Historical Consciousness and Nigerian Political Stability

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Abstract

This paper examined the contributions of historical consciousness to the development of the Nigerian political terrain. Using the Nigerian example, it posits that a distinguishing feature of historical consciousness is in its quest to promote a sense of history among members of a given group or society. This enables it to play a significant role in the task of national development. It proceeded to demonstrate that promoting historical awareness could lead to greater political stability. Having demonstrated the role of historical consciousness to national development, the paper concluded that since development is a product of change, and the subject matter of history focuses on continuity and change, it follows that development can only be understood and appreciated within the context of history. It is this strategic role of history in facilitating development that makes historical societies incubators of development.

A Brief Overview of the History of Nigerian Government and Politics

The historical background of Nigerian government and politics involves both the pre-colonial and the colonial era in Nigeria. The pre-colonial era is the period before the coming of the

colonial masters to Nigeria while the colonial era is the period that colonial administration was established in the country (Nigeria). Before the advent of the European Colonial Masters on the coast of West Africa; there was established various system of government referred to as traditional political system in several parts of Nigeria and other parts of West Africa. These orderly advanced systems of government had all the organs of government established the principles of checks and balances characterizing some of them. Nigeria, prior to the imposition of the British colonial rule and carving the subsequent as a conglomeration of states, had about two hundred and fifty ethnic groups. Each of the ethnic groups maintained a different and independent system of administration.

The colonial era was the period British held sway in Nigeria. The scramble for and the partitioning of West Africa by the European powers acted as the genesis of the establishment of the colonial administration in West Africa. Apart from Liberia, all the West Africa countries were under the rulership of Britain, France, and Germany and at some time Portugal. These nations shared out West African countries as a result of its partitioning that took place during the Berlin Conference of 1884 and 1885.

In response to the call made at the 1890 Brussels Conference, the European nations that shared out West African countries sent their officials to these territories for effective occupation and that was the commencement of the colonial rule or indirect rule in West Africa. Therefore, the period of 1885 to 1950s served as the period of indirect rule in West Africa. This period witnessed political and economic dehumanization for the people of West Africa. This explains why the colonial era has a great impact on the pattern of administration in Nigeria. This clearly means that in the beginning of the Nigerian entities before the arrival of the colonial masters, the people who lived in the territories today called Nigeria were not in any serious conflict with any group hence, there was none to compete with around them. Catherine Coquery-Vidrovitech observed that both the organization of African societies and their modes of production varied among themselves and resembled neither the feudal societies of Europe nor the 'Asiatic' model of Max. Jack Goody in the same vein also observed that feudal societies were not found in Africa. For us, we would say that for the first time, African Societies did not follow the dictates of any economic mode of production, whether European or Asiatic.

Initially, the different ethnic groups were living in small autonomous villages of 100 to 500 persons in different geographical locations without any problem of envying or being jealous of one-another, hence their locations were far apart. For instance, the Hausa, Yoruba and the Igbo were located far apart so that there was no need for chauvinistic feelings. It was the colonial masters who gradually gathered these ethnic entities in Provinces, Protectorates, Regions and finally brought them together under one geo-political entity and governed by one person, using a common treasury.

The origin of ethnicity began with the evolution of the Nigerian federalism. It was Sir Bourdillon who initiated the idea of federalism for Nigeria in 1939. He divided the country into Provinces and Regional Councils along the three major ethnic groups.

According to Nwabughogu (1996, p. 49): Bourdillon himself now begun to develop the federal idea… which would provide for Regional councils in the Provinces, with a Central Council in Lagos… Bourdillon took a practical action to implement his ideas. He divided the protectorate of Southern Nigeria into: Eastern and Western provinces… But he had not yet built a true federal structure before he left Nigeria in 1943. For he still left the North intact, thereby worsening the imbalance which is inimical to the growth of a true federalism. Nevertheless… Bourdillon had created a skeleton of a federation.

The federal structure which Bourdillon laid, generated the notion of divide and rule. The West and East were initially intact as the Southern Protectorate but it was later divided into Yoruba (West) and the Igbo (East). However, the Hausa/Fulani (North) was left intact and larger than the East and the West put together. One question which remains unanswered is the non-division of the Northern Region. Perhaps the Hausa/Fulani ethnic group was the dominant group in the North. This   led to the withdrawal of the East from the West thereby assuming ethnic identity. By 1951, Nigeria was already clearly structured into three major regions: The Northern Region (Hausa/Fulani); the Western Region (Yoruba) and the Eastern Region (Igbo). These major ethnic Regional entities became the basis for many political administrative and economic policies in Nigeria.

