

**REVISITING HISTORY IN THE RECONSTRUCTION OF NIGERIA'S
CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT**

BY

ERINOSHO, Timothy O. PhD

Department of History and Diplomatic Studies

College of Humanities

Tai Solarin University of Education

Ijagun, Ogun State, NIGERIA

email:timothyerinosho@gmail.com

Mobile: +2348065602523

Abstract

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

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

Introduction

The contemporary Nigerian society requires urgent attention regarding revamping the relationships between and among individuals, groups, civil liberty organizations, and more importantly intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic contacts. The current Nigeria's social environment is

not conducive for accomplishing any meaningful task aimed at moving the country to nationhood. Before any nation-state can record remarkable advancement in the economic, socio-cultural, technological, strategic and other areas, its social environment must not be characterized by tension, rancour, ethnicity, educational backwardness, rioting, moral bankruptcy, sectarian cleansing or religious fundamentalism, absence of caring for the needy, unemployment among several other problems such as confronting the contemporary Nigerian society. Where and when these challenges rear up their ugly heads, there will be no commitment, patriotism, self-sacrifice and lofty ideas on the part of the citizens towards nation-building.

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

The present bastardization and polarization of the Nigerian social environment have been exacerbated by the neglect of the study of the Arts and Humanities among which History as an academic subject or discipline occupies a pride of place in the nation's academic curricular at all levels. If this situation has not arisen, Nigerians, particularly pupils and students (the young adults) would have had the opportunity to know that Nigerians related in the pre-colonial era harmoniously and as a result, they were not total strangers as the British colonial grandmasters and their imperial errand boys had demonstrated. It is imperative to state that until recently (2019) when the Federal Government rekindled its interest in the discipline when it was re-introduced at both the primary and secondary levels, the utter neglect of History and its practical erasure from the academic map at the tertiary level was deliberate as the subject was not taught at the primary school and junior secondary school levels, while it was paired with Geography and Literature in English at the Senior Secondary School level, thereby making it optional (Erinosho, 2011:444). It was against this backdrop that Obaro Ikime formerly of the History Department, University of Ibadan had retorted as far back as 1986:

How young people who have never been taught history are expected to suddenly fall in love with the subject at senior secondary school level? Only the designers of our educational system can tell us... Gradually, government will kill the teaching of the history of its own country (*The Guardian*, 1986:3).

The lukewarm attitude of the government, parents and practically the general public towards the Humanities, History inclusive, has contributed to the social and political anarchy confronting the country particularly the harrowing experiences of the jobless graduates thousands of whom have become dangerous in the society. As Erinoshio (2016:2) avers:

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

It is therefore important to carry out rigorous re-engineering of the badly damaged social environment of the polity by going back to history and learn from the lesson it holds by examining the social developments of pre-Islam, Christian and Colonial Nigeria. A historical interrogation will help us to know and appreciate how the people of that dispensation enjoyed harmony, peace and security which became translated into stability on whose compass of development rotated.

History: Its Meaning and Utility in Society

This segment that focuses on the meaning and utility of History has received considerable attention from the current writer. However, for the purpose of this discourse, it is important to briefly explore it. History has many connotations or interpretations just as we have a wide array of writers, scholars and researchers. This has therefore led to History being variously defined. Benjamin Cox (1971) cited by Osokoya (1996:4) regards History as an organised narrative of the past events which depends on the interpretation of the historian as he translates the selected data into a narrative form. This view implies that one event can be interpreted to mean different things to different writers or scholars depending on their perspectives and personal idiosyncrasies. In addition, not all events or information mean history but the opinion or/and interests of the scholars that determine their definition of the subject.

In his own conceptualization, Isaac Akinjogbin a once prime mover in the History Department, University of Ife now Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, quoted by Ajetunmobi (2010:3) says:

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

This definition shows that the role of the professional or academic historian is required by distilling past events, analyze those that he is interested in and thereafter interprets them. It is on this basis that Carr (1961:30) regards History as "a continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts, an unending dialogue between the present and the past".

Daniels (1972:6) defines the subject by saying:

History is the memory of human group experience. If it is forgotten or ignored, we cease in that measure to be human. Without history we have no knowledge of who we are or how we came to be, like victims of collective amnesia grouping in the dark for our identity. It is the events recorded in history that have generated all the emotions, the values, the ideals that make life meaningful, that have given men something to live for, struggle over and die for. Historical events have created all the basic human groupings, religious, classes and all the loyalties that are attached to these.

