

The Nigerian State and Challenges of Nation-Building

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Introduction

Seek ye first the political kingdom and all other things shall be added unto it -- Kwame Nkrumah.

This vision of political independence, being the solution to most of the problems confronting African states, underpinned the struggle for independence by nationalist leaders and their followers during the colonial period throughout Africa, with Nigeria playing a leading role. Thus, it was believed that with the attainment of independence and the control of our destiny in our hands, it would be easier to promote national integration and economic development. Beyond that, it was also hoped that greater continental unity would be achieved and neo-colonialism effectively combated. These aspirations have largely remained unfulfilled in most independent African states. Political instability, disease, and economic underdevelopment have instead become the hallmark of many African states, including Nigeria.

This lecture examines the causes and consequences of these problems, which constitute serious challenges to nation-building efforts, and proffers some solutions. It will be seen that while some of the difficulties are rooted in our colonial experience, others are within the duration of our independence. It is increasingly becoming obvious that we have to accept responsibility for much of the malaise sweeping through the continent and indeed Nigeria.

Before proceeding further on this discourse, it is germane to discuss variables or concepts in this topic. These concepts are State and Nation-building. The question then arises, is Nigeria truly a state in the real sense of it? Besides, can we also argue that it is a Nation

or Nation-State? We need to get this clear right from the outset as the challenges that we have faced and continue to face as a country arose from the manner in which we emerged as a state since Amalgamation in 1914. The other concept is that of Nation-building. We must attempt also to see exactly what Nation-building is all about. First, let us start with the concept of Nationhood.

Nation

Before the European Colonial rule was imposed on Nigeria, the country was composed of many communities that had various sizes and powers and were at different levels of social and economic organization. The sense of nationhood was based on the belief that a community was culturally different from its neighbours. This cultural differentiation hinged on distinctive language, religion, habits, and memories, though not necessarily on political unity. We could also identify other features such as economic ties and common history and traditions. Besides, we could also assert that the presence of each or any of these factors or characteristics is not absolutely indispensable.

Each community had its own beliefs about its origin which provided the ideological basis for their sense of belonging. It was generally believed that members of the community were descendants of the same ancestor. Such a belief promoted a bond of unity and a sense of nationality. Thus, the central unifying concept was that of kinship. We can, therefore, assert that a nation is a group of people with a common language, history, culture, and perhaps geographical territory. However, it is possible that other components of a nation might be outside the geographical territory. The Yoruba people mainly domiciled in Southwestern Nigeria are equally found in

Kwara and Kogi States of Northern Nigeria and in the diaspora in Togo and the Republic of Benin as well as in the Americas, and Brazil.

State

On the other hand, a state is an association of people characterized by formal institutions of government, including laws, permanent territorial boundaries, and sovereignty, namely political independence. Perhaps, this is why we could consider Nigeria a state. Unfortunately, however, the desire to live together was not of our making. The British colonial masters under Lord Frederick Lugard forced us together. Little wonder Chief Obafemi Awolowo described Nigeria as a mere geographical expression. According to him, "Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression.² There are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense as there are 'English', 'Welsh', or 'French'. The word 'Nigeria' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not". For Sir Ahmadu Bello, our coming together was a marriage of convenience.³ God did not create Nigeria, the British did. Looking at how states in other climes such as the United States of America, Germany, and Italy emerged, we might be tempted to conclude that the country is not a state. Hence, the challenges of nation-building from the very beginning of independence in 1960. Indeed, Chief Obafemi Awolowo condemned the situation in which the British created a single country called Nigeria in 1914 but worked against a united Nigeria by her 'divide-and-rule policy'. Thus, Chief Obafemi Awolowo was right in describing Nigeria not as a united nation, but as a collection of heterogeneous ethnic nationalities that was lumped together without due consideration with their natural rulers by the British.

Nation-State

Naturally, a nation-state should be a sovereign territory with groups of individuals who share a common history. This, no doubt, was how states emerged in the United States of

America, Germany, and Italy. Other examples of nation-states include France, and Japan to mention a few. We saw a situation in which these territories came together to achieve a common interest of a unified state with a sense of cohesion through a gradual process. Of course, it must be noted that initially, these states were a composition of different nationalities. But the utmost desire to live as a united people led to the emergence of nation-states with respect to the three examples cited therein. Therefore, a Nation-State is the idea of a homogenous nation governed by its own sovereign state, where each state contains one nation. It is significant to posit that even with its multicultural society, the United States is also referred to as a nation-state because of the shared American culture. In point of fact, a nation-state possesses the following characteristics: sovereignty, land, population, and government. It can also be asserted that a Nation-State is a territorial bounded sovereign polity, that is, a state that is ruled in the name of a community of citizens who identify themselves as a nation.

In light of the above, does Nigeria qualify as a State or Nation-State? I think the answer is No. Though it possesses the four characteristics mentioned above, its emergence in 1914 was not the making of the disparate entities that later became Nigeria. As we shall see presently, Nigeria can be described as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-culture nation whose strength, beauty, and power lie in its unity, plurality, and diversity. It is in light of this, that challenges of nation-building become enormous and appear unsurmountable. What then is Nation-building?

Nation-building

Simply defined, Nation-building is the process whereby a society of people with diverse origins, histories, languages, cultures, traditions, and religions come together with a unified constitutional and legal dispensation, a national public education system, an integrated national economy, shared symbols, etc. However, according to Mylonas,⁴ Nation-building may be defined as the process

through which the boundaries of the modern state and those of the national community become congruent. The desired outcome is to achieve national integration, cohesion, and peace. Yet, Nation-building could also mean the development of human rights, namely political, civil, economic, and social as well as the rule of law. Hence, Nation-building allows the available resources of a country to be allocated efficiently, stimulates competition, supports innovation, and promotes the growth of the economy.

