

Youth and Nation Building in Nigeria, 1960-2020

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Abstract

The paper examines youth and nation building in Nigeria. The investigation taps strength from the understanding that youth exists, because the nation exists and conversely, the nation exists, because youth exists. This axiomatic underpins the complementary roles and relations between the duos, which are the hallmark of Hobbesian social contract theory. While several literatures on nation building focuses on other elements, the youth element the future of the Nigerian society hangs is deliberately and fundamentally undermined. This vexed problematic is what the paper seek to address by bringing youth of diverse religious backgrounds to the centre stage of national development discourse as crucial partner in progress. In addressing this vexed issue, the paper finds the ruling elites made up of Christian and Muslim and even African Traditional Religion on the one hand, and the Nigerian government conspicuously dominated by the adults on the other hands, to have done their best and exhausted. In other words, the adults ruling elites' best appears not to be the best for the Nigerian youth population and for the nation. Thus, the inability of the State to have arrived at the right formula to constructively and strategically engage her youth due to repeated history of policy inconsistencies and disarticulation and the gloomy picture of the future this paints, largely accounts for the outbursts of acrimony and tensions threatening the foundation of Nigeria. Instead of shopping for whom to blame; either adult or the youth in the entire episode of the national question, the paper makes bold to say that all hope is not lost giving the prospects awaiting younger generation of Nigerians in the century and beyond. Against this backdrop and of the residual history of mutual relations between the people of Nigeria, the paper advocates for adequate and compulsory teaching of the nation's basic history at all level of education to create patriotism and sense of belonging to diminishing and dismantling destructive ignorance, deadly prejudice and systemic stereotype. More importantly, since Nigerians are extremely religious, it adds that genuine teachings of Christian Religious Studies and Seerah are done to enable the younger generations imbibe true character of love, tenderness, mercy, justice, honesty, peace and patience lived and showcased by the persons of Jesus Christ and the Prophet, Muhammad S.A.W. The paper concludes that, while the role of the youth is significant to nation building project, all hands must be on deck as the phenomenon and its engineering is not a one-man show, but product of coordinated and cooperative enterprise. Being text of the pepper presented a Two Days International Seerah Conference on the theme "Training the Young Generation for Societal Change: Guidance from Seerah" organized by Shaheed Benazir Bhutto Women University Peshawar Pakistan, 23-24 May 2022.

Keywords: Nigeria, investigation, Training, Generatio, Societal Change

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Introduction

A large number of youth have no immediate prospects and are disenfranchised from the political, social and development processes in their countries. Without urgent measure, we risk creating a lost generation of squandered talents and dreams.¹

The above observation by Ban ki-Moon captured Nigeria's stark reality, which has for years defined the place of her youths. The understanding of the observation would go a long way in the weaving of the argument of the paper. The interplay between youths and nation building across time and space cannot be overemphasized as both phenomenon on the one hand, conjures up personalities that possesses energy, valor, visions, goal getters etc., and on the other hands, it portrays an exercise that requires vision, enterprise, energy, conscious doggedness, among others. While the role of the youths and the adults are fundamental and may tango in the task of building a nation, youthful exuberance should not be mistaken for adult experience. Nevertheless, the place of the youths holds primacy as the future that it is and which is to come absolutely hangs on the shoulders of the young ones. It is against this background the paper exclusively examines youth and nation building in Nigeria since independent-hood. For format purpose, the chapter is structured into six interrelating parts. One is the introduction, which lays the background argument of the paper; part two deals with clarifications of basic concepts that underlined the discourse. Section three, historicizes attempts at intergrading Nigerian youths, while section four considers crises of failing to bringing youths into the orbit of nation building project; five takes care of the prospects for Nigerian youths in the twenty first century and beyond; part six, solace from the Bible and Seerah in the fce of the challenges of nation building and part seven, which is the final, is the conclusion.

Conceptual Clarifications

The concepts that underlined the paper are youth and nation building. This shall be conceptualized in this aspect. First is the concept of youth, which is multidimensional and has been viewed from different perspective. As a result, few conceptions of it would be taken. Taiwo, considers the legal, biological and sociological view of the concept of youth and argues that, seeing youth between the ages of 12 and 20 is misleading.² To him, youth is the transitional ages between adolescence and young adult, which straddled the time young people are in school or have, graduated, but yet to enjoy full status, without access to all family, professional and political rights. Though rewarding, the perception is fraught with crises of age bracket that is very fundamental to the question of youth in the context of national mobilization. There is a perspective that pegs the franchise right at age 18, which appear more to have helped in settling the question of take off age, by the Nigerian Constitution did not solve the problem too but rather compounded it as the bracket is left unclosed.³ Be that as it may, section 2 (1) of the NYSC enabling Act puts the age bracket in its stipulation that a person shall not be called to serve in the Service Corps if at the date of graduation is over the age of thirty (age 30).⁴ This almost appears consistent with the United Nations view, which defined youth as anybody between the ages of 15 and 24 or so considered too narrow for African countries.⁵ Thus, African Youth Policy of 2006 puts youth between ages 15 and 35.⁶ Despite this, given the elastic nature of the concept several developing countries expand the age to thirty five and even more. Thus, the conception of youth varies from country to country. In The Gambia,

youths are humans between the ages of 17 and 35; Zambia ages of 15 to 25 years; Ghana ages 18 and 40, Botswana 18 to 30; South Africa pegged it between ages 18 and 35; Zimbabwe 18 to 35; the UK do not adopts European Union ages 15 to 25, but her national policy sees youths between ages 18 and 19, while her community and voluntary services adopts 25 years.⁷ The Nigeria National Policy 2009 puts the age bracket at 18 to 35 years; the “Not Too Young to Run” specifies age 30 as eligibility for president, while the 2019 Youth Policy of Nigeria specify specifies 29 years as the upper age with the aim of having a targeted intervention to avoid adults masquerading as youths.⁸ The age stipulations of the document emanating from the Ministry of Youth and Sports run contra to NYSC provisions of ages of 18 and 30. The chapter sees youth as species of humans between ages 18 and 35, which is consistent with the Second National Youth Policy Document of the Federal Republic of Nigeria and even N-Power of the current administration uses age limit of 35.⁹ This is more encompassing and would include a larger proportion of Nigerians for the purpose of the discourse. Youths are not children; neither is it adult. The people of the age bracket constitute the labour force of any country given the awesome power they posses and enormous influence they exercise. In Nigeria youth accounts for over 60 per cent of the teeming population.¹⁰ Shakespeare cited in Chikendu captures the relevance and resources of youth age, thus:

...Then a soldier, (i.e the youth), full of strange oaths, and bearded like the pard. Jealous in honour, sudden and quick in quarrel, seeking the bubble reputation. Even in the cannon's mouth.¹¹

Mazzini, in Odeh, buttresses this that:

Place the youth at the head of insurgent multitude; you know not the secret of the power hidden in those youthful hearts nor the magic influence exercised on the masses by the voice of the youth. You find among the youth a host of apostles of the new religion.¹²

Given the potentials inherent in youths, Mazzini through his writings and speeches encouraged them to be involved in the conscious struggle for the unification of Italy, while fighting for the dismantling of alien domination. Youths therefore, are fundamental elements of the society that have a lot of role to play in the task of nation building. However, the reverse is the case if the youths are not trained and their resources not properly harnessed. The pro and cons of the place of youths in nation building shall be examined as the chapter progresses.

Nation building on the other hands is perceived from different angle. Taking the root handle of it, the word nation is derived from the Latin, *natio*,¹³ which connotes the idea of common birth or decent in etymological and ethnological senses of it. Against the ethnological sense, it would be wrong and misleading to refers to the Igbo, Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani, Kanuri, Nupe, Idoma, Ijaw, Esan, Tiv, Igala, Tsekere, Ngas, among others as tribes; they are certainly nations. However, the application of the concept to African States, which is basically territorial as accepted by the United Nations (UNO), dates to 1940s.¹⁴ Going by the European modern and territorial sense of the concept, Nigeria came to nation hood in 1960. This is of course correct, but should be note that there are multiple nations in Nigeria dating to the dim past. Louis Snyder cited in Odeh, aptly captured this, thus:

In 1960, Nigeria came to nationhood with high expectations as Africa's most powerful democratic nation. But within few years Nigeria had to face the possibility of being split into series de facto nations based on tribe, common language, religion and common culture. Traditionally torn by tribal rivalries Nigeria went through further violent tribal uprisings and the nation seem dangerously close to disintegration.¹⁵

Though the events that consummated in the independence in 1960 appear more of statehood than nationhood; the latter may be applied since the various ethnic nationalities inhabiting the geopolitical entity have relatively transferred their allegiances from the petty entity to the entity called Nigeria.

Nation building engineers identifies dimensions and stages of building a nation, namely; vertical and horizontal; and the stages are; co-existence, contact, compromise and coalescence respectively.¹⁶ Vertically, nation building is not all about having a nation state, but accepting the authority of it in a legitimate manner (not through coercive means as experienced during the eras of military dictatorships and the controversial clamp down on #Endsars protesters in October, 2020) and seeing the government as a symbol of political community; horizontally, it is the acceptance of other members of the civic entity as equal fellows against the background of the recognition of shared history, resources, values in the bitter and sweet process of development.¹⁷ The big question is; do Nigerians across ethnic and cultural divide today, particularly the youths see themselves as their brother keepers? On the stage wise, the first stage which is co-existence implies co-habiting within the same border without necessarily knowing each other; contact entails having a minimum knowledge about each other and communication and interaction which may take different forms; compromise involves complex and diverse intercourses and interdependent that requires peaceful reconciliation of conflicting interest finally; coalescence denotes a kind of advance complex and functional integration in which conflict of interest is no longer perceived as clash of identities.¹⁸

A review of the dimensions and stages of nation building casts serous light on the controversial and problematic fact that since 1960 Nigeria lacked clear, constructive and precise political future as one find it very difficult situate the dimension and stage the country is today, going by the trajectory of events, which appeared to have drifted Nigeria backward from the height of compromise it was perceived to have attained in the 1970s.¹⁹ In short, instead of growing together, Nigeria and Nigerians are largely growing apart. This is because the fundamental ingredient in nation building remains a far cry, sixty years after political independence and over one hundred years after the famous 1914 amalgamation of the northern and southern protectorates. While in every successful marriage the fundamental ingredient is love, unity takes the place of love in nation building. The lack of this ingredient or superficiality of it is the objective basis of the constant calls for sovereign national conference for renegotiation of Nigeria's unity or union (marriage). More painfully too, at the moment, it does appears there exists nothing like true Nigerians, but ethnic nationalists and tribal jingoists as allegiance to petty tribe looms larger than to Nigerian State. It is against this backdrop the fulcrum on which the entire idea of nation building revolves is aptly captured by Okpoh, thus:

The problem of national integration revolves round the issue of building a just and democratic social order which gives every individual sense of belonging, which guarantees

each person a satisfactory level of participation and development , and which ensures for a people a share of resources of society commensurate with decent and acceptable living.²⁰

Adejo casts further light on it that:

...The national question is sometimes explained as the perennial debate on how to order the relations between different ethnic, linguistic and cultural groups in their assessment of national political, economic and social asset. Part of the problem is not being sure how they belong to the “modern” post colonial Nigerian nation–state and whether they are expected to have any stake, commitment or obligations to the state....²¹

The concept of “belonging” compromises Okpeh and Adejo’s position. As a deliberate package, how youths across divides have been carried along through targeted and coordinated government policies and programmes and their expectations or obligations to the Nigerian state is the thrust of the chapter and shall be examined in the subsequent part.

Glimpses at attempts in integrating Nigerian youth

About seven periods are discernible in the history of youth development and engagement in national affairs, namely; the era of schools programmes, society and association,(1960s-1970); period of creation of Ministry of Youth and Sports that was reproduced at the state level, the formation of the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) Scheme and the National Directorate of Employment (NDE), 1970-1980s; the domineering era of sporting activities of the 1990s; period of rebranding or the reconfiguration of the Ministry of Youths and Sports under Ministry of Women Affairs and Social development in early 2000s; recreation of the Ministry of Youth Development and seven point agenda of the late President Umaru Musa Yar’dua in 2007; Nigeria Youth Employment Action Plan (NIYEAP), YOUWIN and SURE-P and others youth empowerments programme during the Dr. Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Transformation Agenda, 2009-2015 and the N-Power programme and other youth empowerment initiatives under President Muhammadu Buhari since 2016 and Nigeria’s Nation Policy 2019.

