Inter-group Relations in the Context of Nation-building in Nigeria: Pre-colonial times to present

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ABSTRACT

Post-independence Nigeria like other parts of sub-Saharan Africa continues to face the challenge of internal unity amongst the disparate groups in its territory. In this study, attempts will be made to explore the nexus between intergroup relations in the pre-colonial era, and nation-building in post-independence Nigeria. The aim is to interrogate with hindsight the dynamics of intergroup relations in pre-colonial, and the effect of colonial rule on the process in Nigeria. Also, the concomitant challenges emanating from the unholy compartmentalization of ethnic groups in post-independence Nigeria are examined. Attempts at post-independence nation-building in Nigeria have not achieved the desired success. The question, therefore, remains to this moment, what does the country need to do differently to get it right? Using secondary sources for analysis, the study adopts the historical narrative approach to explore the issues in context. The findings indicated that arteries of group interactions in pre-colonial times like marriage, traditional diplomatic ties, economic activities, and the allusion to common ancestry are still relevant factors in developing national-building policies in Nigeria. There was a truncated trend that could have paved the way for a bigger evolution. The British did an imposition that has not resulted in a united Nigeria. The study concluded that nation-building

challenges in Nigeria would be surmounted when policies in this regard prioritize aspects of inter-group relations as agencies of national integration and unity.
Keywords: Inter-group relations, Nation-building, Post-independence, Colonial era**.**

INTRODUCTION

The geographical location referred to today as Nigeria was peopled by different cultural groups before European contact (exploration, trade, Christian missionary activities, and scramble/partition) and colonial enterprise. Like most parts of pre-colonial Africa up to the eve of the 19th century, in pre-colonial Nigeria, ethnic groups had mechanisms and platforms for interactions. For some groups, these arteries extended beyond the immediate enclave to farther locations. Such group interactions were fostered through mutual ways like diplomacy, marriage, economic activities, the allusion to common ancestry, and so on. On the other hand, it could be argued that aspects like wars of conquest, created new trajectories for inter-group interaction through the resultant terms of settlement and territorial expansion. However, the diplomacy of the British alongside the Berlin Conference of 1884/1885 truncated the cords that held the people together.

In the case of Nigeria, the Berlin conference led to the disarticulation, disorientation, and subjugation of the locales by the British colonialists. An experience that ushered in a system of governance with its attendant consequences of great enmity, distrust, and suspicion among the major regions in present-day Nigeria.[i] Thus, the forced cohabitation of ethnic groups was carefully planned by the European powers (chiefly: Britain, Germany, France, Denmark, Portugal, and The Dutch) and executed at the Berlin Conference on Africa: hatching the hydra-headed challenges that would characterize post-independence Africa. At the dawn of independence in 1960, the leaders of independent Nigeria like elsewhere on the continent embarked on the mission to 'build one Nigeria'. This was against the backdrop of the need to unite the diverse groups divided along different cleavages (particularly ethnic and religious) within Nigerian society. The quest for homogeneity among groups with diverse backgrounds is a task that requires concerted efforts and resources. This task of homogenizing a population comes with attendant challenges. History is replete with such nation-building efforts on the African continent.[ii]

Clarification of Concepts

Nation

An attempt to define the concept of nation is in itself problematic. This is because the very idea of a nation is not fixed/static.[iii] In order words, nations are constantly in the process of making or becoming. According to Kundra, it is this constant evolutionary process that creates "collective self-consciousness", which characterizes a group of people as a nation.[iv] These elements of collective self-consciousness cut across common race, common language, geographical unity, primal religion, common history, shared political