These three regions played politics of ethnicity against themselves and manoeuvred the central government to attract attention. Buttressing further on the ethnic consciousness created by the British colonial masters, Ekeh (2004, p. 21) said that: in the old Provincial Administration of Eastern Nigeria before 1950, the component ethnic groups developed separately. Ibos were largely separated from the Ijaw; the Efik and the Ibibios in Calabar Province and several other small ethnic groups in Ogoja Province had their own administrative Divisions in the Region. With the political changes of the 1950s, all such ethnic autonomous in Eastern region were dissolved. The rationalization that occurred turned the Igbos into the majority ethnic group, both demographically and politically.

Just the same way the Igbos emerged as the dominant ethnic group in the Eastern Region, the same thing applied to the Yoruba in the Western Region. Initially, the Yoruba was not the dominant ethnic group in the Western Region. According to Ekeh, (2004, pp. 19-20): Western Nigeria had six Provinces: four of these were Yoruba, two of them Benin and Warri Provinces were areas that had very little contact with the Yoruba before colonial rule. With colonialism there was considerable labour migration that brought Yoruba and non-Yoruba in the Western Region into contact. However, politically, the Provinces including the Yoruba ones were administered separately. All these political arrangements changed dramatically with the political rationalization of Nigeria, beginning in 1954, that dissolved provincial administrative autonomy. In a spate of a few years, the Yoruba emerged as the political power of Western Nigeria and the non-Yoruba ethnic groups of Warri and Benin Provinces became ethnic minorities. The reactions from the new minority ethnic groups in Warri and Benin Provinces were varied. While a Yoruba-led political party, the Action Group had members among the Yoruba linguistic kinsfolk of Itsekiri, and support from the Northern Benin Province and the Urhobo in Warri, the majority Yoruba, and the new minority groups in Delta and Benin Provinces were fiercely in log ahead (Ekeh, 2004, p. 22).

Another factor that gave birth to ethnic sentiment was the incorporation of Nigeria into the world capitalist system. This meant that the British colonial masters needed raw materials from their African colonies to feed their home industries at the same time look out for market to dispose of their finished goods which were brought from Europe for sale. To get away with the raw materials from Nigeria they need to move the raw materials from their different production joints to the seaport or hinterlands for evacuation to Europe. The process of gathering the raw materials necessarily required the establishment of infrastructures such as roads, railways, and telecommunications. The people were coerced into forced labour to be part of these public works, besides, the local people needed money (the British currency) to pay the taxes that were imposed on them by the colonial masters. This resulted to several persons migrating from the rural areas to the urban centres were there were job opportunities in the European railway constructions and other public works.

As a result of this rural-urban migration, the urban cities became a place of high concentration of the different ethnic groups who came to work. The different ethnicities began to identity with themselves in groups. It was at this time that ethnic and cultural organizations were formed in the cities by the different ethnics to pursue their common goals. These ethnic unions later became powerful unions/ associations to the extent that they started responding to the needs of their members beyond what the government could do for them. Some of these unions were the Idoma Hope Rising (for the Idoma ethnic group); the Egbe Omo Oduduwa (for the Yoruba ethnic group), the Tiv Progressive Union (for the Tiv ethnic group,) Jamyyan Mutanen Arewa (for the Hausa/ Fulani ethnic group). It is clearer now that, ethnic sentiments in Nigeria today have a genesis in the political and economic activities which were the reasons for colonization and imperialism. So, ethnicity cannot be totally separated from colonialism. It was colonialism that forcefully brought the different ethnic groups who were initially separated, together to be governed. It was this forced union of the various ethnic groups that have generated sentimental feeling by the ethnic group against the others.

By 1948 and 1951 the colonial masters gave the nationalists the go ahead to form political parties. For instance, the Egbe Omo Oduduwa "a Pan-Yoruba" organization whose aims included the effort to ensure a "big tomorrow" that would enable the Yoruba people to hold their own among other tribes in Nigeria, suddenly transformed into a political party knows as Action Group (AG). Invariably the AG was a Western Nigeria Yoruba based political party. Chief Obafemi Awolowo was the leader of the Western Region and AG.