Before examining some salient developments in the outlined periods, it is imperative to undertake a retrospective view of Nigerian youth and the struggle for the emancipation from the colonial rule. Nigerians like other African people saw the defects of colonialism from the onset and thus, vehemently resisted and rejected it at all fronts, but were unfortunately subdued by “superior tactics” and diffused politics. While in the British colonial bondage, the struggles for self rule persisted. In 1908 for instance, the People’s Union under which the people protested against water rate imposed by Governor Walter Egerton was formed.²² Like any other protests and social moves in history, there will be little or no room for controversy that the youths were at the forefront. Consequently, the Reform club was formed in December 1920 with members largely drawn from the young educated elites of Lagos. Its major preoccupation was opposition to direct taxation.

Be that as it may the first authoritative reference to Nigerian youth may be traced to the developments leading to the formation of Lagos Youth Movement (LYM) in 1934, later known as Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM). The movement led by young Ernest Okoli, Samuel Akinsanya and Dr. J C. Vaughan was renamed Nigerian Youth Movement in

1936. It may be recalled that the colonial government established the Yaba College for the education of the youths to enable them fit into civil service. However, its establishment was fraught with several challenges, paramount among which were; it was not affiliated to any university in Britain and its Diplomas were inferior and thus, limited to Nigeria and its possessors were to be placed below those that studied in foreign lands.²³ Initially, the operations of NYM was largely limited to Lagos, but with the return of young, energetic and vibrant Nnamdi Azikwe and joining it along with H O. Davies in 1937 and 1938, it developed its national trappings. In short, NYM among other reasons arose as a fundamental response and reaction against the domineering influence of the adult elites who were fast drifting into conservatism.²⁴

While the above was going on in the South and gradually spreading to the country side, Discussion Circles and Social Groups platform for young western educated elements were erected to enable them socialize, share and express grievances with the aim of securing what they considered as a better society. A handful of such circles emerged in places like Zaria, Kano, Bauchi, Kaduna and Sokoto. Through Newspapers such as the Pilot, Comet and groups, the northern branch of NYM known as Northern Nigerian Youth Movement (NNYM) was formed in Kano in 1947 by Raji Abdallah and his group. Before this time, there was Youth Social Circle (YSC) founded in Sokoto province by Mallam Gambo Abuja, Shehu Shagari Ahmadu later Marafa Danbaba, Ibrahim Gusau, Mallam Madugu Zumi, among others.²⁵ Concomitantly and consequently or so, the various pan ethnic unions such as the Omo Egbe Oduduwa, Jimayyar Mutane Arewa, Igbo Union, among others were transmogrified into political organizations like the Action Group (AG), the Northern People's Congress (NPC), National Council of Nigeria and Cameroun later National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) that was to become Igbo defacto party. These parties were led and dominated by youths like Sir. Herbert Macaulay, Nnamdi Azikiwe, Tafawa Balewa, Obafemi Awolowo etc.²⁶ The collapse of groups and unions into a formidable political horse across Nigeria was made possible through the cosmopolitan and liberal nature of the young elites. In the bid to cripple and crumble the development of such nationalistic forums and groups particularly the Northern Nigerian Youth Movement (N.N.Y.M), the British colonial government created the College Old Boys' Association (COBA) in 1939²⁷ to supervise and monitor the activities of the young educated elements. The British tactics of suppressing social and political engagements through constitutional changes and reforms persisted till the eclipse of colonialism on first October 1960.

Be that as it may, against the background of the popular view that youths are the leaders of tomorrow, Nigerian governments has in one way or the other given them attention since 1960. In the 1960s, though there was no clear cut policy towards youth development, in- and out-of-school programmes were devised to shape their character and cultivating in them the spirit of competitiveness, excellence at work and industry. On the one hand, the various clubs in schools and sporting engagement and on the other hands, the creation of voluntary self-help initiatives and association for accelerated community development, skills and vocational training and cultural festivals, among others are part of the packages.²⁸ It may be recalled that it was during this period the maiden call and proposal for the establishment of NYSC was made by patriotic Nigerians in America to the Federal Government under Sir Abubakar Tafawa Balewa and the

Military Government of Ironsi to establish a youth service similar to the United States Peace Corp.²⁹ However, this was never realized in the 1960s due to series of coups and counter coups that rocked the polity. In other words, the inability of the Governments to heed to the calls and implement the proposals was not as a result of its insensitivity to youth matter, but a development over taken by circumstances events. All in all, the attempt at developing the Nigerian youth during period suffered a constructive defect which lives lasting impression, as what was done was without dogged policy and appeared more of a bow shot at per adventure.

The period between 1970 and 1980s opens another era at effort towards developing the youths. The Government took the affairs of the youth to the centre stage by establishing Ministry of Youth and Sports that was reproduced at the state level. The NYSC formed in 1973, the Federal Character introduced in 1979, the National Directorate of Employment formed in 1986 and the intensification of Citizenship and Leadership Training Centre Jos, all exception of the Federal Character to extent aimed at inclusion and development of the potentials of the youths.³⁰ The National Youth Service Corps was established by Decree 24 of 22nd May 1973, principally to promote national unity, integration and development. Gowon cited in Enegwé aptly captured the purpose of the Scheme thus:

The purpose ...is primarily to inculcate in Nigerian youths, the spirit of selfless service to the community and to emphasize the spirit of oneness and brotherhood of all Nigerians irrespective of the cultural background. The history of our country since independence has clearly indicated the need for unity among all our people...³¹

Adebayo Adedeji cited in Odeh buttresses the above, thus:

It had become abundantly clear to discerning observers of the Nigerian political scene that to build enduring national unity, Nigeria youths from all ethnic groups ought to be mobilized and put in the forefront of the task of nation building and integration...patriotism, dedication to the different ethnic groups that constitute the people of Nigeria ought to be deliberately engineered and nurtured.³²

Similarly General Muhammadu Buhari regime of the 1980s attaches importance to youth populace and the Scheme, and notes that:

A nation's hope and pride lies in her youths...the Federal Government had no regrets in establishing the NYSC Scheme which is a crusade to rescue the nation and give it a new lease of life.³³

The above observations found expression in the objectives of the Scheme which states, thus:

to inculcate discipline in Nigerian youths by instilling in them a tradition of industry at work and of patriotic and loyal service to the Nation in any situation they may find themselves;

to raise the moral tone of the Nigerian youths by giving them the opportunity to learn about higher ideals of national achievement, social and cultural improvement;

to develop in the Nigerian youths ,attitudes of mind , acquired through shared experience and suitable training , which will make them more amenable to mobilization in the national interest;

to develop common ties among our youths and promote national unity by ensuring that: as far as possible, youths are assigned to job in the states other than their states of origin; each group, assigned to work together, is a representative of the country as possible; the youths are exposed to the mode of living of the people in different parts of the country with a view to removing prejudices, eliminating ignorance and confirming at first hand the many similarities among Nigerians of all ethnic groups; to encourage members of the corps to seek, at the end of their corps service, career employment all over the country, thus promoting free movement of labour; to induce employers, partly through their experience with corps members, to employ more readily qualified Nigerians irrespective of their states of origin; and to enable our youths to acquire the spirit of self-reliance.³⁴

In view of the self-reliance stance of the Scheme in (g) above, the Murtala/ Obasanjo regime gave attention to the youth and the NYSC; identifies areas where the activities of corps members would be required. Obasanjo, observes, thus:

The other key areas in which the nation expects the full participation and involvement of corps members are (a) the Operation Feed the Nation Programme which aims to make our country self-sufficient in basic food-stuffs, (b) the Cooperative Movement through which the Government intends to ensure the distribution of essential commodities throughout the country, thereby curbing the present high prices demanded for those items by middlemen who heighten inflation.³⁵

In brief, from inception and before the covid19 pandemic messed things up (1973-2019), a total of four million, eight hundred thousand, five hundred and sixty eight (4,800,568)³⁶ graduate youths has been mobilized across the thirty six States of the Federation, including the Federal Capital Territory (FCT), Abuja. Out of this figure, several corps members developed positive attitude towards host communities, some made the supreme sacrifice by being killed in violent ethno-religious and other related conflicts, while others have been employed in states other than theirs underscoring the degree some of the aim and objectives of the Scheme has been achieved. Notwithstanding, the above objectives has been largely unachieved as the Scheme over the years has been unable to produce the new man (youth) capable of pushing the nation to the promised land of integration. This task is clearly captured, thus:

...the foremost challenge of the scheme is to create a new man whose values and attitudinal disposition will be in consonance with the societal/national demands...the central source of concern it would appear is the extent to which the attitudinal disposition of corps member have been affected by the programme and how to measure and sustain such attitudinal change much vital to the future of the scheme.³⁷

Notwithstanding, the Scheme has made marks by becoming the household name (corper) in Nigeria both in urban and rural areas. Youth-related organizations such as the Man O' War, Boys and Girls Brigade, Boys Scout, Girls Guide, Red Cross and Red Crescent exist across the country and have continually served as useful platforms for civic engagement of the Nigerian youth.

On the other hands, the CAP 250 Laws of the Federation formerly, Decree No.34 of 1986 established the National Directorate of Employment, with the following mandate:

to design and implement programmes to combat unemployment;

to articulate policies aimed at developing work programmes with labour intensive potentials;

to obtain and maintain a Data Bank on unemployment and vacancies in the country with a view to acting as clearing house to link job seekers with vacancies in the collaboration with other government agencies and;

to implement any other policies as may be laid down from time to time by the Board established under sections of its enabling law.³⁸

A quick survey of the above would make youth scream at paragraph (c) above as it is no longer a reality in the twenty first century, where twenty thousand graduates would apply for a job opening where less than one hundred people are needed. However, the Directorate through its programmes (Vocational Skills Development-VSD, Small Scale Enterprise- SSE, Enterprise Start-up and Development-ESDTS, Rural Employment Promotion-REP, Special Public Works Programme-SPW,) has been able to achieve some of its objectives through its operational offices in the states of the federation and liaison offices in the 774 local governments. As it is lack of publicity, government neglect and underfunding are basic challenges of the NDE. In short, the Directorate skills acquisition centers have the capacity of producing 73, 800 trainees, but only 23,629 have been graduated from 2008 to 2015.³⁹

As noted, it is laudable that the period between 1970s and 1980s witnessed the creation of the Ministry of Youth and Sports, the drafting of what may be referred to as the first National Youth Policy in 1981, which was followed by social development policy in 1989.⁴⁰ While these are notable, the reality on ground shows no positive impact. From the early 1980s of the Shehu Shagari's years of austerity measure to the Structural Adjustment Programme of Babangida years, it became clear that government as the major employer of semi skill labour lacked the capacity to contain the demand of wage employment.⁴¹ The policies of the time suffered setbacks and was abandoned in the 1990s, while the ministry suffered disbanding and rebranding; tampered sometimes by being brought under the Ministry of Women Affairs and other times by being completely dissolved. As a specialized ministry, the way and manner it is being treated goes a long way showcasing the degree of the importance the government attaches to the youth. From recorded history it does appears a youth between the ages of 18 to 35 has never heads the ministry. However, the current minister, Hon. Sunday Dare, appear younger than his predecessors, but above 35 years of age.⁴² On the issues of appointing youth to head the Ministry, among others, it seems State Governments have done better than the Federal Government. For instance, in August 2019, a 27 years Seun Fakorede was appointed Commissioner for Sports in Oyo State; in December 2019, a 26 years old Joana Nnazua Kolo was appointed Commissioner of Sports in Kawara State and in 2020 Governnor Aminu Waziri Tambuwal appointed a 32 years old Comrade Bashir Gorau as Commissioner for Youth and Sports in Sokoto. Other youths in similar positions at the State level are; appointment of 40 years old Akintunde Oyeboode as Commissioner for Finance and Economic Development by Kayode Fayemi of Ekiti State and appointment

of 35 years old Rabiu Olowo in 2019 as Commissioner for Finance Lagos State by Governor Babajide Sanwo-Olu.⁴³ The Federal Government should take clue from the State Governments and do the needful even if it can't appoints youths in all; certain percentage should be reserved for them. But more importantly, just as the problems of women are best known and addressed by women, the problems of youth are easily and better understood and addressed by youths. Having a youth of ages 18 to 35 as Minister of Youth and Sports Development would go a long way in their inclusion in the task of nation building.

