

THE ROLE OF HISTORY IN NIGERIAN NATIONALISTS STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE AND THE COMPLEXITY OF THE STRUGGLE

Tim Aondofa Raphael*, Ahmed Aisha Baba

Department of History and International Studies, Federal University, Birnin Kebbi, Nigeria.

Corresponding Author: Tim Aondofa Raphael, Email: timraphael094@gmail.com

Abstract: The British colonization of Nigeria necessitated the emergence of a new crop of people known as the “nationalists” on the nation’s political parlance who were targeted to liberate their fatherland from the doldrums of foreign rule that subdued their sovereignties politically, economically, and socially. In this regard, history proved to be pedagogical as it helped the nationalists to accomplish their dream. While it appears that myriads of intellectual works exist on Nigerian nationalism, most, if not all of such works have rather tended to generalise their scope without actually establishing the role of history in the trajectory and as such, the phenomenon beg for more scholarly attention. This paper thematically focuses on the role of history in Nigerian nationalist struggle for independence and the complexity of the struggle. Methodologically, the paper resorted to data provided by secondary sources in the form of textbooks, journals and internet with a discourse style that is quite historical, objective and analytical. Findings indicate that history provided a road map for the nationalists to stage the struggle, revealed to the nationalists how different societies had in the past been successfully liberated by some determined patriots, provided the wherewithal for women nationalists to participate in the struggle, arouse a sense of national consciousness and identity in the Nigerian nationalists, provided historians with the potency to contribute intellectually to the independence of Nigeria, and that it was used to discover the root causes of disunity that bedeviled the country in the struggle. The paper has however unraveled with vigour, that the said struggle was marred with complexity due principally to ethnicism, regionalism, and religion, instituted by the exploitative divide and rule tactic of the colonialists which became endemic scourges that raged the country; thereby creating the embers of disunity and suspicion among the nationalists. This has in turn impacted negatively, on the body polity of Nigeria up to the present postcolonial epoch. It finally notes that albeit this complexity, the nationalists’ eventually bridged theory with reality as independence was actualised, and advocates for more studies to be undertaken in this sphere for a proper appreciation of the inherent potentialities in the discipline especially at the very moment where its survival is seemingly threatened due to extinction.

Keywords: Complexity; History; Independence; Nationalists; Nigeria; Struggle

1 INTRODUCTION

Historically, prior to the British colonization of Nigeria by the late nineteenth to early twentieth century’s, the various ethnic nationalities we know today existed as independent geopolitical enclaves determining the course of their own affairs politically, economically, and socially based on the peculiarities of their environment. Simultaneously, they maintained a considerable degree of social interaction between and among themselves, as was contingent on trade, religion, inter marriages and the like. Crowder as quoted by Mu’azu *Et al* clearly laid emphasis on this point when he wrote:

Within its frontiers were the great Kingdoms of Kanem-Borno, with a known history of more than one thousand years, the Sokoto Caliphate, which for nearly a hundred years before its conquest by the British, ruled most of the Savannah of Northern Nigeria, the Kingdoms of Ife and Benin, whose art has become recognised as amongst the most accomplished in the world, the Yoruba empire of Oyo which had once been the most powerful of the States of the Guinea coast, and the city states of the Niger Delta, the largely politically decentralized Igbo speaking of the South East... and the small tribes of the plateau, some whom are descendants of the people who created the famous Nok terracotta.[1]

The point must however be stressed that the internal contradictions inherent in the economy of Britain such as the needs for raw materials, new markets, and capital outlets incited by the industrial revolution compelled the British to venture into the drive for colonies that finds answers to the aforesaid problems, and therefore, the Nigerian areas was experimented to be suitable. Thus, by the late 19th to early 20th centuries, the British by means of diplomatic and military maneuvers successfully consolidated their stronghold on the various people thereby changing the geographical and political landscape of the Nigerian areas which had previously existed before the coming of colonialism. The process was formalized in 1914 through the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates under one colonial force the British [1-2].