In the Northern Region, the Hausa/ Fulani cultural/ ethnic organization, Jamyyan Mutanen Arewa became a political party known as the Northern People's Congress (NPC). The North was led by Sir Ahmadu Bello who was also the political leaders of NPC. In the Eastern Nigeria Region, the Igbo ethnic Union, the Igbo State Union which was headed by Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe became a political party for the East, known as (National Council for Nigeria and Citizens NCNC).

By 1959 when the Federal General Election was to be conducted, it was on these three ethnic based political parties that the elections were conducted. That is the NPC, NCNC and AG. After independence, it was very clear that Nigeria politicians had not learnt their lessons on the implications of living on ethnically based political parties. Nigeria is a greatly divided country. This division is accompanied with serious suspicion, distrust, and antagonism among its diverse people. These problems have had grave consequences for the development, stable democratic government, unity and survival of the nation. The different measures and approaches designed and employed by successive Nigerian governments to unite and preserve and generally keep the country afloat cannot be said to have been really effective as the polity is daily faced with increasingly monumental crisis of insecurity, sectarian violence, ethnic strife, political instability and threats of disintegration.

A united country and people are in a better position to ably confront its crisis of development, nationhood and stability. A strong historical consciousness of the political leaders and the generality of the people to do this with the appropriate frame of mind and instrumentalities are crucial for a successful and lasting result.

Implication of Historical Consciousness for Nation-building in Nigeria

Nigeria party politics has been polluted by ethnic chauvinism. This problem is one of the major qualms confronting the progress of liberal democracy in Nigeria since 1960, to the extent that ethnic sentiment has gradually crept in to find a place in every facet of Nigerian political activity.

Ethnic sentiment has been one of the factors responsible for most of the inefficiencies and low productivity in Nigeria. Since the end of the Nigerian civil war, Nigeria has moved from one crisis to another owing to contradictory steps taken by past governments. Perhaps the most serious problems in Nigeria today which have made nation-building a mere construct are the issues of ethno-regional affiliation and religious crisis. One of the factors that have seriously dampened the image and glory of Nigerian party politics is ethnicity. The first open display of ethnic chauvinism in Nigerian party politics was the Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in 1941 when the party broke-down due to ethnic feelings.

The major factors responsible for the post-independence economic and political turbulence in Nigeria: were the shaky tripartite federal structure with strong regions, disparity in the sizes and populations of the three regions; three regionally based and tribally sustained political parties and a weak political class driven by ethnic ideologies. According to Omotola (2010, p. 135) the issue of ethnic politics in Nigeria started with the 1964 election when Nnamdi Azikiwe was denied the premiership of Western region after his party, National Council for Nigerian Citizen (NCNC) in alliance with United Progressive Grand Alliance (UPGA) and some elements of the Action Group (AG) won the election. Subsequent political activities that followed this action were tailored towards ethnic mobilization. The political party formation in the Second Republic in Nigeria followed ethnic affiliation of Igbo and Yoruba suspicion among the two leading ethnic groups. Subsequent party formation has continued to follow this trend – Yoruba elements affiliating with political parties based in their region, the same with Igbo and Hausa. In the North, National Party of Nigeria (NPN) paraded a large number of the Hausa or Fulani stock; there was the Nigeria People's Party (NPP) in the East whose composition was basically Igbo and the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) whose members were predominantly Yoruba.

The ethno-regional divide which was supposed to have gone with the creation of States between 1967 and 1996 now defines Nigerian national identity. Since the nation does not have a common denominator, for instance, national dress or culture, to which Nigerians can identify themselves, most Nigerians prefer to seek socio-cultural relevance in their ethnic nationalities. What exists in Nigeria today, according to Iwilade (2007) is a conglomeration of mutually exclusive social groups with fixations on primordial bonds that drive them to communal conflict and deep suspicion. Thus, the intensity of ethnic mobilization in Nigeria makes historical awareness imperative. The need for our leaders to be sensitive to the History of ethno-regional consciousness and subsequent mobilization which has become a fashion in Nigeria becomes more urgent. The formation of socio-political groups such as Igbo Youth Congress (IYC), Odua People's Congress (OPC), and Arewa People's Congress (APC) which present the triadic ethnic groups in Nigeria is an indication that the current efforts at nation-building require more than good leadership. Nigeria needs more than mere slogans and jingles to be able to weld together the pervasive cracks seen to be conspicuous in its political structure.