In short, in the 1990s the ideas of youth development was pigeonholed within the narrow precinct of sporting engagement thereby neglecting other essential areas of civic education, skill acquisition and leadership training. More worrisome, the sporting activities of the regime or the era were not given adequate attention. What existed was more of lip service despite the utilitarian value of youth to national development.⁴⁴ The attention of IBB and Abacha regimes to the youth may be deciphered from comments on NYSC. During IBB, the Vice President, Admiral August Aikhomu, after a look at the Scheme, declared that: "NYSC has come to stay".⁴⁵ Abacha, while noting that: "the National Youth Service Corps Scheme has undoubtedly become a household name in Nigeria"⁴⁶, contends, thus:

Twenty one years after the establishment of the National Youth Service Scheme in Nigeria, the course of our national experience continues to reinforce the relevance of its conception in our effort at nation building. Our resolve and commitment and resolve as a government to support the Corps and strengthen its programmes remain as strong as ever.⁴⁷

As forceful and hopeful the observation is the coverage of youth go beyond the confine of NYSC. Thus, governments appear not to have given adequate attention to the ideal of youth inclusion in nation building project.

Be that as it may, in January 2000 the government attempted to remedy the deficit in youth development and inclusion by dissolving the Ministry of Youth and Sports under the created Ministry of Women Affairs and Social Development. However, no serious impact was made in the enterprise. In its restless struggle to get it right, in 2001 a National Youth Policy was developed and the Federal Ministry of Youth Development was created in 2007, which was to serve as the platform for the review of the 2001 policy in 2009.⁴⁸ The NYSC and Citizenship and Leadership Training Centre were the key parastatals saddled with the responsibility of inculcating and promoting patriotism, harmony, equity and justice in youths.⁴⁹ However, the traditional challenges of NYSC and even of the Centre persisted, as result, no meaningful result was gotten.

The Seven Point Agenda of President Umaru Musa Yar'dua of the blessed memory which point up job creation and the Dr, Goodluck Ebele Jonathan Transformation Agenda, which Youth Enterprise with Innovation in Nigeria (YOUWIN) and the Subsidy Reinvestment and Empowerment Programme (SURE-P) are part of, are part of youth development packages for the years 2009 or so to 2015. Under YOUWIN, some youth were empowered within the range of One Million Naira (N1.0m) to Ten million Naira (10,m) for viable businesses.⁵⁰ Given the multiple challenge of the youth, the policy

thrust of the Ministry of Youth Development under Goodluck Jonathan focuses on the following core areas:

Education;

Health ;

Youth and Agriculture;

Employment;

Science;

Technology;

Environment;

Participation in Decision making;

ICT;

Youth and Crime;

Sports and Recreation;

Culture;

Family Life ;

Youth and Migration; and

Poverty.⁵¹

The above was targeted at mainstreaming youths for enhanced nation building and development. However, while some youths actually benefited from the above package including the YOUWIN and SURE-P, it was largely a failure given the reality on ground as youth poverty and unemployment maintained upward trajectory. It seems the challenge of Nigerian youth and society is so huge that whatever amount of impact is made remain negligible and insignificant.

Arising from the changing realities and trends including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and new and emerging issues affecting majority of young people in Nigeria, the 2009 youth policy was to be revised in 2016 and the review of the 2016 gives birth to the 2019 edition of the policy. The strategic thrust of the 2019 policy that is of utmost interest to the chapter is “Participation, inclusiveness, and equitable opportunities for all youth.⁵² One thought the 2019 youth policy was to drive down the “Not Too Young to Run” bill signed into law by the President on 31 May 2018. While the bill reduced the age for those aspiring to the House of Assembly and House of Representatives from 30 year old to 25 years old, Senate and Governorship from 35 years old to 30 years old, the office of the president was condensed from 40 to 30 years.⁵³ One would have queried the integrity of it and the genuineness of the ruling elites on the basis of the 2019 election had the bill came before the exercise. However, it remains that it would be tested in 2023 elections to ascertain whether a truly political space has been created for the youth. Such testing becomes crucial, because Nigerian youths appeared to have been relegated to the backwaters of political leadership, compared to the formative years of the nation’s politics. Government Official Document substantiates this thus:

Young people are a creative force, a dynamic source of innovation, and they have undoubtedly, throughout history, participated, contributed, and even catalyzed

important changes in political systems of many countries of the world. Whereas, most of the leading political actors and leaders of thoughts at independence in 1960 were in their youthful years, the situation is radically different today with very few youth having the opportunity to play leadership roles in political parties, political processes, and overall governance of the country.⁵⁴

On the political plank therefore, Nigerian youths appear to have being out of corridor of power for long, and denial of power is said to be denial of the benefit of power. With more rooms for them in decision making process they would be positioned to contribute to nation building.

Since 2016, the current administration of President Muhammdu Buhari initiated N-Power with the aim of empowering youths thereby lifting them from poverty to contented human being capable of catering for themselves and possibly for the love ones. In the programme formerly under the office of the Vice President Prof. Yemi Osinbajo and now placed under the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs and Disaster Management, the youths are engaged in a six layered sectors namely; N-Agro, N-Teach, N-Health, N-Build, N-Creative and N-Tech.⁵⁵ Initially it was open for University graduates and holders of Higher National Diploma (HND) or equivalent from the Polytechnic and Colleges of Education, but later holders of National Certificate of Education (NCE) Ordinary National Diploma (OND) and National Diploma (ND) and probably O' Level certificate became eligible, with participants drawing a monthly stipend of #30,000.⁵⁶ Batch A and B of the programme drew a total of five hundred thousand (500,000) youths; batch A with a total of 200,000 youths, while B with 300,000 respectively, before disbandment in 2020.⁵⁷ Though this has been beneficial to unemployed some unemployed graduates and youths, regarded as the greatest Social Investment Programme (SIP) in Africa, one wonders what the amount could do in the face of ailing Nigeria economy since 2016. More challenging is the inability of the government to provide good jobs for youths and even when there is little opening the higher percentage of those that gets it must in one way or the other be connected to a godfather or a politician.⁵⁸

From the foregoing analysis it appears incontrovertible that Nigerian youth are marginalized and fundamentally left out in the task of nation building project. The reason for policy failure to mainstreaming the youth into national project since 1960 is not farfetched, but a consequence of what Claude Ake described as policy disarticulation.⁵⁹ The inability to correct or get it right appears to have being responsible for the crisis the nation is undergoing in the twenty-first century and if not urgently addressed, may degenerate to cataclysmic state capable of liquidating the Nigerian State. The crises of relevance the inability of the State to properly engage her youths have created are examined in the subsequent part of the chapter.