aspirations, common interests, and common culture. There is a similar trend in scholarship about the element of collectivity of a nation which shows that scholars appreciate the fundamental place of these for distinction among groups.[v] In this case, Grosby refers to a nation as a group comprised of social (i.e. norms, customs, or language) and territorial relations, which give rise to self-consciousness over time. The formation of a nation is not a natural phenomenon. Rather it is a human community that is a product of certain historical conditions.[vi] In order words, a nation is a human community that has been made in history and through history. By implication, over time, the usage of the word had different meanings in context. For instance, before the emergence of nationalism in late eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe, the word 'nation' was used in different ways. It was used in a biological category or the sense of race, or to refer to a clan. However, these usages are not relevant in the contemporary usage of the word 'nation'. What is common is the element of human collectivity which shares certain traits in common[vii]. In this context, a nation could be referred to as a group whose members identify themselves as culturally, ethnically, or linguistically belonging to that group.[viii] Drawing from the above, within the Nigerian territory exist groups that have distinctive elements from the other. Here, there is an Igbo nation, Hausa-Fulani nation, Yoruba nation, Nupe nation, Tiv nation, Idoma nation, Jukun nation, and other groups with shared group collectives. Therefore, post-independence Nigeria is a good archetype of a conglomeration of diverse nations. For an effective colonial enterprise, the British colonialists set up artificial borders on a land that was home to more than 400 ethnic group. Foremost Nigerian nationalist Obafemi Awolowo reechoed Count Metternich's quote about Italy, in Awolowo's words, "Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression"[ix]. What he meant was that Nigeria, unlike Israel, France, or England is not a nation. It is simply a territory occupied by diverse nationalities.

Nation-building

There is no generally acceptable definition of nation-building, as the concept means different things to different people. Like most topics in the social sciences, many scholars differ in their views on what nation-building implies. Despite the differing views, some scholars see it as building the tangible and intangible threads that hold a political entity together by giving it a sense of purpose, especially because having a viable nation is synonymous with achieving modernity[x]. As has been argued, nation-building remains the most viable option in the development of modern societies especially in ethnic, religious, and socially diverse climes. It also involves the creation of viable institutions that unite the people above their primor dial sentiments of ethnicity and religion. With this, the citizens take pride in their membership in a state and not in their ethnic affiliations. Put differently, nation-building connotes the creation of a national identity that supersedes local identities and loyalties that might compete with and preclude broader identification with the state. Another perspective sees nation-building as creating a new state out of a failed/collapsed one[xi]. Primarily, countries that have gone through a civil war situation: it is expected that measures are put in place as part of the post-war

healing process to unite the people. On the other hand, a society with multi-ethnic colorations that was sandwiched by a colonial fiat has to work hard to keep the different ethnic groups together.[xii] This scenario was evidenced in post-independence African states like Nigeria, Tanzania, Ghana, Kenya, et cetera. Thus, the fundamental mandate of any nation-building project seems to be how to prevent state collapse and disintegration.

Inter-group Relations

The subject of inter-group relations has attracted the attention of scholars in Sociology, Social History, Political Science, Anthropology, International Relations, et cetera. Hogg, M. A. defines inter-group relations as "the way in which people who belong to social groups or categories perceive, think about, feel about, and act towards and interact with people in other groups"[xiii] In societies with multi-ethnic configurations, inter-group relations foster pluralism whereby groups are more tolerant of each other. Here, the distinction between minority and majority is put aside and equal standing is embraced by all groups.

The need to sustain cordial coexistence between neighbouring groups is a very fundamental phenomenon in society.[xiv] There is no gainsaying the fact that no group can completely ignore her neighbours and live in isolation. As interactions persist many cultural, economic, social, political, and even religious borrowings between groups are bound to occur. In any case, intergroup relations could lead to integration or conflict, hence intergroup relations encompass both the uniting and disuniting factors of a group of people.[xv] Comments regarding inter-group relations were first featured in terms of Nigerian historiography in an attempt to refute the concept that Nigeria is an artificial creation of the British colonialists. Thus, we have been quick to point out that long before the arrival of the British on our shores, our peoples traded together, inter-married, and were aware of the presence of neighbours around them.[xvi]

Before the advent of the European explorers, followed by the European Christian Missionaries and then the European traders, the area referred to today as Nigeria had existed with various autonomous ethnic entities of varied cultural orientations, political organizations, and economic activities.[xvii] The autonomous political entities were organized in the mould of kingdoms, chiefdoms, and empires. On the basis of interactions between these groups, Orngu (2017) provides a tacit description thus:

> As organized socio-political groups, with clearly defined goals, they inter-related with one another on matters of trade, marriages, wars of conquest and annexation, etc.[xviii]

In this regard, prominent political entities in pre-colonial Nigeria were the famous Sokoto caliphate, the Kanem-Borno Empire, the Hausa States, and Nupe, in the northern axis. In the southern enclave, notable political structures were the Oyo and Benin empires. Apart from these, there existed other segmentary groups like the Tiv, the Idoma, and the Igede, among others, which are predominantly in the Middle-belt corridor. These groups were considered to be politically non-centralized.