Ethnic consideration in Nigeria today is more important than who one is and what he can deliver. The demand and desperation for the creation of states and local government councils in Nigeria over the years has been provoked by ethnic marginalization. In Benue State for instance, the Tiv ethnic group is the dominant group in the state, it has been producing the civilian executive governors since the creation of the state. In the First Republic the chief executive was Aper Aku, in the Third Republic it was Moses Orshio Adasu, in the Fourth Republic it was George Akume and then Gabriel Suswan. The Idoma who are a minority group have been crying foul over the political marginalization in the state. They feel the way out is the creation of 'Apa State' a project they have been upon for a long period now. This is just one case out of the several calls from minority ethnic groups for state creation.

Ethnicity also affected the allocation of the federal resources in the first republic, because the Hausa/Fulani was in charge of the administration in the First Republic, they used the opportunity to allocate most of the federal funds for the development of the Northern Region than they did to other regions. Ethnicity has also been seen as a major factor behind most of the civil unrest in the democratic journey of Nigeria. According to Imobighe (2003:14) and Alebo (2006): ethnic and inter-communal conflicts have become so pervasive that there is hardly any part of the country that has not been affected. It is now generally understood that Nigeria is grappling with rising wave of ethnic bloodshed in which well over 2000 people have died since military rule ended in 1999.

Another effect of ethnicity on the Nigerian polity is that it has heightened political competition in electoral contest. Most ethnic groups insist on winning election by duress especially in their regions, creating tension in the polity. According to Hembe (2003, p.110): the contestants sought power by projecting themselves as champions of this or that ethnic group, thereby splitting the country into hostile ethnic blocks. The struggles were spearheaded by Regional governments and the leaders chose to rationalize them in ethnic rather than intra-class terms (Nnolim, 1978).

Furthermore, Hembe (2003, p.110) citing Onobu (1975) said that: Each party sponsored and supported ethnic minorities in order to destabilize the areas dominated by others, thereby promoting the proliferation of ethnic sentiments and the growth of ethnic tension throughout the country. It is obvious therefore that ethnicity has affected every aspect of the governing process in Nigeria. It will be highly deceptive for anybody to think that ethnicity is not harmful to Nigeria and its quest for development. Ethnicity has given rise to a dysfunctional effectiveness among the elite to pursue a common cause. Nigeria would have been independent before 1960 if the zeal of the nationalist was not tampered with given the ethnic tension in Nigeria Youth Movement in 1914.

Shortly after the Civil War, Nigeria introduced a number of policies in its nation-building efforts. Some of these policies were; changing the location of the capital of Nigeria, from Lagos to Abuja, changing National currency, from British currency to Nigerian currency. Among these policies is also the establishment of National Youth Service Corps programme specifically designed for the orientation and integration of young graduates with first degree, to achieve exposure of the corps members, to other zones of the country and to mix freely around their places of primary assignment. Nigeria developed a language policy that compels secondary school students to study one of the major languages outside their ethnic nationalities, and primary school pupils are to be taught in their language of immediate environment, while it forbids any allegiance to a national religion. Other major policies are centralization of certain institutions even when the country pretends to be operating federal constitution, non-ethnic census to avoid disintegration and land indigenization policy. These policies evolve because they were taught to be capable of knitting together the diversities inherent in the country's political structure. Nevertheless, ethnic consciousness and mobilization have rendered the policies ineffective.

The issue of nation-building is contentious in Nigeria. Bandyopadhyay and Green (2008) explained nation-building in terms of "'nation integration' in societies with multiple ethnic, religious and racial cleavages". It may be difficult for Nigeria to weld together its different ethnic groups owing to what Mustapha (2006, p. 46) classified as the problem of ethnic mobilization. The most challenging issue today is suspicion among the three major ethnic nationalities and this is best illustrated by the view of some individuals from Southern Nigeria who contend that the federal structure as presently constituted does not allow each region to

develop at its own pace. This feeling from a section of the country constitutes a wrong signal which is capable of destroying the corporate existence of the country. Perhaps the historical knowledge of our past may help to reduce this tension.