The historian while reconstructing the past cannot cover the whole gamut of human activities and events as the past is not locked up in a store, awaiting its retrieval at will by the historian. As a result, the historian only records the traces of the past available to him by dealing with the reflections of those occurrences available to him. It is important to emphasize that facts do not become history until the historian has put in his own judgment or interpretation which is a major hallmark of historical scholarship (Ikime, 2000:5)

History as a discipline is essential in human societies across time and space. One of such utilitarian values of history is that it informs us about the origins and development of human settlements like family, village, town, city, nation, region and continent. As Ikime has remarked the common experience that brought the peoples of Nigeria into the same geo-political entity was conquest and rule by the British. This common experience necessarily the creation of history (Ikime, 2000:6).

Beyond the function of the subject pointed above, History enables citizens of a country to learn from the achievements, failures, strengths and weaknesses of past leaders, thereby making human beings wise. It also helps us to search for the lessons it is supposed to hold by enabling us not to engage in past mistakes that had brought untold hardships to the people. It similarly assists a lot in the area of policy formulation and implementation since history cannot be ignored as the knowledge of the past helps us to know how the present came into being and how to plan holistically for a better future. Therefore, any good policy design and implementation must aim at the development of the society concerned. The subject also promotes patriotism and equips man with critical thinking. (Erinosho 2007:139-141). No wonder Olaoye (2005: 4), makes known the submission of a group of British historians who assert that:

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

In shedding more light on the functions of the discipline, it is noted that:

History enhances national integration and development as well as settlement of land disputes; revelation that pre-colonial Nigerian people especially the Yoruba and Igbo were democratic in governance; helps to develop, ideology needful for nation building; helps to discourage corruption particularly by public office holders; international relations with the World Economic Order and the need to industrialize the nation's economy; intimates us with devastating effects of ethno-racial and religious conflicts. The discipline also prepares us for diplomatic service (Erinosho, 2009/2010: 136 - 142). Furthermore historical scholarship helps in creating high level manpower as trained bureaucrats, technocrats and consultants. Again, biographical study of heroes and heroines is promoted through conscious learning of history as a discipline (Erinosho 2012: 16 - 18).

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

Nigeria's Pre-Colonial Social Environment

Before the British colonial imposition on the pre-colonial Nigerian societies, there existed harmonious relationships in the family, ward, village, town as well as the state. This situation helped the societies to be stable, progressive and they catered for their citizens as a result of mechanisms devised by the leaders and utilized by them and their followers.

One of such strategies was religion, namely African Traditional Religion (ATR). Every institution in the society was religiously oriented - betrothal, marriage, birth, cultivation of the land, founding of a village or town or market, enthronement of kings and chiefs. They were all done after divination and religious sanctions were obtained before undertaking any of them (Awolalu and Dopamu 1979:208). In order to make the social environment pure and unpolluted, the pre-colonial peoples of Nigeria placed high premium on code of conduct or behaviour for regulating the actions, utterances and reactions of the citizens inhabiting the community as a whole. These norms, values and etiquettes found expression in taboos which the people held with great awe. Taboos are prohibited actions whose breaking is followed by the supernatural penalty. (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1979:211-212).

Kinship and kingship systems were kept alive as the people were kith and kin. Hence, the heads of the families, wards and villages as well as the kings of the towns, states and empires held office in trust and on behalf of the other members of the political community. They were initiated and guided by heavy traditional rituals and rites while taking the oath of office in whatever political/administrative capacity especially the kings who were semi-divine. Once they had entered into seclusion and later enthroned, they had become the spiritual and political representatives between their subjects and the ancestral or supersensible world. As a result, they represented their departed ancestors whose spirits were believed to be still alive and were ever present, knowing all the occurrences in the various domains at all ages. The spiritualization of kingship among the Yoruba is made known here by an expert in *Obaship* institution: "Yoruba Kings since the ages had been the personification of their towns and the deification of divine soul (suggesting that they were deified) as they represented the supernatural on earth with poetic expression of their status and symbols. The totality of their personification and deification loomed large in process of installation and royal schooling, system whereby they received instructions and learning on how to govern well and esteem the status of the supernatural." (Olaoba, 2012:113 - 114).

The *Oba* in Yorubaland were therefore semi-divine and used to commune with the ancestral realm. They were as a result highly respected, feared and venerated by their subjects while the *Oba* themselves operated within the constitutional framework, heavily enshrined in taboos and stipulated calamities if broken.

