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Politics of State Survival and the Dilemma of Nation-Building in Post-Independence Nigeria

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Abstract:

The prevalence of a fractionalized international environment coupled with the fractured African geopolitical landscape and Nigeria's colonial antecedents laden with myriad unresolved structural challenges during the emergence of Nigerian statehood provided the vortex of post-colonial state survival inclination for the country. The above is usually associated with a typically hugely populated and ethno-culturally heterogeneous society, and it renders the country fatigued with the burden of nation-building. Thus, the twin-challenges of state-survival and nation-building have occupied and dominated the political and socio-economic affairs of post-independence Nigeria. The notion of state survival is a realist paradigm which compels nation-states to use all the instruments at their disposal to seek the retention of their national identity within the precarious and predatory international system. Nation building, on the other hand, entails the process of forging a common identity and a sense of national empathy, shared values, and cultures constituting a state. This paper contends that while the pursuit of state survival is propelled by the external environment in which Nigeria emerged and intricately subsists, the structural challenges inherited at independence, no doubt raised the task of nation-building. As complimentary as the two challenges featured and influenced the nation's policy commitments towards the local and international environments, a cursory examination of Nigeria's socio-economic and political trajectories since independence reveal that state survival has often been aggressively pursued at the expense of nation-building resulting into structural volatility which inadvertently threatened the nation's survival prospects. The position of this paper is that efforts should be made to balance these two ultimate challenges in the quest to reposition Nigeria towards the path of greatness.

Keywords: Nation-building, state survival, Nigeria, post-independence

1. Introduction

Bitter contestations and obvious lack of consensus displayed by nationalists and political leaders prior to independence had earlier provided an ominous glimpse into the uncertain future of post-independence Nigeria. Such unsolicited but candid opinions that described the emerging Nigeria as "a mere geographical expression; an artificial creation; the mistake of 1914; a forged union, union of incompatibles; unholy amalgamation; nation space and an afterthought"¹ summed up the fears and pessimism by architects of the Nigerian project that has been ushered into existence. Soon after the fleeting anxiety and excitement that heralded the birth of Nigeria, the entire landscape of the nascent state was soon enveloped with realities of its futility, fragility and transience. Thus, within the first decade of independence, there were widespread and monumental catastrophes in the social, political and economic scenes in which Nigeria lurched from one crisis to the other before it finally imploded into the devastating civil war of 1967 to 1970, which clearly signposted the fragility of country.

Like many other post-colonial African states of the era, Nigeria's numerous challenges derived mainly from unresolved colonial legacies of structural and institutional deficiencies. Nigeria was also plagued by the prevailing precarious and predatory international system at the time of acrimonious power-play and ongoing ideological and hegemonic contestations, which fostered the already fractured and fragmented African landscape, a burden of dependency and underdevelopment. Nigeria, like many other states that emerged on the African scene, continued to suffer imperial meddlesomeness that incurred the frightening multidimensional phenomenon of 'crisis of the African state'², which, in the opinion of Basil Davidson was "one of deep trouble, sometimes a bigger trouble than the worst imposed during the colonial years"³. Thus, from inception, the inherent weaknesses and fragility of the crisis-ridden post-colonial African state were exposed and, therefore, inclined towards 'politics of state-survival'⁴.

The hurried resort to nation-statism by departing colonial powers as a political framework created the structural dilemma for which many emergent pluralist African states, whose diverse peoples were forged into colonial states without recourse to their divergence and disparities. As a paradigm for self-determination, the nation-state had become a

shorthand consensus between nationalist agitators and unwilling but weakening colonial powers as well as the mediating powers, such as the United States -that perceived the idea to be pertinent and consistent with their intent to intensify the idea of universal liberalism as the trademark of the imminent world order. The outcome of this is the emergence of 'juridical statehood'⁵ in Africa that gave legal recognition to African states that, at the same time, lacked substance and attributes for autonomous existence and transformative development. The crisis of the state in Africa has continually been fostered by the crisis of nation-building, which led to the interrogation of the colonially established territorial nation and also the contradictions of fragility, artificiality and differences among co-ethnics⁵.

The task of nation-building in reversing the colonial legacies of weak foundation of nationhood that threatened the existence of complex and composite post-colonial states of Africa like Nigeria has posed a humongous challenge on how to reinvent the basis of coexistence on exigent and mutually agreed and acceptable terms.