Furthermore, as an anti-thesis to the famous dictum on Nigeria by Obafemi Awolowo regarding the multi-nation orientation of Nigeria as a mere geographical expression; Emmanuel Ajayi avers that Nigeria was not a mere geographical expression or creation of the British colonial enterprise. He argues that the history of Nigeria did not begin in 1914 or 1960, with the British conquest, or with the advent of the Portuguese merchants. On the contrary, the history of Nigeria is the history of Nigerian people from the earliest time to the present. The linkages at many points crystallize such history and span over several periods cutting across myths of origin, trade, crafts, religion, and so forth framed into a network of interlocking relationships.[xix] The foregoing characterized the socio-political, economic, and religious dimensions of inter-group relations in pre-colonial Nigeria.

Colonial Rule: inter-group relations and Nation-building in Nigeria

The second half of the 19th century saw an intensification of colonial interest by the European powers in West Africa and elsewhere on the continent. With the consummation of 'African land allocation' at Berlin in 1884/1885 by competing European powers, altered the existing patterns of indigenous group's interactions. In the new dispensation, for instance, group relations between the Kanuri and the Twi, or between the Ewe and Fante, took a new dimension. This ushered in the pattern of group relations along the colonial orientation/structures that the colonialists introduced. In other words, native territories that had come under the control of the European powers as colonies related with each other on the basis of British colonies, French colonies, German colonies, Portuguese colonies, and so forth. It is worth noting that the arbitrariness with which these colonial territories were drawn was problematic. There was no due consideration for groups of similar ethnic or cultural orientations to be put in one colonial entity. Placing groups in any territorial space was dependent on evidence of effective presence (occupation) on the part of the colonial power on the round table at the Berlin Conference of 1884/1885. This scenario divided groups hitherto existing as kith and kin. Typical examples could be found in Nigeria, Togo, Benin, Kenya, Ethiopia, Eritrea, Sudan, and so forth. Such forced divisions would later create huge problems for the continent in the guise of incendiary wars and civil wars.

Within colonial Nigeria, harmonious inter-group relations were severed as a result of the British colonial invasion. Elsewhere in Nigeria, inter-relations between the Bette people and the Kunav as a case in point were drastically dampened; as the schisms initiated by the British continued to fester the crisis between the two groups during the colonial era.[xx] During this period, there was increased rivalry between hitherto friendly groups, in this case, enmity became the bane between such groups. For instance, there was increased rivalry between groups over ownership of resources like land, streams, markets, footpaths, et cetera; that they both made use of. Ofili considers the amalgamation of 1914 as the structural basis for a robust interaction between the diverse ethnic groups in Nigeria which the Nigerian people have not adequately utilized.[xxi] Instead what they

have developed is the 'we' and 'they' feelings as in-group and out-group orientation to be relevant economically, politically, and otherwise.[xxii]

Remarkably, the colonial authorities were aware of the fact that it needed to dislodge or at best weaken the existing inter-group connections for an effective operation of the colonial administration. With the joint efforts of the Missionaries, they needed various changes in the socio-political and economic patterns to leave the people with European ideas and Civilizations, thereby destroying pre-colonial inter-group Relations. This was further accentuated by the setting up of the Native authority system, which had boundaries that were artificial creation. The attendant consequences of this development were that it created unending problems that negatively affected inter-group relations between neighbouring groups in present-day Nigeria.[xxiii]

It is a truism that landmarks had existed as borders, they were nevertheless fluid and were never used as *sine qua non* to identify any clan. The Colonialists carved out the divisions with natural features used as signposts. In the African setting, rivers, streams, hills, and valleys were used to separate one clan from another, notwithstanding the unequal economic potentialities of the areas.

