

Historical Consciousness and Nation-Building in Nigeria since Nationhood: The Missing Link

Murtala Marafa,
Bashar Maccido
&
Yusuf Bala

Introduction

This paper presents an outline for how the concept of historical consciousness can be understood regarding its definition, application, and qualitative character, its relation to other history didactical concepts (i.e. ‘historical culture’ and ‘historical use’), its development, its significance, and, finally, how an aggregated understanding of the concept can be used as an interpretive framework for Nation-building.

Nation-building has become a concept in the mouth of so many well-meaning Nigerians. Nation-building comes with a lot of other concepts like national development, national integration, national unity, sustainable development, sustained underdevelopment and so on. This chapter would look at the definitions of both a nation and nation-building, Nigeria as a nation, schools of thought on nation-building, theories of nation-building, patterns of nation-building and more importantly, the role of history in nation-building in Nigeria.

Historical Consciousness

In 1979 the German historian Karl-Ernst Jeismann presented four aspects of definitions of historical consciousness, and his second one which states that historical consciousness incorporates the connection between interpretation of the past, understanding of the present, and perspective on the future has become the generally accepted one in Swedish history didactics. Thus, historical consciousness is an ability to create connections between past, present, and future in an individual. (Ammert, Niklas; 2010: 17).

Of imperative significance for how the concept of historical consciousness is to be understood is the manner in which it is applied. There is a variety of applications in the research that uses the concept, but the view presented in this paper focuses on historical consciousness as an ability to create meaning in life in general and history in particular. Hence, historical consciousness is applied as a concept that creates and establishes meaning in an individual’s life through multichronological connections. Using this application of the concept, a person by his/her use of historical consciousness manages to understand the underlying conditions for his/her life and that there are historical reasons to why the contemporary world is constituted the way it is. (Ammert, Niklas; 2010: 19).

A person’s historical consciousness is made visible when he/she creates meaning and understanding in her life, and, consequently, it is through this meaning creating practice or

use of history that we encounter an individual's historical consciousness. This application also lends itself to explaining how a person's historical consciousness is instrumental in creating meaning in history itself; our historical consciousness enables us to see patterns in history, instead of just an infinite number of historical events and people. That one historical event follows another one with a certain amount of necessity (real or imagined) is possible because a person possesses a historical consciousness and applies it to create meaning in history. (Ammert, Niklas; 2010: 20).

The final important component of historical consciousness as a history didactical concept is its qualitative character: people can have historical consciousnesses of a higher or lesser degree. Jorn Rusen's typology of historical consciousness is a convenient way to explain the different characteristics that a historical consciousness can have, and the hierarchy between the different types of historical consciousness. The most basic kind of historical consciousness is the 'traditional' one: history is full of repetition and all members of society are supposed to uphold what tradition dictates. The next kind is the 'exemplary' one, and here history is still static, but also generates normative rules about how a person should lead her life (*historia magistra vitae*). The third kind is called a 'critical' historical consciousness and a person that possesses a critical historical consciousness uses history as a way of criticising contemporary society and culture. The final, and most advanced, type of historical consciousness is the 'genetic' one, and this type lends an ability to historicize past and present societies and cultures by explaining continuity and change through the use of history. (Seixas, Peter; 2006: 6).

As noted above, there has been some controversy about this way of perceiving a historical consciousness; this has been criticized as a Eurocentric way of perceiving individuals. The Canadian historian Peter Seixas argues, for instance, that with this understanding of the concept of historical consciousness, the more rational and secular a person you are, the higher you will 'score' in Rusen's typology, and that Western societies, generally speaking, are the ones that are the most rational and secular. I would like to argue that this criticism is deficient in two ways: firstly, it rests on the assumption that Western societies are different in kind than non-Western ones, and, secondly, that an ability to historicise society and culture is incompatible with a non-secular world view. It could instead be proposed that Western and non-Western societies consist of individuals that have historical consciousnesses to varying degrees: there are certainly Westerners with a

traditional type of historical consciousness, and there are also non-Westerners that possess the genetic type of the concept. It is a matter of who you are and how you perceive the world, not where you happen to live. (Seixas, Peter; 2006: 8).