Nevertheless, there is hardly any acceptable definition of Nation-building, as the subject means different things to different people. In fact, it is a contentious subject among scholars, just like several other issues in the humanities and social sciences. In most public documents, its meaning is largely assumed rather than defined. In spite of this, some scholars see it as building the tangible threads that hold a political entity together by giving it a sense of purpose, especially in light of the fact that having a viable nation is synonymous with achieving modernity.⁵ Nation-building is also about building the institutions and values that sustain the collective community in these modern times.⁶ However, the strongest task of Nation-building is how to prevent state disintegration. Unfortunately, however, Nation-building has been the greatest challenge facing the post-independence countries that emerged from the former European colonies in Africa and Asia.⁷

Evolution of the Nigerian State

The incursion of the Europeans, particularly Britain, and France into Africa at the dawn of the nineteenth century led to serious socio-political upheaval in various African states. The British military troops bombarded Lagos in 1851 and annexed it ten years later in 1861.⁸ The British took the entire Yorubaland by their mediation in the Ibadan-Ekiti Parapo War, popularly known as the Kiriji War, beginning in the 1880s and ended with the protectorate treaties, negotiated in 1893⁹ by Gover G. Carter with Abeokuta, Oyo, and Ibadan as well as with the Ekiti Parapo, which embraced

Ekiti, Ijesa, Igbomina and particularly all the groups in eastern Yorubaland. At the same time, they made remarkable incursions into the Niger Delta areas where they subdued the Kings of Benin, Bonny, Opobo, Calabar, Itsekiri, etc.¹⁰ Further inland into Igboland, the Europeans successfully subdued the local rulers and brought them under their control.¹¹ The campaign for conquest was also launched in the whole of Hausaland and Kanem-Borno where superior firepower¹² enabled the British to overrun the Kings of Kontagora, Gwandu, Bida, Nupe, Zaria, Kano, Sokoto, etc.¹³

However, Britain's attempt to incorporate the whole of Nigeria into her influence began to crystalize in 1906 with the amalgamation of both the Colony of Lagos with the Protectorate of Southern Nigeria to form the Colony and Protectorate of Southern Nigeria. In the same year, 1906, the entire Hausaland and Kane-Borno and other neighbouring kingdoms were incorporated into the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. Thus, at inception, Britain began its colonial enterprise in Nigeria from two separate protectorates under the control of two distinct colonial representatives (Lieutenant Governors), one in each of the two protectorates.

In 1914, the British representative, Lord Frederick Lugard, successfully amalgamated the Northern and Southern Protectorates together to form a single country -- Nigeria.¹⁴ In making the two protectorates a single state, the British did not take into consideration the differences that existed among the people in terms of religious, socio-cultural heterogeneity, and multi-dimensional political organization. For Lord Frederick Lugard, the union was important for the economic survival of Britain. The ultimate aim was to exploit the huge economic resources of the colony.¹⁵ The different traditional political institutions, cultures, religions, feelings, and opinions of the indigenous communities were not taken into consideration during the amalgamation.

Meanwhile, the British divide-and-rule system sowed the seed of division and

mistrust among the Nigerian people.¹⁶ In the Northern and Southern parts of the country, there grew social and ethnic bias. Ethnic bias was further accentuated with the partition of Southern Nigeria into two provinces -- East and West -- in 1939, which created an Igbo majority in the East and a Yoruba majority in the West, and the introduction of the Richards Constitution in 1946, which introduced regionalism and divided the country into three unequal regions of North, East, and West.¹⁷ The colonial act broadened the ethnic divide among the people of Nigeria as they began to see themselves as northerners, easterners, and westerners, and not as Nigerians. This marked the beginning of a disunited Nigeria as we have it today. It is one reason we have found it difficult to achieve nation-building and national integration, let alone talk of economic development.

In the Northern region, the Hausa-Fulani emerged as the undisputed major ethnic group, with so many other minority ethnic groups under their control.¹⁸ The basic factor that gave the Hausa-Fulani an edge over other ethnic groups in Nigeria was their huge population, geographical spread, and control of the Northern region government. Had the British colonial government divided the Northern region into two separate regions as they did in the South, the Hausa-Fulani dominance would not have been much felt? The real issue, however, was the Hausa-Fulani hegemony, which had been established in the whole of the North prior to the arrival of the British colonizers. The Hausa-Fulani hegemony was exploited by the colonial administration to create a region disproportionately bigger than the other ethnic regions. The Northern region was larger than the entire two Southern regions, namely the Eastern and Western regions, geographically and demographically. Indeed, the 1953 national population census result revealed that out of a total of 31,750,000 people, the North accounted for 17,573,000, while the Eastern and Western regions had 7,497,000 and 6,408,000, respectively. Lagos, which was the Federal Capital Territory had 272,000.¹⁹

Ukpabi had argued that there are various reasons for the decision by the British colonial government to divide Southern Nigeria into two separate provinces in 1939, while the North was left intact. He noted that it was a punitive measure by the British against the educated Nigerian leaders and people of the South -- the Igbo and the Yoruba -- notably Sir Herbert Macaulay, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, and Chief Obafemi Awolowo, among others; for their anti-colonial posture towards the British government.²⁰ However, Nwankwo and Ifejika argued that the uneven division of the country into three regions was a deliberate act by the British to favour the North, which they found more amenable to British colonial interests.²¹ This singular act had far-reaching political consequences for Nigeria. It laid the foundation for the subsequent Northern domination of Nigeria's political administration. This became evident in 1953, with the introduction of federalism in Nigeria by the MacPherson Constitution. The North insisted that it should be given at least 50 percent of the total seats in the parliament. This gave the Northern region a political edge over the Southern region in the parliament, especially in deciding important national issues by vote.²²

The quest for independence produced a nationalist class from both the Northern and Southern regions that united in the struggle to end colonial rule in the country. At the same time, the nationalists competed with one another for control of the government and politics of their regions and the central government. There was indeed an atmosphere of rancour among the political class during the decolonization period, 1945-1960, which lingered throughout the First Republic, 1960-1966, and culminated first in the bloody military coup d'état of 15 January 1966 that terminated the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa administration and also, the second bloody military coup d'état of 29 July 1966 that led to the Nigerian Civil War of 1967-1970, between the Federal government and the Secessionist Eastern region, known as the Republic of Biafra.²³

Having laid the background for this study, let us now proceed to examine the challenges that the Nigerian State has encountered since the time of independence in 1960.

Challenges of Nation-building in Nigeria

These challenges are, no doubt, numerous, but the most challenging of them have been the twin issues of ethnicity and religion that constitute the National Question in Nigeria. Others include the problems of colonial heritage, colonial economic system, corrupt leadership, bad followership, language and national integration, and developing effective and strong institutions of the state, such as the National Assembly, the Judiciary, the Electoral system, the Police, the Military, etc. We now proceed to discuss the challenges of Nation-building piece by piece.