Against the foregoing, this paper examines the quest for state survival and the daunting challenge of nation-building in the post-independence trajectory of Nigeria. Though state survival and nation-building are themes known to have been dominant in the policy postures of the country since independence, their conception as countervailing rather than complimentary options to sustaining the Nigeria project is identified as the major cause of the inchoate condition of Nigeria since independence.

2. The Colonial Background and Externalization of State Fragility in Africa

The evolution of states in Africa was practically as intriguing as the challenge of sustaining the states in the aftermath. As an offshoot of colonialism instituted by the imperial powers of Europe to subjugate Africa as the adjunct frontier of the colonial powers, the formation of the post-colonial African state was geared towards the continuing exploitation of people of the continent's imperial dependents. Africa came into the strategic reckoning of the leading mercantilist poachers in Europe following the extensive explorations of the world in the 15th century. Particularly, the discovery, conquest and full-scale occupation, as well as the establishment of plantation activities of the American continent, attracted European attention to the known parts of Africa as sources of regular supply of slave labour that was in high demand. The impetus to determine the fate of the African people whenever circumstances demanded a function of the manifest prerogative of the imperial powers of Europe apparently stemmed from the impudence and convenience by which African slaves were procured from their kinsmen and rulers who reigned as indigenous slave merchants. To Acemoglu and Robinson, it seemed plausible that there was a long history of institutions that undermined human and property rights in Africa. Moreover, "the potential to be captured and sold as slaves influenced the extent to which Africans trusted others, historically"⁶. This premise seems convincing to the imperial powers of their manifest providence to determine the fate of the African people whenever circumstances demanded it. Thus, when the mode of production changed during the Industrial Revolution of the 19th century, the European powers touted the inhumane nature of slavery as the moral pretext for jettisoning the slave trade. They did not waste further time declaring that they were embarking on a civilizing mission in Africa. Though, as morally tenable as it seemed, the actual underlying economic logic derived from the shift from an agrarian and manual mode of production to a full-fledged industrial economy, which had rendered slave labour rather irrelevant and non-lucrative. The acclaimed moral custodians of the African people considered the land of Africa as a potential source of raw materials needed to keep the European factories running. The burgeoning population of Africa was equally regarded as a promising market for surplus manufactured goods that were not absorbable into highly protective counterpart economies in Europe. The resultant geopolitical attention on Africa was the scramble, partition, and later apportioning of the continent among leading European powers. This was followed up by the institutionalization of colonialism, which enabled the occupation of the erstwhile sovereign lands as colonial possessions of the imperial powers, and the erstwhile royal citizens of Africa became dependent subjects. It is noteworthy that the entire process that led to the enthronement of colonial order was carried out unilaterally by the Europeans and legitimized by their Berlin Conference of 1884/85 without involving the African stakeholders.

Unlike in previous times, when the active collaboration and involvement of local chiefs and leaders facilitated the process of the slave trade unhindered, the process of entrenching colonial states in Africa led to a series of resistance initiated by various segments of African society. Notable among the groups were the local chiefs and traditional elites whose grouse was the manner in which their traditional suzerainty and territorial possessions were usurped by aliens. They were also joined by a class of wealthy merchants whose source of wealth was the slave trade, in which they massively participated and benefitted. This class of indigenous bourgeoisie was bitter about the alteration to their source of wealth brought about by a change in the European international political economy that colonialism symbolized. The workers and peasants constituted another group of opposition to colonial rule. Their disenchantment against the colonial authority was borne out of their discomfiting condition of service and the high tax exacted on them by the colonial system. This class became readily mobilized as foot soldiers in the struggle against colonial rule, particularly by the educated elites. The last prominent group was the returning educated elites whose privilege to receive education abroad, during which period they encountered black intellectuals and activists who influenced them to join the fledging groundswell of the pan-African movement that had taken root in America and the Caribbean. Having learnt about the unfortunate and undignified plights fostered on the Africans by the European international capitalist system from the periods of the slave trade to the emerging colonial order, the educated elites enthusiastically joined the grand resistance against all forms of European expansionism and imperial domination of Africans with the nostalgia to play a leading role in the final onslaught against the colonial system.

