History and Nation Building Process: A Critique of the Role of Nigerian Academic Historians

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Abstract
This paper is based on published sources. Emphasis of the paper is on relevance as an issue in historical scholarship. The paper castigates Nigerian academic historians for their failure to positively identify and provide remedies for the teething problems of contemporary Nigerian society; problems such as ethnic relations, nation building and rediscovery of enviable values of African society. The paper maintains further that some Nigerian historians sought refuge in professional competence and confined themselves to detailing minutely aspects of Nigerian history that interested them with little regard to the national and pan-Africanist dimension of their subject. They thus ended up writing cold, emotionless, uninspiring but factually accurate and well researched academic history. Even where the evidence suggested conclusion which are nationalistic or pan-Africanist, they shied away from such conclusions probably for fear of being called propagandists. They therefore failed to deepen understanding through historical scholarship.

Nigerian historians began the writing of Nigerian history in the 1950s. K. O. Dike blazed the trail with his Ph.D thesis: *Trade and politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885* revised and published as a book in 1956. In 1957, S. O. Biobaku's *The Egbas and their Neighbours 1842-1872* also a revised version of his 1951 Ph.D thesis was published. The late J. C. Anene, J. F. Ade-Ajayi, and A. B Aderibigbe followed with M. A. and Ph.D thesis in 1952, 1958 and 1959 respectively. According to Ibia (2005), despite the variety of the subjects about which they wrote, these scholars constitute Nigeria's first generation academic historians. All of them produced their first major works in 1950s, at the time Nigeria was struggling to regain her political independence. Naturally, their work was influenced by the political and ideological ferment of the era.
in which they wrote. Yet, not one of these scholars engaged in any markedly
declamatory kind of history. The approach was more subtle. As correctly observed by
Afigbo (1976:6): Colonial rule in Africa was based apart from straight military con
quest, on an ideological brainwashing (which denied) that African especially the Negro
African, had a valid past and an autonomous culture.

It is the challenge of that denial, perhaps, that the first generation academic
historians took up. Dike (1956) and Biobaku (1957), working on the history of different
parts of Nigeria, began the process of re-interpreting Nigerian history by bringing
Nigeria and Nigerians into their own history. Later day Nigerian scholars have
however, pointed out various weaknesses in the works of these two pioneer scholars.
Yet, no one would deny that a distinguishing hallmark of their work is the quality of
the internal history of the Nigerian peoples which constitute the subject of these works.
It is this internal history of Bonny and Egba peoples which provides evidence of how
the African in Nigerian geographical area and, by extension, elsewhere on the African
continent ordered his social and political life; what economic activities supported the
socio-political edifice, and how the creative and adaptive genius of the African enabled
him to find answers to the challenges of his environment and of his age. These works,
thus sought to demonstrate that the African had "a valid past, and an autonomous
culture".

Afigbo (1976) has documented detailed achievement of these pioneer scholars
in terms of role they played in identifying and using new sources for writing African
history or in terms of the establishment of archives. For consideration of time and space
therefore, we would not undertake that here. However, it is worth pointing out here that
it was as a consequence of their work and that of other scholars listed below that
African history became accepted as a worthy branch of the discipline of history fit to be
taught in schools. That was no mean achievement. This paper examines lack of
commitment of Nigerian academics to the promotion of African identity and inter-
group relations. The focus is on how this lack of indept analysis of intergroup relations
affected nation building process in the post independent era.

The Nigerian Academics and the Promotion of African Identify

The search for direct evidence of the commitment of Nigerian academics to the
promotion of African identity can easily be found in some of J. F. Ade-Ajayi's works.
In this regard, it is interesting that it is Ajayi (1962) a seemingly insignificant pamphlet:
Milestone in Nigeria history rather than in Ajayi (1965) Christian missions in Nigeria
1840 - 1891: The making of a new elite that this commitment is best seen. This
pamphlet, the published version of four talk broadcast on the eve of Nigeria's
independence, provides, an excellent example of an academician's role in his society.
Two of the four milestones identified by the author serves to illustrate this point better.
In his conclusion to the section on the Fulani Jihad, Ajayi (1962) wrote:

the new expire must be reckoned as having done more than bring together a large area of Nigeria... It had an important contribution to make to the future development of Nigeria in this idea of a cosmopolitan state demanding loyalty to something outside parochial loyalties (p.18)

Similarly, in his discussion of the age of Ajayi Crowther, the author tells us of:

the returnee slaves turned missionaries consciously acquiring new arts and techniques in the knowledge that such art and techniques were necessary for the building of a new state... They were men with new cosmopolitan views that went beyond Kith, Kin and locality (Ajayi, 1962:24).