The above successful attempt by the British colonial state that altered the political structures that had hitherto existed in the Nigerian areas prior to colonialism was to therefore lead to Nigerian nationalism which began right from the years of colonial conquest in the form of resistance by the traditional chiefs and the generality of the people in losing their sovereignty and became much more pronounced in the later years and presumably, after 1914. Ultimately, this nationalism therefore transcends into the emergence of a new crop of people on Nigeria political parlance branded

“nationalists” who were well versed in the historical experience of the past and come to realize that the diverse people within the newly created Nigeria had hitherto existed independently with full legitimate rights and authority in directing the pattern of their affairs and as a consequence, were bent on struggling to achieve the independence of Nigeria with a view to liberating the people from British political subjugation and domination.

Fundamentally, however, plethora’s of mechanisms were adopted and of course, played their role by helping the nationalists to achieve their struggle for independence. One of these mechanisms was history. In fact, history proved to be pedagogical in the process as it played decisive role by helping the nationalists to accomplish their dream in many ways that will be x-rayed in the subsequent part of the discourse. Nonetheless, despite the magnificent role played by history in the Nigerian anti-colonial struggle, it has not been accorded its desired credibility by the country including during independence celebration and this has therefore become thought provoking. Hence, the topic of this paper is deliberately chosen to present the role of history in Nigeria nationalist struggle for independence and the complexity of the struggle. The remaining parts of the paper are arranged into sections as follows; conceptual framework, history and Nigerian nationalists struggle for independence, the complexity of the struggle, and then, conclusion,

2 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 History

Generally, history is conceived to be the study of past events of man in relation to his environment. That notwithstanding, this definition seems to be limited in the scope of understanding as plethora’s of realities surrounding history are left untouched and unidentified. As such, the best method that seems to be quite tempting and shall therefore be adopted here is by taking a look at the concept from the intellectual perspective of scholars and historians.

According to Tarnande and pawa, history is the treasure house of knowledge about past events. This definition implies that anything that has to do with the past be it politics, economics, religion, culture, conflict, amongst others is an embodiment of history. History is also defined as “a venerable ramification of Knowledge which generally studies the past activity of man in time perspective. It is an inquiry into the coded event of the past with the view of establishing their meaning and relevance in the present.” [2] This definition raised two major issues that deserve proper attention. Firstly, by emphasizing on the activity of man, it entails that Man occupies a central position in the study of history. Simply put, it is man that creates history. Secondly, history is built on time and historians are always conscious of this principle whenever analyzing the trajectories that relates to human activities be it in the past or present. Malcom as quoted by Habib, defined history as “An aspiration to comprehend the totality of Past human experiences and implicitly to discern in it some messages of present and future utility on the basis of reflecting on the situation.” [3]

From the foregoing definitions, it is acceptable to conceptualize history as the study of human action either from the past, present or future. This suggest that whatever human being does, is doing, or is to do is subject to historical interpretation or historical scrutiny.

2.2 History and Nigerian Nationalist Struggle for Independence

History provided a road map for the nationalists to stage their struggle. This role cannot be detracted from the fact that, the sudden decision of the nationalists to venture into the debilitating but yet inspiring task of fighting for the interest of Nigeria which was purposefully geared towards liberating it from the amnesia of British colonial rule was informed by history. In doing this, the nationalists first, explored historical accounts of the past, orally and documentarily. The stated accounts enabled them to gain explicit understanding as to when, why, and how colonialism was institutionalized by the British around the late 19th to the early 20th centuries thus arriving at the agenda to take the bull by the horn and implicitly champion the struggle for independence. Sufficient to say too, that these accounts constituted the precursor for which the likes of Herbert Macaulay, Chief Obafemi Awolowo, Dr.Nnamdi Azikiwe, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Anthony Enahoro, Solanke Ladipo, Oluwofumilayo Ransome Kuti, and Joseph S. Tarkaa (whom represents an inexhaustible list of the concerned nationalists) systematically acquainted themselves with the knowledge of what actually transpired in the pre-colonial epoch as regards the form of governance that was dictated by the Nigerians, in juxtaposition to what obtained in the colonial epoch under which the British imperialists by means of skillful political, military, economic, diplomatic and deceitful tactics successfully altered Nigerians system of governance that became exploitatively, ruthlessly and brutally tainted. Put another way, by exhuming the Nigerian tale in the annals of pre-colonial and colonial historiography, the nationalists came to locate the bedrock of their exploitation and subjugation. This scenario in the right conception of the nationalists underscored the imperative need for an abrupt end to the colonial system. After all, a short yet cogent aphorism goes in this way “identifying a problem by probing into its genesis constitutes a pre-requisite in solving the problem.