Consequently, the colonial system evolved elaborate strategies to deal with the challenge of popular resistance against it. Remarkably, the colonial administrators exhibited the machinations of pacification and divide-and-rule to

sustain the system. As a system that was established to pacify and facilitate the exploitation of the indigenous population, the colonial state devised the means of pacifying the African chiefs and kings by integrating them into the structure of governance by indirect rule. By the same token, the business elites were incorporated into the thriving transcontinental exchange of raw materials and manufactured goods between the African periphery and the metropolitan economies of Europe. The failure to pacify the educated elites on the basis of accommodation into the scheme of colonial administration set them on a path of prolonged agitations and confrontation with the colonial authorities. The grievances of the educated elites became accentuated by the events of the 1930s, principally the Great Depression and the Second World War, which, in their different ways, both exposed the perceived injustices of the colonial system against the educated elites in terms of participation and then by providing them with greater opportunities for participating. Aside from the educated elites, the two events also raised the awareness of the workers and peasants about the hardships that the colonial economy had inflicted and the opportunities to frustrate it. Thus, the educated elites seized the opportunity of the moment to appeal to the sentiments of workers and peasants by promising them improved material benefits and conditions. This would as well include alleviating their hardship and sufferings, indignity, exploitation and alienation associated with colonial rule. With the alliance between the educated elites and the peasants and workers, various political organizations and trade unions were formed to effect the upsurge of nationalism and intensification of the decolonization process⁷.

In the heat of nationalist agitations, the colonial powers of Europe, who were initially overwhelmed by the crippling effects of the Great Depression and later by the devastating effects of the Second World War, were drained of capacity to sustain imperial domination and consolidation of overseas territories. The war-wearied European powers could only condescend to increased pressure and agitations by nationalists for immediate termination of colonial rule. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the imperial clout of Europe declined and was eclipsed by the rise of the United States and the Soviet Union to global superpowers. In their own different ways, the new superpowers (who were previously excluded from the scramble for Africa) began to add to the pressures on European colonial powers to dismantle their empires. In addition to the factors stated above, the establishment of the United Nations in 1945 was also instrumental to the process of decolonization worldwide. According to Mazrui:

As the world body became more truly representative of the human race, colonialism became less and less legitimate. Almost every new member of the United Nations... was a voice against the old systems of empire. The Trusteeship Council of the world body became a major lobby against colonialism at large. The very rationale of the war as a struggle against tyranny and conquest seemed to be incompatible with colonialism: after all, colonialism was itself a form of tyranny and conquest. When Winston Churchill and Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the Atlantic Charter in August 1941, they were not only denouncing injustice in Europe... Even without realizing it, they were also signing the death warrant of the whole idea of 'legitimate colonialism' for the rest of the twentieth century⁸.

Baring the factors that drove the momentum for decolonization, the European powers, perhaps except Britain, did not envisage that their colonial possessions could crumble so rapidly to the forces of decolonization and, as such, could not work out a consensus formula on the planned nature of post-colonial African states. Thus, in their reluctance to abdicate colonial possessions, the departing colonial powers hurriedly put in place a Westphalian nation-state model, which, as a caricature successor to the colonial state, would continue to serve as an exploited periphery. The African nationalists were more fascinated with the prospect of taking over the reins of political power in the absence of colonial functionaries. They regarded the turn of events as a manifestation of their triumph over traditional elites in the long-drawn supremacy battle orchestrated by the 'divide-and-rule' machination of colonialism. Their readiness to be co-opted into the nation-state framework was to foreclose the rejuvenation of pre-colonial powers and prejudices which would have favoured the traditional elites, and instead, preferred the inherited post-colonial state arrangement that the perceived charismatic ability acquired through Western education would give them the advantage to manage.

