

Revisiting History in the Reconstruction of a Better Nigerian Social Environment

Timothy O. Erinosh

Department of History and Diplomatic Studies
Tai Solarin University of Education
Ijagun, Ogun State, Nigeria
email: timothyerinosh@gmail.com
Mobile: +2348065602523

Olusesan A. Osunkoya

Department of History and Diplomatic Studies
Tai Solarin University of Education
Ijagun, Ogun State, Nigeria
Mobile: +2348033786605
Email: olusesanosunkoya@gmail.com

Mishark F. Alex

Department of History and Diplomatic Studies
Tai Solarin University of Education
Ijagun, Ogun State, Nigeria
E-mail: alexfriday59@gmail.com
Mobile: +2348105886046

Abstract

The current Nigerian social environment exhibits a high level of tension, disunity, animosity, suspicion and intrigues among individuals, groups and the various ethnic groupings comprising the federation. In such a situation, no meaningful development can take place as the groups and ethnic stocks will continue to fight and safeguard their individualistic, group, nationalistic interests separately instead of working together in harmony. This has been a major challenge stifling nation-building in Nigeria after the attainment of independence. Indeed, the seed of discord had been sown during the British colonial government which was not the case in the indigenous or pre-colonial Nigerian societies. The relegation of the Arts and Humanities, History inclusive, in our various levels of education has exerted debilitating effects on the Nigerian society as the citizens regard those from other cliques or groups, ethnic groupings aside theirs, as strangers. Hence, there is the need to acquaint the generality of Nigerians the essence of revisiting History in bringing into existence a well-reconstructed social milieu central to unity, fraternity and development. This discourse therefore examines the utilitarian value of history in human society, nature of Nigerian societies and intergroup relations among pre-colonial Nigerian peoples and how they helped to create mutual understanding. Thereafter, the centrifugal policies introduced

by the British colonial rulers are examined before advancing advocacy to borrow from the past for a better understanding among the citizenry for a better and progressive nation.

Keywords: Nigeria, Social environment, History, Reconstruction, Mutual understanding.

Introduction

The contemporary Nigerian society needs urgent attention regarding revamping the relationships between individuals, groups, organizations, and more importantly intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic contacts. The current Nigerian social environment is not conducive for accomplishing any meaningful task aimed at moving the country to nationhood. Before any nation-state can record remarkable advancement in the economic, social-cultural, technological, strategic and other areas, its social environment must not be characterized by tension, rancour, ethnicity, educational backwardness, rioting, moral bankruptcy, sectarian or religious cleansing triggered by irrational and inordinate religious bigotry or fundamentalism, absence of caring for the needy, unemployment among several other problems such as confronting contemporary Nigerian society. Where and when these challenges rear up their ugly heads, there will be no commitment, patriotism, self-sacrifice and lofty ideas on the part of the citizens to nation-building.

This was not the situation in pre-colonial Nigerian societies which were composed of wards, villages, chiefdoms, city states, kingdoms and empires. The peoples who lived in these communities or societies were knitted together and they enjoyed a high degree of harmonious kinship and intergroup relationships borne out of their conception of nationhood and the various strategies they devised to regulate their inter-personal, intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic relationships. Even when some ethnic groups were subjugated by other stronger ethnic stocks, the latter tried to create sense of belonging with the latter. This continued to be the situation in the various societies that existed before the advent of Islam, Christianity and finally, colonialism which threw a spanner in the entire social frameworks. The whole story started changing for the worse with colonial imposition which amalgamated the numerous polities into Nigeria, and the subsequent introduction of diabolical socio-cultural, economic and political policies aimed at weakening any effort towards establishing unity and harmonious relations between and among the citizens. Consequently, the colonial rulers fanned embers of discord among the ethnic groupings and this was demonstrated in their paternalistic disposition to the Northerners and unhidden and unreserved hostility towards their Southern counterparts.