Ethnic sentiment was deliberately introduced in the polity by the British colonial government to realize imperialist economic and political objectives. Since the end of colonialism in 1960, Nigeria has carried forward the spirit of ethnicity into the post-colonial Nigeria. This has been discovered to be responsible for most of the political, administrative, economic, social and cultural maladies in Nigeria. It is suggested that ethnic sentiment phenomenon should be strongly discouraged while Federal Character principles be implemented with sincerity at the federal, state and local government levels in other to remove the age long ethnic unrest in the governance of Nigeria.

Historical consciousness therefore seeks to achieve integration and in the case of Nigeria to reduce tension among the various ethnic groups in the country. Atofarati (1922) seemed to have captured the minds of the Nigerian leaders when he said that "the Nigerian authorities believe that the past can be ignored, that no mistakes of the present can be as serious and grievous as the mistakes of the past." Historical awareness creates potentiality for citizens to promote social reconstruction in society.

Presently, Nigeria is trying to promote social construction through transformation project which involves the use of jingles, rallies and propaganda. Gambari (2006) believed that Nigeria may go beyond the present approach (use of jingles and rallies) to reconstruct its society by taking a trip to the past in order to improve the understanding of the present, examine the present with a view to gaining insights into the future, anticipate the future in order to better prepare for its many challenges. This is where historical consciousness becomes inevitable.

History is about memory of the past, and as Oyerami rightly puts it, history is having memory and being able to build a future from the memory. Its teaching is essential in Nigeria schools, at least if only to arrest the drift in Nigeria's political life.

Historical Perspective of Elite Formation in Nigeria

In pre-colonial Nigeria societies, the natural rulers and chiefs, traded in slaves and palm oil and were able to hold their kingdoms together. They include, King Kosoko of Lagos, King Jaja of Opobo, the Awujale of Ijebu, Oba Ovonramwen of Benin, Attahiru II of the Sokoto Caliphate, King Amachree of Elem Kalabari, King Ibanichuka of Okrika, King Koko of Nembe, King Perekule of Bonny and the educated elite. However, latter development shows that they merely united because they had common enemy- the British. As soon as the Europeans left, this unity collapsed. Each leading nationalist wanted to achieve power using the people of their ethnic nationalities as the base. This shows that what was taken as unity of purpose by Nigeria nationalist's elite was only illusion.

Fundamentally, the educated elite headed all functionaries of governments. Everywhere the educated elite are viewed as essential elements of the political and social life of the country and in every country, the stability of the nation and its regime seem to depend in a large measure on way in which the elite is organized and fits with the other sectors. Essentially, elite formation is legitimated by their identification with most pervasive goals in the society. The Elite therefore is a nexus of need fulfilment that binds situational demands and groups membership. Thus, the failure and success of national development depends on the effectiveness of their elite in knitting together political influence so that it responds to functional demand on the system. Indeed, the quality of a nation's elite and the image which they project upon the world constitutes an important source of power. As Stoessinger said: "No amount of manpower or

industrial or military potential will make a nation powerful unless its elite use their resources with maximum effect. China and America's development status is a function of their elite cohesion on national development exploit".

It is sad that Nigeria has never been lucky enough to have a coherent system of choice in politics and economics. This prevented the emergence of leaders who will take the country as their constituency. Nigeria has paraded political class that regard themselves as the canonical representative of their personal and ethnic interests. Today politicians organize their kinsmen to make various demands on the state. Rather than coming together to transform the nation economically, they mobilize their tribal forces under sub-national organization which threatens national survival.

The Role of Historical Consciousness in Stabilizing the Polity

This paper believes that the only option left for Nigeria in its bid for nation-building is to go back to its history, something that has effectively been done in other countries of the world. Omotola (2010, p. 145) succinctly explains the steps taken by Nigeria to achieve nation-building, namely;

a) Constitutional adoption of secularism which seeks to promote a culture of religious pluralism, and

b) Federal character principle which seeks to promote ethnic pluralism through balancing of ethnic representation in government establishments at all levels. These efforts have had little or no effects on nation-building in Nigeria.