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

By A.D. 1000 a stable state had been established and
imperial adventures began. The office of the Mai had

already developed religious attributes of a divine nature - al Muhallabi reported that the 'people ex-halt and worship (the king) instead of God - and believing that it is (the king) who bring (sic) life and death, sickness and health'. Royal solution and the idea that the ruler needed no food enhanced such beliefs... 'King worship provided a unifying focus for the loyalties of the subject people' (cited in Atanda 2006:14 - 15)

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

...The King is supreme. His decisions have a divine authority, and there is no appeal. Before the advent of the British he had the power of life and death (over his subjects). As head of a spiritual principality, which included a number of nominally independent chiefdoms, he could order the deposition or execution of chiefs who disobeyed his order to make his people to till the royal fields and repair the palace. He could appropriate the major portion of all fines inflicted; for in his person all legislative, judicial, and executive functions were merged. (Cited in Atanda, 15)

The absolutism of the kings was just theoretical as the various pre-colonial Nigerian peoples devised checks and balances through their respective councils of chiefs to check the excesses of the potentates. In addition, religious sanctions and taboos were similarly employed. For instance, among the Jukun, the king was treated or adjudged by results of his administration. If the harvests were good the people were prepared to put up with a moderate amount of tyranny. But excessive tyranny would evoke a demand for his death whether the harvests were good or bad. He was so surrounded by taboos that it was never difficult to discover some breach of taboo which could be interpreted as a repudiation on his part of the gods whom he was supposed to represent and a consequent repudiation of him by those gods. In addition, the king could not take any decision without consulting his councilors headed by the prime minister called *Abo/Achuko*. He was a very powerful figure who knew the secret of royal ritual. (Atanda, 15-16). The same thing was obtained in Yorubaland where the *Oba's* powers were checked by the councils of chiefs or *Igbimo* as well as ritual taboos.

In the non-centralized states or segmented societies, authority was dispersed or diffused as no single individual served as the symbol or personification of authority. What was in vogue

was collective leadership. This system was provided by heads of extended families or lineages. Lineage heads jointly ran the affairs in each non-centralised state through a corporate body called the Council of Elders. The Igbo called such Council the *Ama-ala*, while the Ijo (Ijaw) and the Urhobo called it the *Ekpako* and *Okosuwei*, respectively. The Council of Elders had to summon the Assembly of the people when policy was to be made and each adult male member had the right to contribute to the debate of the matter brought before the Assembly. (Atanda, 12)

The invocation of the powers of the traditional gods was not the exclusive preserve of the people being represented by the chiefs and the priests. The kings also wielded a lot of powers in the dispensation of justice. Ritual sanctions were described as “the engine of the law”. In the words of Oguntomisin (2004:3): “In societies where the king had divine authority and was *ipso facto* the *ponifex maximus*, he could impose ritual sanctions. In some communities certain gods or goddesses were believed to be naturally averse to immoral behaviour or any form of injustice. Such deities included *Ogun*, *Sango*, *Ayelala*, in Yorubaland and *Swem* in Tivland, The deities, it is believed, could hand down instant justice to people who infringed the rules. The ...sanctions...created fear in people and minimized opportunities for engaging in anti-social activities that could lead to public disorder or create atmosphere for political instability, inter-community or inter-group acrimony”.

In a nutshell, the decision-making process in both centralized and non-centralized societies availed the people the opportunity to initiate people-oriented policies and programmes which helped to maintain conducive environment needed for developmental projects. No individual heads were superior to the traditional gods, goddesses and the ancestral spirits of their people. It is therefore apposite to state that the above religion-political mechanism was in tandem with this assertion:

As head of the family, a husband was expected to be at peace with himself. He was also held responsible for keeping peace in his household and ensuring that its members related well with others in the compounds and wards in their village or town. The compound and ward heads as well as the village heads or kings (*Oba*, *Obi*, *Sarkin*) had similar responsibilities in their respective domains. They guarded their communities’ laws and customs and applied appropriate sanctions against any breach (Oguntomisin, 1).

The pre-colonial Nigerian/African economic structure was put on sound educational footing. This was incorporated in vocational training comprising agricultural education - farming, fishing and animal husbandry. Trades and crafts similarly occupied a pride of place in the unwritten curriculum. Hence, weaving, smithing (iron, silver, gold etc), hunting, carving,

sculpturing, painting and decorating, carpentry, drumming, dancing and acrobatics, hair plaiting, mat-making, glass making, wine tapping, wine selling formed part of the vocational acquisition. Furthermore, professional doctors, priests, witch doctors, civil servants, village head chiefs, and kings, tax collectors, heralds, judges, councilors, police and messengers, shrine keepers, soldiers existed (Fafunwa, 1982:30). The above listed vocational training and skill acquisition were vigorously pursued. Consequently, the people were not job seekers as they were mostly self-employed or employers of labour. The curriculum was designed in a very pragmatic way. Hence, there was no problem of unemployment as education was practical in nature. The agricultural sector was consolidated by communal ownership of land as no single individuals could lay claim to any piece of land. While a farmer did not have outright ownership of the land, he "was entitled to whatever family land was available in his place of birth. If he migrated to some other area, he could assume temporary tenancy over such land that he needed or he could at least function as a share-cropper" (Oyemakinde, 1996:1)