The present bastardization and polarization of the Nigerian social environment have been exacerbated by the neglect of History as an academic subject / discipline in the nation's education and curricular at all levels. If this situation has not arisen, Nigerians, particularly pupils and students (the young adults) would have had the opportunity to know that Nigerians related in the pre-colonial era harmoniously and as a result, were not total strangers as the British colonial grandmasters and their imperial errand boys portrayed them. Until recently (in 2019) when the Federal Government rekindled its interest in the discipline, the utter neglect of History was deliberate as the discipline was not taught at the primary school and junior secondary school levels, while it

was paired with Geography and Literature in English at the Senior Secondary School level, thereby making it optional.¹ It was against this backdrop that the late Professor Obaro Ikime, formerly of the History Department, University of Ibadan had retorted in 1986:

How young people who have never been taught history are expected to suddenly fall in love with the subject at senior secondary school level? Only the designers of our educational system can tell us... Gradually, government will kill the teaching of the history of its own country.²

The lukewarm attitude of the government, parents and practically the general public towards humanities of which History occupies a pride of place has contributed to the social and political anarchy confronting the country particularly the harrowing experiences of the jobless graduates. As Erinsho avers:

The failure of the ruling elite being manifest in their propensity for corruption, lack of transparency, accountability and public probity has made nonsense of the educated class particularly those from poor family backgrounds and rubbished their image and personality as a result of their inability to secure jobs after labouring hard to complete their studies.³

It is, therefore, imperative to reconstruct the badly damaged social environment of the polity by going back to history and learn from the lesson it holds by examining the social developments of pre-Islam, Christian and colonial Nigeria and discover how the people of that era enjoyed harmony, peace and security which translated into stability and development.

History and Its Utility in Society

This segment that focuses on the meaning and utility of History has received

considerable attention from the current leading author. However, for the purpose of this discourse, it is important to briefly explore it. History has many connotations or interpretations just as we have a wide array of writers, scholars and researchers. This has therefore led to History being variously defined. Benjamin Cox regards History as an organised narrative of the past events which depends on the interpretation of the historian as he translates the selected data into a narrative form.⁴ This view implies that one event can be interpreted to mean different things to writers or scholars. In addition, not all events or information mean history but the opinion or/and interests of the scholars that determine their definition of the subject.

In his own conceptualization, Isaac Akinjogbin says:

History is an organised critical study of such past activities of human beings as had produced significant effects on subsequent course of events. It is not just a study of the past, nor is it an uncritical cataloguing of significant past events or is the study of all past events.⁵

This definition shows that the role of the professional historian is required by distilling past events, analyze those that he is interested in thereafter interprets them. It is on this basis that Edward H. Carr regards History as “a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past.”⁶

The historian while reconstructing the past cannot cover the whole gamut of human activities as the past is not locked up in a store, awaiting its retrieval by the historian. As a result, the historian only records the traces of the past available to him by dealing with the reflections of those occurrences available to him. It is important to emphasize that facts do not become history until the historian passes his own judgement or interpretation which is a major hallmark of historical scholarship.⁷

History as a discipline is essential in human societies across time and space. One of such utilitarian values of history is that it informs us about the origins and development of human settlements like family, village, town, city, nation, region and continent. As Ikime has remarked, the common experience that brought the peoples of Nigeria into the same geo-political entity was conquest and rule by the British. This common experience is necessarily the creation of history.⁸

Beyond the function of the subject pointed above, History enables citizens of a country to learn from the achievements, failures, strengths and weaknesses of past leaders, thereby making human beings wise. It also helps us to search for the lessons it is supposed to hold by enabling us not to engage in past mistakes that had brought untold hardships to the people. It similarly assists a lot in the area of policy formulation and implementation since history cannot be ignored as the knowledge of the past helps us to know how the present came into being and how to plan for a better future. Therefore, any good policy design and implantation must aim at the development of the society concerned. The subject also promotes patriotism and equips man with critical thinking.⁹ No wonder R. A. Olaoye submits that:

We cannot escape from History, our lives are governed by what happened in the past; our decisions by what we believe to have happened. Without a knowledge of history, man and society would run adrift, rudderless craft in the uncharted sea time...¹⁰

Erinosh is of the opinion that:

History enhances national integration and development as well as settlement of land disputes; revelation that pre-colonial Nigerian people especially the Yoruba and Igbo were democratic in governance; helps to develop, ideology needful for nation building; helps

to discourage corruption particularly by public office holders; international relations with the World Economic Order and the need to industrialize the nation's economy; intimates us with devastating effects of ethno-racial and religious conflicts. The discipline also prepares us for diplomatic service.¹¹

Furthermore, historical scholarship helps in creating high level manpower as trained bureaucrats, technocrats and consultants contribute significantly to the nation's development especially in terms of policy formulation and implementation in the public service. Again, biographical study of heroines is promoted through conscious learning of history as a discipline.¹²

From the brief navigation of essentiality of History, it is clear that for any society to be peaceful, progressive, stable and nurture friendly citizens, the study of the subject must not be glossed over. Any nation that neglects it does so at its own peril. Nigeria has underrated the discipline and Nigerians are paying dearly for it.

Nigeria's pre-Colonial Social Environment

Before the British colonial imposition on the pre-colonial Nigerian societies, there existed harmonious relationships at the family, ward, and state levels. This situation helped the societies to become stable, progressive and cater for their citizens as a result of mechanisms patronized by the leaders and their followers.

One of such strategies was religion, namely African Traditional Religion (ATR). Every institution in the society was religiously oriented in practically every social-political and economic activity- betrothal, marriage, birth, cultivation of the land, founding of a village or town or market, enthronement of kings and chiefs. They were all done after divination and religious sanctions were obtained before undertaking any of them.¹³ In order to make the social environment pure and

unpolluted, the pre-colonial peoples of Nigeria placed high premium on code of conduct/behaviour for regulating the actions, utterances and reactions of the citizens inhabiting the community as a whole. These norms, values and etiquettes found expression in taboos which the people held with great awe. Taboos are prohibited actions whose breaking is followed by the supernatural penalty.¹⁴

Kinship and kingship systems were kept alive as the people were kith and kin. Hence, the heads of the families, wards and villages as well as the kings of the towns, states and empires held office in trust and on behalf of the other members of the political community. They were initiated and guided by heavy traditional rituals and rites while taking the oath of office in whatever political cum administrative capacity especially the kings who were semi-divine. Once they had went into seclusion, and later enthroned they became the spiritual and political representatives between their subjects and the dead ancestors or supersensible world. As a result, they represented their departed ancestors whose spirits were believed to be alive and were ever present, and know all the occurrences in their various domains. The spiritualization of kingship among the Yoruba is made known here by an expert in Yoruba traditional political system:

“Yoruba Kings since the ages had been the personification of their towns and the deification of divine soul (suggesting that they were deified) as they represented the supernatural on earth with poetic expression of their status and symbols. The totality of their personification and deification loomed large in process of installation and royal schooling, system whereby they received instructions and learning on how to govern well and esteem the status of the supernatural.”¹⁵

The *Oba* in Yorubaland were therefore semi-divine and used to commune with the ancestral realm. They were therefore highly respected, feared and venerated by their subjects while the *Oba* themselves operated

within the constitutional framework, heavily enshrined in taboos and stipulated calamities if broken.

The spirituality of kingship in the pre-colonial Nigerian polities existed also among the Kanuri and the Jukun. According to John E. Lavers while writing about the Kanuri asserts:

By A.D. 1000 a stable state had been established and imperial adventures began. The office of the Mai had already developed religious attributes of a divine nature - al Muhallabi reported that the 'people exalt and worship (the king) instead of God - and believing that it is (the king) who bring (sic) life and death, sickness and health'. Royal solution and the idea that the ruler needed no food enhanced such beliefs... 'King worship provided a unifying focus for the loyalties of the subject people.'¹⁶

Indeed, the kings were regarded as absolute rulers at least in theory and they could do whatever they like. This was belief of their subjects. Hence, among the Jukun, C.K. Meek observes that:

...The King is supreme. His decisions have a divine authority, and there is no appeal. Before the advent of the British he had the power of life and death (over his subjects). As head of a spiritual principality, which included a number of nominally independent chiefdoms, he could order the deposition or execution of chiefs who disobeyed his order to make his people to till the royal fields and repair the palace. He could appropriate the major portion of all fines inflicted; for in his person all legislative, judicial, and executive functions were merged.¹⁷

The absolutism of the kings was just theoretical as the various pre-colonial Nigerian peoples devised checks and balances through the councils of chiefs to check the excesses of the potentates. In addition, religions sanctions and taboos were similarly employed. For instance, among the Jukun, the king was by result of his administration. If the harvests were good the people were prepared to put up with a moderate amount of tyranny. But excessive tyranny would evoke a demand for his death whether the harvests were good or bad. He was so surrounded by taboos that it was never difficult to discover some breach of taboo which could be interpreted as a repudiation on his part of the gods whom he was supposed to represent and a consequent repudiation of him by those gods. In addition, the king could not take any decision without consulting his councilors headed by the prime minister called *Abo/Achuko*. He was a very powerful figure who knew the secret of royal ritual.¹⁸ The same thing obtained in Yorubaland where the *Oba's* powers were checked by the councils of chiefs or *Igbimo* as well as ritual taboos.

In the non-centralized states, authority was dispersed as no single individual served as the symbol or personification of authority. What was in vogue was collective leadership. This system was provided by heads of extended families or lineages. Linage heads jointly ran the affairs in each non-centralized state through a corporate body called the Council of Elders. The Igbo called such Council the *Ama-ala*, while the *Ijo* and the *Urhobo* called it the *Ekpako* and *Okosuwei*, respectively. The Council of Elders had to summon the Assembly of the people whenever policy was to be made and each adult male member had the right to contribute to the debate of the matter brought before the Assembly.¹⁹

The decision-making process in both centralized and non-centralized availed the people the opportunity to initiate people-oriented policies and programmes which helped to maintain conducive environment needed for developmental projects. No individual heads were superior to the

traditional gods, goddesses and the ancestral spirits of their people. It is therefore apposite to state that the above religio - political arrangement was in tandem with this assertion:

As head of the family, a husband was expected to be at peace with himself. He was also held responsible for keeping peace in his household and ensuring that its members related well with others in the compounds and wards in their village or town. The compound and ward heads as well as the village heads or kings had similar responsibilities in their respective domains.²⁰

The pre-colonial Nigerian/African economic structure was put on sound educational, footing. This was encapsulated in vocational training comprising agricultural education - farming, fishing and animal husbandry. Trades and crafts similarly occupied a pride of place in the unwritten curriculum. Hence, weaving, smithing (iron, silver, gold etc), hunting, carving, sculpturing, painting and decorating, carpentry, drumming, dancing and acrobatics, hair plaiting, mat-making, glass making, wine tapping, wine selling formed part of the vocational acquisition. Furthermore, professional doctors, priests, witch doctors, civil servants, village, head chiefs, and kings, tax collectors, heralds, judges, councilors, police and messengers, shrine keepers, soldiers existed.²¹ The above listed vocational training and skill acquisition were vigorously pursued. Consequently, the people were not job seekers as they were mostly employers of labour. The curriculum was designed in a very pragmatic way. Hence, there was no problem of unemployment as educational was practical in nature. The agricultural sector was consolidated through communal ownership of land as no single individuals could lay claim to any piece of land. While a farmer did not have outright ownership of the land, he “was entitled to whatever family land was available in his place of birth. If he migrated to some other

area, he could assume temporary tenancy over such land that he needed or he could at least function as a share-cropper”.²²

In fact, A.B Fafunwa identifies the seven cardinal goals of Traditional African Education. The aim of the education was/is “multilateral and the end objective is to produce an individual who is honest, respectable, skilled, co-operative and conforms to the social order of the day”.²³ The seven cardinal goals are:

1. to develop the child's latent physical skills.
2. to develop character.
3. to inculcate respect for elders and those imposition of authority.
4. to develop intellectual skills.
5. To acquire specific vocational training and to develop a healthy attitude towards honest labour.
6. to develop a sense of belonging and to participate actively in family and community affairs.
7. to understand, appreciate and promote the cultural heritage of the community at large.