Furthermore, being able to appreciate continuity and change in history and contemporary society (as Rusen's fourth and most advanced type states) is an ability that harmonizes well with a religious way of perceiving the world: to understand that historical persons and societies have had differing ways of perceiving the world can hardly be challenging to a Christian or Muslim world view, for instance. It is also possible to imagine people being secular and rational and still viewing history as static and full of examples of how we should lead our lives. (Seixas, Peter; 2006: 20).

The aim of this aspect is to theoretically locate 'historical consciousnesses in relation to the other key history didactical concepts of 'historical culture' and 'historical use.' To achieve this aim, this briefly defines the two latter concepts and describes their relation to the concept of historical consciousness. Historical Culture If the analysis presented above limits historical consciousness to meaning making individuals, 'historical culture' becomes the concept that most conveniently deals with how historical meaning is constructed and maintained on a societal level. The Swedish historian Peter Aronsson writes that historical culture is 'the artifacts, rituals, customs, and assertions with reference to the past that offer manifest possibilities to connect the relation. (Thorp, Robert; 1013: 3). Although this quotation does not explicitly state that 'historical culture' is a societal and not individual concept, one could argue that cultural artifacts, ritual, customs and assertions are implicitly societal in character since they are present in society regardless of its individual members. With 'regardless' here means that, the cultural components of a given society is present in that society when an individual member is born into or otherwise enters it, but that this individual member later on can influence the historical culture of the same society to a certain degree. (Thorp, Robert; 1013: 5).

Historical culture is thus a dynamic concept that shapes individuals' historical consciousnesses. Consequently, it can be asserted that 'historical culture' is the societal historical landscape that individuals are born into. A society's historical culture thus a priori affects how individuals interpret historical events or facts. For instance, almost all members of Western societies regard Adolf Hitler as a historical villain regardless of what they know about him or his actions, and this is not necessarily the same case in other historical cultures.

This view of the concept claims that no person meets history from a neutral position; all historical knowledge is 'pre-interpreted' by the historical culture that is dominant in the society in which the individual is born or lives. This does not necessarily mean that all individuals automatically adopt the societal historical culture, but they do have to relate to it, and a historical culture can be seen as a pre-requisite for a historical consciousness: without it individuals would have no means to express their views on history. (Thorp, Robert; 1013: 10).

Furthermore, it should be noted that a historical culture is always a matter of negotiation and that it is, as stated above, dynamic. It is also important to underline the fact that it might be misleading to talk about 'historical culture' in the singular case, since most societies are historically multi-cultural, meaning that there in a society are various and competing historical cultures and ways of interpreting history. (Thorp, Robert; 1013: 10).

Historical Use is when an individual makes use of the historical knowledge he/she has or uses history to achieve various things, it is generally said that he/she portrays 'historical use,' and there are a number of different historical uses and categorizations of them. Of importance to the argument presented in this chapter is what relation the concepts of historical use and historical consciousness have to each other, and according to the view presented here an individual expresses her historical consciousness when he/she uses history for various purposes. This means that it is through an individual's historical use that we can access his/her historical consciousness. (Thorp, Robert; 1013: 11).

The Meaning of History

History is one of the branches of knowledge or discipline that engaged in the study of man and society. The word history itself is from the Greek word *Historia* meaning inquiry (Crookall; 1977: 9). The word was apart from the above come to have three different levels of meaning. In the first place the word history can connote the entire humans past as it actually happened. It also refers to man's attempt to describe or understand the past with the aid of sources. The last meaning is that which sees history as an academic discipline or the systematic study of history which started in the 19th century (Crookall;1969:13).