Problems of Colonial Heritage

Most African leaders associate the problems of stability and underdevelopment partly with the colonial masters and partly attribute such problems to the deficiencies in African leaders. The states in Africa do not seem to relate to the society. African governments are most alienated from the people, rather than being regarded as the people's government. The situation in Nigeria is no exception. There is a wide gulf between the government and the governed. To what extent can this situation be attributed to the colonial legacy?

Colonialism marked a break in the continuity of African history, especially in the relations between the state and society. In this sense, the post-colonial state in Africa is a successor not to the pre-colonial state, but to the colonial system. In many ways, therefore, the independent states of Africa have, like colonial predecessors, become alien to the society.

The problem, therefore, has been how to re-establish a continuity between the pre-colonial and the post-colonial states. This is because, in terms of their boundaries, laws, law enforcement agencies, languages of

business, political culture, and forms of jurisdiction, the dependent countries inherited colonial structures and institutions.

Colonial governments established authoritarian regimes based on the use of force. The colonial laws were made not by consultation with the colonial subjects, but through proclamations by colonial officials. Any contravention of such laws was punishable by the courts and backed by law enforcement agencies. The emphasis was on the maintenance of law and order for the exploitation of the resources of the colonies. In some cases, as in the French colonies, special powers of detention without trial were granted to the colonial officials. The legal systems catered for the interests of the colonial officials more than those of the colonial subjects. Any protests against such laws were put down with brute force. Several years after independence, this is the situation in Nigeria, not minding that the British system was in a way liberal but exploitative like all foreign administrations. The law is not made for those in authority or the well-to-do, but for the poor masses of the land. Authoritarianism prevails. The legal system applies only to the common man on the streets, and not to the very important persons (VIPs).

Colonial governments established not only authoritarian regimes but also the principles that government was concerned primarily with the maintenance of law and order rather than that government should take charge of development. The government was for the benefit of the rulers and not for the improvement of the welfare of the governed. Irrespective of the differences in the kinds of government between the colonial powers, the framework of the colonial administration was authoritarian. The citizens were compelled to obey the laws without question.

The gulf between the government and the governed in the colonial period was justified on the grounds of the differences in the level of education and civilization. To the colonial leaders, education was seen as an essential part of the gradual devolution of power. Education, therefore, became part of the process of alienation of the future African

leaders from their populous illiterate fellow citizens. Those citizens who acquired Western education in the time of the colonies were assimilated and granted the same privileges as the colonial rulers themselves. In this way, they imbibed the culture and authoritarian approach to governance by the colonial masters.

This situation partly explains the autocratic style of administration of some African leaders who perceived themselves as replacements for the colonialists. Like their colonial predecessors, they used their positions to continue the exploitation of the resources of the country for their selfish ends. That explains why most African leaders became wealthy as their subjects became more impoverished. Attempts by well-meaning citizens to point out that the function of government should be to raise the standard of living of the populace were regarded as a personal smear of the character of the leadership and attracted severe punishment. As the leaders became more autocratic in their efforts to suppress criticisms, and as the people became increasingly disenchanted with the various regimes' inability to meet their expectations, the ground was softened for military intervention in politics. One leader after the other was toppled from office in the first decade of independence. Ironically, even the military leaders who had posed as liberators of the people from unwarranted oppression soon fell into the same draconian administrative style. No wonder, therefore, that Nigeria has witnessed seven military coup d'états and eight military heads of state.²⁴

Colonial Economic System

Whatever the differences in the nature of colonial administrations in Africa, their economic policies were largely the same. The basic aim was the maximum exploitation of the resources of the colonies. Colonialism thus created a situation in which the economies of the various colonial territories were integrated into those of their colonial masters, while the neighbouring African countries had little or no economic relations.

A good indication of the exploitative feature of the colonial economy can be seen in

the transportation systems of the colonies. Most of the railway lines ran from the hinterland to the coastal seaports because they were designed for the evacuation of the products of the colonies to the metropolis in European countries. It is also worth noting that Africa, including Nigeria, was denied the opportunity of developing healthy trade links with other parts of the world other than Europe and North America. That type of imbalance engendered underdevelopment and dependence in the African states.

Broadly speaking, there were three different modes of exploitation of African resources. The first was to use African peasants to produce cash crops. Before colonialism, few cash crops were produced. African peasants began to cultivate cocoa, coffee, groundnuts, palm trees, etc as was the case in Nigeria. With this came the monetization of the economy and the development of traditional African currencies. The infrastructures were then built for the evacuation of these products to Europe.

Secondly, in those parts of Africa where there were European settlers, there was a different economic system. The European settlers dictated the trend of economic development. Their land was taken away from the Africans and so the landless peasants formed a group of cheap labour. Since the Africans had to pay taxes, they had no option but to work on white-owned farms to earn some money to meet such commitments. It is worth noting that as the emphasis was on cash crop production, little was done to increase the cultivation of food crops; a situation that led to food shortages later in some African countries.

The third mode of production was not to depend on Africans or European settlers, but on companies granted certain concessional rights to exploit the resources of some countries. This was a characteristic feature of the Belgian and Portuguese territories, but even British and French colonies that were rich in minerals were exploited by concessional companies. In Nigeria, tin mining was controlled by such a company, and arrangements were made to

procure cheap labour. It was in the mining sphere that some of the most atrocious crimes against Africans were perpetrated.²⁵

Taking these three modes of production into account, one can discern the legacies of colonialism in the independent African States. The first was the effective integration of African economic systems with those of Europe, creating satellite economies and dependence in Africa. African economies became export-oriented, dependent on European shipping and Airlines.

Again, the Europeans dominated the banking system, which discriminated against Africans in the advancement of credit facilities. The attempts by Africans to establish their own banks in the 1930s²⁶ were frustrated by the European banks, sometimes by bringing in Asian interests as in East Africa. The value of African currencies was generally lower than those of their European counterparts and so created an imbalance in trade in favour of the Europeans. In any case, the prices of African export commodities were fixed in the European capitals without consultation with the African merchants.