In fact, Fafunwa (20) has identified the seven cardinal goals of Traditional African Education. The aim of the education was and is still "multilateral and the end objective is to produce an individual who is honest, respectable, skilled, co-operative and conforms to the social order of the day". The seven cardinal goals are:

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

The above cardinal objectives of the indigenous African education helped to create egalitarianism, justice, fair play, patriotism, sense of belonging and robust inter-personal, inter-communal and inter-state relationships as well as robust economy. The social environment was therefore peaceful and progressive. The education also emphasized morality and frowned at pre-marital sex and several other social vices. Accordingly:

Among the Efik and Ibibio, there were "very stringent taboos about incest and adultery" and stealing was considered a very serious offence. Similar attitudes were prevalent among many other Nigerian ethnic groups: among the Ibos, Yoruba and the Nupe, adolescents were taught to avoid heterosexual activities, to shun acts of immodesty, masturbation, aggressive behaviour, and to refrain from divulging secrets (Fafunwa: 23- 24).

These ethical behaviours coupled with the roles that parents played in the pre-colonial era in the marriages of their children helped to protect marriages from breaking up. As a result,

divorce was very rare in the pre-colonial Nigerian societies. Parents, children and wards carried out responsibilities expected of them respectively. As a result sanity prevailed in the society while acts of misconduct were scarce.

Intergroup Relations Among Pre-Colonial Nigerian States/Societies

Before bringing together the various ethnic groups that constitute the contemporary Nigeria State by the British, the peoples had engaged in one form of relations or another between and among themselves. These are referred to as intergroup relations. Ikime (1985:6) points out that "...commerce and social contacts led to linguistic borrowings and often to bilingualisms among traders...commercial contacts between our people in pre-colonial times...are the aspects which tend, to receive the greatest attention in studies of inter-group relations in the period, especially in the period up to 1800". Inter-group relations are series of contacts between different states or peoples, usually in form of trade, diplomatic ties, management of trade routes, boundaries and wars. Such interactions were necessitated in the early times by the need to ensure good relations with one another. A state had to recognize the territorial integrity of other states in its neighboring areas. Therefore, it had to promote peace relations through trade, inter marriage and the establishment of diplomatic relations. (Joshua 2011:1)

A major strand of pre-colonial contacts had to do with the origins of dynasties. Practically all the peoples in the pre-colonial period attributed their existence or emergence to the coming of some migrant or migrants from without. As Ikime has noted, the Hausa states, the Benin/Bini and the Yoruba, among many others devised this strategy in state creation. In each case some accommodation was ultimately reached between new comers on the one hand and earlier settlers and office holders on the other, until a new political arrangement was worked out, while writing about the Baganda dynasty of Kano, the Durbawa dynasty of Katsina. The Igbo-Jukun relations and Benin-Ife contacts exhibited similar trait. The phenomenon of "brotherhood" was deliberately contrived as a charter for determining relations between neighbouring or reasonably nearby groups is widespread or the Nigerian geographical area (Ikime, 6-8).

In the same vein, there existed borrowing of political institutions and titles. For instance, Igbo groups west of the Niger adapted Benin style political institutions and title system. So have the Yoruba of Owo, Akure, and some of the Ekiti groups. The Igbo of the Nsukka area took Igala titles and went to Idah for investiture. Many of the Jukun neighbours adopted the religious cults of the Jukun and based their socio-political arrangements on the Wukari model. The Idoma used to obtain titles from Wukari before they switched on to Idah. Some Urhobo and Isoko groups claim that their *ivie* used to go to Benin for investiture. There are strong resemblances between the Lagos title system and that of Benin. (Ikime.8-9).These illustrations establish the fact that war and compromise must have characterized the various pre-colonial Nigerian peoples' political relations. Indeed, the statesmen of the pre-colonial order in their wisdom created brotherhood among diverse ethnic stocks who had no blood

relationship or patriarchal origins through blood covenants in order to keep peace. This practice is known as *Igbandu* in Igboland which might artificially involve two or more clans with no previous blood ties. A similar practice existed among the Tiv who devised covenant-making or *Ikur-yan* which was an important means of ensuring peaceful inter-group relations (Oguntomisin, 3-4)

Religious contacts also permeated the inter-group relations among the ethnic groups. Festivals as well as cults with traditional worship took place between them. For instance, the *Igunnuko* festival was introduced to Yorubaland from the Tapa of Nupe (Odu 2011:98) while the Egba/Remo contacts were promoted through *Agemo* and *Oro* cults. The Remo introduced *Agemo* to Egbaland for spiritual assistance from *Agemo* worshippers to cure childless women of their bareness. The second way by which the cult spread into Egbaland was through marriage ties as female Remo elements who were married to Egba men practiced it in their marital environment (Sofela 2000:11). The existence of spiritual healers, priests, priestesses, diviners and custodian of cults promoted relations across international boundaries as renowned specialists were invited by people from outside their states and ethnic groups for spiritual/religious solutions to their problems. In the process, inter-marriage alliances were forged while celebrations of their cults' festivals enhanced such relations.