Apparently, the process of nationalism was not nurtured with patriotism that is strong enough to stimulate the forging of national unity and a sense of purpose. Apart from serving as an opportunity for the educated elites to assert their ascendancy, it was also a process for them to engage in a struggle for succession without due consideration for the imperative. Indeed, the independence of African states produced a ruling class that emerged from the educated class segment of nationalist agitators who inherited the patterns of dominance that prevailed during colonial rule. Members of this fractious ruling class had to engage in grim factional battles for the control of state power. They placed too high a premium on political powers that would enable them to seek and use state power to achieve particular interests (personal, ethnic or sectional) at the exclusion of a vast populace whose input in the decision-making process could have expanded the platform for national rebirth. In order to avert the backlash of marginalization, which could challenge or upset their capacity to retain power, the governing elites in Africa became unduly sensitive to the strategy of state survival as the hallmark of governance in Africa since independence. State survival inclinations, which involve the resort to the regime and leaders' security and strategic focus on the preservation of territorial integrity, were contrived to alienate the majority of the people, divert the attention of the society from substantive issues such as reforms and reordering of the post-colonial state, and to also legitimize the flawed structure and institutions of colonial heritage. Against the expectation that a new dawn of freedom and progress was being ushered into reality, the mostly poor, weak and agglomeration of artificial states that came onto the international scene after independence were exposed to deeper miseries and despondency due to the process of nationalism, which transmogrified itself into nation-statism that subjugated Africa to the history of Europe rather than liberating and restoring Africa to its own history⁹. The African state thus formed on the European model produced what Davidson described as the 'curse of nation-state,' in which they failed to achieve legitimacy in the eyes of the majority of African citizens who are consequently forced to defend themselves by resorting to tribalism or

clientelism which in this estimation, has the capacity to sow chaos¹⁰. By this, the state entities in Africa were vulnerable and fragile from inception.

The crisis of vulnerability and fragility of the post-colonial African state soon assumed a glaring and seemingly insurmountable magnitude as its elements became increasingly interconnected and cumulative. First, there was a crisis of colonialism and capitalism, which started as a byproduct of the propensity to exploit and cart away the resources of Africa by the European powers. The African states, except for Ethiopia and Liberia, were the product of imperialist occupation. In their colonial form, African states were little more than a set of externally oriented, coercive and extractive institutions possessing narrow political economies centred on a handful of agricultural and mining activities. African states inherited an economic structure that was based on trading and extractive industries that favoured the imperial economies of Europe and North America at the expense of qualitative growth and development of the dependent economies of Africa. In the post-independence era, the structures for exploitation were sustained with the addition of Multinational Corporations and indigenous bourgeoisie. With this, the crisis of development that heightened in the post-colonial era was entrenched. Secondly, the nation-state model that was hurriedly put in place to afford the colonies the right to internationally recognized statehood merely by virtue of having been colonized, unlike in previous eras, when statehood was premised on the capacity of the state to sustain itself in the international system. "The post-colonial age, by contrast, upheld an approach to sovereignty whereby states were accepted as such simply on the basis of recognition by others. Thus, newly independent African states emerged at a time when the international standing of weak polities was being nurtured and affirmed"¹¹. Finally, exacerbating the weakness and fragility of the African state was the prevailing Cold War environment that was characterized by ideological and hegemonic contestations among the superpowers. The quest for geopolitical advantage by the protagonist superpowers led them to court neutral and usually weak states for the expansion of the ideological sphere, including the already weak states of Africa, which inevitably resulted in a high degree of external influence. In his assessment of African international politics, Christopher Clapham provided insight into how international considerations during the Cold War such as trade, aid, investment, arms purchases, and externally backed insurgencies -- shaped and determined the domestic political strategies of African rulers in search of resources to maintain themselves in power. He contended that African states and those who have ruled them have considerably been products of the international system¹². The coincidence of wars of succession in Congo (1960) and Nigeria (1967) immediately after independence through support for domestic forces that push for secession or cessation of state suggested the factor of external elements in the existential challenge to autonomous African states. It is against this background that Mazrui described the Nigerian civil war as a microcosm of world war with the following illustration:

The Biafra war was indeed a 'world war in microcosm' without the nuclear factor! French support for Biafra counterbalanced British support for federal Nigeria. Israel's material support for Biafra counterbalanced Egyptian pilots for the federal air force. South African and white Rhodesian support for Biafra counterbalanced the Organization of African Unity's concern for the territorial integrity of Nigeria. The Chinese also intervened for Biafra to counterbalance Soviet support for federal Nigeria. Indeed, the Soviet Union's strengthened intervention on the side of federal Nigeria coincided with Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia on the side of an unfragmented socialist world. The Second World of socialism and the Third World of underdevelopment were both embedded in the Brezhnev doctrine of proletarian internationalism. The Czech government had previously obeyed a Moscow order to deliver Delphin jet fighters and other weapons to the Nigerians. However, the Liberal Dubcek regime in Prague banned all arms sales to Nigeria in May 1968. Three months later, the Warsaw Pact forces invaded Czechoslovakia - and a reversal of policy occurred concerning the ban on Delphins to the federal side. The escalation of Soviet support for Nigeria was not due to Ojukwu's invasion of the mid-West or a counter-offensive into federal Nigeria. To the Soviets at that time, the defence of socialism in the Second World had become almost indistinguishable from the defence of national unity in the Third World - from Vietnam to Nigeria. However, although the Nigerian civil war came close to being a 'world war' in microcosm, we know that Uli Airport was its last frontier. It is worth reflecting that the British Empire had once been an empire over which the sun never set - given that the Empire was scattered over all the time zones of the globe. However, Biafra, despite its flag of the rising sun, was a republic over which the sun never really rose. Biafra died before its own dawn - despite Uli Airport, despite generating a 'world war' in microcosm. What it did demonstrate was Africa's incorporation into the wider world of global rivalries. It also showed that an African identity born out of racial humiliation and foreign domination was bound to be fragile and uncertain¹³.

