

Nigeria and Challenges of Nation Building (Nigeria Civil War and Military Intervention)

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Introduction

Hanging thick in the air on that October 1st 1960, was a glorious beacon of hope of uncluttered freedom savored with the relish of a people who have known nothing but oppression,

Suppression, intimidation, subjugation, exploitation, marginalization, economic, and political domination by the British overlord who colonized them for more than a decade, as children expressed it in songs, and demonstrated it at various parade grounds across the nation as they marched on their first Independence Day celebration that was on the 1st of October 1960 in Nigeria (Akonye, Obike and Onele 2023). However, the expectation was that of better education, improved agriculture, health services, more rapid industrialization and economic abundance generated by natural and human resources but after so many years there was nothing to justify the hopes. The aspirations were becoming a mirage and politicians played politics for what they could get out of it rather than the desire to serve and develop the country; hence, the outcome of the people's expectation were series of military coup and counter coup d'état that later gave birth to a civil war that posed a b

ing threat to the country's economic, and political development and nation building. At this point all hope was lost because what the people saw was not what they expected from their so called leaders. It is at this backdrop this paper aims to examine Nigeria and Challenges of Nation Building like the Nigeria Civil War and Military intervention, among other challenges to nation building.

The Concept/Meaning of Nation Building

Nation building as the name goes is the process whereby a society or state with diverse origin, histories, language, culture and religion come together within the boundaries of a sovereign state with a unified constitutional and legal dispensational, a national public education system, an integrated national economy, shared symbols, and values as equals to work towards eradicating the divisions and injustices of the past, to foster unity and promote a country's wide conscious sense of being proudly Africa or a country (Nwabughu 2009). Afianmagbon (2013) opined that nation building is the process of constructing or structuring a national identity using the power of the state. This process aims at unifying the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable in the long run, accordingly, Andrea (2018) identified three factors that can determine the success of nation building over a long run, these include:

- The early development of civil society organization,
- The rise of a state capable of providing public goods across a territory and
- The emergency of a shared media of communication.

Having said that let us look at some of the major challenges of nation building in Nigeria

Challenges of nation building in Nigeria state

- **The Nigeria –Biafra civil war as a challenge to nation building**

The Nigeria –Biafra civil war is said to be one of major challenges of nation building in Nigeria state. This challenge came up between the Nigeria's Federal Government and the secessionist state of Biafra in 1967 which lasted for three years (1967 to 1970), as the point of no return was reached in January 1966 after the army has over thrown the govern

ment of Tafawa Balewa and Maj. General Aguiyi Ironi took over the government of Nigeria but his plan to abolish the Regions and imposed a unitary government met with Anti-Igbo riots in the North. In July 1966 Northern officers staged a counter coup d'état and Ironsi was assassinated and Lieutenant Col. Yakubu Gowon took over power. Here, the crisis was compounded by inter communal clashes in the North and threat of secession in the South-East. At this point efforts made to settle the constitutional future of Nigeria was abandoned after a series of ethnic massacres in October 1966. At last efforts to save the country was made in January 1967 when the Eastern delegation led by Lieutenant. Col. Odumegwu Ojukwu agreed to meet others on neutral ground at Aburi in Ghana but the outcome of the meeting could not be positive. In May 1967 the Eastern Region's Consultative Assembly authorized Ojukwu to establish a Sovereign Republic while at the same time the Federal Military Government of Gowon promulgated a decree dividing the four Regions into 12 states, just to break the power of the Eastern Region. On May 30, 1967, Ojukwu declared the secession of the Eastern Region under the name of the Republic of Biafra which Nigeria's Federal Government interpreted as an act of rebellion. At this point crisis broke out in the early hour of July 1967. Within weeks the conflict had escalated into a full-scale civil war and that was a big threat to nation building.