The 19th century religious fervour went to create greater religious contacts among the Nigerian people. This is particularly true of the Northern parts where the Fulani Islamic reformist movement or *Jihad* broke out and the Sokoto Caliphate established, embracing most of the Hausa states, parts of the Borno Empire. These became the emirates of Gombe, Hadejia and Katagum; Nupe and Ilorin. The prosecution of the *Jihad* was attended by more frictions as the Fulani revolution triggered off chains of crises in areas such as Yorubaland and Northern Edoland. The Bornu enclave was not spared. At the same time, Muslim law or *Sharia* replaced customary law of the people where Islam found itself well established outside the North especially Ilorin and *Sharia* courts replaced customary courts. The advent of Christianity in Southern parts also created some peace particularly in the beleaguered and war-ravaged Yorubaland (Oguntomisin 13-14) and the introduction of Western education by missionaries. The introduction of these two foreign religions sowed centrifugal forces with which the country is grappling with (Ikime 1985:11-16).

The pre-colonial contacts also took the dimension of "foreign" trade as there is no people or state that was self-sufficient economically. The Southerners-Yoruba, Edo (Bini), Igbo, Ijo, Ibibio, Efik etc had to sell their commodities to their Northern counterparts, and vice-versa. The Southerners were in need of cattle, camels, donkeys, yam, hide and skin and other numerous commodities from the North where Southern fish, kolanut, beads, mirrors etc were sold. As Osuntokun (2002:10) avers, the horses that the Oyo imperial cavalry mounted in warfare came from Borno through Hausaland and Nupeland implying that the people also engaged in commercial intercourse with the Yoruba. The *goro* or kolanuts found its way to the Sudanese belt of Northern Nigeria from the forest belt of West Africa through Southern

Yorubaland and Oyo Empire on the northern fringes of the Yoruba habitat. In a similar vein, “the Igbo have made a fetish of eating kolanuts grown in Yorubaland, demonstrating longstanding contact in the past”. Geographical imperatives compelled the various ethnic groupings to interact, either for good or otherwise. The peoples, therefore, were not isolated prior to the colonial intrusion.

Colonial Rule and Its Centrifugal Policies

Nigeria fell to the imperial bayonet of the British and the Northern and Southern Protectorates were amalgamated on 1 January 1914 for the selfish interests of the colonizers. This development went a long way in creating disharmony and hostility between and among the numerous nationalities forming the new colonial state called Nigeria. Otite 2000: 221-231) has identified a total number of 389 ethnic groups inhabiting the country. It has been established that ethnic identity did not exist until the emergence of the colonial state. As Ikime opines “... it was European visitors, traders and writers who first began to refer to whole conglomerates in terms of the language they speak. When such foreigners referred to the Igbo, they meant those who speak that language, not a single politically-coherent group”. Our ethnic groups, our nationalities,

Are thus essentially linguistic and cultural groups that have been increasingly forced by circumstances of history to act politically in defence of their interest's vis a vis the interests of other competing groups in what we now know as Nigeria. This is clearly a 20th century development (Ikime 1985: 3)

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

The Colonial rulers in their education system were paternalistic towards the Northerners who were encouraged to be taught instructions not oriented towards emulating the European cultural values which were common in the South. Rather Islamic culture was promoted and this led to the North becoming backward educationally and as a result was unable to produce manpower needed for the civil service and in growing the economy. In addition, "No attempt was made early enough to induce Islam to accommodate other religions and ideas. If this had been done, another area of difference between the North and South of Nigeria which has been a sense of instability would have been eliminated (Obiegbu 1988:9)

The Indirect Rule system of administration thrived in native authorities which the British preferred to a Nigerian nation. They therefore discouraged the nationalists from the South to cross over to the North and vice-versa. Thus, divide and rule was promoted while 1946 was the first time that that year's Richard Constitution established a Nigerian Legislative Council. In fact, the Nigerian Council of 1914 excluded the North from being represented as the Governor General made proclamation on its behalf. The 1946 constitution divided the country into three regions viz: the North, West and East, with the North bigger than the combination of both East and West, and this has become a bone of contention up till now because the North has been enjoying greater number of seats in the House of Representatives due to the colonial imposition of the Northern political hegemony on the South. This marked the beginning of Federalism in the country. (Coleman 1986: 271-277). The Northern domination is an aberration and a hindrance to nationhood.