Instead of speeding up growth, colonial activities such as mining and cash crop farming contributed to the decay of traditional African life. It must be emphasized that the character of economic growth in Africa under colonialism was such that it did not constitute development. In recent times, economists have termed this phenomenon 'growth without development'. It meant that goods and services of a certain kind are on the increase, but the profit flows to Europe and the economy becomes more and more dependent on the metropolis. A further revelation of growth without development was the over-dependence on one or two exports. The term "monoculture" is used to describe those colonial economies which are centred around a single crop or product. The discovery, exploration, and exploitation of crude oil at Oloibiri since 1956 have not allowed the diversification of the Nigerian economy. The various Nigerian governments have concentrated on monies accruing from crude oil and by so doing neglected the growth and development of Agricultural products.

The factor of dependency made its impact felt in every aspect of the life of the colonies. It can be regarded as the growing vice among the negative social, political, and economic consequences of colonialism in Africa. Therefore, being primarily responsible for the perpetuation of colonial relationships into the epoch that is called neo-colonialism.

Ethnicity and Religion

Ethnicity involves a feeling of solidarity and a sense based on certain common factors, among these are a common language, culture, and historical experience. There is also a sense of distinctiveness vis-à-vis other people. It should be noted that ethnic groups in Nigeria have a history of movements and cultural change. They were not static and isolated as implied in the term 'tribe', which was itself an invention of the colonial anthropologists. African ethnic groups did not have the concept of a nation as such, although they could be called nationalities.

As Ikime notes, "The point needs to be made that many of what we call ethnic groups in Nigeria today are in fact nationalities, some of which boast of higher populations than a number of modern nation-states in Africa and elsewhere; that the nationalities with which we have to deal in the Nigeria of today did not exist in their present size or form till the colonial period of our history".²⁷ To start with, the term Hausa was not a political expression in the 17th or 18th century. That term represented a language spoken by many autonomous socio-political entities in and beyond the present Nigerian geographical area. These socio-political entities whose language was Hausa did not see themselves as having common interests. Indeed, their conflicting economic and political interests provide the key to the wars that erupted between them from time to time. Of course, until the beginning of the 19th century, Hausaland could not boast of being a Commonwealth state. It was grossly disunited. It took the Fulani Jihad of 1804/1805 to unite the whole of Hausaland under a theocratic leader, Uthman dan Fodio,

a Fulani who headed the Sokoto Caliphate as the first Caliph. Similarly, the term Yoruba as now understood did not come into existence until the 19th century, and certainly did not, even then, apply to all we now call Yoruba. Evidence that a common or similar language did not necessarily indicate common interests can be found in what the history books have termed the Yoruba Wars of the 19th century. Besides, anyone vaguely familiar with the history of the delta states will recall that those states did not see themselves as belonging to an Ijo State or even a commonwealth. Bonny, Kalabari, Okrika, and later Opobo, each saw itself as a sovereign state, and competition among them for available resources in their peculiar terrain was a recurrent feature of their history.²⁸ What is true for the people here mentioned is true for other Nigerian people.

It was the transformation of the separate and autonomous socio-political entities in the Nigerian geographical area into component parts of a single colonial state known as Nigeria that led to the rise of the nationalities in the shape and size in which we know them today. The rise of these nationalities necessarily involved a certain degree of fusion of hitherto separate interests. The Yoruba, Tiv, Hausa, Igbo, Ijo, Benin (Edo), Efik, Ibibio, Isoko, Angas, Birom, Urhobo, Itsekiri, and all the other nationalities began to identify themselves as such first in the context of the colonial state, and then in the context of the Nigerian-multi nation-state, as they were forced by changing circumstances of history to act politically in defence of their perceived interests vis-à-vis the interests of other competing groups.

Clearly, the driving force that led to the degree of fusion that produced our nationalities in their present configuration was the perceived interests of each nationality in the competition for social and economic amenities and political office. It follows that any search for some solution to that extremely high degree of loyalty to the relatively new nationality (otherwise called ethnic group) which has so far undermined the search for national unity and integration must focus on the strategies which the Nigerian nation has worked out for the provision and distribution

of social and economic amenities and the sharing of political office.

Although the point has been made that it was the coming of colonial rule – and with it the administrative and other structures which it erected – which forced hitherto autonomous and comparatively small socio-cultural cum political entities to seek a larger framework for action, it is necessary to draw attention to another development, pre-colonial, which has had an important impact on the way in which the politics of our multi-national states have been played since the 1950s. I speak here of the coming into the Nigerian geographical area of two world religions, namely Islam and Christianity. The traditional religions of our peoples often served as an integrative factor in the sense that it was possible for the religious observances of an incoming migrant group to be accommodated in the existing observances of their host community. At the same time, it was not too difficult for the strangers to fit themselves into the religious observances of their hosts. Islam and Christianity were not accommodating. While each religion invariably felt some impact of the culture of the area in which it took root, it regarded its adherents as distinct and separate from non-believers. Indeed, it can be argued, as Professor J. F. Ade Ajayi did, that although “Each world religion drew its followers into a common culture, [it] also urged them to remain combative and exclusive”.²⁹

In the context of Nigeria, the significance of this aspect of the two religions is heightened by certain historical accidents. Islam first took root in Borno and then spread into Hausaland. Although Islam influenced the administration of Borno and the Hausa states; although it resulted in bridges being built across the various Hausa states as the jama'a in one state interacted with other jama'a, Islam did not, until the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century, result in the promotion of greater political cohesion and integration across Hausaland. Then came the Sokoto Jihad of the 19th century which brought a large chunk of Hausaland into the Sokoto Caliphate, creating a major political revolution thereby. Bala Usman argued that it is difficult to regard the

ethnic factor in the Sokoto Jihad as major. He takes the position that by the 19th century the ethnic lines between the Hausa and the Fulani had become so blurred, in view of centuries of co-existence, that it does not make that much sense to see the Jihad as a Fulani Jihad.³⁰ Also, R. A. Adeleye argued that from the viewpoint of the ruling elite in Hausaland, “the fear of Fulani domination was ... a real one”.³¹

In the context of our subject, it does not matter much whether, at the time of the Jihad, the ethnic factor was significantly identifiable. What is important is that the success of the Jihad resulted in the greater flowering of Islam and established a single religio-political authority over the great expanse of territory that was the Sokoto Caliphate. That expanse of territory was dominated by the Hausa and the Fulani. In time, the Sokoto Caliphate became indeed the heartland of Islam. Today, many Nigerians speak of Hausa-Fulani as a single group, even though the careful observer will discern important differences between the Hausa and the Fulani as ethnic groups. As some authorities have pointed out, ethnic identification does become more intense and assertive when it coincides with religious boundaries.³² Although in our situation, Islam has spread beyond the original area of the Caliphate, it is a fact that the religion of Islam is most closely associated with the Hausa-Fulani. The fact that certain other accidents of our history conferred certain political privileges on these same Hausa-Fulani has made the place and role of the Hausa-Fulani in Nigerian politics a crucial aspect of the National Question and indeed, the process of Nation-building.