While the biography of the aforementioned nationalists is beyond the scope of this work, but which would nevertheless clarify the matter, a perusal of available documentary evidence on their lifestyles do indicates that with the exception of Herbert Macaulay, who was born since 1864, hardly was any of them so matured enough at the time of the British conquest of their respective areas as to know vividly the tracks of events that unfounded pertaining to colonialism. To avoid doubt, Ransome-Kuti according to records was born in 1900, Zikiwe in 1904, Awolowo in 1909, Bello in 1910, and Tarkaa in 1932. In this token, one is doubtful how they came about this in-depth knowledge of the Nigerian past if not from history. Not only were there concisely informed by historical antecedents, but the acquisition of this knowledge can be considerably adjudged to have marked the beginning of the desire which was subsequently backed by

actions to liberate the Nigerian people from the forces of foreign domination in what eventually gained prominence as “struggle for independence.” It was in appreciation of this logic of history that Awolowo, one of the leading nationalists whose penchant and resilience for Nigerian freedom was glaringly expressed, foresightedly stated pertaining to the Nigerian independence the following “we must study our past to understand our present and shape our future” and that “Nigerian nationalism is not a sudden growth, but a product of historical forces.”[4] Judging from the analytical framework drawn so far, one is not left in doubt that history provided a road map for the Nigerian nationalists in their liberation struggle for the country’s independence.

A more scientific spectacle of the role of history in the nationalist struggle for the independence of Nigeria could be located under the pretext that nationalists through historical revelation learn how different societies or individuals had in the past been successfully liberated by some determined patriots from the backwoods of either bad leadership or threat by foreign aggressors or both. A plethora of evidences that palpably point to this scenario abound. Shehu Usman Danfodiyo, Abdullahi Fodiyo and Muhammadu Bello, the great Jihadist leaders were able to strategically and meaningfully manipulate Islamic religion as a portent gimmick to bring out the Hausa people in the early 19th century, from the onus of maladministration perpetrated by the Habe rulers who developed very high corrupt, despotic, exploitative, and arbitrary tendencies in the discharge of their government responsibilities. It is therefore not surprising that Sir Ahmadu Bello (The Sarkin Sokoto and Premier of Northern region), who spearheaded the independence struggle from the Northern region was a descendant of the Jihadists and to be exact, Usman Dan Fodiyo. The significance of this evidence to contemporary historians represents a call on the Sarkin Sokoto to tap from the past example of his charismatic ancestors (Jihadists), by fully partaking in the movement to emancipate the Northern people, and Nigerians at large, from alien rule. A rational observer of the entire historical process may be tempted to raise a question as to why there existed a host of people with rational abilities from the North during the period under discussion, but the man to be bestowed with this mantle of leadership happened to emerge from the family of the eminent Sheikhs. The political wisdom and philosophy of Abrahams Alegh as cited by Tim can at best be brought to sharp consideration as an answer to the foregoing question. It reads:

The rise of any politician in Africa starts with the blessing of his immediate community. By this, we mean that, no matter one’s fame internationally or nationally, if one does not have the home support, one’s fall in politics is inevitable.[5]

Understandably, by and large, the Sarkin Sokoto was chosen by nature and among his kith and kin, as the best man to carry out the aforesaid mandate given his wealth of historical experience that arose directly from emulation of the good legacies left behind by his ancestors (The three Sheikhs). It is also logical to reason that the nationalists been well equipped in the past experience of patriots like Olaudah Equiano of the Igbo, Attahiru II of the moribund Sokoto Caliphate, King Jaja of Opobo, and Nana of Itsekiri among others felt entitled to use this experiment in dealing with their British colonial overlords. One way they optimistically succumbed to and typified this experience was by opposing any aspect of the colonial policies with a view to compelling the colonialists to relinquish power to the sons and daughters of the soil. As Ransome-Kuti intelligibly sum it up “the history of our people is a story of resistance and resilience.”