The foregoing premise of colonial antecedents, the friction generated by divisive nationalism and nation-statism, and the prevailing hostile international environment, which tended to swallow the African states in the then ideological conflagrations, were responsible for the fragility of many African states at independence. Their prospect for continued existence has since been threatened by myriad unresolved structural challenges that colonialism bred and the predatory international system that fostered marginalization and vulnerability on them. Africa has consequently been described as a replica of a war-torn society, and hence, most often, it is included among the failed states of the world¹⁴. Indeed, the fragility that post-colonial African state has constantly acquired notoriety in the annual Fragile State Index - a yearly report by a Washington, DC-based think tank, which ranks 178 countries using 12 indicators of the risks and vulnerabilities faced by individual nations to include security, group grievances, economic decline and brain drain, uneven development, state legitimacy/human rights and rule of law, demographic pressures, internally displaced persons or refugee, and external interventions. These indicators assessed: "the vulnerability of states to collapse" by measuring "vulnerability in pre-conflict, active conflict and post-conflict situations"¹⁵. In the 2020 edition of the Fragile States Index,

out of the 20 most fragile nations, 16 are African states. The African countries that are identified and ranked in the order of world's most vulnerable and fragile states are Somalia (second), South Sudan (third), Democratic Republic of Congo (fifth), Central Africa Republic (sixth), Chad (seventh), Sudan (eighth), Zimbabwe (10th), Burundi (11th), Cameroun (12th), Nigeria (14th), Guinea (15th) Mali (16th), Eritrea (18th), Niger (19th), and Libya (20)¹⁶.

The issue of fragility has posed a serious challenge to the socio-political and economic trajectories of post-independence African states. Efforts to manage its implications have occupied the policy orientations of African leaders and states towards state survival inclinations that continue to stretch the capacity of the states to exist. The post-independence experience of Nigeria bears enormous testimony to this.

3. The Context of Fragility and State Survival Inclination in Post-independence Nigeria

A report of the World Bank, which included Nigeria as one of the failed states in its 1980 survey, also found out twenty-eight years later that those countries so identified were still failed and that they would likely require another twenty-eight years for a total of fifty-six years to fully recover¹⁵. In the context of Nigeria's over sixty years of statehood, while it is agreeable that the twenty-eight years recovery window has been exceeded, a cursory reflection reveals that the state of fragility is ahead of the prospect for stability. In the 2020 Fragile States Index, for instance, Nigeria is ranked 14th most fragile state in the world and the tenth in Africa. The ranking of Nigeria in this regard is particularly based on conditions which include uneven economic and social development, fractionalized elites, a failure to address group grievances as manifested through an active insurgency, and a perceived lack of public services and government legitimacy¹⁷. These conditions and more that stemmed from colonial legacy have been recurrent and persistent at every epoch of its six decades of independence. An insight into the colonial history and the fragmented structure it created would suffice in understanding the foundation of fragility that the post-colonial Nigeria has been contended with.

The pluralistic attribute of the Nigerian state is a product of the British imperial power, which brought several disparate and independent ethnic groups together for the purpose of colonialism. By the time of the amalgamation of the southern and northern boundaries in 1914, as many as approximately 350 relatively different and autonomous ethnic groups had been agglomerated into the entity called Nigeria. A former British colonial Governor-General, Sir Hugh Clifford, confirmed this in 1920 when he was quoted to have described Nigeria as:

A collection of self-contained and mutually independent native states separated from one another... by vast distances, by differences of history and tradition, and by ethnological, racial, political, social and religious barrier¹⁸.