The preoccupation with the emerging Nigerian state is unmistakable. The academic historian was properly playing his craft.

Arising also from a series of broadcasting before independence was Anene (1960) Eminent Nigerians of the nineteenth century. Whether one agrees with the selection or not, it is pertinent that the aim was to demonstrate that we Nigerians have our own heroes, our own leaders of thought and movement who, even in the century in which European activity in our country became triumphant, demonstrated a vision, courage, competence and commitment to their independence of which we can be justly proud.

Elsewhere, Afigbo (1976) and Eke (1977) have begun to question whether it is right and proper that we should set up as national heroes, men and women who built their economic or political empires on slavery and slave trade; or extol political systems that were allegedly tyrannical and undemocratic. Why, it is being asked, do Nigerian historians want to make us believe that such "tyrants" were great men? Are the historians aware that such adulation of slave traders and 'tyrants' may well explain why we have so many dictatorial regime on the African continent? The answer is simple. Let the academic historian of these 'tyrants' be faithful to his evidence. Let him have the courage to condemn aspects of his subject which he finds damnable. But let him do so in the context of the age in which his subject lived, for as Block (1953) has aptly warned:

How absurd it is, by elevating the entirely relative criteria of one individual, one party, or one generation to the absolute, to inflict standards upon the way in which Sulla governed Rome, or Richelieu the states of the most Christian King! (p.140).
One more caveat. There is a certain tendency on the part of African scholars to take their cue from Europe and America. African scholars are anxious to be seen by their European and American colleagues as progressive who can identify the evils in African society and boldly condemn same. How many of the older generation scholars in Africa today did not learn about Sir Francis Drake at school? Is it not possible to see him as a common thief and pirate? Yet, is he not a national hero in England. How was the empires of the world founded, if not by labour or related system? Can we truly think of many really great names in history who achieved the heights they attained without a streak of tyranny or some other form of exploitation of their fellow men? How many nation states of the world have sought or are seeking, to desecrate the almost sacred memory of which such men and women are held? Yet, in Nigeria, in some mistaken concept of academic excellence, the call goes forth for the dishonouring of our national heroes. Our first generation academicians, in setting before us some of these heroes, were properly performing their duties in the context of their age. Given our different circumstances, the academician of today may want to take another look at these heroes. However, let us ensure that our re-examination is not based on false premise; lest we respond unconsciously to the new academic imperialism which seeks to use Africans to belittle African achievements.

The above statement does not seek to create the impression that the works of our first generation academic historians are falseless. Dike (1956) account of Bonny history for example, reveals the changing patterns of alliances between the Houses and various British interests as each group sought to promote its commercial interests. These alliances played an important role in weakening Bonny in the face of increasing British encroachments. Indeed, they are reminiscent of the activities of Nigeria's businessmen, bureaucrats, politicians and intermediaries who place their personal or group interests above Nigeria, and are prepared to ally with foreign businessmen in sabotaging the socio-political and economic well-being of Nigeria. Perhaps in 1956 when Dike's book was published, the parallel was not this obvious. Even so, now looking back, one may have expected Dike to consider the general principle regarding the danger to the state, the larger body politics, of alliances contracted purely for economic interests. Similarly, Biobaku (1957) work on the Egba while bringing out clearly the confederate nature of Egba political arrangements, does not engage in a general discussion of the political problems of a confederacy. There are no doubts other weaknesses.