Another policy that was detrimental to the stability and development of the country was the colonial government's inability to solve the minority question. The Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Igbo had emerged as dominant ethnic groups at the expense of the minorities. The Hausa-Fulani dominated the North, the Igbo controlled the East, while the Yoruba ascendancy prevailed in the West. As Obiegbu has asserted, the minorities in each of the three regions "... were of such size and location that they could have been able to form one or more viable units of government with cultural and linguistic homogeneity in some cases." (11) He sheds more light on this:

In the Eastern region for example, the Efik-Ibibio speaking groups had a population of one and half million, the Ijaw and Ekoi- Yakurr about a million. In the West before the creation of Mid- West in 1963, there were about one million Edo speaking peoples, half a million Urhobo, three hundred and sixty five thousand Ibo, and about eighty thousand Ijaw; whilst in the North, there were one million two hundred Kanuri, four hundred thousand Nupe and about seven million others including the Tiv of the Middle Belt and the Yoruba in Ilorin and Kabba provinces. In such a majority- minority structure, tension was inevitable since such a set up entrenched the permanent control of the regional government by the majority tribe. (11)

The superimposition of a Parliamentary Democracy on the country was similarly another unhappy legacy bequeathed to the country by the British. The system had evolved over a long period of time in Britain while opposite or reverse was the case with Nigeria and some other African countries including Zimbabwe. The separation of head of state and head of government was evolutionary in Britain. It was in the course of centuries of constitutional evolution that the Monarch lost his personal discretion in the exercise of sovereignty. The

historical antecedents of the system were not grown in Africa and as a result the Prime Minister regarded himself as the President's superior and even behaved as such towards him. The president and the ministers had been opposed to each other in party politics and due to ethnic chauvinism, many saw him with the kind of Kingly majesty the Queen was accorded in Britain. The President was just a ceremonial head, lacking executive powers and authority (Obiegbu, 12-13). This factor greatly accentuated the collapse of the First Republic arising from unhealthy rivalry and power tussle between the ceremonial President and Prime Minister who wielded real executive powers.

Electoral violence and rigging that characterized the politics of decolonization as well as the regionally based political parties namely, Northern People's Congress (North), National Council of Nigeria and Cameroon (later National Council of Nigerian Citizens), in the East, and the Action Group in the West further created tension and polarized the country along ethnic and party lines. The failure of the British to industrialize the economy was a total disservice to the country. The colonial fiat laid more emphasis on the production of cash crops like cocoa, palm produce, rubber, groundnuts needed for their industrial survival back in Britain. In this case, production of food suffered and the urban dwellers who had increased in large numbers were hungry and mostly jobless. This unpleasant development created more tension, social vices and restiveness in the urban centres. Similarly, the kings and chiefs suffered a lot of deprivations as they were stripped of their powers during the colonial period. Initially, they were favoured as they the colonial rulers allowed them to make decision with or without consulting their chiefs to the chagrin of the latter. But in the 1950s the traditional rulers began to lose their relevance with the inclusion of educated elite in government after many years of struggle with the British. Gradually, the regional government headed by their respective Premiers had the right to appoint and depose the royal fathers. This has become the norm up till date, a situation in which the former appointees now appoint their erstwhile employers/principals because it is now the state governors that approve the appointment of the kings. In the past, it was the kings that appointed the provincial governors. While commenting on the changing status of the *Oba* in Yorubaland, Ajetunmobi and Yonlonfoun (2012:154) assert:

The *Oba* were no longer officers in their domain (*sic*), but rather are accounting officers. As instrument of Indirect Rule, the *Oba* had to report to the Colonial Administrators. They were made to execute colonial policies as it were in the pre-colonial times. The colonial administrations ushered in an era of placing the traditional rulers on annual salary and were made to face panels for violation of colonial laws. In all, the colonial administration was the beginning of gradual erosion and

pollution of *Obaship* tradition in which new class of
political leaders surfaced.

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

Taking the above colonial experiences into cognizance, it is altruistic to admit that the British had succeeded in planting seeds of discord which have created the present unwholesome social environment in Nigeria exhibiting the perennial indicators of a failed state and crippled giant.

The Way Forward

It is imperative to note that the ethnic composition of the country can be fully appropriated positively in our march towards nationhood. Nigerian leaders and followers should discard the idea of artificiality of the country's creation in order to forge sense of belonging, eliminate marginalization, ethnicity and exclusion as far as the equitable distribution of the national cake and political-cum-administrative offices are concerned. Adherence to geo-political balancing as well as transparency and accounted by the leaders and provision of qualitative condition of living for all and sundry will go a long way in creating a dynamic nation free of tension and acrimony. This signifies that true federalism must be put into operation. The royal fathers on their part should retrace their steps and evaluate their conducts and make amends. It is worrisome to note that many kings have been involved in scandals like getting involved in physical combat in public, embezzlement, taking position with certain politicians and political parties as well other anti-royalty behaviours that were never tolerated in the past. The religious crises between Christians and Muslims could be grossly mitigated if they could practice their religions with moderation and tolerance like traditional worshippers who were and are still accommodating. The practitioners of the two foreign religions should borrow a leaf from their traditional counterparts.

