

## A HISTORICAL APPRAISAL OF LEADERSHIP AND PROBLEMS OF NATION BUILDING IN POST-COLONIAL NIGERIA.

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**Abstract:** Nigeria shook off the British political hegemony and became an independent sovereign state in 1960. Soon after the independence, the nation-building process started in its full swing. The leaders who took over the mantle of power from the British overlords aimed at resolving many conflicting issues and crises but from various political and economic challenges the nation is plunged into, it is evident that the country has not been fortunate to have leaders who can be exhibiting the type of leadership that could command patriotism from followers. The paper focuses on the problems inhibiting nation-building in Nigeria and the types of leaders Nigeria have had. The work further offered useful suggestions that could help in building a virile, stable and viable, and developed nation.

**Keywords:** British political hegemony, nation-building, concept leadership.

### Introduction

For over a century the British established its rule over what is now modern Nigeria and tried to unite various ethnic groups together into a single state within British Empire. The effort of forging various groups into an entity cannot be described strictly as a building process. It is only a feature of creation and control of the colony not the evolution of an independent self-governing entity in which a nation should exist.

Before Independence, Nigeria had not been integrated into one nation but remained an affair of Northern and Southern Protectorate as created by the British until 1914 when the two protectorates amalgamated to become one Nigeria. The process of nation-building started after independence. The leaders to whom the colonial masters handed over the powers were full of hopes to build a strong nation. It was their aspiration that within the shortest possible time Nigeria will be a glorious country with the abundance of resources available in the country. Nobody doubted the realization of such hopes but fifty-four years after, there was nothing to celebrate as all hopes and aspirations were dashed. And Nigeria still remained at the grass-roots level when compared with industrialized nations.

At independence on 1st October 1960, Nigeria became a Republic while its new Head of State took the title of President. The Head of State was a Nigerian and not the British Crown. The First President of the Republic of Nigeria was Dr. Nnamdi Azikwe while Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa became the Prime Minister. Nigeria entered into a period of rapid social and economic change and many people were quite optimistic about its future as the colonial power withdrew from the direction control of the political economy of Nigeria. The leaders who took over the mantle of power from the British overlords aimed at resolving many conflicting issues and crises but as conspicuously known by all the low levels of patriotism in the country this accentuated the crises.

In an attempt to make this paper a quality one, an effort was made to interview some categories of people; those that are at the corridor of power, some in governmental parastatals, government offices, and few private individuals. Some prefer to remain anonymous for security reasons. Nevertheless, this paper was able to achieve its aims and goals. It further makes use of secondary sources that is relevant textbooks that treated this topic and some other related literature.

Since many years back the colonial powers withdraw in principle to control the political economy of Nigeria but yet retained the capacity to orchestrate and manipulate the decolonization process to exclude stubborn aspiring leaders and empower their own interest. The leaders who took over the mantle from the British overlords aimed at resolving these concentrated crises.

### **The Concept of Nation Building**

This has to do with the capacity to build state-society relations and also external interventions. Nation-building is constructing or structuring a nation's identity using the power of the state. In other words, it can be called Nation formation through which Nation came into being.

Nation Building means enhancing the capacity of the state institution, Building state-society relations, and also external interventions. According to James (1996), nation-building can involve the use of propaganda or major infrastructure development to foster social harmony and economic growth.

In this modern era, Nation Building referred to the efforts of newly independent nations, notably the nations of Africa to redefine the populace of territories that had been carved out by colonial powers or empires without regard to ethnic-religious or other boundaries. These reformed states would then become viable and coherent national entities. Nation Building includes the creation of national paraphernalia such as flags, anthems, national day, the national stadium, national theatres, national airlines, language etc. National Identity needed to be deliberately constructed by molding different ethnic groups into a nation especially since in many newly established states colonial practices of divide and rule has resulted in ethnically heterogeneous populations (Wikipedia, 2015). The Nation Building in itself is not difficult but the new states were plagued by tribalism i.e. rivalry between ethnic groups within the nation.