The above cardinal objectives of the indigenous African education helped to create egalitarianism, justice, fair play, patriotism, sense of belonging and robust inter-personal, inter-communal and inter-state relationships. The social environment was therefore peaceful and progressive. The education also emphasized morality and frowned at pre-marital sex. This is affirmed in the following quotation:

Among the Efik and Ibibio, there were "very stringent taboos about incest and adultery" and stealing was considered a very serious offence. Similar attitudes were prevalent among many other Nigerian ethnic groups: among the Ibos, Yoruba and the Nupe, adolescents were taught to avoid heterosexual activities, to shun acts of immodesty,

masturbation, aggressive behaviour, and to refrain from divulging secrets.²⁴

These ethical behaviours coupled with the roles that parents used to play in the marriage of their children helped to protect and largely prevented marriages from breaking up. As a result, divorce was very rare in the pre-colonial Nigerian societies. Parents, children and wards carried out responsibilities expected of them respectively.

Intergroup Relations among pre-Colonial Nigerian States/Societies

Before bringing together the various ethnic groups that constitute the contemporary Nigeria State by the British, the peoples had engaged in one form or another of relations between and among themselves. These are referred to as intergroup relations. Obaro Ikime points out that "...commerce and social contacts led to linguistic borrowings and often to bilingualism among traders.... commercial contacts between our people in pre-colonial times... are the aspects which tend, to receive the greatest attention in studies of inter-group relations in the period, especially in the period up to 1800."²⁵ Inter-group relations are series of contacts between different states or peoples, usually in forms of trade, diplomatic ties, management of trade routes, boundaries and wars. Such interactions were necessitated in the early times by the need to ensure good relations with one another. A state had to recognize the territorial integrity of other states in its neighbouring areas. Therefore, it had to promote peace relations through trade, inter marriage and the establishment of diplomatic relations.²⁶

A major strand of pre-colonial contacts had to do with the origins of dynasties. Practically all the peoples a pre-colonial period attributed their existence or emergence to the coming of some migrant or migrants from outside of their domains. As Ikime has noted, the Hausa states, the Benin/Bini and the Yoruba, among many others devised this strategy in state creation. In

each case, some accommodation was ultimately reached between new comers on the one hand and earlier settlers and office holders on the other, until a new political arrangement was worked out, while writing about the Baganda dynasty of Kano, the Durbawa dynasty of Katsina. The Igbo-Jukun relations and Benin-Ife contacts exhibited similar trait. The phenomenon of "brotherhood" was deliberately contrived as a charter for determining relations between neighbouring or reasonably nearby groups is widespread in the Nigerian geographical area.²⁷

In the same vein, there existed borrowing of political institutions and titles. For instance, Igbo groups west of the Niger adapted Benin style of political institutions and title system. So have the Yoruba of Owo, Akure, and some of the Ekiti groups. The Igbo of the Nsukka area took Igala titles and went to Idah for investiture. Many of the Jukun neighbors adopted the religious cults of the Wukari and based their socio-political arrangements of the Wukari model. The Idoma used to obtain titles from Wukari before they switched on to Idah. Some Urhobo and Isoko groups claim that their *ivie* used to go to Benin for investiture. There are strong resemblances between the Lagos title system and that of Benin.²⁸ These examples illustrate the fact that war and compromise must have characterized the various pre-colonial Nigerian peoples' political relations.

Religious contacts also permeated the inter-group relations among the ethnic groups. Festivals as well as cults with traditional worship took place between and among them. For instance, the *Igunnuko* festival was introduced to Yorubaland from the Tapa of Nupe²⁹ while the Egba/Remo contacts were promoted through *Agemo* and *Oro* cults. The Remo introduced *Agemo* to the Egba who sought for spiritual assistance from *Agemo* worshippers. The second way by which the cult spread into Egbaland was through marriage ties.³⁰ The existence of spiritual healers, priests, priestesses, diviners and custodians of cults promoted relations

across international boundaries as renowned specialists were invited by people outside their states and ethnic groups for spiritual/religious solutions to their problems. In the process, inter-marriage alliances were forged while celebrations of their cults' festivals enhanced and concretized such relations.

