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RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE CHALLENGES OF NATION-BUILDING IN NIGERIA.

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Abstract

Nations are an important part of modern society. As an integral part of the modern world, therefore, Nigerians are rightly concerned about nation-building. Nation do not happen by mere historical accident, rather, they are built by men and women with vision and resolve. Nation-building is therefore, the product of conscious state-craft, not happenstance. Nigeria's efforts at nation-building started since independence to address issues that have predated 1960. The study observes that the Nigerian nation-building endeavour is hampered by her historical antecedence, poor leadership, corruption, and contentious constitutional provisions. The argument of this study is that the creation of dependable institutions and a patriotic demonstration of political will address the challenges of nation-building in Nigeria.

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Introduction:-

Nigeria is a British colonial creation with various ethnic groups paying allegiance to their ethnic communities. Ethnic loyalty was thus promoted by the colonialists as this set the stage for division with the selfish colonial policy of "Divide and rule." This policy was manifested in the political real in which certain administrative policies positioned a particular ethnic group to the exclusion of the others. Nigeria, like other West African territories, had her boundaries configured by the conspiracy of the Berlin West African Conference. It was more of a reflection of the agreements at the European conference tables than to the social affinities between the people that found themselves within the boundaries (Ibrahim 87).

The entrenched political hegemony of the Hausa/Fulani by the British at the centre upon independence at the expense of other ethnic groups (Dudley 32) spelt doom for Nigeria. Although an identity of self-awareness grew among Nigerians during the colonial era, it was fostered by the relatively unified administrative legal system, currency, growth in communication, trade and by the sense of belonging that a common name begins to generate. However, James Coleman argues that, "the whole conception was flawed because colonial administration homogenized highly heterogeneous and contentious socio-political reality" (319). The British also promoted this sentiment by fashioning a constitution that emphasized ethnic loyalties. The Richard and Macpherson Constitutions of 1946 and 1951 respectively intensified ethnicity (Tamuno 6). It is this foundation that gave political articulation in Nigeria an ethnic form (Mafaje 9). The elite at the vanguard of the national struggle promoted these sentiments in order to maintain and/or gain power. Hence, what they had achieved was regional integration as opposed to a national consciousness (O'Connel 153).

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The Concept of Nation-Building

Nations are an important part of modern society. Historically, the world used to be divided into empires and kingdoms. In the modern times, however, nations or nation-states have replaced empires as the basic unit of organization (Gambari 1). As an integral part of the modern world, therefore, Nigerians are rightly concerned about nation-building. Nation do not happen by mere historical accident, rather, they are built by men and women with vision and resolve. Nation-building is therefore, the product of conscious statecraft, not happenstance. Nation-building is always a work-in-progress, a dynamic process in constant need of nurturing.

Since Nigeria's independence, the greatest need of the country has been to weld together a unified entity from the desperate communities whose members retain primary loyalties to the smaller units. The major political parties in the First Republic- the Northern People's Congress (NPC), National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC), and the Action Group (AG) had enjoyed the support of their respective regions of origin (North, East and West respectively) and non had a national outlook (Agi 188).

Nation-building has important aspects. First, it is about building a political entity which corresponds to a given territory based on some generally accepted rules, norms, principles, and a common citizenship. Second, it is also about building institutions which symbolized the political entity. These institutions include bureaucracy, economy, the judiciary, universities, civil service, and civil organizations. Nation-building is about building a common sense of purpose, a sense of shared destiny, a collective imagination of belonging. It is therefore, about building the tangible and intangible threads that hold a political entity together and gives it a sense of purpose. This is in consonance with this era of globalization and rapid international inflow of people and ideas make a nation viable and synonymous with achieving modernity. It is about building the institutions and values that sustains the collective community in the modern times. This paper is aimed at x-raying the challenges of nation-building in West Africa using the Nigerian example since independence.