Ajayi (1965) *Christian missions in Nigeria 1841-1891: The making of a new elite*, like Ayandele (1966) *The missionary impact on modern Nigeria 1842-1914: A political and social analysis* are competent works in many respects. They provide the complexities of the background against which various Nigerian peoples accepted or rejected Christian missionary activity in their midst. They reveal that usually, the considerations were either political or economic or both, not religious. Further more,
they provide details of inter mission politics, details of which reveal that the men and women of God were so human as to be racist and unashamedly ambitious. Perhaps even more importantly, these works give us the background to the development of Western-type education in Nigeria. Ajayi's focus, as his subtitle clearly indicates, is the making of a new elite. Yet, nowhere in the work does the author pointedly discuss the uneven spread of this elite as it began to be made. Abeokuta received missionaries in 1846. Benin did not until after 1897. The Dayspring brought its cargo of missionaries to Onitsha in 1858. The more interior parts of Igboland did not receive missionaries till after 1914. The first post primary school, the CMS Grammar School, Lagos was founded in 1859. There are parts of Nigeria where there were no grammar schools till a whole century later. These inequalities clearly deserved comment in 1964 when Ajayi revised his doctoral dissertation for publication.

Furthermore, Ajay (1965) focusing as it does on the elite, also discussed the aspiration and frustration of the emergent elite in its search for gainful employment in the colonial civil service, in the missions, and in the European-dominated commercial houses. Indeed, it is a well known fact that their frustration in this regard was an important ingredient in the rise of Nigerian nationalism. He also makes the point that it was this frustration that drove the elite into studying law and medicine overseas so they could be independent of the British ruling class on return. Because of inequality in educational opportunities, only certain parts of Nigeria who could afford to sponsor their sons abroad produced these lawyers and doctors during a certain period of our history. Yet the academician of the rise of our new elite did not stop to ponder the significance of this fact for Nigerian politics and Nigerian history. Five years after the writing of the book and three years after its publication, the Igbo and Yoruba elites, the second generation, as it were of Ajayi's new elite, were engaged in a fierce competition for dominance especially at the nation's premier University of Ibadan, a competition which observers insist, played an important role in the chain of events culminating in the fierce Nigerian civil war of 1967-1970.

Similarly, E. A. Ayandele, another historian of missionary activity, whose focus was the social and political impact of this activity, fails to make good this weakness in Ajayi (1965) work. In some ways, this oversight in Ayandele's work is the more remarkable because he pointedly draws attention to the difference in educational development between the north and south. According to Ayandele (1966):

the consequences of the prohibition of Christian mission from the larger part of Northern Nigeria are not easy to ascertain. There is no evidence to show that outside the "pagan" areas, the people would have been willing to receive western education, the aspect of missionary propaganda, which hastened the political and social sophistication and "enlightenment" of Southern Nigeria, and the lack of which accentuate the 'backwardness' of the Northern territory (p. 52).
One wonders why a work revised in 1965 for publication should have failed to 'ascertain' the consequences of the disparity in education between the north and south. It could not be that Ayandele was afraid to fish in troubled waters, for such fear is not one of the weaknesses of this distinguished historian and social analyst. Be that as it may, one year after the publication of this book, Nigeria was engulfed in a civil war, a major remote cause of which was the inequality of political and other opportunities for the different groups which constitute the new nations; an inequality brought about by unequal educational opportunities.

Whatever was the original conception of their works, one can conclude that both Ayayi and Ayandele failed to display sufficient sensitivity to the problems of Nigeria in which they lived as they revised their thesis for publication. However, Ayandele has since redeemed himself in his *The educated elite in the Nigerian society* (1974) in which he analysed the role of the elite in Nigeria politics. Nobody would argue that he should have produced two books in 1966; but many of the issues which he took up in 1974 were apparent in 1965, and the role of an academic historian demanded that he drew attention to them, however tentatively.

The criticism of Dike, Biobaku and perhaps even Ajayi and Ayandele above may be unfair. In leveling criticisms of this sort, one need to remind ourselves about an important aspect of historical scholarship, the various influences which conditioned the historian's writing. As aptly noted by Pirenne (1970):

> historians are not conditioned in various ways solely by inherited qualities; their milieu is also important. Their religion, nationality and social class influence them more or less profoundly. And the same is true of the period in which they work. Each epoch has its needs and tendencies which demand the attention of students and lead them to concentrate on this or that problem (p. 32).