- **Military Intervention as a challenge to nation building**

Military interventions in Nigeria politics have not been without a cause thus, when the military first intervened in January 15, 1966, it was to rescue Nigeria from the aimless drift to which it had been subjected by politicians of the First Republic who had begun to penetrate and politicize the military establishment (Akonye, Obike and Onele 2023) Here, the weak political institutions and the concomitant decline in the political elite legitimacy, co

upled with the widespread corruption, favoritism, and nepotism, had created an enabling environment for the Military intervention in Nigeria politics, and this posed a big threat to nation building, (Ota, 2000)

- **Politics of godfatherism as a challenge to nation building**

The emergence and tremendous role played by the so called political godfathers in Nigeria politics have a big disadvantage in enhancing political participation and encouraging nation building. For instance, in Nigeria politics is seen from investment perspective which increased the rate of political violence. Here, political godfathers provide jobs for the unemployed and the poor who will in turn be ready to help their masters to win election by any means. As remarked by Ugwu (2005), electoral bodies in Nigeria cannot be exonerated from the less participation of people in the political process. For example, the Independent Electoral Commission, (INEC) like the past electoral bodies has structural and credibility problem as its independence is doubtful as it always depends on the Executive arm of government for its operation. Moreover, this affects its performances as people say, who blows the piper dictates the tune.

- **Weak and dependent judicial system as a challenge to nation building**

Weak and dependent judicial system is another major factor discouraging full political participation as well as encouraging nation building in Nigeria state. This has constituted a big set back to the growth and development of democracy in the country which is a threat to nation building.

Unethical conduct and practices by security agents during elections

The use of security agents to rig elections is another factor that poses a big threat to nation building. In Nigeria the security agents do not play their security role as expected before

ore, during and after election. They are usually manipulated by the government in power to secure victory for them by any means. This can be seen in Orsu state gubernatorial election in 2018, where the All Progressive Congress (APC) Federal government sent a large number of police and Military personnel in the name of safeguarding the election activities, whereas the hidden agenda was to assist to rig the said election in favor of the All Progressive Congress governorship candidate against his opponents from other political parties

Mass poverty and youth unemployment as a challenge to nation building

The resultant effect of mass poverty and youth unemployment in the country, mainly among the school leavers has created a big opportunity to our desperate politicians to see these unemployed youths as good materials and instruments for election rigging, and malpractices. As observed, these unemployed youths are easily manipulated due to their precarious conditions. They are bought over and used for unwholesome jobs during elections to satisfy their manipulators

Lack of transparency and accountability by our leaders as a challenge to nation building

The apparent absence of the doctrine of accountability in the use of public resources places the office holders almost beyond the laws. In Nigeria, there is no system of accountability. Here, public office holders can afford to behave anyhow. This creates opportunities for people to go and loot public treasury and yet go Scott free. This makes electoral competition more deadly and is a threat to nation building

Mass Poverty as a challenge to nation building

Poverty is said to be one of the major reasons why many people do not like taking part in political activities in Nigeria. To these people, politics is looked at as the game of the rich. While the poor in the society think they have no business getting involved. Yes, in Nige

ria we actually and really play money politics in which the rich can organize things to intimidate opponents, be able and ready to buy over electorates' conscience with gifts and cash. They can equally manipulate security agents with money to enable them perfect their evil plan against their political opponents.

Lack of political education/awareness creation as a challenge to nation Building

This is equally one of the factors discouraging people from participating actively in a political process of this country. Here, most voters do not really know why they should vote and how they should vote. In that regard, voting is a civic responsibility which we must carry out. It is the electorate's weapon to bring about change. It is your power to change and ensure that a political office holder who is on the right track is not chucked out by political manipulators. However, we should know that our vote is our power and when we vote, we also try to protect our votes, to ensure that it is not hijacked by political opportunists

Bad governance as a challenge to nation Building

Here, the electorates expect to see the gains of democracy which has to do with the provision of good roads, portable water supply, constant electricity power supply, and security of lives and property. There is no gain saying that in most cases what the people get leaves much to be desired. It is sad to state that Nigerian politicians see public office as an avenue for personal enrichment.