Crises of failure to mainstreaming youth into Nation Building project

The failure of the Nigerian State to fully bring on board youths element in the task of nation building are legion, but few would be taken. The critical and most challenging is unemployment and poverty, insecurity, youth restiveness, apathy and attendant gloom and doom it poses to the nation. First, unemployed and poverty stricken youths are the most desperate group; an educated conscious souls who are aware of what is going on in the country as observers of events and time, but have no job to earn a living are threats

to the nation. Unemployment produces conflict and crime, which in turn increases unemployment due to their causal effects on economic performance, investors' confidence, and political instability. Job creation, therefore, is a critical tool for conflict resolution. Unemployment and poverty are quite tangled. The share of the total population living below the \$1.9 per day threshold of 46 per cent is higher in 2016 than in the 1980s and 1990s—despite significant improvements in the growth of GDP in recent years.⁶⁰ Statistics has shown upon completion of the compulsory one year national youth service corps (NYSC), only 5.7 per cent of graduates receives offer of employment; 60 to 70 per cent spends up to thirteen to fourteen months, 14 per cent spends two to three years, while some never get a government job at all.⁶¹ The graduates of the last century particularly in the 1960s, 1970s, and up to 1980s had different labour market experience. During this period, story has it that before ones' final paper at the university, college of education and even polytechnic, jobs were waiting. As a matter of fact, immediately upon graduation or final papers in those days, graduates chooses organizations of interest to work and were attached with official car, decent accommodation and good condition of service.⁶² As noted, the narrative has changed in the century making the over 70 million unemployed Nigerians⁶³ who are of the youth community a time bomb awaiting explosion if nothing is urgently done. In short, if the "most important democracy is democracy of the stomach" as Adeshina⁶⁴ argued, it also means the most important democracy and government is the democracy and government that offers employment.

Related to the crisis of youth unemployment and poverty is the problem of insecurity. Investment in youth is an investment in security and the collective future of the people and the nation, because the future belongs to the youths. In other words, if youthful resources are properly utilized they could make positive contributions to national security through partnership with security agencies, information sharing, cooperation and even actual fighting of crime. The greatest threat to national security in the twenty first century is cyber crime and youth across nations has the best knowledge of the latest technology and gadgets. In short, the world gone to the net, and the number of youths on the net are more than adults. Youth marginalization and non inclusion in the affairs of the State, means, while adults heads and leads the State politically, youths dominate and leads technologically and knowledge wise. The reader may be interested in the table below showing youth distribution by type of crime.

Table 1: Distribution of youth by type of crime committed and Age Group

Type of Crime	Age Group				Total
	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-35	
Abducting /Kidnapping	166	168	335	236	905
Aggravated Assault	1117	1219	2449	1239	6024
Armed Robbery	455	1595	1002	888	3940
Arson	193	154	253	241	841
Burglary	309	271	369	280	1229

Cocaine and Crack Cocaine	49	85	105	75	314
Cultism and Ritual	99	182	70	14	365
Curfew violation/loitering	27	101	51	24	203
Cyber crime (yahoo yahoo)	21	29	37	25	112
Disorderly conduct	149	312	264	298	1023
Drug law violation	186	338	310	209	1043
Ecstasy(MDMA)	8	6	2	1	17
Embezzlement	12	7	90	127	236
Forcible rape	163	209	257	169	798
Forgery and counterfeiting	30	55	111	83	269
Fraud	32	94	153	230	499
Gambling	78	288	322	128	816
Human trafficking	31	5	41	75	152
Immigration/Emigration offences				5	5
Marijuana	784	1656	1816	1092	5348
Meth	9	36	44	34	123
Murder	261	535	956	808	2560
Opium(Heroin)	9	47	66	49	170
Prostitution and related offences	83	113	142	40	378
Robbery	60	366	185	73	684
Sex i.e. Statutory rape	50	61	111	35	257
Simple assault	617	822	1129	800	3368
Stolen property	336	916	763	290	2305
Theft	1602	1367	3061	3149	9179
Traffic offence	134	444	1111	713	2402
Unlawful possession of weapon	144	374	316	215	1049
Vandalism	33	89	66	34	222
Total	7237	11944	15986	11669	46836

Source: A. Mohammed, "Youth Empowerment and National Security in Nigeria: An Appraisal" in *Constructive Engagement on National Security on the theme: Youth Empowerment and National Security: Options for Nigeria*. Journal Publication of Alumni

Association of National Defence College (AANDEC/NDC), Abuja: National Defence College, Vol. 1. No. 6, 2014, P.23.

Missing in the above is terrorism and banditry accelerating the nation to distressed and buckled state. Rather than diminishing, the above crimes have continued to maintain astronomical rise. The inability of the government to create jobs and address youth related challenges was what Gen. T Y. Danjuma described as “Somalialisation of Nigeria.”⁶⁵

Furthermore, non inclusion leads to youth restiveness as a way of expressing grievances to claiming and reclaiming what they felt have been deprived of or trying to correct what they perceived as odd in the society. Frustration, it is said, leads to aggression. Elegbeleye in Uzundu, puts the essence of restiveness, thus:

Youth restiveness is a sustained protestation embarked upon to enforce desired outcome from a constituted authority by an organized body of youths. This act has remained the challenge that Nigeria is facing as nation and urgent attention.⁶⁶

As noted, protests led to the formation of People’s Union in 1908 and the founding of LYM (later NYM) in 1934. Student and youth opposition and protest led to the abandoning of the Nigeria-Anglo Defence Pact of 1961.⁶⁷ In 1978, there was “Ali must go” student’s protest against increase in school fees. “Ali must go” has been described as one of the most violent student agitations and restlessnesses in Nigerian history.⁶⁸ Most recently was the #EndSars that culminated in the disbanding of the Special Anti Robbery Squad (SARS) of the Nigerian Police Force (NPF) following the October 2020 gory experience climaxed in Lagos at the Lekki Toll Gate episode.⁶⁹ The youths started it by taking to the social media to campaign against police brutality and before one knows it, the heat and tensions it generated has engulfed the whole of the nation. Government therefore, should be cautious of similar protest from the battalion of unemployed youths in the nearest future and its possibility of leading to an implosion.