A number of scholars have attempted to explain what the concept of Nation Building means based on individual perceptions.

Amstutz (1982) defines nation-building as the name giving to the group of processes involved in the growth and development of the nation-state. He went further to state that nation-building requires the corporal will, determination to make a nation. Similarly, Ake (1980) perceives nation-building as the

problem of winning for the political system, the loyalty, and commitment of its subjects while Adekanye (1981) sees it as the psychological reconstitution of individuals, a process of infusing into the peoples of new independent territories who differ widely in language, religion, and values with a new sense of common belonging and shared identity.

From these definitions, one can say that nation-building is a complex process. It involves the interdependence and synthesis of political, social, economic, religion, and military aspects of the society in order to attain growth and stability of the society. In addition, it involves the rules and the ruled alike. Nation-building is a dynamic process, that is to say, it has no end, it is a continuous process to improve on the well-being of the people.

### **The Concept of Leadership**

Olawale (2013) in his own perspective opines ‘that leadership is the key factor in determining the speed of development or underdevelopment of nations is an incontestable fact; the multitude of evidence lie in the bowels of history and different experiences of natures. The interplay of leadership, governance, and nation-building is inseparable. This is so because the context of leadership both theoretically and practically and the impact of governance reflects on the national development process.

Warren Bennis, one of the leading authority on leadership once stated that leadership is like a beauty, it is hard to define but you know it when you see it. This confirms a statement that says ‘beauty is in the eyes of the beholder’.

According to Olugbade as quoted by Agboola T.O. & Lamidi K.O. (2017). Leadership is the exercise of power or influence in social collectivities such as groups, organizations, communities or nation. He sees leadership as both a research area and a practical stall encompassing the ability of an individual or organization to ‘lead’ or guide other individuals, teams, or entire organizations. Leadership can either be understood as a pattern of behavior or a personal quality, a pattern of behavior towards the achievement of a desired goals.

On the other hand, bad leadership leads to undesired goals or outcomes and power is concentrated in the hand of few ones and can thus lead to corruption and tyranny.

According to Stodgill (1974), there are almost as many different definitions of leadership as there are persons who have attempted to define the concept. Cubb (1975) defines a leader as a person who exercises influence over others while Shartles (1980) observes a leader to mean an individual who exercises more important positive influence than other members of a group or organization.

In a simple term a leader is a person who guides or directs a group of people while leadership means the group of people who leads. Leaders can be termed as the competence to govern a state for promoting the welfare and happiness of individual citizens. It also involves creating a conducive environment for an individual to develop his or her potential. The two categories of leaders that took over from the colonial masters are thus:

Nigerian elite from 1940 to 1953. Cole (1985) refers to them as collaborating classes. For example, Henry Carr and KiloyeAjasa (1983) also supported this view in Cole’s work.

The second category is the representation by the younger professional and commercial classes up and coming bourgeoisie, which coveted to material civilization, represented by the West and its imperialism. Nigerian leaders shall be evaluated later.

Ajayi (1970) is of opinion that when more than one nation is joined in a single state, a national problem is bound to exist likewise when a nation is divided among two or more there seems to be an international problem. Eluwa (1988) supported Ajayi and wrote “Nigerian leaders reached compromises without facing realistically their differences like the minorities problem and issues of equal opportunity, proper sharing of nation’s wealth and so on. This they tried to do after independence was won when Nigerians faced the difficult task of making a nation”.