The notion in question can also be adjudged from the angle of women nationalists. This is precisely done to resist the nagging temptation to evoke gender prejudice or stereotype into the discourse as recent scholars with keen interest in this area (gender studies) has cynically observed hence “women in Nigeria have been marginalized in the historical record, despite their many contributions.” [6] Interestingly, history provided the wherewithal, and as well endowed the women nationalists with the directed optimism to participate in Nigerian nationalism. The women nationalists did this by visiting the past which informed them that women were since time immemorial, recognised in the Nigerian society for navigating through the odds and challenges that encumbered them by undertaking their roles to an appreciable extent, in different spheres of societal life and development with politics inclusive. These roles qualify such women to be accorded special positions of recognition in the tapestry of history. Popularising this point, Adesina had this to say:

...In the annals of Africa’s most populous and dynamic country, the knowledge about women boasts a rich history of influential women who have shaped the political, social, economic, and cultural landscapes. Narratives of these powerful women are quite popular and have spread across generations. Prominent among these women are Queen Amina of Zaria, Queen Idia of Benin, Emotan of Benin, Nana Asmau...[7]

It is considered akin to the prevailing thought that when the women nationalists went down the memory lane into history, they remembered how the above named women figures and many more were harbingers of development in their respective societies, and could not help imagining why their (women nationalists) case should be different. This pertinently underlay the secret behind the pro-activism demonstrated by a good number of women in order to mitigate Nigeria from British colonial tutelage. As such, available records are replete with the evidences of brave women across the nooks and crannies of Nigeria who magnanimously conquered cultural and socio-religious impediments to render their quota in the struggle for independence. This was true of the western region that witnessed the emergence of women nationalists like Chief Mrs Fumilayo Ransome Kuti, Margaret Ekpo; Hajjiya Gambo Sawaba from the Northern region; so did the determined women in Eastern region adopted a radically revolutionary posture against colonialism and more precisely, using the Aba Women Riot of 1929-1930. To this extent, the kind of nationalism undertaken by those concerned women should be aptly contextualised within the purview of these historical trajectories. It is also rational to posit that history arouse a sense of national identity and consciousness in the Nigerian nationalists during the independence struggle. This national identity initially operated at the cultural level, before it was subsequently demonstrated at a fully fledged political level and of course, mechanism that was formidably used to

tackle colonialism. This fact appears to be convincing when it is noted that culture and history are dialectically interconnected and interrelated. In short, culture is a child of history as it is from the latter that the former is preserved and transmitted from one generation to another. The major political parties that masterminded the Nigerian nationalism during the historical epoch under study are pointers that succinctly lend credence to this idea. A cursory look at the nature of these political parties shows that they (political parties) most often than not, began as cultural associations before transcending into political parties. To be specific, from the North, the *Jamiyya Mutaneh Arewa* cultural group of the Hausa/Fulani transformed into the Northern Peoples' Congress (NPC) in 1951, whereas in the West, the *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*, a Yoruba socio-cultural group formed in 1949 midwived the Action Group (AG) which officially came into force in 1951. This assertion became more realistically affirmed in the words of Yusuf and Zakaririya as they averred: *"Therefore history helps us to understand the origin of our existence. It helps us understand and answer such questions as who are we? Where did our ancestors come from? What was the society and culture like during their time? What did we inherit from them? What is it that we have to do to be like them? Thus, history helps us understand everything about our past so that we can build on it."*[8]

It was after a rigorous acquaintance into the preceding antics of the Nigerian historical past that the formation of the above named cultural associations which unabashedly transitioned into political parties became inevitable. In effect, these political parties were undoubtedly, staggering instruments that predetermined and galvanised the nationalists' heated struggle for independence. To strengthen this point, it was under the aegis of these political parties that Nigerians notably the nationalists were elected into legislative houses, ventilated their feelings towards colonial rule and conscientised the Nigerian people on the pressing issues of the day as regards colonialism. Most fundamentally, the nationalists who represented Nigeria in the various constitutional conferences and debates such as those converged in Ibadan, Lagos and London in 1951, 1953 and 1957/58 respectively were drawn from the various political parties. To this end, if it is agreed that these political parties were inherently characterised by historical undertones, there can be no disputing the fact that they represented the role of history in the nationalist liberation struggle. As pungently adumbrated thus:

It can hardly be disputed that everything about the emergence of the world is history. What is being said here by extension is that the world itself is a product of history. It can therefore be said that history is the source of all that has come to be.[9]

The role of history in the subject matter under concern can also be deduced within the prism of concerted efforts made by historians. As the interpreters of historical processes, historians contributed intellectually to the attainment of Nigerian independence. Among these historians, the personality of Professor K.O. Dike can be figure out to substantiate this point. The appearance on the scenery around the 1950s, of a highly visionary historian like Professor K.O. Dike, who was endowed with the wisdom of sound judgments, was consequential. In that, Dike was not just conceived by his contemporaries from the academia and elsewhere, as a person who had the "messianic" and promising role to play in the struggle, but was also predicated unmistakably, on the tireless quest to salvage his fellow Nigerians from the dreaded ravages of colonialism. In a bid to pursue what can rightly be considered as the "Nigerian cause", the first thing that attracted the attention of the historian for solution was how to reconstruct the Western (European) misinterpretation of African's historical past in general and Nigeria in particular. At the heart of this misinterpretation was the theoretical premise that, "Africa has no history prior to European adventurism on the continent." It (the misinterpretation) was inadvertently, a by-product of the Hamitic hypothesis which holds that the entire race in Africa are devoid of any useful initiative capable of bringing development. That even the few of such developments eminent in the continent must be externally inclined from Europe or Asia. The foregoing point was evidenced in the words of notable Euro Centric scholars like professors Perham and Hugh. For the avoidance of doubt, Perham as cited in Apollos work, once stated that "Until the very recent penetration by Europe the greater part of the continent (Africa) was... without writing and so without history." Hugh (1965:9), re-popularised this ideology. He put it this way:

Perhaps in the future there will be some African history to teach. But at present there is none; there is only the history of Europeans in Africa. The rest is darkness and darkness is not the subject of history.[10]

But one rational observation to be made from the above divergent however, seemingly interconnected assertions as they relates to the phenomenon under investigation is that, they tends to serve a dual purpose in the historical arena. They (the two assertions) were not only convincing to the historians that such a characterisation of the African continent including Nigeria by the inordinate ambitious imperialist scholars of the era was capable of denigrating the potency of the people in governing themselves, but also lured the entire globe to confide in the inferiority complex held by the British towards Nigerians. It was indeed, this scenario that prompted Dike to illuminate the minds of these Europeans scholars and their cohorts whom though, recalcitrant in changing their viewpoint, were eventually compelled by the highly explanatory and analytical logic of the African and of course, Nigerian historians to dispel it, Equally, Dike and his historical stalwarts beamed their spot light on the faces of Nigerians' to realize that the Europeans has no justifiable right whatsoever in the aforesaid claim. It follows therefore, that while the nationalists were clamoring on the need for the independence of Nigeria from the political fora, Dike and his compatriots on the other hand, were busy waging an intellectual revolutionary war against colonialism from the academic fora through their credible writings and works. As a British writer coherently postulate "the pen is mightier than the sword." For the avoidance of doubt, Dike's efforts was exemplified by his publication of *African History and Self-Government* in 1953 where he revealed that the future of Nigeria depends on the ability to manage their own affairs, *Trade and politics in the Niger Delta 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria* published in 1956 where he acclaimed that Nigerians

must be the architects of their own destiny, and founding of the *Ibadan School of History* which has been practically observed by Afigbo that this school:

Came into being at a time when the foremost pre-occupations of Nigeria were the winning of political independence from Britain and the construction of a Nigerian nationality out of the ramshackle colonial state created by Britain. At that time, hardly did anyone raise the issue of the character or quality of that nationality.[11]

Instructively, not quite long the historians joined the nationalists in this race (the 1950s), that the British colonialists quickly handed over the baton of governance to Nigerians, so as to enable the latter to determine the course of their political affairs, notwithstanding the emergence of neo-colonialism. Had these patriotic historians' of the Dike type decided to shy away from the responsibility bequeathed on them by virtue of their wisdom of value based judgments deeply mired in history as earlier stated, and maintained a lukewarm attitude of "sit and look" as was, and still remains the attitude of many Nigerians, one could have perhaps, argue that despite the doggedness displayed by the nationalists, the eventual achievement of Nigerian independence on 1st October, 1960, would have been extended to a much later date. On the strength of these considerations, it becomes quite clear that, the historians contributed inexorably to the Nigerian nationalist struggle for independence. This scenario constitutes the etymological background to the prestigious title of "nationalist historians" conferred on the historians thereby signifying the role of history in the episode.