The 19th century religious favour went a long way in creating greater religious contacts among the Nigerian people. This is particularly true of the Northern parts where the Fulani Jihad broke out and the Sokoto Caliphate subsequently established, embracing most of the Hausa states, parts of the Borno empire. These became the emirates of Hadejia and Katagum; Nupe and Ilorin. The prosecution of the Jihad was attended by more frictions as the Fulani revolution triggered off chains of crises in areas such as Yorubaland and Northern Edoland. The Borno enclave was hot spared. At the same time, Muslim law or Sharia replaced customary law of the people where Islam found itself well established outside the North especially Ilorin and Sharia courts replaced customary courts. The advent of Christianity in Southern parts also created some educational imbalance by missionaries. The introduction of these two foreign religions sowed centrifugal forces with which the country is grappling with.³¹

The pre-colonial contacts also took the dimension of "foreign" trade as there were no people or state that were self-sufficient economically. The Southerners-Yoruba, Edo (Bini), Igbo, Ijo, Ibibio, Efik etc had to sell their commodities to their Northern counterparts, and vice-versa. The Southerners were in need of cattle, camels, donkeys, yam, hide and skin and other numerous commodities from the North where Southern fish, kolanut, beads, mirrors etc were sold. The geographical imperatives compelled the various ethnic groupings to interact, either for good or otherwise. The peoples, therefore, were not isolated prior to the colonial intrusion.

Colonial Rule and its Diabolical Policies

Nigeria fell to the imperial onslaught of the

British and the Northern and Southern Protectorates were amalgamated on 1 January 1914 for the selfish interests of the colonizers. This development went a long way in creating disharmony and hostility between and among the numerous nationalities forming the new colonial state called Nigeria. Otite has identified a total of 389 ethnic groups inhabiting the country.³² It has been established that ethnic identity did not exist until the emergence of the colonial state. As Ikime avers "... it was European visitors, traders and writers who first began to refer to whole conglomerates in terms of the language they speak. When such foreigners referred to the Igbo, they meant those who speak that language, not a single politically-coherent group. Our ethnic groups, our nationalities,

are thus essentially linguistic and cultural groups that have been increasingly forced by circumstances of history to act politically in defence of their interests vis a vis the interests of other competing groups in what we now know as Nigeria. This is clearly a 20th century development.³³

The British interest in exploiting Nigeria's resources for their country led to the construction of roads, railways, sea ports, banks, and floating of marketing boards. This increased urbanization in towns like Lagos, Ibadan, Kano, Kaduna, Benin, Enugu and ethnic rivalry became intensified among the various ethnic groupings. In the process, the British did not integrate the diverse cultural groups. Instead, the Southerners living in the North were segregated in strangers' quarters outside the walled periphery of the native towns. This situation prevented the people from having close interaction, promoting national understanding was therefore lost.

The colonial rulers in their education system were paternalistic towards the Northerners who were encouraged to be taught instructions not oriented towards

emulating the European cultural values which were common in the south. Rather, Islamic culture was promoted and this led to the North becoming backward educationally and as a result was unable to produce manpower needed for the civil/public service and in growing the economy. In addition, "No attempt was made early enough to induce Islam to accommodate other religions and ideas. If this had been done, another area of difference between the North and South of Nigeria which has been a sense of instability would have been eliminated."³⁴

The Indirect Rule system of administration thrived in native authorities which the British preferred to a Nigerian nation. They therefore discouraged nationalists from the South to cross over to the North and vice-versa. Thus, divide and rule was promoted while 1946 was the first time that Richards Constitution established a Nigerian Legislative Council. In fact, the Nigerian Council of 1914 excluded the North from being represented as the Governor General made proclamation on its behalf. The 1946 constitution divided the country into three regions viz: the North, West and East, with the North bigger than the combination of both East and West, and this has become a bone of contention up till now because the North has been enjoying greater number of seats in the House of Representatives due to the colonial imposition of the Northern hegemony on the South. This marked the beginning of federalism in the country.³⁵ The Northern domination is an aberration

