their background due to their sense of security (Schulte, 2018). Since the killings of some NYSC members in some parts of Nigeria in 2011, prospective Corps members and their parents havebeen reluctant to accept their deploymentsto some parts of the country characterized by insecurity.

The incessant killings and insecurity across the country, especially in the northeast has not only become the excuse for the redeployment of NYSC Corp members, but has also accounted for the gradual deterioration and relative retrogression of the Unity schools from their status as a Federal School to pseudo-state secondary schools. Instead ofproviding security for the citizens, Nigerian leaders are obsessed with the provision of security for themselves and the suppression of real and imaginary oppositions. This accounts for the large governmental investment in weaponry, which Nigerian leaders have either knowingly or unknowingly mistaken for security of lives and property. This was succinctly captured by Nwolise who opined that:

> "any attempt to talk to the Nigerian state is interpreted as challenge to the sovereign authority of the state, and met with military force even as first option — no dialogue(Nwolise, 2017:14). The character of the state remains predatory, anti-people, arrogant, and force based as in the days of Lugard who used Bismarkian Blood and Iron Policy in settling the great issues of the day. The state has never believed in dialogues with aggrieved groups as a way of resolving issues peacefully, and building peace and confidence in the state. As it was over the Aba women riot, Iseyin crisis, ondo crisis, and Iva Valley

massacre of 1949, so it is in contemporary times over Ogoniland, Odi, Zaki-Biam, Bakalori, Umuechem, Ogominana, and recent Afara (IPOB) massacres (Nwolise, 2017:14)."

With the near collapse of security in Nigeria, some states have been marked as a no go area in Nigeria, even when they have no business in the area other than making use of the federal roads that passed through the area. Areas like the Naka Road, the Jos Road, Borno, Yobe, Taraba, others, are some of the examples of places that Nigerians from the other states often avoid today. The unabated attacks across Nigeria, especially the herdsmen and Boko Haram have demographically affected the socio-economy of the northern states and Nigeria at large. For example, there have been massive migrations of investors/businessmen from areas that are prone to security challenges to areas that are relatively safe (Amune, 2018).Some civil servants have also influenced the transfer of their services from areas notoriously known for insecurity to places relatively less-prone to insecurity.

The migrations out of these areas should not be mistaken for a total abandonment because the groups who are mostly on the move are those from other states. In most cases, indigenes of the troubled areas often remain in their states, however, there are cases of people from these troubled areas that have also migrated to neighbouring states, considered to be less volatile.Thechallenge of insecurity like in some African countries and even in Europe and America has continued to fuel exclusionism rather than inclusive development (Obasanjo, 1990:1).The situation is compounded by the inability of the Nigerian state to enforce its own laws on some persons and groups and assert itself above religious and ethnic groups(Nwolise, 2017:17). Today, it appears that some Nigerians have lost confidence in the ability of the Nigerian state to guarantee their constitutional rights and security, hence resort to the wide spread use of vigilantes, ethnic militias, and personal "armies", which on the long run constitute insecurity to others (Nwolise, 2017:14).

The various Nigerian governments have failed to rejig the security apparatus despite the information, warning and advice of authorities such as McNamara as far back as 1968 to the effect that security has nexus with development, and that security is not military hardware alone, yet, Nigeria's rulers still see and practice national security from militaristic point without serious efforts to resolvingthe fundamental issues that create insecurity such as bad governance, poverty, hunger, unemployment among others (Nwolise, 2017:13).

It appears that the benefits of federalism such as better security, faster development and stronger diplomatic clout among the comity of nations has eluded the Nigerian political class. In addition, the Nigerian political elite failed to understand the truism that when the expected gains of federalism are not forthcoming over a period of time, the federating states may be tempted to pull out of the union, especially where impunity, arrogance of power, injustices, exclusionism, deliberate neglect, marginalization, oppression and suppression are manifested by those in power (Nwolise, 2017:14). This may have accounted for why Pakistan and Bangladesh broke from India, Eritrea from Ethiopia, Croatia, Slovenia, Bosnia-Herzegovina from Yugoslavia, and South Sudan from Sudan (Nwolise, 2017:14).

Although, most Nigerian leaders often claim that 'Nigeria's unity is not negotiable', not much has been done to actualize this rhetoric.States that have disintegrated or failed may not have done enough in ensuring inclusiveness in power and development. In Nigeria, the key issues are the near failure of the security apparatus, lopsided distributions of national resources and political power, grinding poverty, unemployment, impunity, exclusionism, marginalization, and nepotism, which call for questioning the essence ofthe state.Nigerian democracy has therefore become the politics of fiefdom and the supposed republic like a personal estate.Therefore, Nigeria appears to be far from being a federation, a republic, or democracy (Nwolise, 2017:16).