Though the various groups prior to the advent of colonialism existed as distinct and independent societies in the forms of city-states, kingdoms, empires, etc., they were not in isolation from one another. Extensive political, trading, and other forms of interactions had developed among them, which stretched across the Sahara, and there were historical records of conflict and instability among them within the entity now known as Nigeria¹⁹. The major ethnic and linguistic groups among them are the three regionally distributed groups - the Hausa/Fulani (North), Yoruba (Southwest) and Igbo (Southeast). Other notable ones are Kanuri, Ibibio, Tiv, Ijaw, Nupe, Anang, Efik, and Kalabari. Significantly exacerbating the ethnic and linguistic milieu is the geographical and historical diversity among these various groups, which formed the basis of inbuilt structural friction and tension along ethnic, regional, cultural and religious boundaries spanning a collection of people with divergent histories and traditions. The newly created "Nigeria" was composed of diverse people with no common sense of nationality²⁰ with differing effects of colonialism on them, thereby producing the contrasting conditions that have been the hallmark of Nigeria since independence.

Nigeria eventually and pacifically achieved political independence in 1960 through a flawed transition process that was claimed to have compromised the country from birth²¹. The cacophonies of fears and pessimism about the imminent collapse of Nigeria that characterized the later period of decolonization were to manifest soon after independence when the constitutional and structural bequests were found to be insufficient to guarantee the stability and viability required of a state with a diverse group of peoples and cultures that had not attained full unity. The colonial institutional and structural legacies became the bane of social development and myriad structural challenges after independence. Rather than reversing the polarization of Nigeria along the fault lines that colonialism entrenched, the post-colonial ruling elites retained those elements as a means of entrenching themselves in power. It is the disparities and traditions of Nigeria's tribal and colonial past that significantly created the social tensions that have made establishing an integrated, coherent, and legitimate government difficult under the best of circumstances.

Nigerian leaders and policymakers at the dawn of independence realized the deficits and demands of legitimization usually faced by many other states in similar fragile situations. The demands for legitimization in this context are both domestic and external. The domestic demands expect the state to act in ways that correspond to the population's wishes and priorities, while the external demands of legitimization come from other states, international organizations, donors, etc. In such a situation, the expectations of the citizens do not correspond to those of external actors, thereby making it impossible to simultaneously satisfy the expectations of both. Thus, when a state like Nigeria does not have sufficient capacity to maintain internal cohesion and stability or goodwill to pacify particular aggrieved groups, it may then seek benefits from international legitimacy, tailored along international laws, regulations and rhetoric and constantly fed by externally tailored institutional models by which it may decide not to engage in efforts to negotiate, compromise and possibly integrate divergent groups or areas, into a structurally united and purposeful one²². Faced with this kind of dilemma, the governing elites in Nigeria prioritized state survival strategy through regime stability, leadership security and protection of territorial sovereignty in the hierarchy of legitimization above the more urgent and important qualitative reforms of the internal structure.

A demonstration of the cleavage between Nigeria's domestic and external constituencies is particularly demonstrated in the formulation of the underlying principles of foreign policy at independence. The policy elites, who were then faced with the dilemma of internal disunity, sought to project a wider pan-Africanist framework as a distraction from the constraints of internal instability. In this stead, Nigeria professed that the adoption of Africa as the centerpiece of its foreign policy framework was a result of the "inability of the leadership to draw upon any national value hierarchy or national objective in the formulation of an international 'role' which would enjoy the united support of the Nigerian nation (and, thereby, consolidate the domestic political stability), made a close commitment to the more abstract, and less domestically sensitive, continental whole Inevitable"²³.

The implications of the above cannot be oversimplified. From the beginning, the emphasis of the Nigerian government has been to garner sufficient international clout to cloak the survival of the state whilst jettisoning the more arduous task of building a united nation out of its plural composition.