Another policy that is detrimental to the stability and development of the country was the colonial government's inability to solve the minority question. The Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo had emerged as dominant ethnic groups at the expense of the minorities. The Hausa-Fulani dominated the North, the Igbo controlled the East, while the Yoruba hegemony prevailed in the West. As Obiegbu asserts, the minorities in each of the three regions "... were of such size and location that they could have been able to form one or more viable units of government

with cultural and linguistic homogeneity in some cases".³⁶ He sheds more light on this:

In the Eastern region for example, the Efik- Ibibio speaking groups had a population of one and half million, the Ijaw and Ekoi- Yakurr about a million. In the West before the creation of Mid- West in 1963, there were about one million Edo speaking peoples, half a million Urhobo, three hundred and sixty-five thousand Ibo, and about eighty thousand Ijaw; whilst in the North, there were one million two hundred Kanuri, four hundred thousand Nupe and about seven million others including the Tiv of the Middle Belt and the Yoruba in Ilorin and Kabba provinces. In such a majority- minority structure, tension was inevitable since such a set up entrenched the permanent control of the regional government by the majority tribe.³⁷

The superimposition of a Parliamentary Democracy on the country was similarly another unhappy legacy bequeathed to the country by the British. The system had evolved over a long period of time in Britain while opposite was the case with Nigeria and some other African countries including Zimbabwe. The separation of head of state and head of government was evolutionary in Britain. It was in the course of centuries of constitutional evolution that the Monarch lost his personal discretion in the exercise of sovereignty. The historical antecedents of the system were not grown in Africa and as a result the Prime Minister regarded himself as the president's superior and even behaved as such towards him. The president and the ministers had been opposed to each other in party politics and due to ethnic chauvinism, many saw him with the kind of kingly majesty the Queen was accorded in Britain. The President was just a ceremonial head, lacking executive powers and authority.³⁸ This factor

greatly accentuated the collapse of the First Republic arising from unhealthy rivalry and power tussle between the President and Prime Minister.

Electoral violence and rigging that characterized the politics of decolonization as well as the regionally based political parties Northern People's Congress (North), National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (later National Council of Nigerian Citizens), in the East, and the Action Group in the West further created tension and polarized the country along ethnic and party lines. The failure of the British to industrialize the economy was a total disservice to the country. The colonial fiat laid more emphasis on the production of cash crops like cocoa, palm produce, rubber, groundnuts, and coffee needed for their industrial survival back in Britain. In this case, production of food crops suffered and the urban dwellers who had increased in large numbers were hungry and mostly jobless. This ugly development created more tension, social vices and restiveness in the urban centres. Similarly, the kings and chiefs suffered a lot of deprivations as they were stripped of their powers during the colonial period. Initially, they were favoured and in the 1950s the traditional rulers began to lose their relevance. Gradually, the regional government headed by their respective Premiers had the right to appoint and depose the royal fathers. This has become the norm up till date, a situation in which the former appointees now appoint their erstwhile employer/principal because it is now the state governors that ratify the appointment of kings. In the past, it was the kings that appointed the provincial governors. While commenting on the changing status of the *Oba* in Yorubaland, Ajetunmobi and Yonlonfoun assert:

The *Oba* were no longer officers in their domain, but rather are accounting officers. As instrument of Indirect Rule, the *Oba* had to report to the Colonial Administrators. They were made to execute colonial policies as it were in the pre-colonial times. The colonial administrations ushered

in an era of placing the traditional rulers on annual salary and were made to face panels for violation of colonial laws. In all, the colonial administration was the beginning of gradual erosion and pollution of *Obaship* tradition in which new class of political leaders surfaced.³⁹

This situation was not peculiar to traditional rulers in Yorubaland but all over the country. It is not surprising that the present state governors have the power to give marching orders to the royal fathers who were formerly regarded with high sense of honour, dignity and respect as the intermediaries between their subjects and departed ancestors.

Taking the above colonial experiences into cognizance, it is altruistic to conclude that the British had sown seeds of discord which created the much-vilified contemporary social environment in Nigeria.