However, the above three meanings can be reduced to two - history as a process and history as study. In this regard, history as a process can be defined as a relationship between man and man and man and environment (Kwanashie, 2005). It is a series of specific events in

which men are consciously involved (Carr: 1961; 134). It constitutes the episodes, events and historical happenings over time. In history as a process we are dealing with a concrete historical reality that is independent from man's will, control or influence. It is the totality of changes that man undergoes ever since the emergence of human society. This constitutes a series of events which are not static but in motion with one leading to another. One central thing in history as processes is change. There will be no history without change. The changing activities of man over time constitute the transformation of societies. This is possible when man engaged in contact relation with his society and environment to earn a living. This constitutes a major factor leading a changing nature of the people's ecology, climate, demography, birth rate, death rate, population, settlement pattern, quality and quantity of goods, culture, communication, economy etc, which are of great interest to the historian. On the other hand history as a study is a recent phenomenon which Carr defines as the "continuous process of interaction between the historian and his facts and unending dialogue between the present and past" (Carr:1961;30).

History as a study is an organized critical study of such human activities (History as process) in the past that have produced significant effects on subsequent course of events. It is the study of some selected past human activities at a particular place over a period of time so as to record changes over time. It is a systematic study of the process of events or motion of event through the aid of records or broadly sources (Chaffers; 1975:17).

Hence history as a process and as a study have dialectic relationship. The relationship is like that of a coin that has two sides. On the one side are events and reality (or process) while on the other side is the attempt to understand the process. They are interwoven and inter-related in the sense that you cannot have one without the other. From the above issues we can define history in a very simple term as a body of knowledge about the past activities of man in a society in relation to environment or other events that have had an influence on man which is obtained through a systematic research. Having discuss what is so far clear to us about the meaning of history we shall focus on the conceptual issue with respect to National Development.

Concept of Nation-Building

Johnson, (1966:79) defines a nation as "a relatively large group of people inhabiting a more or less definite area, and having enough in common, language, race, religion, and common history to consider themselves a distinctive people". Robinson (1975:138),

perceives a nation as “a group of people who feel that they have been sound together and in addition possess cohesive and solidarity which metamorphosed through a common way of life, common experiences, common cultural traits and common tradition”. Price (1975:24) on his part conceptualized a nation as: a group of men and women who have or who feel they have the following things in common: a common ancestry, a common history or tradition; a common language, a common culture, a common religion, a common territory and a common government. For a nation to stand there must be common factors as mentioned above that bound the people together as one.

Nation-building as a concept cannot be overemphasized because of its relevance to human and material resources development. This is why Mezieobi and Nwosu (2016:89) averred that “it (nation-building) is seen as a democratic divided”. Definitions of nation-building are numerous. Mbakwem (2009:9) sees nation-building as “a concerted effort to bring people of peoples together (in a nation) for the purpose of achieving common objectives”. Birabel and Ibekwe (2016:74) defined a nation-building as “the solid and incremental sustainability of a nation in order to ensure its functional longevity in the overall interest of the citizenry and the nation”.

On the other hand, Meziobi (2016:46) simply sees a nation-building as “ the collective effort of all in relatively large group who have been brought together by a superior force or collective agreement to inhabit a more or less definite area or a common solidarity or national consciousness are continuously striving relentlessly to move the distinctive territory they are occupying as a country or nation and their own-community of persons from more or less comfortable stage of development and a living standards to higher or better stage in all facets of national life”.

Nigeria as a nation, that gained its independence from the British colonial masters on the 1st October, 1960. Since Nigeria’s independence, Nigeria has wallowed in neo-colonialism indirectly without knowing. This is because its (Nigeria) skill relies on the countries of the world for financial and material aids, export and import, oil refining and so on. Nigeria is located in the western part of Africa. Mezieobi and Nzegbulem (2016:21) said that Nigeria “lays between latitudes of 4o and 14o and 15o east of the Greenwich Meridian covers an area of 922, 220 square kilometers”.

Some important events that need to be re-emphasized on Nigeria as a Nation

The Berlin Conference resulted in the British conquest of Nigeria which went through various stages; in 1851, Britain had its first direct intervention in the political affairs of Nigeria and Nigerians. Lagos was marked as a British colony and occupied by British government in 1861, and this was the beginning of British formal ruler ship of Nigeria. In 1885, Britain extended its territorial seizures to the coastal areas (oil River) by making it a protectorate and making Calabar its headquarters.