Challenges of Nation-Building

Scholars interested in the nation-building discuss in Africa nay Nigeria, are in agreement that, the attainment of ersatz independence did not come with liberation from problems facing African countries. Their independence status rather opened new chapters in their respective histories and one of the most turbulent chapters in Africa's chequered post-colonial history is the one on the challenges of nation-building (Imbua, Onor and Odey 271).

The following are some of the challenges of nation-building in Nigeria since independence.

Historical Challenge

The legacies of colonial rule created some challenges to nation-building in Nigeria. Colonial rule split Nigeria into irreconcilable halves- North and South with different land tenure systems, local government administration, educational systems, and judicial systems. While large British colonies like India and Sudan had a single administrative system, Nigeria had two, one each for the North and South. It was almost as if these were two separate countries, held together only by shared currency and transportation system (Gambari 3). Many members of the elite in the 1950s and 1960s had their education and world outlook moulded by the regional institutions. Some had little or no understanding of their neighbouring regions. Under these conditions, it was easy for prejudice and fear to thrive. During the period of decolonization struggle, Nigerian nationalists from different regions fought each other as much as they fought the British colonialists. Nigeria never had a central figure like Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana or Nelson Mandela of South Africa, rather each region threw up its own ethnic champions.

From the historical legacy, regionalism has been a major challenge to nation-building in Nigeria. To their credit, however, the founding fathers of Nigeria tried to deal with this challenge by adopting federalism and advocating a policy of unity-in-diversity. Unfortunately, the lack of consolidation of Nigerian federalism around commonly shared values and positions means that this challenge of divisive historical legacy continues to undermine the nation's efforts at nation-building. A close manifestation of this is the division between 'indigenes' and 'settlers'. This division has been a source of domestic tension and undermined the efforts at creating a common nationhood as evident in the ethno-religious crises in the case of insurgency in the North-East, inter and intra-ethnic conflicts, the intractable Jukun-Tiv conflicts, among others.

Leadership Challenge

Leadership is a responsibility and not a privilege. Nigerian leadership has declined with the destruction of the First Republic with military intervention in 1966 except for some occasional attempts there have been no genuine efforts

to salvage the leadership situation (Usman 4). Chinua Achebe has stoutly demonstrated the intractability of the leadership challenge in Nigeria. Using the colonial setting in *Arrow of God*, Akachi Ezeigbo analyzed the theme of leadership thus, Achebe seems to imply that the struggle for power at different levels of individual and communal interaction by people of different beliefs, orientations and backgrounds would more often than not generate crises and conflicts which could cause a lot physical, mental and spiritual harm to those concerned and even others who are under authority (5).

In another of Achebe's books, *The Trouble with Nigeria*, he stated that the trouble with Nigeria is the failure of leadership. This is because, "In spite of conventional opinion Nigeria has been less than fortunate in its leadership. A basic element of this misfortune is the seminal absence of intellectual rigour in the political thought of our founding fathers- a tendency to pious materialistic wooliness and self-centered pedestrianism" (11). An absence of vision coupled with lack of intellectualism has plagued Nigeria into the abyss of poor leadership from the twilight of colonialism through independence to post-independence. Leadership is a critical factor in nation-building and it should be understood in two important but related ways. First, there are the personal qualities of integrity, honesty, commitment and competence of individual leaders. Second, there are the collective qualities of common vision, focus and desire for development of the elite as a whole.

The standards for recruitment and performance of our individual leaders over the years have left much to be desired. Nigeria do not need leaders who do not understand the economic and political problems of the country, leaders who see themselves as champions of only some section of the entire population, leaders who cannot find a durable solution to the nation's problems. Nigerians do not need leaders who are interested in silencing their opponents, than in pursuing justice. To succeed in the nation-building effort, Nigeria must have a leadership that is committed to the rule of law and has a demonstrable sense of fair play and democratic tolerance, a leadership with the ability and integrity above the ostentatious pomp of office.