The Way Forward

It is imperative to note that the ethnic composition of the country can be fully appropriated positively in the nation's march towards nationhood. Nigerian leaders and followers should discard the idea of artificiality of the country's creation in order to forge sense of belonging, eliminate marginalization, ethnicity and exclusion in order to create a dynamic nation free of tension and acrimony. It has been established that:

...most nations of the world are artificial creations, in so far as they are the products of accidents of history. The United States of America is only 110 years old as a nation. No one can doubt that despite racial and other problems the U.S.A. is a strong and United Nations. Yet the U.S.A. is also an artificial creation even if its colonial experiences were, in some ways, dramatically different from ours. The example of the United States is clear evidence that the artificiality of

the original coming together of diverse groups does not constitute an insurmountable barrier to the building a united nation-state. If we in Nigeria have thus far failed to evolve policies and strategies that can lead to the emergence of a truly united nation, let us not continue to blame it on our past. Rather let us take a hard look at our policies and our strategies.⁴⁰

Apart from the U.S.A, the United Kingdom is made up of multi-ethnic groups... Yet it has developed a nation over the centuries. The Scottish, Welsh, Irish and English formed the political entity.⁴¹ In spite of their divergent ethnic backgrounds, they have found the strength in ethnic plurality and have used it to their advantage. The British and American experiences and development must have been made possible by patriotism and nationalism of their citizens. Their development of national ideologies propelled the growth and advancement of the two countries. In a similar vein, the Italians had the national ideology of the Risorgimento; the French had the national ideology of Francophones, the United States of America had the ideology of melting pot, while the British had the ideology of unity in diversity.⁴²

Given the above illustration, Nigeria's case is not a hopeless situation, The main pre-occupation of the political leadership, bureaucratic class and the followership is to borrow a leaf from the pre-colonial social situation and positive aspects of the advanced countries across the world, adapt a synthesis of both, and domesticate them for the good and development of both the country and its citizens. However, this can only be realized if and when national ideology is coined/invented. Then Nigeria social environment will wear a new look.

Conclusion

The study x-rays the need to reconstruct the social environment of the country by revisiting history. It begins by informing us about the tension-soaked Nigeria's society before interrogating history

as a subject and its utilitarian values in society. The study thereafter sheds light on the pre-colonial Nigerian socio-economic and political conditions, underscoring that the then existing societies were egalitarian and accommodating. The international intercourse or intergroup relations that percolated intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic pre-colonial state and kingdoms are navigated before dwelling on the British colonial policies which only fuelled divide and rule across the nation, thereby worsening the social and political conditions and inter-group relations of the Nigerian people. The study then offers an antidote by referring to other complex but advanced Western countries like the United States, United Kingdom, France and Italy, that Nigerian can borrow the good aspects they represent in its bid to move forward and engender a new social environment that will improve the lots of the people.

Endnotes and References

- ¹ Timothy. O. Erinosh, 'The state of history teaching in Nigerian schools and colleges: The case of Ogun State', *Sapha: Journal of Historical Studies* 2, nos. 1 and 2, (2011), 444.
- ² Obaro Ikime 'Editorial' *The Guardian*, Tuesday, December 30, 1986, 3.
- ³ Timothy O. Erinosh, 'Historical scholarship and job prospects in the Nigerian labour market', *Lapai Journal of Nigerian and International Studies*, (2016), 2.
- ⁴ I. A. Osokoya, *Writing and teaching history: A guide to advanced study* (Ibadan: Laurel Educational Publishers, 1996), 4
- ⁵ R. O. Ajetunmobi, *Historiography and nature of history, Second Edition* (Lagos: Gabby Printing Nig. Enterprises, 2010), 3
- ⁶ Edward. H Carr, *What is History* (Great Britain: Macmillan, 1961), 30
- ⁷ Obaro Ikime, "Why teach history" Eminent Personality Lecture delivered under the Auspices of the Students' Historical Society, University of Ibadan, Thursday, February 17, 2000), 5
- ⁸ Ikime, 6