Purposeful education entails the transmitting of values from one person to another, aimed at preserving societal ethos, histories, technologies and development (Adesina, 2018). A careful observation of the Nigerian educational system since independence indicates that, the situation appears to be copy and paste or 'monkey see monkey do'. This brand of education is more of a transplant of education from one culture to another without subjecting it to scrutiny and proper adaptation. Despite the teaching of subjects like social study, civic education and government in Nigerian schools, no subject in the secondary or primary school curricular is properly scheduled to nurture national values or the spirit of a'Nigerianess' in the psychology of Nigerian students. Education is therefore seen as a mere ticket to securing jobs or access to the corridor of economic sovereignty with less emphasis ondevelopment. It is in this sense that despite several faculties of engineering in Nigerian universities and specialized universities of technology and agriculture, in the past three decades, the country remain dependent on foreign technology and scientists to meet critical technological needs as well as agricultural related needs.

Prior to 1966, the military as earlier mentioned was the only detribalized institution in Nigeria as it was the only institution where the personnel saw themselves beyond ethnic confides as Nigerians rather than ethnic extraction with parochial loyalty. Since the January and July 1966 coups, the nature and character of the Nigerian military have not remained the same as the rots of ethnicity and nepotism that characterized the larger society became a working attribute of the hitherto apolitical Nigerian Army with the faction alization of officials along ethnic or cultural divides (Amade, 2018). This has never been seen as a major problem to the spirit of nation building since 1966 due to the politicization of the military.

According to Osuma, the military become more answerable to calls from their religious and ethnic affiliations than the Nigerian cause, a situation made possible by former military leaders who during their regimes, sought to promote and despotically favour their ethnic cliques (Otite, 1992:13). The military who were thought to be immune from corruption, suddenly became notorious for graft, a situation that was out of control, beginning from the regime of Babaginda up to Abdussalam. Many privileged military officers in collusion with their civilian cronies became multi-millionaires through abuse of their offices. This led to lack of discipline and respect in the military as some privileged juniors officers no longer respected their seniors who were not privileged to have access to stolen funds. Similarly, it is no longer secret that military official are fast overtaking the police in extortion of money from motorists on the highways, especially in the Middle Belt and Southern

parts of the country. The loss of the military to the vagaries of corruption and ethnicity appears to have foreclosed the emergence of the Nigerian spirit in the militaryin its present state (Ake, 1996:1).

On the whole, language will be discussed as the last sustainable pillar of nation-building. The official language of a state is more or less a unifying factor in the life of such nation and expected to be the only communicative language within official functions. The use of such language provides an understanding relationship among citizens. In Nigeria however, the use of indigenous languages in the absence of an official indigenous language in most federal and state offices without apologies to those who do not understand them, could be counterproductive to the urgent assignment of nation building.

The selective use of indigenous languages, especially the majority ones, points to the disintegrative elements that characterize the Nigerian state. Where the above exist, services have to be rendered to fellow ethnic nationals before attending to those who are not indigenes. In addition, it should be noted that where there is no common language, common goal and integration may be difficult to achieve. It is fast becoming a usual trend in most military training schools in Nigeria, especially the ones situated in the north where Hausa language is sometimes used in giving instructions to the dislike of the non-Hausa trainees. This is not good for the Nigerian State because it breed disintegration.

Conclusion

The Nigerian State can only achieve the efforts toward nation-building, if the pillars of nation building like security, education, military and language among others are considered and coopted into the integrative mechanisms in the country in order to reinvigorate and sustain them. If the Nigerian state succeedsin nation building,there will be a departure from the orthodoxy of underdevelopment and disunity (Oyemakinde, 2011:11). It is in this sense that it can be said that there is optimism for development despite the challenges of nation building in Nigeria.

Efforts at development must therefore start with overcoming the predicament of nation building, a situation rooted in the poverty of leadership and in recent times that of followership. Nigeria must therefore begin to produce leaders that are committed to nation building and not themselves. The now developed and newly developing countries achieved development through the instrumentality of the quality of their leaders, a situation eloquently demonstrated in the Meiji of Japan who laid the foundation of modern Japan. No doubt, the examples in the leadership of developed and newly developing countries would benefit Nigeria's efforts toward nation building.

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