In pre-colonial times, language intelligibility was an important element that fostered group cohesion. Inasmuch as the various groups tried to maintain their separate entities, there was a great deal of linguistic borrowing and cultural diffusion which was made possible through some commercial and social contacts. The essence was to maintain peaceful relations for trade to flourish and, reduce the degree of tension and differences in these areas.[xxiv] However, with the influence of external factors notably Islam and Christianity, the mutual linguistic borrowing process was truncated. By way of prognosis, the linguistic build-up among the various groups in pre-colonial Nigeria presents a recipe for convergence and perhaps unanimous integration. One could argue that with the introduction of Western education and the English language, the process of language integration was accelerated. Herein lies the critical question about whether the locales were willing and ready to learn the Whiteman's language, which came thousands of miles across the Mediterranean. At least for the period, the English language was of no relevance to the locales: what was important was to understand the language of their neighbours: easy understanding that could pave the way for economic, social, religious, and political benefits. The introduction of Western education rather altered the values of the various groups in colonial Nigeria. For instance, a new group of African elites emerged on the scene who were distinct from the traditional elites as they could aspire to a position of leadership in the new dispensation. With this, the traditional political structure of the people was affected; as it was the center of formal coordination of group relations among groups. High-powered diplomatic engagements between groups, for instance, were coordinated by traditional political institutions.

Regrettably, there was a deliberate attempt by British colonizers to weaken the indigenous system of government. In the first place, most of the communities were acquired as a result of conquest and deposition or threat of exile of the rulers and their

councils, which certainly brought into disrepute the whole business of kingship and chieftaincy. The colonial officers on the spot became dictators instead of advisers to the traditional rulers. This manipulation of the age-long institution of kingship and its paraphernalia resulted in a loss of prestige and respect for the traditional rulers in the eyes of their subjects.[xxv]

In the study of inter-group relations in pre-colonial and colonial Nigerian history, colonial rule is seen as an onslaught that frustrated the already existing mutual relations among the various groups. Indeed, the British colonialists introduced new elements and altered greatly the political, economic, and social organization of the people. The process of colonial political domination over the different ethnic groups reached a crescendo with the amalgamation of 1914, which was superintended by Lord Frederick Lugard. Thus, colonial Nigeria was birthed with the emergence of different ethnic groups with fluid boundaries. According to Tamuno as cited in Iruonagbe, & Tayo, "the British did not seek the views of the people to ascertain if the amalgamation was necessary"[xxvi]. The priority of the colonialists was to put in place structures for new markets for British industries and also the desire to exploit the natural resources of the colonies. Already the boom of the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century called for a dual purpose in the British colonial enterprise.

The unholy alliance created by the British colonialists provided a playing ground for fear of domination by one group over the other. This suspicion, distrust, and fear of hegemony was displayed when political leaders from the North and South met to decide on the future of colonial Nigeria in 1953; in the motion for independence moved by the late Chief Anthony Enahoro. The reactions that greeted that move by a southerner, from the northern political elites (legislators) was a clear expression of the high level of distrust that had come to feature prominently in the political landscape of Nigeria. The consequences of these actions would later define the relations between the different ethnic groups in post-independent Nigeria in the first two decades 1960s – 1970s.

Given the threats to the survival of independent Nigeria, different national governments embarked on national integration strategies. The next section will explore the different nation-building efforts in Nigeria from 1960 to the present.

Efforts at Nation-building in Nigeria since Independence

Following the fear of domination by one group at the end of the Nigerian Civil War (1967 – 1970) came the 'No Victor, No Vanquished' proclaimed by the then Head of States General Yakubu Gowon. Consequently, in an attempt to reintegrate the renegade Biafrans back into Nigeria, the policy of Reconciliation, Rehabilitation, and Reconciliation (the 3Rs) was promulgated. With this policy, the Federal Government of Nigeria hoped to calm frayed nerves and forge a more virile Nigeria.[xxvii]