We study history to acquire knowledge, as well as some basic data about the forces of change, we emerge with relevant skills and an enhanced capacity for informed citizenship, critical thinking, and simple awareness. We need to study it in order to make progress, even though this progress may take years in materializing. Clearly, history enables us to plan for the future. In interrogating the purpose of history, J.H. Plumb opined that history seeks to 'deepen understanding about men in the society, not for its own sake, but in the hope that a profound awareness will help to mould human attitudes and human action' (Plumb 1971, p. 106).

The reason why historical consciousness is being considered a viable option may be found in Bandyopahyay and Green's (2011, pp. 2-9) reported on the policies of nation-building in post-colonial Africa. In this report, nine nation-building policies in post-colonial Africa, namely, changing states names, changing capital cities' names and location, changing national currencies, conscription and national service, religious and linguistic homogenization, republican and centralization policies, one-party states, non-ethnic census and land nationalization were considered for possible use to help nation-building. They examined each of these policies to see their contributions to nation-building in some countries in Africa. Their findings suggest that the "nation-building policies do not promote political stability and may in some cases even promote instability, as for instance in the positive correlation between higher levels of education and ethnic violence" (Bandyopahyay and Green's 2011:19). They argued that "promoting political stability in Africa is a long and difficult process and is not one that can be easily achieved through select policies" (Bandyopahyay and Green's 2011, p.19).

History was a critical weapon for deconstruction of the psychological colonialist construct that sought to undermine African achievements and thus provide the ideological basis for colonial rule. The challenge of Kenneth Onwuka Dike's era was one in which Africans were faced with the superiority toga of the Europeans as justification for colonialism. The history that was propagated at the time succeeded in the task of demythologization of European stereotypes

about the African past. As noted by Adiele Afigbo, the ability of the historian to rise to the challenge of demystifying colonialism and shattering its basis provided the needed intellectual and psychological succour for the African (Afigbo 1975, p. 4). For the European, it extricated from him the socio-political and moral basis on which to continue his colonial enterprise in Africa. The ability to meet this challenge, brought historians of the era into prominence as defenders and heroes of the larger society. They were not merely knowledgeable but also transformed this knowledge into skills for proffering solutions to contemporary problems. This partly explains why historians of Dike's period were found in virtually all walks of life. The point to emphasize is that history was a veritable tool in the struggle to secure Nigeria's independence.

After independence, new challenges of development and national integration emerged. Unfortunately, there was no follow up after the colonialists left the scene. The nation is quick to forget the role history played in the past to deploy historical knowledge in combating new challenges of post-independence. However, the gap created by military rule deprived us of the benefits of historical knowledge. Consequently, history began to play a minimal role in our national life. Decisions on several aspects of our national lives were taken without recourse to our past experiences. The consequence is the persistent crisis that have enveloped and pervade the socio-economic spheres of the country.

For knowledge to triumph and become useful for the transformation of society, it must be rooted in tradition. From philosophy we know that the codification of knowledge emerged from rational and logical thought processes, which may have been derived from randomized observational behaviour, experimentation and practice.

The concept of *Sankofa* is derived from Adinkra of the Akan people of West Africa. Sankofa is transliterated in the Akan language as '*se wo were fi na wosam kofa a yenki'*. Literally translated, 'it is not taboo to go back and fetch what you forgot'. Sankofa is used today across the pan-African world to promote the idea that African people must *go back to their roots in order to move forward*. Visually and symbolically 'Sankofa' is expressed as a mythic bird that flies forward while looking backwards with an egg (symbolizing the future) in its mouth. This concept is used to buttress the point that, as African peoples, our destiny lies in understanding and appreciation of our history. No civilization current or past has achieved any significant development based on rejection of its indigenous culture, worldview and history, and wholesale importation of foreign ideas and ways of life. Sankora reminds us to go back to our roots and claim what is rightfully ours rather than uncritically accepting what the West and Islamic civilizations handed down to us.

Until about seventy years ago, political science, government and international relations were taught as diplomatic history. The relationship between history and a nation's development is very well summarized thus: …History interacts with the nation for the nation is a product of history in the sense of historical circumstance and event and therefore the nation cannot escape from its past. At the same time, the nation is shaped by the effort of history among others, who try to establish the history of the nation, influence its group memory and seek to define its nationality. This is the essence of what binds its people together what constitutes their identity, what makes them a people distinct from other peoples (Ade-Ajayi 2005, p. 3).