This was the real situation of Nigeria and the causes of her problem since 1914. Any country is in a sense an artificial creation. In the case of Nigeria however, the union was so sudden and included such widely differing groups of people that even the British who created it and the inhabitants themselves have often doubted whether it could be survive as a political entity. Nigeria became a new state comprising of many ethnic and cultural groups divided by religious beliefs and cultural affiliation and different historical experiences. British colonial government brought them under one yoke for administrative purposes without considering the consequences it could bring on the people. Right from inception, this is since Amalgamation of (1914), up till the independence era and collapse of the first republic in 1966, Nigerian had got it wrong from many angles. Right from the alien parliamentary system inherited from Western government to the authoritarian role by an internalized oligarchy set of people that constituted the main structural obstacle to actualizing democratic leadership in Nigeria.

Adefarasin (2015) asserts that Nigeria is blessed with both human and natural resources but, it is quite evident today that political resources had halted since independence. Nigeria has refused to develop and join the comity of developed nations. Its economic index is confirmed to drop on a daily basis and no longer of fit to be the giant of Africa before its neighbour nations like Ghana, Gambia and Sierra Leone.

Obiozor (2015) opines that Nigeria is a nation born in optimism in 1960 at independence but till now still lived in a state of doubt and uncertainly.

Chimakonam&Ogar (2015) asserted that in Nigeria, however, some people who resent our national importance by calling us the Giant of Africa” they call this inscriptive perspective because. They considered the National population and oil wealth, but in reality, the greatness has to be earned not by the size of population or abundance of its natural resources. Japan has few natural resources but has long managed to run itself in the global economic power house; China and India have the largest population in the, but they are now rising as important global players.

The Nigerian leadership style can be measured or appraised whether it is growing and moving backward from Segman’s definition that says that only effective leadership can finish integrative direction and action as a cure for the stalemated pluralism endemic to Western democratic systems. The pathology of political pluralism, as we have in Nigeria is immobilism.

Greater effective and accountability from public sectors formation of transparent government accountable to the people open into space for competitive politics. Independent media and autonomous civic association for National renewal state construction and economic revival. Nigeria has the capacity to end poverty but has continue to increase poverty through her haphazard policy.

### **Factors Inhibiting Nation Building**

One of the major problems Nigeria encountered in his way upward was the problem of leadership (Oshadare 2005). There is a popular saying that “good leadership commands good fellowship and bad leadership commands bad fellowship”. The truth of the matter is that over the years most of the Nigerian leaders were self-centered, ethnic conscious and religious fanatics and hypocritical in their running of state affairs. For instance, various investigations have revealed that the majority of the leaders came to power with the sole aim of filling their pockets with ill-gotten wealth. The resources that are meant for the populace is being extravagantly spent by few ones thereby enriching themselves illegally. The recent bribery and corruption scandal that eroded the house of the senate and the house of representatives is a typical example of the state of moral and political decadence in Nigeria. This situation cuts across both the socio-political and economic spheres of the country.

On the day of independence, it was generally accepted that nationalists would succeed the colonial master, however, having inherited the mantle of leadership, some leaders became a mere replacement of the former overlords with no programme of improving the quality of life of the fellow citizen. The political kingdom supposed to be a gateway to economic and political prosperity and happiness but to what extent has political leaders achieve this?

The leaders could be categorized in two groups: Those that were concerned more with immediate gains of certain policies and secondly are those that have a greater vision for the future posterity of the nation he governed.

Nigeria could be critically seen as a nation with a false start (Ajayi 1970). The mode of government adopted on the eve of independence was not efficient and productive and it was even alien compared with the traditional system of government before independence. One of the serious problems that erupted the foundation was the issue of sectionalism and ethnic rivalries. There was no unity of purpose among the leaders that took over from British overlords and that has been the cog in the wheel of the Nation is progress. Awolowo was thinking of Federation while Azikwe was interested in unitary government, Tafawa Balewa was ready to join the party of his own interest. There was no single direction for the country.