History was also used as an enviable tool to unearth the causes of disunity in Nigeria by the nationalists during the struggle for the country's independence. Put it more elaborately, when Nigeria was plunged into a state of disunity as a result of frictions that arouse among the nationalists of the three regions; North, West, and East in the course of the independence struggle, they (nationalist) could not but utilized history to discover the focal rationale behind the frictions that scandalised them and the country at large. It can be said pungently that at this juncture, the nationalists could not but yielded to the temptation of their high provocative tempo to condemn out rightly, the arrangement that brought the diverse ethnic cleavages into a single geopolitical entity called Nigeria. It could be recalled also that the creation of Nigeria in 1914 by the British was followed forthwith the emergence of three major calamities; ethnicism, regionalism, and religion that tended to negativities and direct the pattern of politics in Nigeria from the colonial era till date. A case in point was the argument made by Chief Obafemi Awolowo refuting the description of Nigeria as a "nation which has appeared variously in the recently written works of scholars with keen interest on Nigerian nationalism particularly Ajor and others. Awolowo opined:

Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no 'Nigerians' in the same sense as there 'English', 'Welsh', or 'French'. The 'word 'Nigerian' is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not[12]

Whatever may be the accuracy behind this opinion, the point that readers should drive home by the above publication is that, Awolowo was simply historicising on how the diverse ethnic groups existed independently, though inter-relatedly, with each tribal grouping having due regard for the other before they were coercively integrated into one geopolitical entity (Nigeria), arising from the artificial boundaries created by colonialism. Without being in concord with Awolowo's opinion, the artificial boundaries must be underscored as a ploy that was deliberately orchestrated by the British to drive home their motive of economic exploitation however, in disguise of political subordination. If this is what Awolowo portrayed by the above assertion, then, it is tantamount to accepting also the view that the intricacies of history were at work in properly informing the nationalists that had the British incorporation of the diverse ethnic nationalities into one polity was effected by taking into cognisance their (ethnic groups) peculiarities, perhaps, the primordial sentiments that sowed the seed of discord and disunity among the various people with the nationalists inclusive would have been minimised, if not completely averted. As a corollary, Abubakar Tafawa Balewa (in Coleman, 1958:320), also delved into the history of Nigeria to lament bitterly yet realistically, the new geopolitical order inaugurated by the colonialists under the auspices of amalgamation, as the major cause of difficulties in the struggle for independence. The lamentation read in part:

*Since 1914, the British Government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian people themselves are **historically** different in their backgrounds, in their religious beliefs, and customs and do not show themselves any sign of willingness to unite. Nigerian unity is only a British intention for the country.*[13]

As if that was all, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto also hold his historical acumen as a weapon to challenge the British agenda that incorporated the various ethnic groups into one country, Nigeria. This was particularly when the tribal and regional animosities reverberated on the country's political arena in the Kano riot of 1953. Expressing his deep heartfelt bitterness on the riot in a historical context, therefore, Sardauna was quoted to have said "The mistake of 1914 has come to light." [14] One important lesson that can be discerned from the above divergent but seemingly collaborative thoughts of the Awolowo, Balewa, and Bello is that the crisis in question and other issues associated with their grievances occurred long after the amalgamation, but all of them had to quickly go back to the past and specifically, 1914. This was for them to primarily understand the complicated nature and character of the crisis situation. It became crystal clear that, history was pivotal in dictating to the prudent nationalists on the need to probe into the genesis of the crisis for the purpose of equally deciding on how to handle it in order to achieve independence. Whether those nationalists were able to judiciously apply this knowledge of history they had gained and resolved their controversy or not will be made known subsequently, in the flow of historical analysis.