Finally, but not limited to, the way and manner youths are treated may lead to nation building apathetic. The state and the citizens are in contract. The contract is binding as long as parties keep to its tenets.⁷⁰ As strong as mutually enforcing and reinforcing the nature of the agreement is, the State should lead the way and then the citizens practically the youths follows. The dwindling level or lack of patriotism often cried about are fundamental fallouts of the unfaithfulness and inability of the government to provide the basic needs of the populace, which for the youths; quality education, security and employment top the list. The cumulative effect of this is the slogan among the young ones, “who go die for Nigeria”;⁷¹ which is now found even in the mouth of the adults; an expression showcasing frustration, despair and despondency, which are forerunners of total apathy to the affairs of the State. As it is at the moment, Nigerian youth appears to be one of the most neglected in the world and this spells doom for the nation, because a nation without quality youth is a nation without tomorrow. The question is, is there possibilities of changing the tide in the twenty first century and beyond? This raised problematic is what the remaining section of the chapter shall dwell on.

Prospects for Nigerian youth in the 21st century and beyond

Against the backdrop of over half a century of neglect, it appears many waters has gone under the bridge and possibilities are that one may want to resign to fate and despondency

in view of what the future holds for the youths. In such critical moment in the history of national youth development, once may take clue and solace in the words of Wilson Churchill, that: "success is not final, failure is not fatal; it is the courage to continue that counts".⁷² There is therefore prospect for Nigerian youth in the twenty first century and beyond. The prospects hinges on one; youths has the highest population and are assets to the nation; two the future belongs to them; three the restoration of history teaching in schools and its benefits to younger generation; four, skills and agility to undertake any national assignment, among others. First, youth have the highest age groups in Nigeria and are therefore valuable assets the nation must invest on. Age plays crucial role in several issues Nigeria and Africa faces. The young Africans- those aged 15 to 25 are the fastest growing age. They represent 20 per cent of the continent's total population and 60 per cent of the unemployed inhabitant.⁷³ For Nigeria, as noted, youth are over 60 per cent of the total population and well over 70 million of them are unemployed. The significances of youth population to nations including, Nigeria is put by Donald Duke, thus:

...A young population is an asset. Why is America giving out green cards? The reason is that they have an ageing population. Canada is one of the best societies in the world but it has a critical problem. It has more infrastructure than people right now. Japan is experiencing the same thing. You need a young population. A young population is productive and consumptive. Old people don't spend, they are fewer, they don't consume much, and they eat once a day. Their wardrobe is small and conservative. They won't buy sport cars, they won't go to cinema. You need a young population. It's an asset but if we don't develop them, they will be a liability.⁷⁴

Against the backdrop of the above and the utilitarian value of youth, African and Nigeria governments and leaders must brace up, develop and bring their youths to the centre stage of State's affairs for sustainable development of generations to come.

Related to the above is the fact that the future belongs to the youths. The adult ruling class knows this too. The expression by adult that "children or youths are the leaders of tomorrow" underscores this point. The Agenda 2030 in Nigeria's 2019 National Youth Policy notes the futuristic role of youth elements that: "the future of humanity and of our planet lies in our hands. It lies also in the hands of today's younger generation who will pass the torch to the future generations".⁷⁵ The challenge has being that generations of children and youths who have graduated and are graduating to adulthood were told, they are the leaders of tomorrow unfortunately or ironically, when it appears the tomorrow should have come, old generation still dominate political leadership space. Odeh, bluntly put this, thus:

...the youths are tired, because some years back they were told that they are the leaders of tomorrow and now that the tomorrow has come, those who told them they were the leaders of tomorrow are still in power or the leaders. Where and when then is this tomorrow?⁷⁶

An elder of a blessed memory buttresses the above position that: "Yesterday (at independence), we prayed for a better tomorrow; but today we pray for a better yesterday".⁷⁷ The observations shows Nigeria is not getting it right in youth enterprise and more so, that the country is neither going forward nor backward. The prospect for

youth in the context lies in understating the philosophy of time and change that, the past (yesterday) and the future (tomorrow) are products of the minds that remembers and expects respectively, because what exist and will continue to exist is now. The youth and the ruling class or the government needs coordinated and constructive engagement in the project of building.

Thirdly, the restoration of the teaching and studies of history in schools promised great deal to the youth and nation building. This was a great achievement the Historical Society of Nigeria under the watches of the former President, Professor CBN Ogbogbo and the incumbent, Professor Okpeh O. Okpeh Jr. Many Nigerian youths lacked adequate knowledge of history of the country. This has being a gap NYSC and other mechanisms developed by the government to familiarize the youth with the history and geography of the people could not remedy. Just like the saying that “one cannot be more catholic than the pope”, no means can furnish the youth with adequate knowledge of the history of Nigeria than the teaching of history itself. A graduate once pathetically asked in Sokoto if Usmanu Danfodiyo was a Governor like Sen. Dr. Aliyu Magatakarda Wamakko? Such question and many more un-asked ones in the minds of the younger generation displays absolute lack of the basic history of Nigeria and portend danger to nation building. History furnishes that ethnic entities inhabiting contemporary Nigeria had relations that cut across every spheres of lives. Y B. Usman, fiercely asserted this, thus:

...those who are advocating for the restructuring of Nigeria into a Federation of nationalities and ethnic groups have failed to grasp the substance of the historical process which has produced our ethnic groups and the Nigerian polity. Not only do they repeat blatant falsehoods about how Nigeria came into being, but they are oblivious of the impossibility of demarcating the boundary between most of the ethnic groups of contemporary Nigeria and their neighbours. These nationalities have actually no boundaries; they intermesh into one another at the level of language, culture, identity and history. Any attempt to carve out the territories of Nigerian ethnic groups, or even sub-ethnic groups, to create ethnically based federating units will lead to violent conflicts and sustained border wars, because there is no basis for these ethnic boundaries at ethnic level, given the mosaic nature of the ethnic and cultural geography of Nigeria and most of Africa.⁷⁸

Erim in Usman and Odeh, buttresses the above and argue in favour of the pre-colonial tangible and intangible links among the people of Nigeria, thus:

...it was this network of pre-colonial ties which over the centuries created a solid basis for the development of modern nationality in Africa. That these nation-states today lived within ill-defined boundaries is dictated primarily by the considerations of European power politics as well as the process of modernization.⁷⁹

The various ethnic groups whether major or minor, which produces contemporary Nigerian youths therefore had relations with one another; relations not antagonistic as showcased in colonial historiography.⁸⁰ What is therefore necessary for the youths is adequate knowledge of these relations to help overcome prejudice and other destructive barriers to nation building. Ifemesia in Adejo, suggests this antidote thus:

If a culture group knew enough about the background and antecedents of their neighbours, intergroup relations would be advanced, for that would enable one know the merits and

defects of others and so they can tolerate one another and interact with minimum friction and conflicts.⁸¹

History is the best instrument to fostering such knowledge as noted. As a result, its restoration and teaching should be enforced and sustained by all stakeholders since nation building project is not a one man show.

Finally, but not limited to, is the fact that youths possesses requisite skills and agility to undertake any national assignment. Nigerian youths are not “lazy”⁸² as once averred. The nation’s youths at home in diasporas makes their marks wherever they are found. The Nigeria Armed Forces, the Police and other security agencies probably have more than 70 per cent of the youths within the age bracket of 18 to 40.⁸³ The National Youth Development Conference in Uzundu summarizes it that:

Youths are the foundation of a society. Their energies, inventiveness, character and orientation define the pace of development and security of a nation, through their creative talent and labour power, a nation makes giant strides in economic development and socio-political attainments. In their dreams and hopes, a nation finds motivation, on their energies; she builds her vitality and purpose. And because of their dreams and aspiration the future of a nation is assured.⁸⁴

Against the background of the essential qualities youth element possesses, the Nigerian government and leadership class should change their orientation towards youth, invest in them and stop disconnecting them from the mainstream of nation building project and development. The Vision 2020 appeared to have largely failed because of un-endearing attitude of the government to the youths and the consequences it produces.

Youth and the crisis of nation building in Nigeria: solace from the Bible and Seerah

In the face of repeated failure of mainstreaming young folks into the project of nation building what should do? First, the youths should take solace in the residual history of mutual relations between the people of Nigeria and the contribution of the young folks in the struggle for political that was consummated. Adequate and compulsory teaching of the nation’s basic history at all level of education will therefore, to create patriotism and sense of belonging to diminishing and dismantling destructive ignorance, deadly prejudice and systemic stereotype that has for decades kept the youth disunited from chatting common course to rescuing the nation. Whether Muslim or Christians the youths should see themselves e one and struggle for the well being of it. Secondly, and more importantly, since Nigerians are extremely religious, it adds that genuine teachings of Christian Religious Studies and Seerah are done to enable the younger generations imbibe true character of love, tenderness, mercy, peace and patience lived and showcased by the persons of Jesus Christ and the Prophet, Mohammed S.A.W. In the Bible it is recorded thus: “...endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ...if a man also strive for masteries yet is not crowned, except he strive lawfully” (2 Timothy 2:3,4). That was Paul’s letter to Timothy, one of the youths of his own generation. We see patience and the instruction not to take laws into ones hands by engaging in acts of illegality. Jesus himself demonstrated these tributes by being resolute on his assignment and endures pains, without breaking laws (see Hebrews 12:2). The Seerah on the other hands promises great deal to the youths. Conceptually, Seerah is the life story of the Prophet (PBUH) before after the revelation, s life associated with difficulties and challenges, which he

solved.⁸⁵ Having lost both parents at a very tender age, he maintained perseverance, courage, sense justice, trust, love for others, among other essentials qualities that Nigerian youths needs to imbibe for their inclusion in good governance and in the task of building the new Nigeria. Above all, all hands must be on deck on the nation building assignment.

Conclusion

The chapter has examined youth and nation building in Nigeria. The investigation tapped its strength from the understanding that youth exist, because the nation exist and the nation exist, because youth exist. This underpins the complementary role and relations between the duos, which is the hallmark of Hobbesian social contract theory. While several literatures on nation building focuses on other elements, the youth element which the future of the Nigerian society hangs on its shoulder has been fundamentally undermined. This vexed problematic is what the chapter seeks to address by bringing youth to the centre stage of national development discourse as crucial partner in progress. In addressing the issue, the chapter found the ruling elite and the Nigerian government predominantly made up of adult appears to have done their best and exhausted. However, their best is still not the best for the youth and for the nation given the significant space the young blood occupies as critical actor and factor in nation building enterprise. In other words, the inability of the State to have arrived at the right formula to constructively and strategically engaged the youth over the years, due to policy inconsistencies and disarticulation, largely accounts for the acrimony, challenges and tensions threatening the foundation and existence of Nigeria.

While not shopping for whom to blame; the adult or the youth in the entire episode of the national question, the paper makes bold to say all hope is not lost given the prospects that awaits the younger generation of Nigerians in the twenty first century and beyond. Against the backdrop of the stretched history of mutual relations that existed among and between the people of Nigeria, the paper advocate for adequate and compulsory teaching of the nation's basic history at all level of education to create patriotism and sense of belonging since unity and idea of nationhood is a not a child of natural growth, but a product of historical consciousness and experience that diminishes destructive ignorance and dismantles deadly prejudice and systemic stereotype .the paper further charges that, giving the religious nature of Nigerians, the youths should imbibe the qualities demonstrated by Jesus Christ and the Prophet (PBUH) as contained in the Holy Writ and seerah. In all, the paper concludes thus, while the role of the youth is significance to nation building exercise, all hands must be on desk as the phenomenon and the engagement is not a one man show, but coordinated cooperative enterprise.

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