When the average Nigerian south of roughly the 8th parallel uses the expression Hausa (he does not go into the nicety of Hausa-Fulani), he means everyone north of that parallel, including the many small ethnic groups that were in fact the victims of Hausa-Fulani raids and domination from the 19th century down to the creation of states from 1967. While strictly speaking this lumping together of scores of ethnic groups is essentially stereo-typical and therefore

unacceptable, there is an area in which it makes political sense. Although as a consequence of the Jihad the Hausa lost the top political positions in the emirates of the Caliphate to the Fulani, it was not Fulfulde but Hausa that became the everyday language of the Caliphate. That Caliphate included areas like Nupe and Ilorin which were originally not Hausa speaking, but which increasingly came to acquire Hausa as a second language. Even in areas in the former Northern Nigeria where the Jihad failed to make any permanent impact, annual Caliphate raids during most of the 19th century, and continued commercial relations with the Hausa, as well as voluntary and involuntary Hausa migrations eventually resulted in the spread of the Hausa language. By the time the British overran the Sokoto Caliphate and established their Protectorate of Northern Nigeria, it was easy for them to observe that Hausa had become something of a *lingua franca*. They proceeded to set up Hausa as the language of Native Administration and so made that language even more of a *lingua franca* in the old Northern Nigeria. Consequently, even in Tivland, Hausa is widely spoken. Because Hausa is spoken by many non-Hausa groups in the old Northern Nigeria, the not-so-well-informed regard all those who belonged to that political entity as Hausa. But that is not all.

As is well known, independent Nigeria has had to find some way of accommodating the fact of uneven educational development in the country. In broad terms, it became accepted that the old North was educationally backward even though there were areas in that North that had schools before certain areas in the South. When it came to appointments to federal institutions, persons from the North were not required to possess the educational qualifications and experience demanded from persons in the South seeking the same positions. In that sense, it became a distinct advantage to be educationally disadvantaged! Many Hausa-Fulani as well as non-Hausa and non-Fulani took advantage of this accommodation to rise rapidly to leading positions in the nation's public life. The group interest of this Northern elite has compelled

them to seek an equalization of educational facilities, they prefer to institutionalize educational backwardness and to demand continued concessions which, because of the political dominance they enjoy, they invariably get. This is the reason why the Northern elite has continued to do all in its power to ensure that the idea of “the North” is not destroyed despite the creation of states in 1967, 1976, 1987, 1991, and 1996.³³ And because this elite speaks Hausa, it makes some political sense to refer to all of them, irrespective of their original ethnic groups, as Hausa.³⁴

While Islam was helping to create the situation, we have just been describing, Christianity was taking root in parts of what later became known as Southern Nigeria. If Islam brought with it Islamic culture, Christianity brought with it elements of Western European culture, including Western European education. The already existing cultural diversities in the Nigerian geographical area added a new dimension that partially explains the North-South dichotomy in the politics of Nigeria.

Two aspects of the impact of Christianity need to be highlighted. The first has to do with the spread of Western European education by Christian missions. Admittedly, the original aim of these missions was to impart limited education, enough to produce low-grade teachers, clerks, some catechists, and ultimately pastors, not to produce high-level manpower that would ultimately lead to the struggle for independence. Once education began to be provided, however, it developed a certain momentum of its own. The colonial authorities eventually made some contribution, admittedly low keyed, to the mission's education effort, since that effort produced the Nigerian junior civil servants, the colonial state needed. This is how education took root in Southern Nigeria. In the North, Christian missions were not allowed to operate in the Muslim areas. And because the British were themselves never anxious to promote education, the Muslim North did not acquire Western education to the same extent

as the South did – hence the phenomenon of unequal educational development.

The second aspect of the impact of Christian missionary activity on the South and the nation has to do with the fact that, unlike Islam, Christianity made a distinction between church and state. Whereas the Jihad created a religio-political entity, the Sokoto Caliphate, Christianity produced no such edifice. Islam through the Sokoto Caliphate “provided a rallying point for Muslims spread over a wide geographical area, creating a sense of belonging, the like of which was completely missing in the areas that were to constitute British Southern Nigeria”.³⁵ It is this that explains why “in relations between the North and the South in the 20th century and now, the former was always more together than the latter”.³⁶ So, although there is an undeniable North-South dichotomy in the politics and public life of the nation, there is a great Northern togetherness than there is Southern cohesion. This is why it is always possible for the dominant Northern political and military elite to find a Southerner to do their dirty work for them, thereby compounding the process of Nation-building.³⁷ Only last year, towards the build-up to the emergence of the presidential flag bearer of the All Progressive Congress, the Northern Governors demonstrated their unity of purpose, by making a case for power to shift to the Southern part of Nigeria.

As it were, therefore, some aspects of the colonial situation helped in the evolution and widened consciousness of ethnicity. In effect, therefore, it would be argued that while colonialism brought various ethnic groups together for new purposes, it also created new differences and intensified rivalries and animosities between the various groups. In some ways, it was the interest of the colonial masters to sustain such rivalries as part of their divide-and-rule policy geared toward the impending emergence of strong nationalist movements that could eject the colonial overlords. It is noteworthy that ethnicity rather than class distinction has been an important factor in the politics of the African

states. Indeed, that situation played into the hands of the colonial masters who manipulated the system, in such a way that the chosen ethnic groups, who were generally the more conservative groups inherited political powers, and ensured that neo-colonialism thrived in the post-colonial states.