Corruption Challenge

The issue of corruption in Nigeria is a terribly fragile web. The Nigerian situation of corruption was once described thus by the *Weekly Star* of 15th May, 1983 with the caption, "The Nigerian and Corruption" "keeping an average Nigerian from being corrupt is like keeping a goat from eating yam" (cited in Achebe 18). The newspaper description of Nigerians using the yam and the goat analogy is rather over-simplistic and over-generalization which attracted Achebe's rebuttal, clarification and recommendation on endemic corruption prevalent in Nigeria,

A goat needs yam because yam is food for goats. A Nigerian does not need corruption, neither is corruption necessary nourishment for Nigerians... . Nigerians are corrupt because the system under which they live today makes corruption easy and profitable; they will cease to be corrupt when corruption is made difficult and inconvenient (38).

The military officers who aborted the country's post-colonial democratic experiment averred that the aim of the revolutionary council was to "establish a strong united and prosperous nation, free from corruption and internal strife" (Onumah 153). Continuing the young military officers stated,

Our enemies are the political profiteers, the swindlers, the men in high and low places that seek bribes and 10 percent, those that seek to help the country divided permanently so that they can remain in office as ministers or VIPs, at least the tribalists, the nepotists, those that make the country look big for nothing before the international circles, those that have corrupted our society and put the Nigerian political calendar back to their words and deeds (153-154).

The Fourth Republic appears to be riddled with despite creation of anti-corruption agencies like the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC) and the Independent Corrupt Practices and Related Offences Commission (ICPC) by the Olusegun Obasanjo's Administration in 1999.

Challenges of Socio-Economic Inequalities

The denial of equal opportunities for Nigerian is a major challenge to nation-building in Nigeria. The building of a common citizenship is an important aspect of nation-building. In Nigeria, not only are many citizens denied basic rights life freedom of speech, life, movement, and association just as access to basic infrastructure like education, roads, water, health, employment, and electricity. This has caused the rate of impunity to soar, increase in the

illiteracy, unemployment and insecurity rate, and above all, economic depression. The failure of the Nigerian government to address the contentious resource control conundrum has caused violence protest in the Creeks of the Niger Delta leading to the militarization of the oil-rich region and loss of oil revenue to the country. It is also worthy of note that the environmental degradation in the Niger Delta as a result of oil exploration with no commensurate compensation from the Federal Government and the various multinational Corporation and the socio-economic prosperity in the North at the expense of the oil-producing region briefly explains the grievances of the region.

The Constitutional Challenge

Since independence, Nigeria has been faced with the challenge of crafting a constitution that would reflect the needs and aspirations of the citizens. The opening statement in the 1999 Constitution (As amended) “We the People of Nigeria...” has been contested to be fraudulent because, the Constitution was midwife by the Military and was never a product of the people. Thus, its anti-people provisions laden with ambiguous and divisive provisions. The challenges of previous efforts and the heterogeneous nature of Nigeria predisposed the choice for a federal constitution for the country. This choice of a federal constitution has not been free from the attacks by exponents of a unitary constitution.

Ibrahim Gambari argues, “to my mind, the worst enemies of Nigerian federalism are those who speak of federalism, but act in a unitary fashion brushing aside all the divisions of powers between all levels of our federalism” (5). There is the issue of fiscal federalism which has become contentious in the Nigerian federalism that hampers nation-building. The economy of the country is majorly dependent on oil sourced from the Niger Delta. The 13% accruable revenue from oil to oil-producing States in Nigeria has been contested by the Niger Delta region given the environmental degradation and sustained neglect by the leaders whose developmental interest are other regions especially the North at the expense of the polluted Niger Delta. Thus, there have been agitations for up to 50% if not 100% revenue from oil going to the oil-producing States.

Conclusion:-

Nigeria is a country in transition desirous of nation-building. Unfortunately, an interplay of her historical antecedence, corruption, leadership, and her contentious constitutional provisions have hampered this effort at nation-building. For this well-intentioned desire of nation-building to be realized, the building of dependable institutions rather than strong-men is necessary just as the mobilization of a well-conscientized citizenry that would boldly demand accountability from the leadership class. The neo-colonial strings need to be severed with the development of indigenous economies and socio-cultural and political environment.

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