Divide and rule tactics was put in place and this eventually led to the state of disintegration. The pre and post of colonial independence politics have tried a diverse system, regionalism was tried but succeeded in giving birth to ethnic consciousness. Gowon created more states (12) yet the issue of one ethnic group dominating the other was not allayed. The number has increased thrice; Nigeria now has thirty-six states plus the Federal Capital Territory with seven hundred and seventy-four local governments yet the problem was not solved. Everybody likes power. One cannot shy away from the fact that building a nation was not an easy enterprise but pursuing one particular course while forgoing a common purpose, national goal and consensus could not do it.

Muritala Muhammed (1972-1973) embarked on this kind of policy but he was not good enough on what necessary step to be taken. Every other ruler before him and since seems not to have given the question serious thought. Nigeria is a country where old habits die-hard. Since about sixty-one years ago when it gained political independence, its cloud still looked bleak and uncertain and the prospects for National corporations still looked cloudy. The nation is being faced daily with challenges and criticism both constructively and destructively. The gap between the rich and the poor continues to be widened.

A deeply felt consciousness of this basic issue and commitment to continue actions to resolve it is a non-issue to those in authority. How can a Nation forge ahead in this ugly situation? Day after day it becomes more difficult to agree on more relevant criteria and procedures for the selection of leaders. Honesty and patriotism have given up way for nepotism, ethnic rivalry, and tribal consciousness. The citizenry is more conscious of where a leader comes from, if he is from his side, he would be given adequate support or else no support. Votes are bought by the economic strong class while people's rights and privileges are bought with money. The focus has been shifted from patriotism to materialism.

Corruption remains one of the biggest problems that has eaten deep into every aspect of Nigerian society. Quality is thrown into the wind and corruption rose to unprecedented demission. Social evils perpetuated could not express openly or honestly against for fear of other party could take offense. It is an only free society with tolerance and fearlessness that can provide the solid base foundation on which peace and prosperity could be built.

Fear of domination by one group over another was rife since the time the flag of the new nation was being hoisted in 1960. Independence was thus received by two culturally irreconcilable groups, the traditionalist constructive not westernized progressive south. The North proceeded from independence to impede effort at national integration and cohesion. Northern leaders shielded the Northerners from their Southern countrymen. Northern urban towns such as Kaduna, Kano, Sokoto areas were demarcated into Federal areas and local areas. The Nigerian police operated only in Federal areas. In political Nigeria, it seems the North was predominant. The National census of 1952 conducted by the British contrary to all demographic principles gave the North three-quarters of the fifty-two million (52m) people which they said Nigeria was, this was a bitter pill for the Southerners to swallow.

The impact of this was that from 1960 till date, Nigeria had a very low degree of national cohesion, it diverse ethnic nationalizes looking inward to themselves for political succor and survival because the other group would not succumb to the exploitation of one. The Military politicians too did not help the matter rather they continued with the de-nationalization principle and failed to recognize or reckon with the nation in Nigeria. As a result, Nigerians continue to live among themselves in a permanent state of mutual antagonism. Discrimination of one group against another became detrimental to the well-being of the community. Those who are discriminated against are backed in their social impulse and they are prevented from developing their capacities. This in return makes people warped or frustrated and secretly or openly nurse a spirit of animosity against the other group.

### **The state of democratic government in Nigeria**

The country adopted the Western democratic system of government at inception, that is, immediately after the independence during the first republic. Though the system was alien to traditional political

institutions practiced in the pre-colonial and colonial period yet the pseudo-capitalist elite Nationalists who took the mantle of leadership could not manage it. Democratic leadership according to Aristotle as explained by Nweke (2015) supposed to be participative, considerate, and consultative. Could we say this is the experience in Nigerian politics today? Throughout history, the most important aspects of the democratic way of life have been the principles of individual equality and freedom, citizens in a democracy should be entitled to equal protection of their persons, possessions, and rights, people to enjoy freedom without undue interference and domination by the ruling party. Freedom of speech, association, live where and how they choose should not be compromised. Banditry, kidnapping, terrorism, assassinations has become the order of the day yet, the leaders at various level could not abate the state of insecurity in the nation. Could this be ideal democracy?