Having identified and discussed some of the major challenges of Nigeria nation building, we will now look at some effects of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war on nation building and on the Nigeria citizens at large

Effects of the Civil War in nation building

- **The Civil War gave birth to Tribal politics among the ethnic groups in Nigeria**

These vices were common in the Nigeria political system within the period under study, and it manifest itself in the area of resource control, in allocation of amenities, offer of positions in government, promotion of staff to higher position and this has been posing a big threat to nation building and economic advancement; hence, issues are complicated by the way quota system is applied in public affairs in this countries

- **The Civil War gave birth to Imbalance In The Political Structure of Nigeria**

The imbalance in the political structure of Nigeria does at time generate a big problem among the political elite from the various ethnic groups that dominates others due to their size. For instance in Nigeria, people from the Eastern part of the country saw the geographical size of the Northern part of the country as a threat to nation building. as the north has half of the legislators in the Federal House, provides more Ministers to the executive council and collect larger share of the annual revenue allocations

- **The Civil War created room to political parties in Nigeria to be formed alongside ethnic groups**

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Power struggle among political parties in Nigeria is based on ethnic group This factor is witnessed among political parties in the first, second, third, and Fourth Republics respectively and this poses a big threat to nation building as each ethnic group struggle to be at the helm of the government to control other ethnic group and their resources

- **The Civil War creates room for Electoral malpractice/Violence**

Electoral malpractice has been a serious issue in Nigeria political administration since independence, from the first, second, third and fourth Republic. Eke, etal (2014) observed that the political parties in Nigeria first, second, third and fourth Republic organized themselves base in their ethnic origin and this showcases itself in various electoral forms, ma

practices, and molestation of opponents. like the National Council of Nigeria Citizens (NCNC) formed by Dr. Azikiwe, from the East, Action Group (AG) by Awolowo, from the West and Northern People's Congress (NPC) by Alhaji Aminu Kano, from the North, as well as the recent political parties in the last General elections in Nigeria like; the All Progressive People's Congress controlled by the Yoruba man President Bola Tinubu, (APC), People's Democratic Party (PDP) control by Hausa man Atiku Abubakar and Labour Party (LP) control by an Igbo man Peter Obi, among others. The crisis generated by these electoral malpractices has weakened the bonds of trust in nation building, and it increases tribal and sectional feelings of suspicion and hatred.

- **The Nigeria-Biafra Civil War gave birth to Economic poverty**

The Nigeria-Biafra civil war has been observed to have caused a serious setback in nation building as leaders in their various localities and political system were seen operating on ethnic lines and interest and this possess a big threat to nation building and good governance, thereby instituting poverty in the country. This as an indicator has been affecting the Dick and the Harry in the country. Here, Nigeria leaders cannot meet up with the need of the masses in providing them with the basic needs like; good roads, good drinking water, funding the education of their children, and providing other social amenities that can make life meaningful, and this poses a threat to nation building.

- **The Civil War Encouraged Corruption in the country**

This is another negative effect of Nigeria-Biafra civil war in nation building here, leaders of this country creates room for poverty rather than good governance and nation building, and this act equally breeds corruption, nepotism, ethnocentrism, tribalism, and insecurity, which is inimical to nation building, and economic development. Here, Public office h

olders and leaders who want to break the cycle of poverty in their respective families takes much of the money stolen from the public treasuries which would have been used in providing infrastructure, industries, jobs, and other development-orientated activities.

- **The Civil War kills initiative of the young school leavers**

The outcome of the Nigeria-Biafra civil war did not only affect the nation building, it also kills political economy of the country and youth's initiatives by not creating room for these youths to put their wisdom, Knowledge, and intelligence into action and productive ventures. In effect, the civil war had nothing good to offer the people; they only depend largely on the developed countries of the West for machinery and technical expertise to process even the least of the country's natural resources. It is even the developed countries that determine the cost of the finished goods which they sell to our country.

- **The Civil War creates room for political instability**

The Nigeria-Biafra civil war contributed much to a series of Military interventions witnessed in recent past. Looking at the effect of this on the nation building and political economy of this country, it has caused a serious setback to the political and economic development of this country.