In the works which they published before Nigeria attained political independence, Dike and Biobaku decidedly reflected the problems of the era. This reflection was sometimes put across in the turn of phrase; in emphasis; sometimes it was the total impact of the work that reflected this awareness of society's pre-occupations.

**Lack of Commitment to Inter-groups Relations**

The criticisms of aspects of the work of Ajayi and Ayandele made above appertain to works published after 1960. Attention must now be tuned to the corpus of other scholarly works published within the first two decades after independence. For purpose of this paper and considering time constraints, detail examination of the works published during the period under reference will not be possible. Consideration will
therefore be given to works dwelling on one aspect or another of British colonial rule in Nigeria.

It is necessary to begin with Adeleye (1971) study on *Power and diplomacy in Northern Nigeria 1814 - 1906*. This is an excellent work in many regards on the Sokoto Caliphate. The author provides an indept analysis of the background to the Sokoto Jihad, its persecution and the working of religio-political edifice which it produced. The work is equally useful in its exposition of the relations between the caliphate and the non-muslim area of what is today known as Middle Belt. Furthermore, it provides the nature and course of caliphate - British relations from Cloapperton's first visit to Sokoto in 1824 to the British conquest of northern Nigeria in the period 1900 - 1906. However, the author does not attempt a discussion of the significance of the Sokoto Jihad for the history of Nigeria as a whole. Though implied in some of what he says, nowhere is the point directly made that the very success of the Jihad meant the triumph of Arab cultural and religious imperialism; that from that time on the Sokoto caliphate adopted more intensely a foreign culture and a foreign religion. Today, because no scholar of the Muslim areas of Nigeria cares to make the point, we have tended to treat this Arab religious and cultural imperialism as if it were indigenous to the Mohammedan North. The Northern Muslims see themselves as a people who have stuck to their traditions and culture. While they look upon their southern brothers as having given up their culture and traditions when they accepted Christianity. Thus Sharia, a body of laws based on Islamic precepts, is a matter of pride; British law based on British legal system, is evidence of imperialistic enslavement. Conversely, the southerners think that because they have accepted Western-type education and culture, they are superior to the Muslim northerner who had to accept an Arab and Islamic culture. Both positions are equally untenable. Both sides seem to forget that they really had no choice in the matter which strictly speaking was an historical accident. They need to understand this if they are not to think of themselves more highly than they ought.

In his sub-title, Adeleye (1971) tells us that the work is also concerned with a study of Sokoto caliphate and its enemies; it’s most devastating enemy turned out to be the British who conquered it and imposed their rule on it. By seeking, as they did, to preserve the Arab and Islamic culture of the muslim North, while at the same time insisting that government and economic benefits increasingly follow a Western model, the British created a more fertile ground for the tensions which later developed between the North and South. For as Muslim educated Northerner was not seen as suitable for a career in the British civil service or the British-dominated mercantile houses, southerners with the Western-type education were recruited to serve in these areas in the north. When the same British introduced regionalism into our politics, tension arose over whether or not the Southerners were to continue in the Northern civil service. Students of Nigerian government will recall the acrimony that this matter generated in
the 1950s. The scholars of the Jihad and British imperialism must see these imperialism in their true light including especially their respective legacies.

It may be argued that Adeleye's terminal date is 1906 and that as of that date none of the issues raise here had arisen. We must grant that. However, the author revised his thesis for publication in 1969 when the civil war was raging. The issues to which attention has been drawn were as of that time issues of contemporary politics. Yet not only in the post script did he relate his work to these issues. And yet the Jihad and its consequences were germane to the differences in attitude, differences in educational systems, and differences in political evolution, all of which were important ingredients in both the remote and immediate causes of the Nigerian civil war. Adeleye (1971) failed like many other scholars and did not pointedly draw attention to how historical accidents can threaten the very co-operate existence of Nigeria as a nation state. To the extent to which this scholar failed in this and similar regards, to that extent have other scholars mentioned earlier failed to perform one of the major functions of an academic historian - to deepen understanding. The point being stress here is that the perceptive academic historian of Nigeria, working in a newly independent country, ridden with interparty and inter-ethnic rivalries, as well as medley of other socio-political problems, would be expected to demonstrate an awareness of these problems, as well as a sensitivity commensurate with the complexity of the situation, for if historical scholarship is to serve any useful purpose at all, it must deepen man's understanding of why and how things have happened (Block, 1953).