4. Unending Dilemma of Nation-Building in Nigeria

Since independence, the issue of nation-building has been a recurring and dominant theme in Nigeria because the ultimate need of the country, owing to its plural nature, has been to forge into a unified entity and identity of disparate communities and diverse peoples who make up the country and whose members retain primary loyalties to their primordial units. The essence of nation-building is not lost to Nigeria and is not only limited to the role it is expected to play in the drive towards a united and purposeful entity. Nations are an essential part of modern society and the basic components of the contemporary world system, and historically, states that are formed out of the convergence of hitherto divergent and mutually exclusive groups aspire to place a premium on nation-building, usually to create nation-states or nations. The term has also been commonly used for mobilizing the support of unwilling citizens towards purported national needs. Importantly, because of the colonial history of Nigeria and the pluralistic structural challenges it created, nation-building is also identified as a panacea. Thus, in the Nigerian context, Nation-building may be said to refer to the process of constructing a shared sense of identity and common destiny, usually in order to overcome ethnic, sectarian or communal differences and to counter alternative sources of identity and loyalty.

Needless to reiterate the colonial system created structural imbalances within the nation in terms of socio-economic projects, social development and establishment of administrative centres. However, at independence, these imbalances deepened the antipathies between the various ethnic/linguistic and religious groups and the ruling elites, motivated mainly by selfish interest, readily played on these ethnic fault lines in pursuit of personal political and economic ends. Consequently, within six years of the country's independence:

Nigeria was a cesspool of corruption and misrule. Public servants helped themselves freely to the nation's wealth. Elections were blatantly rigged. The subsequent national census was outrageously stage-managed, and judges and magistrates were manipulated by those in power. The politicians themselves were pawns of foreign business interests... The structure of the country was such that there was an in-built power struggle among the ethnic groups and, of course, those who were in power. The easiest and simplest way to retain it, even in a limited area, was to appeal to tribal sentiments, so they were egregiously exploited in the 1950s and 1960s²⁴

The severe crisis of fragility and legitimization suffered by Nigeria at independence brought the imperative of nation-building to the fore following the outbreak of a thirty-month civil war between 1967 and 1970. This war was a secession attempt by an aggrieved section of the country and was the first major event that pushed the delicate structure of Nigeria to the limit. The war, apart from exposing the failure of the state and people of Nigeria to explore the instrumentality of nation-building to resolve colonially inherited structural challenges, also put on the front burners the essence of nation-building in the projection and realization of the national project.

Immediately after the war, which, accordingly, produced 'no victor, no vanquished', the then-ruling military declared the measures of Reconciliation, Reconstruction and Rehabilitation as the post-conflict nation-building drive. As laudable as these and other efforts appear, they did little to resolve the structural challenges faced by Nigeria from independence and assuage the feeling of alienation faced by many, which led to the civil war. In his reminiscence on the situation in Nigeria after the civil war, Achebe declared that the post-Nigeria-Biafran civil war saw a "unified" Nigeria saddled with a greater and insidious reality. To him, therefore, "We were plagued by a homegrown enemy: the political ineptitude, mediocrity, indiscipline, ethnic bigotry, and corruption of the ruling class²⁶.

Decades after the civil war, Nigeria's vicious circles of crises have been multiplying, mutating and mountainous. The ranking of Nigeria as one of the world's most fragile states in the 2020 Failed State Index indicates its failure to overcome the colonial structural heritage. It is also an indication that the several institutional, constitutional, symbolic, advocacy, coercive and other measures that have been put in place towards sustaining the state have not been particularly deployed to build a strong entity with a common sense of national identity, purpose and dedication among Nigerians as the diverse people are increasingly and particularly sensitive to primordial affiliations for identity, welfare, loyalty and security.

5. Conclusion

An appraisal of the post-colonial trajectories of Nigeria has indicated that the country has not escaped the persistent state of fragility state as manifested in the rise of suppressed nationalisms, ethnic or religious violence, humanitarian disasters, major catalytic regional crises, and the spread of dangerous weapons which rendered the country

a danger not only to its own people but also to her regional neighbors, and to the world economy and the vital interests of other nations in a highly globalized world²⁷.

Indeed, it is without a doubt that the failure of politics of state survival at the expense of consciously building a purposeful and united nation has widened the scope of national question and deepened the fragility of the country as witnessed in the open and brazen agitations for the dissolution of the country; the bulging youth population, unemployment and restiveness; high rate of insecurity; institutional and systemic corruption; poor infrastructures; raging militancy and insurgency in most parts of the country; resource control agitation; ethnic-based leadership recruitment process; incessant demands for restructuring and a new constitution; absence of the rule of law and abuse of judicial process; majority/minority imbalance; indigenes/settlers conflicts; poor economic performance; rising external debts and dependence on external aid, amongst others.

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