Nigeria is not the only country that was artificially created. It has been established that:

...most nations of the world are artificial creations, in so far as they are the products of accidents of history. The United States of America is only 110 years old as a nation. No one can doubt that despite racial and other problems the U.S.A. is a strong and united nation. Yet the U.S.A is also an artificial creation even if its colonial experiences were, in some ways, dramatically different from ours. The example of the United States is a clear evidence that the artificiality of the original coming together of diverse groups does not constitute an insurmountable barrier to

the building a united nation-state. If we in Nigeria have thus far failed to evolve policies and strategies that can lead to the emergence of a truly united nation, let us not continue to blame it on our past. Rather let us take a hard look at our policies and our strategies (Ikime, 1985:2-3)

Apart from the U.S.A, the United Kingdom is made up of multi-ethnic groups yet it has developed as a nation over the centuries. The Scottish, Welsh, Irish and English formed the political entity (Otite, 10). In spite of their divergent ethnic backgrounds, they have found the strength in ethnic plurality and have used it to their advantage. The British and American experiences and development must have been made possible by patriotism and nationalism of their citizens. Their development of national ideologies propelled the growth and advancement of the two countries. In a similar vein, the Italians had the national ideology of the Risorgimento; the French had the national ideology of Francophonies, the United States of America had the ideology of melting pot, while the British had the ideology of unity in diversity (Erinosho 2009 – 2010:139).

Given the above illustration, Nigeria's case is not a hopeless situation. The main responsibility expected from the political leadership, bureaucrats, technocrats and the followership is to borrow a leaf from the pre-colonial social situation and good aspects of the advanced countries across the world, adapt a synthesis of both, and domesticate them for the good and development of both the country and its citizens. This social re-engineering calls for "modernizing the ancient and ancientizing the modern." Re-affirming this belief Osuntokun posits: "If Nigeria is to develop as a happy and strong state, we must go back to the beginning of building blocks of ethnic unity, which is the reality, rather than through enforced unity and uniformity of the military era. I also believe that we need to vigorously promote the study of our history, our languages and cultures." (9) However, this can only be realized if and when national ideology is coined/invented, nurtured and domesticated. Then Nigeria social environment will wear a new look.

Conclusion

The study x-rays the need to reconstruct the social environment of the cotemporary Nigeria by revisiting the study and application of our history. It therefore begins by informing us about the tension-soaked Nigeria's society before interrogating history as a subject and its utilitarian value in society. The study thereafter discusses the pre-colonial Nigerian social conditions which regulated the people's economic and political life, underscoring that the then existing societies were united, egalitarian and accommodating. The international intercourse otherwise known as intergroup relations that percolated intra-ethnic and inter-ethnic pre-colonial states and kingdoms are navigated before dwelling on the British colonial policies which only fuelled divide and rule across the polity, thereby worsening the social and political

conditions and inter-group relations of the Nigerian people all of which have turned the country into a state of anomie. The study then offers an antidote by encouraging all the citizens to have a change of attitude while also advising Nigeria to emulate other complex but advanced Western countries like the United States, United Kingdom, France and Italy. Nigeria should borrow the good aspects these developed nations represent in its bid to move forward and engender an integrating social order that will ensure stability needful for improving the lots of the people.