It was not until after the bitter experience of the Civil War that made any serious efforts at nation-building. Importantly, this period saw the promulgation of the 3Rs (Reconciliation, Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction): a post-Civil War strategy put in place by the military administration to heal the wounds and reconcile Nigerians who

were affected by the war. Other measures included the introduction of the new currency (Naira), the establishment of the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC); "de-regionalization" of university education where all previous regionally-owned: Ife, Nsukka, and Zaria Universities came under the control of the Federal Government. The introduction of Unity Colleges and the introduction of the National Sports Festival; the introduction of the Joint Admission and Matriculations Board (JAMB); and the introduction of the Federal Character Principle: were all immediate (political) responses to the quest for nation-building after the Civil War in Nigeria.[xxviii] A brief spotlight on post-independence nation-building developments in Nigeria could suffice in this context to drive home the rationale for introducing such measures on the part of the government. Drawing from the multi-ethnic configuration of post-independence Nigeria, the Federal Capital Principle was introduced to look into the fundamental issues of intense competition for power and influence in Nigerian politics and public space. In the first decade of the country's independence, the struggle for power among the different ethnic groups in the country between the northern oligarchy and their southern counterparts featured prominently in the political landscape.[xxix] The agency of government responsible for the enforcement of Federal Character Principle (FCP) is the Federal Character Commission (FCC) which was established by Act No. 34 of 1996 (see federalcharacter.gov.ng). The core mandate of the commission is to ensure fairness and equity in the distribution of public posts and socio-economic infrastructures among the federating units of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. This was recalibrated in the 1999 Constitution in Sections 14 and 153 for a democratic arrangement.[xxx] Today, the practice of FCP raises curiosity and doubts as to how effective the implementation of the principle is in the public space.

As part of measures to inculcate unity among Nigerian children, the Federal Government of Nigeria created the Federal Government Colleges otherwise known as Unity Schools across the country. This is seen as a deliberate measure to foster national unity and cohesion in the country, by bringing students from different parts of the country together in one school. Today, these Unity Schools are located in every state of the federation with each having one or two, while Lagos State has three. The Unity Schools are platforms for parents to key into the government's quest for "One Nigeria" by enrolling their children in these schools. The essence is to ensure that there is cross-fertilization of ideas across the cultural, ethnic, and religious landscape of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria. The teenagers were considered to be the best agents for birthing a cultural mix and could be well-integrated into modern Nigeria. Like the NYSC which was established in May 1973, the Unity Schools were expected to provide an opportunity for young Nigerians to undergo a culture shock in other culture zones within the Nigerian area for a while. While the NYSC is a mandatory one year service to fatherland for university graduates, and finishers of Higher National Diploma and National Certificate of Education. Both programmes embraced Nigerian pluralism and cultural diversities in strengthening national unity and for engendering oneness.[xxxi] The legacies of these programmes in

Nigeria's nation-building quest remain sacrosanct. Courtesy of the NYSC and Unity Schools, for instance, inter-ethnic marriages have been consummated, stereotypes have been corrected, and new bonds created among hitherto unfamiliar individuals.

Challenges of the Nation-building Process in Nigeria

In a heterogeneous society, the task of nation-building is riddled with challenges. Nigeria like other post-colonial countries in sub-Saharan Africa has been confronted with these pitfalls for the past decades beginning in 1960 independence. In this section, the focus is to examine some of the challenges to nation-building in post-colonial Nigeria.

Ethnic configuration and rivalry

With over 400 ethnic groups with a population of over two hundred million, Nigeria is considered one of the most ethnically diverse countries in Africa (see National Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Aside from religion which is typical of the diversity expressed in Nigeria, ethnic diversity takes a prime stage in Nigeria's multi-layered landscape. In the same manner, when ethnicity in plural societies is not well managed creates acrimonies and differences amongst groups in a society. This leads to the highly divisive notion of "we and/versus they". The ethnicity question has remained latent in virtually every Nigerian experiences and interactions. At every given opportunity ethnic differences are factored into conversations particularly questions about where one comes from. This elicits feelings of out-group belonging rather than a sense of inclusivity. The challenges and opportunities of contemporary ethnic relations in Nigeria are shaped within the framework of social, political, economic, and cultural institutions. Today, national discourses, currents of opinion, and attitudes are influenced by significant events that are woven into the porous configuration of local, regional, and national relationships.[xxxii]

The Nigerian political elites understand the political benefits of ethnic diversity and have always leveraged on it during electioneering campaigns. In recent times with the return to civilian rule in 1999, Nigerian politicians have cashed in on these sentiments to win elections. The 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019, and the recent 2023 General Elections in Nigeria are replete with calls for groups to vote for candidates from their ethnic backgrounds. For instance, in the build-up to the 2023 General Elections in Nigeria, Vanguard Newspaper tacitly captured the mood and interplay of factors to determine the outcome of the General Elections thus:

> Since Nigeria returned to democratic governance in 1999, several factors including ethnicity, religion, zoning, and other sentiments, have always influenced the candidate and political party that wins the presidential election. As politicking ahead of next year's election becomes intense, it is becoming increasingly certain that the twin factors of ethnicity[sic] and religion will be a major factor in influencing the election (Vanguard Newspaper, August 2022: para. 1).[xxxiii]

Herein lies the unflinching role of ethnic sentiments in shaping the outcomes of elections in Nigeria. At the state level, the situation is the same where in most states the political space is largely dominated by one particular ethnic group within the state. A typical case could be seen in a state like Benue state in northcentral and Rivers until 2023. Since the commencement of the fourth republic in 1999, the governorship seat of the state has only

been occupied by individuals of Tiv ethnic background and Ikwere respectively. In a state that also has the Idoma, Igede, and Etulo as ethnic groups. The Tiv have continued to perpetuate themselves in governorship with their demography and land size as strength over the other ethnic groups in the state. As a result, there is an ill feeling of injustice and unfairness among the groups that are denied equal access to exulted positions of political leadership. In such an atmosphere of distrust and suspicion, it becomes difficult for groups to accept each other as one and work together, hence the schisms continue to widen. The situation is akin to that of Kaduna state where the Hausa-Fulani dominated north had continued to occupy Government House for the greater part of the democratic dispensation. In 2011 an opportunity came for southern Kaduna indigenes to produce a Governor in the person of Patrick Yakowa who died regrettably in less than a year in office under unclear circumstances. To this day, the pocket size of ethnic groups (Adara, Agweshi, Jaban Lungu, Atyap, Nizo, Kanufi, et cetera) in southern Kaduna zone have been sidelined in the political scheme of producing their own indigene to the number one political seat in the state, and the civil service.[xxxiv]

With such ethnic configuration also comes the fear of majority domination over minority ethnic groups. It is in a bid to resist the domination that is latent in the political space by the hegemony of the majority ethnic groups that incites violence.[xxxv] When the political yearnings and aspirations of the minority ethnic groups are not actualized they become rebellious thereby making it difficult to work together to achieve societal set goals. Ethnicity by its very nature as a rallying point for mobilizing greater participation and placing the question of control and sharing or distribution of the power and resources on top of the political agenda, is capable of exacerbating ethnic conflicts.[xxxvi] The task of nation-building is difficult to accomplish in a society where the people are divided along such deep ethnic cleavages.[xxxvii]

Leadership/political elite

In his seminal work "The Trouble with Nigeria", the late literary sage Achebe (1984) captures succinctly in the opening paragraph that "The trouble with Nigeria is squarely that of leadership"[xxxviii]. Post-independence Africa is riddled with the challenge of bad leadership and selfish political elites. The situation is the same from Dakar to Dares Salam, Johannesburg to Cairo, Abuja to Algiers; with common denominators of bad leadership. A scenario that has been largely attributed to the failure and non-functioning of states on the continent. Over the years since the attainment of independence in 1960, the challenge of leadership has bedeviled Nigeria with civilian and military regimes at the helm of affairs at different intervals. Iyorwuese Hagher argues that only effective, morally scrupulous – 'God-centered leaders, modeled for example on Mandela and Nyerere, will bring about the necessary democratic transformations, and end the corruption and dependency of African states, of which Nigeria is a key player.[xxxix] This brings to the understanding that visionary leadership is the fulcrum on which the desired multi-faceted change on the continent rests.

No doubt, it takes visionary leadership in place for a society to work. The examples of remarkable transformations recorded in Southeast Asian countries from the 1980s up to the present are evident. What catapulted these countries from Third World countries to First World countries remains a puzzle in the eyes of Western development theorists/pundits. Visionary leadership made the difference that culminated in Asian Tigers and Asian Miracle (Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, and Thailand). Until there is consciousness and deliberate effort to produce national leaders that will rise above ethnic and religious sentiments; with integrity to endear them to the Nigerian citizens, the quest for a united and stronger nation is far from reality.