A lot of activities took place within this period until the Northern and Southern protectorates in Nigeria were amalgamated. This amalgamation resulted in the birth of Nigeria. This happen in 1914, Nigeria finally gained her independence and became free of British indirect rule in 1960. This was the benefit of nationalism and nationalist agitators. Such nationalist are Nnamdi Azikiwe, Obafemi Awolowo, Ahmadu Bello, and Tafawa Balewa and so on.

Schools of Thought in Nation-Building

Mezieobi (2016:49-57) outlined and discussed the following schools of thought in nation-building; Mezieobi (2016:49) stated that “the stance of this school of thought is likened to the birth of a human child whose development though perceived in some medical or psychological quarters as commencing from conception in the mother’s womb, has at birth drawn the child’s development attention to the public”.

The histo-cultural school of thought

Goni-Awa (2006:148) represented this school of thought when he pointed out that every individual involved in nation-building are “a group of people with common history, language, ancestry, customs, traditions, culture and descent”.

The National Integration School of Thought on Nation-Building

This school of thought as led by (Bakey;2015:37) primarily talks about “the primary aim of nation-building as the unification of the people” This means bringing together the Nigerian people irrespective of their differences in ethnic groups, languages, historical background, gender, and so on.

Emphasis on government school of thought on nation-building

Bulya (2011:4) noted that nation-building is the process of development of a country (or nation) to (the) highest efficiency, through the government and the governed working in collaboration (political) leaders (who have) ideas, visions and can bring the people of a nation together to combine efforts in building the nation and making it a better place.

The School of Thought on Education as the Therapeutic Panacea to Nation-Building

According to (Mezieobi;2016:51), “this school of thought which houses all critically minded educational practitioners who are at grips with the utilization value of education for virile nation-building, including every author of nation-building”. This emphasis in the school of thought is on education becoming the stepping-stone to nation-building. So making education a priority in a nation’s scheme-of-things would facilitate its nation-building process.

Nigeria’s Territorial Boundary Restrictive School Of Thought On Nation-Building

Burgess M. Otelaja (2008:233) sees nation-building as “a population with unity, inhabiting a territory with geographical unity” and trying to gain independence.

Nation-Building Perspective’ Education-Enveloped School of Thought

Bozimo and Ikwuemelu (2009:23) outlined the following perspectives of a nation-building: “nation-building as a national development as

nationalism....as political emancipation as cultural identity as modernization as promotion of national consciousness as institutional transfer nation as attainment of self-reliance as attitudinal change as value orientation as political maturity as guaranteeing of citizen’s well-being (and) as national unit”.

The caution-should be exercised on foreign-based ideas’ school of thought on nation-building

Colonial mentality among Nigerian writers and authors should be emancipated and completely rejected. Nigeria should be able to contextualize nation-building for its speedy achievement.

Must unit be an inevitable criterion of nation-building school of thought?

The question in the minds of people is that ‘must unit be an inevitable criterion of nation-building? Especially in Nigeria and other African countries. People should begin to

understand that violence, chaos and war are inevitable and by such a nation's people do not need to be in unity for nation-building to be achieved; what is paramount is national interest and not ethnic, personal or cultural interest.

Watch the globalized village gimmicks' school of thought on nation-building:

Mezieobi (2015:52) perceived “the current globalization process (As) a continuous ploy of the former colonialists to plunder their former colonies in their neo-colonialist machinations (to make impossible their nation-building efforts)”.

Conclusion

As the argument presented in this chapter hopefully has shown, historical consciousness is a complex concept that needs quite a bit of tinkering with to become theoretically versatile. However, if the concept is theoretically specified it can afford many interesting perspectives on the construction of historical meaning (both on an individual and societal level), the development of historical knowledge and thinking, the influence of history on the construction of personal identities, and how meaning in Nation-building can be analyzed from different perspectives.