**Historical Scholarship during Colonial Era**

Let attention now be turned to the works of those scholars who concerned themselves with Nigeria's colonial period. Leaving out the journal articles, the main works are Anene (1966) *Southern Nigeria in transition 1885-1906*, Ikime (1969) *Niger Delta rivalry*, Tamuno (1972) *the evolution of the Nigerian state, Southern phase 1898-1914*, Afigbo (1972) *The warrant chiefs* and Igbafe (1979) *Benin under British*. Time will not permit detail examination of each of these works. Therefore, one cannot do more than make a few comments of general and common applicability to all of the works listed.

A cursory look at these works listed above will reveal that each deals with some region, some province or provinces, each of which was later broken up into divisions and districts. Readers will agree that this was an innovation introduced by the British. Yet, not a single one of the scholars bothered to discuss the concept of a region, a province, a division or district. Indeed, it is illuminating that it is the late J. C. Anene, the pioneer historian of Nigeria's colonial period, who makes the most telling comment on the creation of divisions and districts. With regard to 1895 administrative arrangement of the Niger coast protectorate, Anene (1966) wrote:
it should be obvious that the new pattern of administrative control involved the elimination of the separate identity of the traditional coast states, and was in fact the beginning of the artificial division of the territory into administrative units which cut across the traditional groupings of various communities. It was the first step toward the amalgamation of the many groups in the region to produce a politico territorial unit called Southern Nigeria (p. 214)

Commenting on the 1990 arrangements, the author drew attention to "fluctuations in the status of the coast city states" as a consequence of administrative re-arrangements. Having drawn attention to a crucial issue of that magnitude, Anene leaves it at that. No further discussion follows to relate that issue to problems of the 1960s. Here in lies the weakness of the works in the context of this paper.

In his study on the evolution of Southern Nigeria 1894-1914, Tamuno (1972) touches on the amalgamation of 1914 and the administrative arrangements of the period maintained:

if the 1898-1914 amalgamation arrangements ever made Nigeria an 'artificial' British creation, so were the various administrative districts, divisions and provinces which developed arbitrarily. These amalgamations constituted important landmarks in Southern Nigeria's political developments (Tamuno, 1972:244-245).

The author leaves it at that and we are not told what were the provinces that emerged in 1914, with the view to indicating their artificiality and the problems that could arise therefrom. Similarly, the importance of the "landmarks" is not discussed. Yet this book went to press in the 1970s when these provinces, divisions, districts, even regions had undergone major changes. Did these changes not raise fundamental questions of inter-groups co-existence in a newly emerging nation? Should not present realities affect the vision of the past?

Still on this matter of administrative arrangements, Afigbo (1972) points out that "the town in which a (native) court was located generally tried to treat her neighbours who attended the court as inferior or subordinate to her". What about the town in which the seat of divisions, district, province region or state was or is located? How many of our academic historians cared to study how the attitude of the capital or headquarters people has affected their relations with others, how it has affected politics and distribution of political power, commerce and industries?

Atanda's (1973) study on The new Oyo empire: Indirect rule and change in Western Nigeria 1984-1934 which focuses on Oyo-Ibadan relations raises this same issue. For most of the author's period, 1894-1934, Oyo was given an importance completely unrelated to its powers even under the old Oyo empire. As headquarters of the new Oyo province, even Ife was made subordinate to it. Ibadan was then of little
consequence. The ruler was a baale, upon whose head the Alafin had to place the traditional leaves. The tide changed in 1934. Ibadan, an Oyo town was removed from the overlordship of the Alafin by a colonial administrative fiat. Ibadan, now a new city by Yoruba standards, grew to become the headquarters of the old Western Region, the former Western state and the present Oyo State. One may ask, why the name Oyo State? What has happened to Ife in all this? Only in recent past, the Olubadan, already an Oba from being a baale, was given a beaded crown. Was the administrative status of Ibadan anything to do with this development? How have these developments affected the politics of Oyo State? Is the history of few years ago influencing the political decisions and social interactions of today? Have Nigerian academic historians dwelt on these issues so that we can cause others to dwell on them? Have Nigerian academic historians written Nigerian history in such a way as to deepen understanding of these and related issues?