Ethnicity in the independent states has impeded national integration and the evolution of a high level of national consciousness. Most Africans have tended to elevate their ethnic and cultural loyalties above the national ones. Such conflict between primordial ethnic loyalty and national commitment has tended to deprive the African leaders of the vital legitimacy necessary for national mobilization and development. Ethnic rivalries have become so intense that in Nigeria, it led to civil war between 1967 and 1970.

Ethnicity has contributed to the flourishing of corruption, nepotism, and inefficiency in the public and private sectors as different groups try to entrench their interests against those of their counterparts. Such preoccupations divert the collective energy and attention of the nation from the true pursuit of development, nation-building, and national integration.

In countries where some ethnic groups are dominant, this has tended to translate into the domination of political power to the chagrin of the less populous groups as in Nigeria, where the emphasis is shifted from proven leadership qualities to ethnic affiliation, thus encouraging, in some cases, the enthronement of mediocrity and poor leadership.

A low level of national commitment stemming from ethnicity renders many of the African states vulnerable to neo-colonial machinations. The intruders could afford to occupy the various sub-nationalities with the struggle for the crumbs, while the multinationals continued their undisturbed economic exploitation of the African states.

As with other factors involved in the nation-building process, religion is very important. It is significant to note that religion is sectionally based rather than ethnic-oriented.

It is generally involved to serve the interests of its followers. In Africa as a whole, we have a triple religious heritage, namely, African Traditional Religion (A.T. P), Christianity, and Islam.

Conflicts between Islam and Christianity have quite often revolved around political power sharing. Political power is seen as a way of protecting the religious interests of the officeholders and fostering the spread of such religions. Cabinet positions are, therefore, shared with care to avoid accusations of religious domination. In Nigeria, Christian missionaries won converts by spreading Western education. That meant that Christians were generally better educated than their Muslim counterparts. This meant that the Muslim fear of Christian domination became a major source of friction in the country.

Leadership and Corruption

In discussing the problems of leadership in Nigeria, it is important for us to understand what we mean by the term 'leadership', how to evaluate it, and how to promote it. It should be borne in mind that good leadership, among other things, involves the competence to govern a state for the promotion of the welfare and happiness of the citizens. This requires the creation of a conducive atmosphere for the individual to realize his or her highest potential.

In Nigeria, government tends to depend on personal abilities and attributes than on impersonal and established institutions. There is the tendency, therefore, for government to degenerate into a personal rule. This in turn results in the promotion of the relations linking the rulers with their patrons, associates, clients, and supporters rather than with the public. The ruler becomes more preoccupied with maintaining a system of relations than seeking to establish a rapport with the populace. In effect, the leadership is not mass-oriented, but elitist.

This meant that Nigerian rulers had to develop machinery for manipulating and monitoring personal rules. It is worthy of note that in the period of decolonization, it was

generally accepted that the nationalist leaders would succeed the European colonial masters. However, having inherited the mantle of office some leaders became mere replacements of the former overlords, with no programmes or policies for the improvement of the quality of life of their fellow citizens.

In evaluating the purpose of leadership, we should bear in mind the goals of modern African states. This was supposed to lead to the realization of peace, justice, and development. The political kingdom was to be the gateway to economic prosperity and happiness. To what extent have Nigerian leaders been able to achieve such objectives? Again, in evaluating leadership, there should be a distinction between a politician concerned more with immediate gains of certain policies, and a statesman with a greater vision of the future and posterity. Undoubtedly, some Nigerian leaders have been outstanding in their performance. These include General Murtala Muhammad and President Umaru Yar'Adua. But also the role of many Nigerian rulers has brought shame to the continent. By and large, stability, justice, and development still remain elusive.

There was also the problem of corrupt leadership in which the rulers subverted the state machinery for the purpose of amassing personal wealth. General Sani Abacha was a typical example. Tyranny was also prevalent during his administration. Even more importantly, the administrators of the country since the beginning of the Fourth Republic in 1999 up till now are no exception. Corruption remains the vogue, that is, the order of the day. There is also the problem of a low level of political consciousness among the followership. This has contributed to the promotion of mediocrity in leadership. How critical and demanding have they been in choosing their leaders? Is it not true that every society gets the type of leadership it deserves? If in the traditional societies the citizens have been more careful in selecting their leaders, to what extent are the criteria used in the process relevant to the modern Nigerian State? Do we expect in our leaders at the state level those

characteristics we demand at the local level? We should recognize the fact that leadership should not only be evaluated at the political level but also from the social perspective. This includes the management of our affairs in different social spheres like religious organizations, youth clubs, and student unions.

It has been suggested that there is the highest standard of leadership in private rather than in public institutions. In many business concerns, leadership is taken seriously and so adequate provisions are made for the training of leaders. To what extent can we have this practice in the public sector? Can such training be directed to the political and educational spheres? The Nigerian Institute for Policy and Strategy Studies is one such institution as well as The Centre for Democratic Studies. In effect, there is the need to set forth acceptable criteria for the selection of the best leaders at every level in the state.

Problems of Developing Effective Institutions: Problem of Selecting and Changing Leaders

There are constitutions and various attempts to establish laws, rules, and regulations that should govern elections. Owing to the problems of ethnicity, and differences in language, culture, and religion, such laws have not been effective. This has led to arbitrary rules rather than strict compliance to objective laid down procedures in the conduct of elections. Without observance of such rules, we cannot have good governance.

The question of succession to an office is important because unless there is a consensus as regards the adequacy of the mode and practice for such exercise we would not be able to produce leaders that are legitimate. Such leaders that lack the legitimate right to govern do base their authority only on the use of force, and so have to depend on various other means like religious and ethnic allegiance and the

manipulation of conflicting interests to govern the people.

The current situation in Nigeria is one in which no institution is working and Nigerians do not seem to have confidence in the institutions of the state. While the executive appears inept and corrupt, the legislature and the judiciary are rather worse as they are also corrupt and do not in any way fare better. Yet, law enforcement agencies, especially the police are accused of taking bribes from the public and by so doing undermining their performance and the integrity and dignity of the profession. All of these constitute clogs in the way of Nation-building, national integration, and development of Nigerian society. These are indeed serious challenges that could pull down a state, no matter its size and strength. We must endeavour to develop strong institutions of state and ensure that people who are above the board occupy positions of authority in the country. Otherwise, the process of Nation-building will never suffice.