- **The Civil War gave birth to embezzlement of public fund/lack of transparency**

It is a known fact that the money embezzled by our leaders has contributed negatively to the economic and political development of this country. First, these leaders have been forced by the circumstances of their corruption and greed to accept policies dictated to them by other nations which increase the poverty level in this country. This has tied the country permanently to the control of neo-colonial masters. For instance, in 1986; General Babangida was forced to adopt Structural Adjustment Program, (SAP). This later brought

untold hardship on Nigeria people as SAP goes with the cut down in social services, devaluation of a country's currency, a rise in the price of food, laying off workers, and an increase in unemployment, which resulted to workers unrest. It even makes the process of nation building more difficult.

- **Civil war led to over-dependence on the foreign nations/aid**

This as one of the effect of war and a threat to nation building manifested in 1990 when the act of sit-tight syndrome of our leaders attracted the attention of the neo-colonial powers and their institutional agents in to the country. These agents force Nigeria government to change their political and economic system as a prerequisite for future assistance. Reason was that, these leaders have looted the country's wealth and dumped it in the foreign account, and with this condition given by the neo-colonial powers, our leaders had no choice than to comply. This is the only way to safe guard their looted funds, and to avoid been disgraced by the world leaders. At this point, these foreign agencies, financial institutions, and Multi-National Corporations, (MNCs), even went further to agree that, aid to Nigeria should be linked to the expansion of democratic freedoms, and improve governance in Nigeria. These factors are said to be some of the resultant effects of the civil war on nation building in Nigeria.

Having said that or discussed some of the effects of the Civil War on nation building, we will now look at some of the positive impact and contributions of the Military in nation building despite their observed negative parts played which was against nation building

Contributions of the Military to nation building

military is the term used to refer to the Army, Navy, Air force, Police and other paramilitary, and security services and agencies charged with the responsibility of protecting the rul

ing class and its government as well as maintaining the country's territorial integrity, law, order, and other functions, (Njoku 2001) (Igwe, 2005). According to Njoku (2001) Military organization is designed to defend, preserve, and protect the terminal frontiers of the state. Military as a Professional body performs some special functions to the country to encourage nation building, among these contributions to nation building according to Akonye, Obike and Onele (2023) include;

- **Provision of security for the country**

The Military is said to perform the function of defense and security for protective and even offensive purposes. Here, the Military performs these functions for the survival of the state and its citizens, retain its independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity. It also protect its interest and itself, as well as to attack other actors if need be. This is one of the most important functions performed by the Military for the well fair of the state.

- **Fighting War for the country**

This is one of the major functions of the Military. Here, the Military performs the duty of going to fight war for the protection of the lives and property of the citizen, state, and general well fair of the people. The Military function in terms of going to war showcases the aim of saving the state from internal rivalries and external subversion or to fight against foreign aggressors as well as for the acquisition of national wealth. The Military most at times are use or deploy for defense and security as well as for expansionist purpose

- **Defending the country and its citizens**

Military function/role do takes the form of the state's effort to deter and or repel enemy forces of aggression aimed at territorial annexation and or outright dismemberment

- **Protection of lives and property of the citizens**

The protective dimension function of the military relates to the efforts of the state in deploying its Military and security forces to maintain the statuesque with regard to preservin

g the interest of the state and its citizens, whether material, economic, social and political or even territory which it already possess and would not let go. These and others not mentioned or discussed here are said to be some of the contributions of the Military body for the survival and upholding of nation building despite it odd. Though the Military as a body equally gave reasons to justify their interventions and involvement in the administration of Nigeria government and politics contrary to their assigned professional duties, among these reasons include:

Reasons/Causes of Military Intervention in Nigeria Politics

Military intervention in Nigeria politics have not been without a cause thus, when the military first intervened or struck in January 15 1966, they said it was to rescue Nigeria from the aimless drift to which it had been subjected by politicians of the First Republic (Akonye, Obike and Onele 2023) Not only had political schism becomes rampant, the politicians had also began to penetrate and politicize the military establishment. The weak political institutions and the concomitant decline in the political elite legitimacy, coupled with the widespread corruption, favoritism, and nepotism, created the enabling environment for the first Military intervention or coup d'état in Nigeria politics, (Ota, 2000) and (Akonye, Obike and Onele, 2023) by extension, the following factors/reasons were implicated as some of the causes of Military intervention in Nigeria politics within the period under study. First, soldiers tend to seize power in areas with low or minimal political culture or what Finer called areas of "latent chronic crisis", meaning, "the need for strong executive" often leads to the adoption of a one party system by civilians, and the use of repressive measures such as, the Preventive Detention Act (PDA) and Secret Police to keep the people in line because such civilian regimes are not always popular and they do not respect public opinion.