3 THE COMPLEXITY OF THE STRUGGLE

It must be emphatically stressed at this juncture that, despite the applicability of history in the struggle as presented in the preceding section, the struggle was complex in nature due largely to centrifugal forces like ethnicism, regionalism and religion which as already espoused, created disunity and by implication, conflict among the nationalists. Some scholars has therefore capitalised on the stated forces to apportion much blame on the nationalists as part of the *raison d'être* behind the complexity of the situation. This scenario is what tempted Olusegun(2014) to brand those patriots as “so-called Nigerian nationalists.” The scholar further maintained that:

Instead of exploring ways of reconciling the apparently irreconcilable forces for a united and focused nation, the Nigerian political elites emphasized them to the point of dismemberment for selfish reasons. The elites failed to encourage the need to harness extant elements of unity and co-existence instead they reinforced micro-patriotism with religion and tribe as instruments of nurture.[15]

While the above underpinning is to a large extent, correct in view of the circumstances that culminated into the independence of Nigeria, that unpalatable nomenclature of “so-called nationalists” coined by the above named scholar needs to be carefully and sincerely examined by purging out some subterranean facts. One thing that is beyond doubt is the fact that in dealing with the issue of conflict be it physically or psychologically, it must be borne in mind that, this was not a peculiar phenomenon to the nationalists. Indeed, conflict is a concept that dates back to the history of human relations itself. This explains why one is optimistic with Karl Marx in his theory of historical determinism that, “the history of all hitherto existing societies is the history of class struggle.” When a survey of the capitalist situation in Europe in the era of industrialization is conducted, it becomes much more conspicuous to appreciate this fact. It was the internal contradictions such as the desires for raw materials, new markets, and capital investment that transcended into “conflict of interest” among the major contending European capitalist nations of Britain, France, Germany, Portugal, Belgium, Italy and Spain. These needs went along way in precipitating them (powers) to as a matter of necessity, arrived at a unanimous agreement to colonise the vast continent of Africa and in particular, Nigeria. To have therefore branded the nationalists as “so-called Nigerian nationalists” because of the regional and ethnic conflicts that beclouded Nigeria during the struggle for independence, and which has continue unabated till date is rather a product of faulty reasoning borne out of misdirected optimism. As already established, even the colonial masters themselves were first plunged into conflict and there is a logical connection that the said conflict was arguably, bound to mammothly affect the nationalists in their struggle for Nigeria's self rule. The issue of misunderstanding that ensued among the nationalists should therefore be viewed as a normal phenomenon which any one could have done; and not the description of been “so-called” as the learned scholar may like us to believe.

The principle of objectivity must however, be allocated its rightful place in the historical analysis of political and social phenomenon so as not to be entangled in the gamut of sentimentality. In this vain, the inability of the Nigerian nationalists to resolve their skirmishes that were deeply rooted in the politics of ethnicism and regionalism introduced by the colonialists as earlier stated, can be counted as the area where they did not help matters. This point can best be understood by way of comparison. Going back to the issues that hamstrung the European powers on the eve of colonialism, historical evidence has revealed that despite their conflicts, an amicable settlement was successfully reached by the competing nations (Europeans), before the dream for the acquisition of Nigeria and other African enclaves materialised. This fact becomes veracious when the Berlin conference of 1884/1885 convened under the stewardships of Otto Von Bismark, and Jules Ferry, Chancellor of Germany and Prime Minister of France respectively is recalled. It was this historic conference that settled the ‘conflict of interest’ among the major European powers by addressing the lingering issues involved in the conflict, and as a consequence, acted as a milestone in determining the conditions under which the territories like Nigeria were acquired. It can be posited here and correctly too, that, the inability of the nationalists from the three regions to come together on a round table having known the major issues that accounted for their conflict by digging into reliable historical paraphernalia's as presented above, was rather unfortunate. As Carr avers, history “consist essentially in seeing the past through the eyes of the present and in the light of its problems” so also Wright noted that “the study of our period must be a comparative examination of these worlds and their interactions.” Suffice to say that had the nationalists come to grasp these two rational lessons of history to settle their misunderstanding in the years of the struggle before independence was eventually granted to Nigeria in 1960, most, if not all, the myriads of challenges that inhibits the country under the postcolonial dispensation but are ingrained in the colonial past would have been improbable, if not almost impossible.