Reference

- Ammert, Niklas, Historical Consciousness in Swedish History, in *Journal of Educational Media, Memory and Society* 2, No. 1 (May 30, 2010): 17-30.
- Seixas, Peter. *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, edited by Peter Seixas, 3-20. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006.
- Thorp, Robert. 'The Concept of Historical Consciousness in Swedish History Didactical Research'. In *Yearbook (of the International Society for History Didactics)*, edited by Joanna Wojdon, 1-19. Schwalbach: Wochenschau Verlag, 2013.
- Wineburg, Samuel S. *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001.
- E.H. Carr, *What is History?*, Middle Sex Pengium, London. 1964
- J.F Ade Ajayi, ''The Problem of National Integration in Nigeria: A Historical Perspective'' Text of the 11th in the Series of NISER Distinguished Lectures Delivered at the University of Sokoto. 1984
- Kware, A.A. and Murtala, M.A., 'Poverty Reduction Strategy in the Sokoto Caliphate and the Lesson to Contemporary Northern Nigerian States' in *Kaduna Journal of Historical Studies (KJHS)*, Vol. 4., No. Department of History, Kaduna State University. 2012
- Mezieobi, S. A., "School of Thought on Nation-building in Nigeria" in Mezieobi, K. A. and Mezieoi, S. A (Eds.) *Social Studies and Nation-building in Nigeria: New Perspectives*. Owerri: Whyte and Whyte Publishers. 2016
- Goni-Awa, A. B., *Citizenship Education: Issues, Trends and Practice. Part1*. Owerri: Barbe Publishers Inc. 2006
- Bassey, A. O., "Social Studies Education: Theories, and Patterns of Nation-building" in Ediyang, S. D. (Ed.) *Social Studies for Colleges and Universities in Nigeria*. Calabar: Word of Life Publishers. 2015
- Bozimo, G. and Ikwumelu, S. N. *Social Studies in a Changing Society*. Owerri: Acadapeak Publishers. 2009
- Atelaja; O. R., "Social Studies Education and Patterns of Nation-building" in Fageiyinbo, M. O. and Olugbuyi, K. O. (Eds.) *Groundwork in Tertiary Social Studies*. Lagos: Path light Educare Publishers. 2008
- Mezieobi, K. C., "Decolonization of Western Sahara: Nigeria in Focus as a Failed Example" *International Journal of National Development*, 10 (8), 2015
- Mezieobi, K. A. and Philips, O. M., "Theories of Nation-building for Social Studies Education" in Mezieobi, K. A. and Meziobi, S. A (Eds): *Social Studies and Nation-building in Nigeria New Perspective*. Owerri: Whyte and Whyte Publishers. 2016

- Ohuery, G. O., "The Role of Western Education in National Development: The Nigeria Experience" in Ezegbe, M. O. and Owunwa, S. C. (Eds.) *Social Sciences and National Development*. Owerri: Whyte and Whyte Publishers. 1999
- Mezieobi, K. A., Meziobi, K. C. and Nwosu A. "Adolescents and Educational Underachievement: Detractors and Defense in Nigeria's Example"; An unpublished Work. 2016
- Robinson, H., *Human Geography*. London: MacDonal and Evan Ltd. 1978
- Johnson, S. A., *Essentials of Political Science*. New York: Barron's Educational Series Inc.
- Price, J. H., *Political Institutions of West Africa*, 2nd Ed., London Hutchison and Co. Publishers Ltd. 1975
- Mbakwem, J. N., *Millennium Development Goal Social Studies and Nation-building*. Owerri Zionbless Publishers Co. 2009
- Mezieobi, K. A. and Nwosu, A. "Pattern or Strategies of Nation-building in Nigeria" in Mezieobi, K. A. and Mezieobi, S. A (Eds.) *Social Studies and Nation-building in Nigeria: New Perspectives*. Owerri: Whyte and Whyte Publishers. 2006
- Birabel, S. T. and Ibekwe, P., "Pattern of Nigeria's Nation-building" in Mezieobi, K. A. and Mezieobi, S. A. (Eds.) *Social Studies and Nation-Building in Nigeria New Perspectives*. Owerri: Whyte and Whyte Publishers. 2016