pinion. They tend to rely on the army as the last resort for the implementation of their drastic and repressive laws. At this point, once the soldiers realized that the regime depends wholly on them, they quickly blackmail such regime. Moreover, "Generals" are being used as police to suppress dissident elements within society. Evidence of this was the Alhaji Tafawa Balewa government in the Western Region of Nigeria in 1965. Other reasons according to Akonye, Obike and Onele (2023) are:

- **Poor Condition of Service**

This could easily ignite a flame that get down the civilian regime if such difficulties were deliberately caused by the politicians rather than the economic conditions of the country. Other reasons are the failure of the Nigeria leaders to give a listening ear to their people, to deliver good governance, stop corrupt practices, and lack of promotion within the army.

- **Personal ambition of the young officer and eager to test power**

Military intervention in Nigeria politics occurs when the Military noticed that their corporate interest is in jeopardy and felt intimidated by the political leadership. For instance, when President Shagari was overthrown, the reason given by the soldiers was poor Military budget and Shagari's idea of cutting down defense budget which discourages Military willingness and readiness to face their professional assigned duties and functions. Again, the intervention of Gowon was a prove of eager to test power. The intervention of Saka Duka Dimka by assassinating Murtala Mohammed was a prove of eager to test power, the intervention of Sani Abacha was a prove of eager to test power, to mention but a few

- **Bad leadership**

Bad leadership has been identified as one of the main sources of coups d'état in Nigeria. Here, once a civilian government shows it's incompetent in governing, maintaining law, a

nd order, and not to cope with the social, and economic problems of the society, that government is inviting the Military

- **Corruption among Political Leaders**

This has been one of the major reasons given by the coup leaders for their intervention in Nigeria politics. This takes the form of diverting public funds to private coffers at the expense of the public, the award of contracts and the way political leaders live in great affluence, while the masses live in abject poverty.

- **Absence of Peaceful Means of Changing Government**

This factor or reason as seen is a prescription for violence. Here, Nigeria leaders have turned this country into authoritarian one party state or the ruling elites have constituted themselves into self-perpetuating corrupt clique, determined to cling to power at all cost. Once the opportunities for coming into power through peaceful means have been blocked, this group of people will be driven by despair into trying to change the government by force. As William Gutteridge put it, "A situation which cannot be changed by constitutional means, invites the use of violent measures". Here, instead of changing the government by ballot, it is by the bullet. (ALuko, 1975 and Akonye, Obike and Onele, 2023)

Conclusion

Nation building is the process of constructing and structuring a national identity by using the power of the state. It is the process whereby a society or state with diverse origin, histories, language, culture and religion come together within the boundaries of a sovereign state with a unified constitutional and legal dispensation, an integrated national economy, shared symbols, and values as equals to work towards eradicating the divisions a

nd injustices of the past, to foster unity and promote a country's wide conscious sense of being proudly a country. on the other hand, Military are the armed forces of a country which consist of the Army, Navy, Air force, and other Military outfits that may be setup for a similar purpose. The Military institution derives its strength and philosophical intensity from the age-long tradition of professionalism, discipline, and hierarchical command structure. Military organization is designed to defend, preserve, and protect the terminal frontiers of the state. Military bodies do not recognize constitution in their ruling rather, they rule with decrees and edicts. The constitution which is the bed rock of the fundamental human rights in every democratic or civil society is side tracked once the Military comes to power. The constitution which is taken as indestructible supreme documents on which the state and its institutions depend on is destroyed once the Military is in power. The Military involvement in Nigeria politics is an aberration. For the Military to abdicate its traditional responsibility and dabble into political management is a rape of the civil society and a threat to nation building. In effect, this in conjunction with the Nigeria-Biafra civil war has posed a big threat to nation building and its great set back to economic advancement, peace, unity, and progress of this country within the period under review

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