Military Coups

Before independence, the army played no important part in African countries' politics. The armies were small and concentrated on their primary role of defence of the nation from external and internal aggression. Consequently, the army played no active part in decolonization politics. It was only in the Portuguese colonies, Algeria and Zimbabwe that the army led the struggle for independence. Nobody reckoned, therefore, that at independence the army would play any part in the politics of any African state. Yet, within a short time after independence, military coups became widespread in Africa.

The first of these coups occurred in Egypt in 1952 when a group of military officers toppled the monarchy. It was followed in 1958 by that in Sudan. Similar developments took place in many African countries in the second half of the 1960s. Algeria, Zaire, Dahomey, Central African Republic, Upper Volta, Ghana, Burundi, Mali, and Nigeria, for example, came under military regimes. Thus, the second half of the

independence decade came to be known as the era of military coups in Africa. In Nigeria, there were a couple of Military coups in January 1966, July 1966, July 1975, February 1976, December 1983, August 1985, and November 1993. All of these coups did not help the process of Nation-building, integration, and development. Military rule in Nigeria rather than being a corrective regime turned out to be worse than civilian administration, thus not helping the Nation-building process. They were more of political instability than creating peace in society.

Dependency and Neo-colonialism

The concept of neo-colonialism in the economic context has two important dimensions. First, it argues that despite the attainment of independence by the African states, the real exercise of power with regard to the direction and character of economic development does not rest with the sovereign country. Secondly, it asserts that even those countries that control the apparatus of government without any overt or subtle outside pressures have effectively accepted a defective economic structure that the country has inherited. Hence, sixty-two (62) years after independence, Nigeria is still tied to the apron string of Britain, her colonial master. Therefore, so long as we remain dependent on Britain, it will be difficult for us to grow as a Nation-state. We would only remain as producers of raw materials, which would be exported to the European capitals for processing, while the finished products would be shipped back to Nigeria and other African countries. Hence, while the economic bonds with the European countries were strengthened there was little or no trade between neighbouring African countries.

Conclusion: Which Way Forward?

I have endeavoured to take us through our trajectories and travails as a nation and demonstrate that the process of Nation-building does, in fact, demand serious attention from all of us. The problem that we face is how, in the words of Nnamdi Azikiwe, we can adapt the reality of "tribalism" to the

“unreality of national unity”,³⁸ or as Ajayi puts it, “how to get people to trust the Nigerian state to provide the same feeling of security and equity which they instinctively feel in their traditional cultural or language group”.³⁹ The answer that all who have grappled with this problem have recommended is fair and equitable development; recognition; and acceptance of the fact that each group is entitled to a minimum level of self-determination within the larger national framework; a national policy that ensures that no group, however small, is denied their just rights and entitlements as such denial leads to frustration and inability to identify with the Nation-state.

The above can be dismissed as mere platitudes. Indeed, part of the problem thus far has been that the elite, whose business it has been to govern Nigeria, has tended to be content with these platitudes. Without doubt, Nation-building process is complex: it is not just that of inter-ethnic relations narrowly defined, ever present as that aspect is. It includes, as I have tried to demonstrate, inter-regional and inter-state relations. It has led to the building of new groups that are not ethnic, but interest groups which exploit ethnic, cultural and even religious factors in the pursuit of these group interests.

Speaking of the religious factor, Nigerians need to ask themselves why, after nearly two centuries of peaceful co-existence between Muslims and Christians in the country, tensions between them have suddenly attained dangerous proportions. In my view, the answer lies in the determination on the part of certain ambitious individuals and elite groups to use religion as an instrument of political and economic domination, taking advantage of the locus of political and military power in the nation at this particular period of our history. Unless the mounting tension between Christians and Muslims in our land is handled with the maturity and sensitivity it deserves, the religious factor could well become the most explosive and disastrous aspect to achieving Nation-building, national integration and development.⁴⁰

Perhaps, one reason why we have not really seriously tackled the issue of Nation-

building is that we have been content to keep operating within certain history-bound frameworks - Northern and Southern Nigeria; North, East, and West; the 12, 19, 21, 30, and 36-state structures. And not quite long ago, the idea of Six geo-political zones of North West, North East, North Central, South East, South West, and South-South was created by the General Sani Abacha regime. We were brought together into Nigeria by force. After over 100 years of that togetherness (precisely 109), we must ask ourselves whether we mean to stay together or pull apart. We will be deceiving ourselves if we pretend that we do not know that right now there are many who take the view that we have more than one Nigeria; more than one calibre of Citizenship. The time to take the crucial decision to stay together or pull apart is, in my judgment, now. One prays that in a world that appears to favour larger agglomerations of peoples, we would opt to stay together. If we do, we must seek greater equity for all our component peoples. Perhaps, we need now, in the words of Ikime, an 'Act of Union' which spells out what it means to be Nigerian and what rights the Nigerian expects from the state in return for his loyalty and the sacrifices he is called upon to make from time to time.⁴¹ Such rights must be such that can be legally protected.

Finally, from the aforesaid, I have attempted to take us through our experiences as a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-culture nation whose strength, beauty and power lies in its unity, plurality and diversity hoping that with time we shall overcome the challenges of Nation building and thus integrate as a nation-state and as well attain the desired development that we have been yearning for since the attainment of independence in 1960.

Endnotes and References

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4 Ahmadu Bello, *My Life* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1962). Harris Mylonas, 'Nation-Building' in *Oxford Bibliographies in International Relations*, ed., Patrick James (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020)

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6 E. Gbenenye, 'African Colonial Boundaries and Nation Building,' *Inkanyiso: Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, 8 (2), (2016), 117-124.

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10 A. E. Afigbo, 'The Eastern Provinces under Colonial Rule,' in *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, ed., Obaro Ikime (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Plc., 1980), 410-428.

11 Afigbo, 410-428.

12 M. Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria* (London: Faber and Faber Ltd, 1962), 11-13. See also O. Ikime, *The Fall of Nigeria*, (London: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., (1977), 42. Kano and Sokoto were the last two kingdoms to succumb to British rule in 1902 and 1903, respectively.

13 Ikime, *The Fall of Nigeria*, 42

14 Lagos State Records and Archives Bureau: Ref. No. Ram 1.5.43: 'Amalgamation of Northern Nigeria and Southern Nigeria and

Administration, 1912-1919', December, 1919.