References

- Ajetunmobi, R.O. 2010. *Historiography and Nature of History*, (Second Edition), Lagos: Gabby Printing Nig. Enterprises.
- Ajetunmobi, R.O. and Yonlonfoun, Egun 2012 “Yoruba Traditional Rulers and Public Ethics”, In Isaac Olawale Albert (ed); *A History of Social Conflict and Conflict Management in Nigeria: A Festschrift for Professor Biodun Adedidan*, Ibadan: John Archers (Publishers) Ltd,154.
- Atanda, J.A. 2006 *Political Systems of Nigerian Peoples up to 1900* (edited by G.O. Oguntomisin), Ibadan: John Archer (Publisher) Limited.
- Awolalu, J. Omosade and Dopamu, P. Adelumo 1979 *West African Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: Onibonoje Press & books Industries (Nig.) Ltd.
- Carr, E.H. 1961 *What is History*, Great Britain: Macmillan.
- Coleman, James S. 1986 *Nigeria: Background to Nationalism*, Nigeria and Sweden: Benin City, Broburg & Wistrom.
- Daniels, Robert V. 1972 *Studying History, How and Why*, New Jersey: Eaglewood Cliffs
- Erinosho, Timothy O. 2007 “Historical Scholarship and Reshaping Nigeria’s Foreign Image”, *Journal of Arts and Social Sciences*, Vol. 9, 139-140 A Publication of the College of Social and Management Sciences, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ijebu-Ode, Nigeria.
- 2009 – 2010 “The Utilitarian Value of History and Diplomatic Studies Education”, *Anyigba Journal of Arts and Humanities*, Vol. 8 & 9, 132–147, A Publication of the Faculty of Art and Humanities, Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria.
- 2011 “The State of History Teaching in Nigerian Schools and Colleges: The Case of Ogun State”, *Sapha: a Journal of Historical Studies*, Vol. 2 Nos 1 & 2, 444-453, A Publication of the Department of History, Faculty of Arts, University of Abuja, Abuja, FCT.
- 2012 “Introduction, Conceptual, Theoretical and Historical Background” In R.O. Ajetunmobi, B.O. Osiyale and T.O. Erinosho (eds) *Professional Teaching Methods and Resources in History*, A Publication of the Department of History and

- Diplomatic Studies, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ijebu-Ode: Alamsek Gen. Concept Enterprises, 1-24.
-2016 “Historical Scholarship and Job Prospects in the Nigerian Labour Market”, *Lapai Journal of Nigerian and International Studies*, Vol. 9 No.1, 1-18 Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida University, Lapai, Niger State.
- Fafunwa, A. Babs 1982 *History of Education in Nigeria*, (Eighth Impression), London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd.
- Ikime, Obaro 1985 *In Search of Nigerians: Changing Patterns of Inter-group Relations in an Evolving Nation State*. An Inaugural Lecture Published for the Historical society of Nigeria by Impact Publishers Nigeria Limited, Ibadan: Johnmof Printers.
- 1986 “The Neglect of History in Nigerian Schools” *The Guardian* Tuesday, December 30.
-2000 “Why Teach History” Being the Second Eminent Personality Lecture in Honour of Emeritus Professor J.F. Ade Ajayi delivered under the auspices of the Students’ Historical Society, University of Ibadan, Thursday, February 17, 5 – 6.
- Joshua, Grace Olatundun 2011 “Patterns of Inter-Group Relations: a Study of Oyo and Ilorin in the 19th Century” B.A. (Ed) Long Essay, Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Ogun State.
- Obiegbu, James Ngozi 1988 “The Colonial Roots of Political Instability in Nigeria”, *The Historia: Journal of the Students’ Historical Society of Nigeria*, University of Ibadan Vol .xi, No.9, 11-13.
- Odu, Yomi 2011 “Traditional Festivals in Nigeria” In R.O. Ajetunmobi and B.O. Osiyale (eds) *Themes in Nigeria as a Nation*, A Publication of the Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijagun, Lagos: Gabby Printing (Nig.) Enterprises, 90-128.
- Oguntomisin, G.O. 2004. *The Processes of Peacekeeping and Peacemaking in Pre-Colonial Nigeria*, Ibadan: John Archers (Publishers) Ltd.
- Olaoba, O.B. 2012 “Kings and Palace Culture in South-West Nigeria”, In Isaac Olawale Albert (ed) *A History of Social Conflict and Conflict Management in Nigeria: A Festschrift for Professor Biodun Adedidan*, Ibadan: John Archers (Publishers) Ltd, 113-114.
- Olaoye, R.A. 2005 “History, Historians and the Crisis of Relevance in Nigeria,” Paper presented at the Golden Jubilee Anniversary of the Historical Society of Nigeria, University of Ibadan, 16-21 October, 4.
- Osokoya, I.O. 1996 *Writing and Teaching History: A guide to Advanced Study*, Ibadan: Laurel Educational Publishers.
- Osuntokun, Jide 2002 “The Place of History in National Development” Lecture Delivered at Conference of History Teachers Association of Nigerian Colleges of Education, Oyo on Monday 10/3, 9-10.

- Otite, Onigu 2000 *Ethnic Pluralism, Ethnicity and Ethnic Conflicts in Nigeria* (Second Edition), Ibadan: Fayoson Commercial Printers.
- Oyemakinde, Wale 1996 “The Structure of the West African Economy”, In G.O. Ogunremi and E.K. Faluyi (eds) *An Economic History of West Africa since 1750*, Ibadan: Rex Charles Publication, 1-13.
- Sofela, B. 2000. *Egba-Ijebu Relations: a Study in Conflict Resolution in Nineteenth Century Yorubaland*, Ibadan: John Archers (Publishers) Ltd.