Corruption

Corruption is one phenomenon that is a major clog in the wheel of nation-building attempts in Nigeria. In Nigeria, there is a multi-sectoral dimension to corruption. No facet of Nigerian society is immune to the venom that corruption spills. Corruption cases headlining newspaper pages are a daily occurrence in Nigeria. Page describes corruption as "the single greatest obstacle preventing Nigeria from achieving its enormous potential"[xl]. For the average Nigerian, the country is considered one of the world's most corrupt, and the effects are felt daily. Over trillions of Naira are fizzled away from the country's economy, stifling development and weakening the social contract between the government and the citizens. There are a plethora of corruption cases in Nigeria. In December 2021, former National Security Adviser, Colonel Sambo Dasuki (Rtd) was charged for alleged misappropriation of $21.1 million Arms Fund Diversion; former Governor of Benue state Gabriel Suswam diversion of 3.1billion Naira Police Reform and Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme funds; former Minister of Justice/Attorney General of the Federation Mohammed Bello Adoke fraud of $6,000,000 in a fraudulent transfer of an oil bloc, OPL 245; Chief Femi Fani-Kayode former minister of Aviation alleged 4.6billion Naira fraud.

In his taxonomical analysis of corruption syndrome in Nigeria, Page provides twenty overarching contexts (sectors) that are vulnerable to corruption. This taxonomy applies not only to national-level dynamics but also to the component levels (state and local governments).[xli] Corruption is a major challenge as it breeds favouritism, and nepotism in every sector of Nigerian society, as positions and contracts are awarded based on personal connections rather than merit. Corruption is ingrained in Nigeria, in the public and private sectors, family, households, religious institutions, civil service, judiciary, police, house of assemblies, and many other such systems.[xlii]

Corruption and nation-building in Nigeria are deeply intertwined, with corruption posing a significant obstacle to the country's development and progress. Corruption hinders economic growth by extension discourages foreign investment, undermines economic stability, and diverts resources away from essential public services, thereby hindering Nigeria's economic growth and development. Over the years, widespread corruption has eroded the Nigerian citizens' trust in their government, leading to

disillusionment and disengagement from the political process (as could be seen in the political apathy of some individuals during voting periods).[xliii]

Political instability

Political instability has hindered economic growth and development in Nigeria due to incessant military coups in Nigeria in the past. The military truncated the democratic process in Nigeria in January 1966 thereby preventing the maturation of Nigerian politicians in the art of governance despite the few gains accrued to the country under the intermittent military regimes including the creation of states, ending the civil war, nationality, unity, National Youth Service Corps and the quota system. This is coupled with the unstable democratic system which comes with a long period of electioneering process, unstable policies, and lack of sincerity of purpose by the political class, and embezzlements which created an unfavourable business environment, discouraged investment, and hindered economic progress. The above has resulted in a lack of modern infrastructure development including roads, electricity, and water supply, which are important indices of economic growth.[xliv]

The lack of consistent and enduring policies led to a brain drain hence many Nigerians now move abroad to seek better opportunities because of the not-too-clear political space. Thus, a large

number of skilled professionals, academicians, and intellectuals who would have helped to drive the economy are lost to other countries. This has birthed different ethnic militias like IPOB, MASSOB AND Oduduwa Congress, and Boko Haram. The activities of these organizations affected the agricultural output and many farmers have been killed resulting in reduced considerate numbers of farmers. In the middle-belt region of the Benue plains, the volatility of the area caused by the herders-farmers crisis has had a huge hunger toll on the country. The 'expected consequence' is the cancerous food crisis Nigeria is currently facing.

Furthermore, the activities of agitators have instilled palpable fear in the citizens of Nigeria. Not spared is the manufacturing sector, as companies struggle to operate in an environment with frequent changes in policies and regulations (Over Year2020) which reduced the GDP growth rate in the country making it difficult for them to achieve sustainable economic development.[xlv]