### **The State of Political Corruption and Thugery**

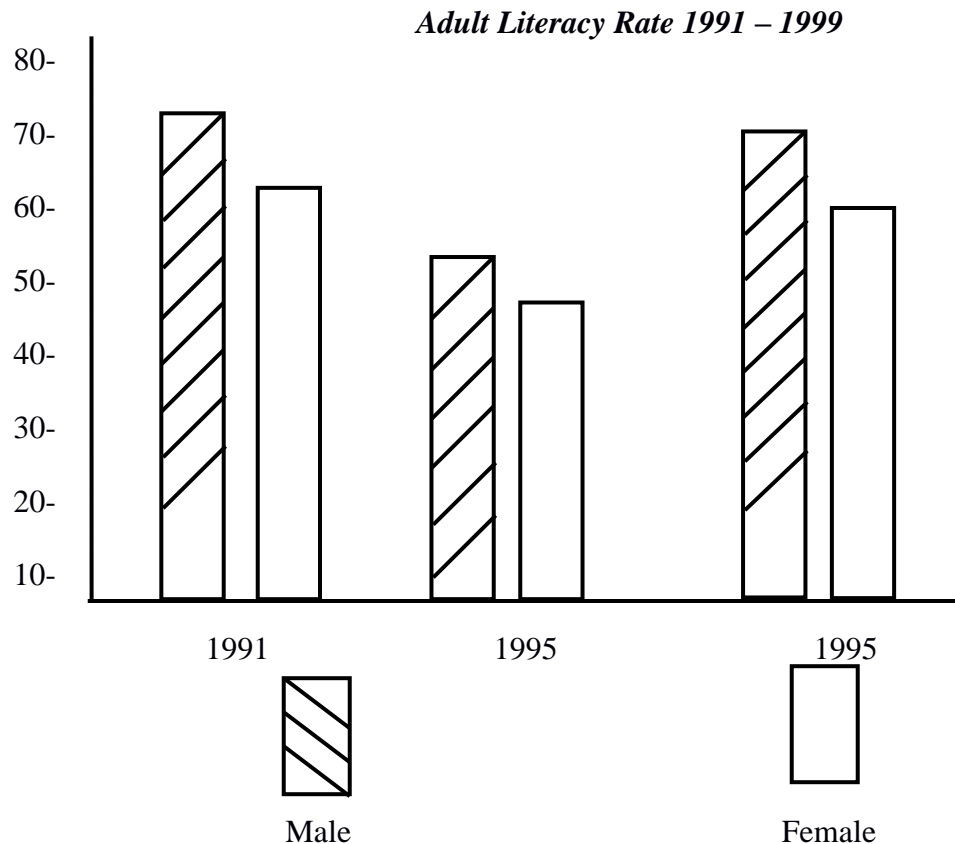
The political corruption of the leaders is widespread and it has been endemic to economic development and political integration. On the eve of independence, many Nigerians especially the leaders vehemently went against it an issue to be addressed. The soldiers who seized power in January 1966 accused the colonial regime of gross maleficence and promise to reform the administration. Subsequently, civilian and military leaders have made similar charges and claims. Some of them engaged in financial crimes and even collude with foreigners to destroy the economy of the country.

Thugery in politics, lack of commitment to democratic ideals, ethnicity, and bureaucratic inexperience all surfaced openly during the 1950s till the present. Bribery, nepotism and the use of political office for personal enrichment became the order of the day. The politicians exploit the ignorance of the masses to enrich their pockets. There was no focus on national unity, once the election is carried out; the party that emerged became the automatic enemy of the opponent party. Nigeria was groaning under heavy debt burden if not for the recent debt relief. There is widespread corruption in the society. Corruption is perpetrated into every level of the government. Late General Abacha's regime was characterized with looting of the Nation's treasury while his predecessors are not innocent. Today the democratic government was trying hard to discourage the perpetrators of evils.