Indeed, what historical understanding does essentially for any nation is to place its development predicament within national time perspectives of human evolution. This is the utility value of history. History also helps people not to under-value what they had and over-value what they are not. It provides confidence-building strategies to any nation that is striving to overcome present problems. As has been briefly demonstrated, history is crucial for national development.

Apart from the opportunity offered to investigate in greater details the myriad of conflicts that have characterized Nigeria's postcolonial experience, the crucial resource control conflict in the Niger Delta received considerable attention. In addition to appropriately historicizing the conflict, possible solutions were proffered. For example, to the insinuation that the Niger Delta people are lazy and unable to take advantage of the new opportunities that arose with the exploration and exploitation of crude oil and gas came a reply that was anchored on the people's history. We are quickly reminded that the Niger Delta peoples were arguably the most enterprising merchants, who dominated the economic scene in the Nigerian geographical area throughout the periods of the slave trade and palm oil trade. Indeed, Bonny played a leading role during this period. Dike reminds us that at the peak of the slave trade, Bonny had the largest slave market in the world. The merchants of the Niger Delta travelled as far as the Igala country and criss-crossed the entire Nigerian coastline. Surely, their historical experience indicates that their forebears were widely travelled merchants imbued with a substantial dose of the business acumen. Alagoa has noted that the commercial activities of the Niger Delta peoples were to significantly shape their socio-political structures.

G.I. Jones refers to the state systems they evolved as trading states. Again, we are reminded that the determination of the people in the region to control their resources dates back to the last quarter of the nineteenth century when they resisted European incursion and control of their perceived resource at the time-strategic location. It is for this reason that leaders like Nana Olomu, King Jaja of Opobo and Oba Ovarenmwen of Benin were all exiled by their British conquerors.

Conclusion

Part of the subject matter of history is the study of change and continuity in society. Development is necessarily a product of change. However, for it to be relevant and meaningful to society, it must have some elements of continuity, even if only at the level of ideas that have informed such development. Implicitly, development is not possible and cannot be appreciated outside the context of history. History therefore studies development and determines when it has taken place. For, as is now apparent, not to have a sense of history is to remain a child forever. It is a case of not knowing about the past, and so comprehending the present is impossible. This means that there cannot be a platform for planning for the future.

The difference between a politician and a statesman is their sense in history. The politician can only work for today, but the statesman has a memory of the past and a vision of tomorrow. He or she uses history as a rear-view mirror, to chart the way forward for his society.

History should be studied because it is essential to individuals and to society as it helps us to understand people and societies. In the first place, it offers a storehouse of information about how people and societies behave. A person with historical consciousness will sift through historical documents; study how similar scenarios played out elsewhere, what was done there and how it was countered. He will also strive to understand the role that belief systems play in shaping individual and family lives. By studying several societies where similar situations subsist, a conclusion can be drawn with solutions provided on how to address the situation.

History also serves as a platform for moral contemplation. Studying the stories of individuals and situations in the past allows a student of history to test his or her own moral settings. People who have weathered adversity, not just in some work of fiction, but in real historical circumstances can provide inspiration that can galvanize an entire nation. The late Nelson Mandela of South Africa is a classic example that most people can easily recollect. Sir Winston

Churchill, former Prime Minister of Great Britain's singular role in rallying his people to confront Nazi Germany during the Second World War also readily comes to mind.

In galvanizing a nation as complex as Nigeria – no singular attitude is necessary than having a sense of identity; history provides this, which is unquestionably why modern nations encourage its teaching in varied forms. Historical data include evidence about how families, groups, institutions and whole countries were formed and about how they have evolved while retaining cohesion. One key area that we need to have a positive sense of the subject is in the area of good citizenship. This is the most common justification for the place of history in school curricula. Sometimes advocates of citizenship history hope merely to promote national identity and loyalty through a history spiced by vivid stories and lessons in individual success and morality. But the importance of history for citizenship goes beyond this narrow prism. It provides data about the emergence of national institutions, problems and values which offers evidence how nations have interacted with other societies, providing international and comparative perspectives essential for responsible citizenship.

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