The Civil War

The Nigeria Civil War of 1967-1970 caused by the desire of the Biafrans to secede from Nigeria, plunged the country into a serious threat to national integration and unity. The war, fought between the federal government and Biafra had a significant effect on the nation-building process in Nigeria. The Igbo pogrom under the aegis of the Biafran war created serious human, economic, and political losses that have hindered the country's economic and social growth. The dust raised by this horrific debacle has remained unsettled in the country to date. For instance, there was an unprecedented massive displacement of people estimated at over 2 million people, while more than 1 million

people died.[xlvi] The destruction of the existing infrastructure like bridges, roads, and buildings left many wondering whether the region could recover fully to its feats. Similarly affected was the production of crude oil which declined considerably in Nigeria.[xlvii] With a negative impact on the Nigerian economy because of reliance on oil as the major source of revenue. The post-civil war 3Rs (Reconciliation Rehabilitation, and Reconstruction) were introduced to help reintegrate the Igbo into Nigeria, hence the 'No Victor, No Vanquish' mantra. Little wonder, fifty years after the policy was enacted, events in the country suggest that the wounds of the Civil War have not yet healed, and the factors that led to its outbreak are still very much obvious in present-day Nigeria.

The war created political tensions and divisions that brought to the fore ethnic polarization, grievances with each side, harboring feelings of injustice, betrayal, resentment political marginalization, and economic disparities. These factors made it impossible for the government to build a united and cohesive society.

The Way Forward

Despite the challenges to nation-building in Nigeria, hope is not lost if the political class can take a proactive stand to sincerely address the issues that hinder economic development and growth. For the nation to grow there is every need to promote national unit. It will be proper to encourage the citizens to have a shared sense of citizenship that transcends ethnic and religious differences. This can be achieved through emphasizing the significance of national symbols like the flag, anthem, and coat of arms, Civic education, natural celebration, and promotion of Nigerian history particularly aspects of precolonial inter-group relations.

Moreover, good governance which is essential for the nation building should be promoted. The government should ensure transparency in decision-making and eradicate corruption. Government institutions can be strengthened if leaders are held accountable for their actions and face consequences for corruption and mismanagement. Efforts should be made towards participatory governance that will allow diverse stakeholders in decision-making processes. The national assembly has been caught in the web of under-performing, corruption, and dereliction of their duties while abandoning their responsibilities of a democratic system to become an extension of the executive arm of government. Thus, efforts should be geared towards making them effective for the yearnings of society.

The rule of law is another important factor that can help nation-building in Nigeria. Government at all levels should strengthen the judicial system and allow for equal applications of the law. This will allow for the effective implementation of anti-corruption policies including embezzlement of public funds, asset declaration, transparency in the award of contracts, whistle-blower protection, and sanctions for corruption. The anti-corruption agencies like EFCC, ICPC and The Nigerian Police established by law to deal decisively with acts of corruption should be more empowered and allowed the ambiance to work independently. The recruitment of these agencies should be made more transparent and rigorous to prevent 'bad eggs' from joining the organization.

Lastly, there should also be an improvement in the quality of public services such as healthcare, education, and sanitation. The quality should also be complemented with accessibility to all citizens of the country without discrimination and professionals in the civil service should earn promotion on merit and competence above personal and ethnic gains.

Conclusion

Inter-group relations in Nigeria have contributed to the quest for nation-building, though only minimally. Given the expediency of internal unity in Nigeria coupled with the fast-changing social landscape, there is an urgent need to prioritize aspects of native inter-group relations in pre-colonial Nigeria. For most of pre-colonial Nigeria, there is evidence to support the existence of harmonious group relations. Such mutual understanding and misunderstanding in the circumstance had brighter prospects of future integration and unity. No doubt, the tendency of groups to subsume others is possible. We dare say that, the foundation of poor nation-building in Nigeria and elsewhere on the African continent was laid in the over three centuries of the inhuman trans-Atlantic slave trade. It was further firmly consolidated during the partition and subsequent take-off of the colonial enterprise in Nigeria.

Until the puzzle of nation-building is demystified a clear-cut and consensus national development agenda would continue to elude the country. For Nigeria to get it right moving forward, nation-building measures must project and foster aspects of native interaction and intermingling among the various ethnic groups. Concrete national policies should be put in place to encourage and incentivize such interaction among people of different ethnic backgrounds based on marriage, workplace, and other areas of social interactions. Finally, to change the narrative of nation-building in Nigeria, there must be lasting solutions to the challenges impeding inter-group relations, such as boundary adjustments and socioeconomic equality and equity.

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