Obasanjo's administration in 2005 has just announced the level of corruption in which some honourable members at the house of Senates and Representatives are involved in. This is an eye sore. The corruption cut across the levels of government parastatals. Unemployment is rising by leap and bound while education is receiving less attention leading to a drastic fall in the standard of education. Academic Staff Union of the Universities (ASUU) and Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) are always at loggerhead with the government, incessant strikes on another hand are uncountable. The number of literacy was declining daily as people, despise the government's cry in order to defile the government's effort and yearn for universal basic education.

The below graph adapted from the UNICEF handbook shows the declining rate of educational attainment in Nigerians from 1991 to 1999. In 1991 the abduct literacy was optimum satisfactory, it was above 75 percent for male and above 65 percent for female. The standard was drawn down in 1995 during the Babangida Regime because less attention was paid to adults' literacy. The educational programmes picked up again in 1999. The level has not yet stabled since then. There is a need for government to shift

more attention on education. Education had been one of the major factors that brought Japan to the limelight today and make him stand among the industrialized nations.



**Source:** NNPC and UNICEF 2011

The above graph which was copied from the UNICEF handbook shows the declining rate of educational attainment in Nigeria. The situation got worsen in 1995 and 1999 but later accelerated again in recent due to Covid 19 waves.

### **The Quality of a Good Leader:**

The provision of good leadership is crucial for national development. Power and influence can only be effective when leaders adopt pro-active communication with followership devoid of communication or coercion. A good leader must be objective, open-minded and confident. Among other attributes of a good leader are simplicity, humility, uprightness, and selflessness. At the birth of the commonwealth, the leaders build on the institution, the structure of government for the purpose of organizing the society. Later the institution then tried to mould leadership. Among the typical model example in today history are Gandhi Nehu of India, Thomas Jefferson of the United States, Winston Churchill (leader of New State) India got her independence in 1948 and Gandhi was a generation of his leaders that use token salary to develop the society and was able to give his nation a facelift.

He planned well, used both the spiritualism and closeness to his people and was able to forge ahead. Nigeria could emulate this. In Nigeria, Awolowo was an admirer of Nehu. Can we compare the above



people, their style of leadership with the first generation of leaders such as Azikwe, Awolowo, AhmaduBello? Awolowo believed that you need to have money to be able to fight capitalism.

For the purpose of this paper, there is a need to make mention of these charismatic and dynamic leaders such as Julius Nyerere of Tanzania, Winston Korea, Gandhi Lineage in India. All these dynamic and patriotic leaders were able to guide their citizens towards perceived national goals while leaders such as Mobutu Sese in Zaire, used alienation and exploitation policy with its anti-developmental consequences. Inept leadership pathetically demobilizes and alienates their citizens as it was experienced during Babangida and Abacha's regimes who stunt the process of development.

### Conclusion

A good leader must be purposeful and have the ability to direct. Alexander Pope once observed that "Let fools contest, what the best administered is the best" which means the political leadership must serve the greatest good of the greatest majority. Nations can only be built by patriotic members of government who has will and vision, not for self-centered and visionless group of people.

Nigeria needs a good leader that would have the capacity to plan, guide, manage and direct the society towards achieving the goals that would benefit the masses that constituted the bulk of the society.

It could be rightly said that what Nigeria has been having so far was the cosmetic change of leadership and not ridicule overhauling of the society. If the future of a country is to be secured, those leading it must work together on all matters affecting its wellbeing. They should put off selfishness, insincerity, intrigues and jealousy, and corrupt practices which weakened the society. A leader must have the love of those he leads in mind with a good spirit of brotherly love. It is high time Nigerian stopped seeing his brother as the enemy, competition must be replaced by cooperation and cooperation at all levels and regions. Nigerians need to be disciplined. Submitted that a disciplined behavior is that which is consistent with the prescribed norms of the society. Any society that desires development must not ignore discipline.

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