There are however, basic facts that must be made clear about the inability of the nationalists to unsuccessfully hearken to the aforethought historical lessons of Carr and Wright, in settling their misunderstanding as noted from the preceding paragraph. The exploitative character of the British colonialists that finds expression in “divide and rule” was what dragged the nationalists to be pitted at loggerheads against each other in their independence struggle. This implies that the crafty colonialist finds in divide and rule as a tactic that has a promising impact to accomplish, and hence, playing one region against another. But how did the British demonstratedly manipulated the divide and rule tactic to factionalise the nationalists and Nigerians as a whole?

Numerous evidences could be drawn from the various policies of the Governors of colonial Nigeria under the auspices of constitutions to arrive at a coherent answer. Beginning with the first Governor of Colonial Nigeria, Lord Lugard, when the Nigerian Council of 1914 was set up, 2 out of the 6 unofficial Nigerians in the council were drawn from the North, whereas the West and East had one each. Similarly, Clifford and Richard in their constitutions of 1922 and 1946 respectively limited voting rights to Lagos (3) and Calabar (1), thus disenfranchising many Nigerians. The legislative council created by Clifford was limited to the Southern province but did not include representatives from the North, as the Governor reserved the prerogative to make laws for the latter by proclamation. In addition, while the Northern

region was given a bicameral legislature (Houses of Assembly and Chiefs) under the Richard constitution, the West and East on the other hand, had only a unicameral legislature thereby creating an imbalance in the political pyramid of power. Then, came Macpherson with his constitution of 1951 that added salt to injury by allowing the North and West to operate with a bicameral legislature, howbeit, the East still remained under its unicameral legislature. The most pathetic of all, was the division of Nigeria into 3 unequal regions with the North occupying the largest Size as compared to the West and East. Consequent upon that, Nigeria envisaged, though regrettably, the emergence of three major ethnic groups; Hausa, Igbo, and Yoruba from the North, West and East respectively that over populate and marginalise the less populated ethnic groups. This is the genesis of majority-majority question in the body polity of Nigeria that hydra-headedly affect the desire for cooperate existence up till today.

To continue probing into the complexity of the struggle in question that was concomitantly influenced by the misunderstanding that arouse among the nationalists, that defies their efforts for resolution would rather rejuvenate the already provoking sentiments. But it is evidently clear that the “divide and rule” became the sharpened edges of the colonial knife in exploiting the people and creating the impulses that thwarted all efforts intensified by the nationalists to resolve their collisions, and broker peaceful coexistence for national unity, social cohesion, and harmony in the struggle for independence. In any case, posterity reserves the prerogative to perfect judgement.

4 CONCLUSION

This paper was grounded on the presupposition that history played a decisive role in the nationalist struggle for and actualisation of the independence of Nigeria. The decision to base the discourse on this topic was informed by the fact that despite being a force that paradigmatically assisted the nationalists in this regard, scholars has hardly, if not totally, hesitated in devoting their significant attention to bringing out expediently, these role. To say that the modicum of issues extensively brought to limelight were in the main, directed to achieve this idea is only a recapitulation of what has been accomplished by the paper. It also did not foreclose the reality that certain forces such as ethnicism, regionalism and religion accounted for the complexity of the struggle. In an aura quite welcoming, the nationalists were able to manage these grudges and reach the destination point which as affirmed, was nothing more or less than independence. And as a philosopher once noted “The greatest emotional need of an individual is to feel appreciated.” That is what the leaders, contemporary historians, political analysts, and the entirety of Nigerians owes the nationalists in their enviable role of setting Nigeria and its good people free from the backwoods of British colonial control.

The paper at this juncture drags the argument to a logical conclusion; and this seems to be that history was fundamentally used as a weapon in dictating and shaping the trajectories that transcended into the nationalist struggle for independence of Nigeria; and this, it must be stated in crystal clear terms, underpins its (history) role in the struggle. There is thus the need for more studies to be undertaken in this sphere for a proper appreciation of the inherent potentialities of history especially at the very moment where its survival is seemingly threatened due to extinction by the Nigerian government and the citizenry.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

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