What does Igbefe's (1979) *Benin under British* see as the significance of Benin province which included the 19bo of Agbor and Asaba? Has the author or any other of his colleagues studied Benin - Igbo relations in this context? Or take the Onitsha province which constituted part of interest of Afigbo's (1971) *The warrant chiefs* (1972). What has been the relationship between Onitsha as a town and other towns in the province? Was it a mere co-incidence that not one of the governorship candidates from any of the then six political parties that contested elections in Anambra State in the 1979 general elections for instance came from Onitsha town? Has the history of few years ago anything to do with this and other decisions of today? Are Nigerian academic historians writing the kind of history that aids peoples to better understand these things.

The more fundamental defect in all the works of our post independence academic historians is the failure to see that although they were engaged in a study of British colonial rule, that phase is part of the history of the Nigerian nation today. Preoccupied as they were with examining British colonial policies, they have failed to identify the larger issues, those issues which still remain a major challenge to our nation building efforts. So Ikime (1969) in his *Niger Delta rivalry* sought to explain Isekiri - Urhobo relations in terms of problems arising from British administrative decisions. This is true in a sense. But there are other equally important issues which have do with the economic opportunities available to the two groups about which the author says nothing.

There is the socio-psychological problem of how people react to changing political and economic fortunes. Perhaps even more importantly, Ikime (1969) fails to put his fingers on a really fundamental and nagging problem; how groups so recently separated and independent cope with the administrative innovations and adjustments that must take place when new state is created. How do government get to the people and persuade them to give up part of their social and cultural identify in order to
partake of the identity of the larger whole? The Nigerian academic historian of the colonial period, when the problems of nation building are exercising the minds of rulers and challenging the fellowship, must begin to see these larger issues. He may not be able to offer solutions. He could and should write in a manner that shows his awareness of these larger issue; a manner that can deepen knowledge.

Post Civil War Historical Scholarship

What kind of history is being written by Nigerian academic historians after the trauma of a civil war and in a country still grappling with intractable problems of national integration? We can discern two tendencies. There is a definite swing from social to economic and social history in quite a number of the departments of history in the nation's 52 universities. A good example is Dr. Wale Oyemakinde's work on labour on the Nigerian Railways and the History of Agriculture. This author may not really be competent to comment meaningfully on the quality of work done thus far. However, there is need to make the same appeal to our economic historians. Just telling us how kolanuts was grown, harvested and the sales organized in years past is no longer enough. In addition to the commercial relations which developed between groups and the social contacts engendered as a consequence, there is need for identification of who the most successful kolanut traders were, what kind of surpluses they amassed, how they used these for the development of their families, societies and what kind of offsprings they left behind, combining thereby, economic and social history. It is clear that we cannot go back to the trading methods of the past in this era of globalization. We may, however, learn a few things from the kind of responsibilities leading traders in their various societies assumed or were called upon by society members to assume.

With regard to social history, this author believes that no one would question the need for it. There is need however to question over compartmentalization of the Nigerian history by our academic historians. The call here is for our academic historians to be multi-dimensional in order that our history may be complete. Those whose chosen field is political history need to do more than add a chapter or two on social and economic development as has tended to be the case else where. They can weave quite a bit of social history into political history they write. Take for example, the era of colonial native courts. The pre-occupation of Nigerian academic historians had been on how the courts were set up, what their powers were and how these were wielded etc. Not one of our academic historians gave thought to studying what happened to the families of the leading court members, the beneficiaries of the system. Are there not many children of court clerks and court messengers who made it educationally and professionally while their less privileged age mates failed to pull themselves out of the circumstances into which they were born? If academic historian of Nigeria had been so oriented, they could have made quite a major contribution to social history at the same time as they wrote their political history. Specialization by all means should be encouraged. But our academic historians should also seek to make
specialization more meaningful by making historical scholarship much more complete by combing political and social history. This make biographies a major contribution to social history.