15 Crowder, *The Story of Nigeria*, 190. See also A. Nwankwo and S. Ifejika (eds.), *The Making of a Nation: Biafra* (London: Churst Company, (1969), 11-22. See also, T. N. Tamuno, 'Nigerian Federalism in Historical Perspective,' in *Federalism and Political Restructuring in Nigeria*, eds., K. Amuwo, A. Agbaje and R. Suberu (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1998), 13-15. Tamuno noted that the Amalgamation of Northern and Southern Nigeria was an administrative convenience of using "funds available from the richer 'South' to offset the adverse financial standing of the less prosperous 'North' and to reduce the fiscal dependence on scarce imperial grants-in-aid".

16 D. Aworawo, , 'Nigeria from Independence to Year 2000' in *History and Culture of Nigeria up to A.D. 2000*, eds., Akinjide Osuntokun et. al. (Lagos: Frankad Publishers, 2002), 199.

17 Lagos State Records and Archives Bureau: Ref. No. Ram 1.5.33: 'Memorandum on the Future Political Development of Nigeria, 1939.

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19 See N. U. Akpan, 'The Position and Role of Nigerian Ethnic Minorities in War and Peace' in *Nigeria Since Independence: The First 25 Years*, eds., T. N. Tamuno and S. C. Ukpabi (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books Ltd., 1989), 126-127.

20 Nwankwo and Ifejika, *The Making of a Nation*, 45

21 Nwankwo and Ifejika, 32-33.

22 M. Amoda, 'Background to the Conflict: A Summary of Nigeria's Political History from 1914-1964,' in *Nigeria: Dilemma of Nationhood: An African Analysis of the Biafran Conflict*, ed., J. Okpaku (New York: The Third Press, 1972), 55.

23 Amoda, 20.

24 General Abdulsalami Abubakar emerged as the eighth military head of state as a result of the

sudden death of General Sani Abacha on 8 June, 1998.

25 Even though this was not too serious a case in British colonial Nigeria, the situation in Belgian Congo was not palatable.

26 The first indigenous bank in Nigeria, the now defunct National Bank of Nigeria, was established in 1933.

27 For a detailed discussion of this matter, see O. Ikime, *In Search of Nigerians: Changing Patterns of Intergroup Relations in an Evolving Nation State*, Presidential Inaugural Lecture of the Historical Society of Nigeria, published by the Historical Society of Nigeria (1985).

28 V. O. Edo, "Peoples of the Niger Delta up to 1800," in *History and Cultures of Nigeria up to AD 2000*, eds., A. Osuntokun, D. Aworawo and F. Masajuwa (Lagos: Frankad Publishers), 34-50. See also, O. Ikime, 'The Peoples and Kingdoms of the Delta Province' *Groundwork of Nigerian History*, O. Ikime (ed.), *Groundwork of Nigerian History* (Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books, 1980), 89-108. See also, E. J. Alagoa, 'The Niger Delta states and their neighbours, to 1800,' in *History of West Africa*, Vol. 1, eds., J. F. Ade Ajayi and M. Crowder (London: Longman Group Limited, 1971), 331-373.

29 J. F. Ade Ajayi, 'The Problems of National Integration in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective', 11th NIISER Distinguished Lecture Series delivered on 11 December, 1984 (Ibadan: NISER Mimeograph, 1984).

30 Y. B. Usman, 'The Transformation of Political Communities: Some Notes on a Significant Dimension of the Sokoto Jihad' in *Studies in the History of the Sokoto Caliphate*, ed., Y. B. Usman (Zaria: Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, 1979), 34-58.

31 R. A. Adeleye, 'A Neglected Theme Revisited: The 19th Century Jihad in Hausaland', Being the Abdullahi Memorial Lecture delivered on the Occasion of the 31st Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria, 21 May, 1986.

32 D. R. Smock and Kwamena Bentsi-Enchill (eds.), *The Search for National Integration in*

Africa (New York: The Free Press, 1975), 6.

33 During the Second Republic, as it is even now, an attempt was made to organize meetings of Governors that shared certain common ideas – the Progressive Governors, they styled themselves. The group cut across North and South and was a move in the right direction. Strangely, however, under the allegedly corrective military regime of Muhammadu Buhari and Tunde Idiagbon, the Ten Northern States began to meet with a regularity and over matters which worried some political observers. In the Fourth Republic, the Governors of the Nineteen Northern States have in fact solidified their common interest in making the North a stronger entity.

34 O. Ikime, *In Search of Nigerians: Changing Patterns of Intergroup Relations in an Evolving Nation State*, Presidential Inaugural Lecture of the Historical Society of Nigeria, published by the Historical Society of Nigeria, 19-20

35 Ikime

36 Ikime

37 It is significant that the situation has yet not changed in the 21st century. The cord of unity no doubt continues to be strong against a disunited Southern Nigeria.

38 Nnamdi Azikiwe, 'From Tribe to Nation: The Case of Nigeria,' in *Themes in African Social and Political Thought*, ed., Onigu Otite (Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publication, 1978), 277.

39 Ade-Ajayi, 'The Problems of National Integration'

40 Still fresh in our memory is the incident of blasphemy in a College of Education in Sokoto, namely: Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto that led to the assassination of Miss Deborah Samuel, a Christian, by Muslim fanatics in Sokoto on 12 May, 2022; and the subsequent vandalization of the residence of Bishop Hassan Mathew Kukah, the Arch Bishop of Sokoto Diocese of the Roman Catholic Church. Also, the stance of Yakubu Dogara (former Speaker of the House Representatives) and Babachir Lawal

(former Secretary to the Government of the Federation), calling for the resignation of Kashim Shettima as the Vice Presidential candidate to Bola Ahmed Tinubu of the All Peoples Congress, thus agitating against the Muslim-Muslim ticket and instigating Christian Northerners not to vote for the party in the fourth coming election on 25 February, 2023. It is, therefore, clear that the two major evils of Nigeria, among other factors, are ethnicity and religion. We must endeavour to fight the two evils and kill them before it is too late. For far too long, we have lived with them to our peril.

41 Obaro Ikime, 'Towards Understanding the National Question', *A Keynote Address on the Occasion of the Former Opening of the National Seminar on the National Question in Nigeria*, Organized by the Department of History, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, at Abuja, 4 August, 1986.