One of the often repeated claims as to why newly independent states of Africa are finding it difficult to forge really meaningful nation - states is the fact that they are artificial creations of the colonial powers. The study of Nigeria's more ancient past can furnish evidence of links of social and economic nature which bound together many of the ethnic nationalities who constitute what became Nigeria. Put differently, academic historians of our ancient past can demonstrate that while there were things in our past that were different for the various ethnic nationalities that now make up Nigeria, there are also a large number of facts which could be used to seek to unite. Ayandele (1979) correctly observed in this regard that:

Our patriotic obligations as historians should flower in many directions. Firstly, we should consciously select those elements of our cultural heritage and past that reveal in bold relief that, in a sense, there was a Nigeria before British Nigeria. In other words, that before the colonial period, peoples in what became Nigeria coexisted, practiced good neighbourliness, engaged in inter-ethnic trade and did cultural borrowing. We should fervent out the data about the cultural and haquistic links, apart from the theories of origins, of our country (p.6).

Indeed, there is validity in Ayandele's advocated role of Nigerian historians above. The expected role of the historian need not however constitute the sole justification for studying Nigeria's ancient past. Indeed, one must warn against false unities as against false autonomies. In contemporary Nigeria, we have seen many attempts to use history to build false empires. It is the view of this author that the historian can remain faithful to his evidence and yet contribute to the nation building effort. If in the process of unearthing the history of Nigerian past, the historian finds that evidence points to divergences rather than unities, he owes a duty to say so and yet be making his contribution to the forging of a new nation. We should be persuaded that it is the function of the historian to demonstrate why things have happened the way they have happened and to go on to examine the consequences. In doing so, he appeals to general principles. He demonstrates that given certain circumstances, man does tend to behave in certain ways; at the same time he also shows that particular groups behave in particular ways for reasons peculiar to their respective situations. In this way, the historian fulfils his purpose which according to Plumb (1971) is to deepen understanding about men and society, not for its own sake, but in the hope that profound awareness will help to mould human attitude and human action. By unearthing the history of the past, ancient and recent, the leaders of contemporary Nigeria will have material with which to appeal to all concerned for a sympathetic understanding of the problems of Boko Haram, religious crisis, ethic crisis, youth restiveness in the Niger-Delta which the Nigeria society has to contend.
Conclusion

The impression may have been created from the foregoing that the works of our academic historians after the first two decades of flag independence are either timid or short sighted. That is not the purpose of this paper, nor would it be a fair verdict. In many ways, the works to which references have been made are most worthy contributions to Nigerian history both in terms of subject matter and methodology. The point being made is that whereas the works of the 1950s to which references have been made had fulfilled a purpose, the works in the 1960s and 1970s have not had the same success in that regard. Our academicians may have flogged the departed British harder, but they certainly did not provide enough food for thought for the succeeding generation of Nigerians. It is as if in the post independence era they ceased to ask themselves what is the purpose of history. They may have produced good academic history, as indeed even the worst reviews of their works tell us they did. Perhaps because the majority of those of them whose works have been mentioned were still busy trying to establish themselves as academics, they saw their duty as that of writing 'academic' history only. Therefore, although the works mentioned have sufficient data and evidence on which conclusions relevant to national social and political issues and problems could have been based; although they had the material to enable them point out the larger issues and the more general principles pertaining, for example, to our nation-building efforts, they failed to address themselves to such larger issues. And also the Nigerian academic historians failed in their calling because history must have a purpose. Nigeria is still seeking to forge a true nation, to transform "a geographical expression" into a nation that demands the loyalty of its citizenry. This is a worthy goal after which all nations of the world have striven. In the achievement of that goal, every nation has used history as one instrument. All that has varied is the way and the degree to which history has been used. The academic historian of Nigeria need not be ashamed of playing a role that historians all over the world have unashamedly played and continue to play.

References


