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Exploring the Power of Philosophy in Nation Building

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Abstract

This paper aims to critically explore the roles of philosophy in nation building. The unbiased, self-reflecting, objective, and critical nature of the mother of all disciplines namely, philosophy makes it a treasure chest for ethical principles which drive nation building. By its promotion of open mindedness and critical thinking, philosophy provides a balanced perspective which engenders reasoned discourses employed to challenge existing paradigms in order to enable the evolvement of development-oriented policies. Without the foregoing, nation building becomes a farce. This is because whenever the human element that takes up the challenges of nation building are not logically and ethically

guided, society ends up building structures without men of reason and character that will sustain the structures and institutions. Our paper therefore suggests the promotion of critical consciousness and critical thinking as found in philosophy. This offers humanity with the framework for naturally evaluating human fundamental principles and beliefs. These principles and beliefs in turn constitute the necessary ingredients which place leaders and the led on a better pedestal to pursue social integration as well as adopt patriotic life styles both of which combine to enhance nation building. We adopted the expository and content analysis methods of inquiry in this research.

Keywords: Exploration, Critical Thinking, Paradigm, Ethical Principles and Nation Building

1. Introduction

The Nigerian civil war, a political and ethnic armed conflict ravaged the new nation from July 6, 1967 through January 13, 1970 barely seven (7) years after her colonial masters Britain left her shores. This regrettable war coupled with the incessant religious riots all over the country and more recently, the insecurity of lives and property brought about by the activities of the blood-letting gangs of Boko-Haram, the Fulani Herdsmen and other violent groups in Nigeria have increasingly widened the gap of disunity among the peoples of Nigeria. This war, which is estimated to have claimed between 500,000 to 3million lives together with the factors identified above opened the doors of the country to ethnicdivisiveness, tribalism and all forms of disharmony and social disintegration. It could also be recalled that this same people, prior to this ugly developments had been coerced into an amalgamation in 1914 by the British. The consequences of forcing over 625 different linguistic groups of Nigeria into belongingness to a single country become so enormous that misunderstandings, deep-seated religious bigotry and lack of common purpose nurtured unpatriotic spirit among the peoples of Nigeria hence, the need for nation building which enhances national integration arose. Nation building in this paper, however relates more to the process of developing a shared sense of identity or community among various groups that constitute a population of a particular state, and it is considered here in contra-distinction to state building, which limitedly represents the task of building functioning states, which are only capable of fulfilling essential attributes of modern statehood (Dinnen 2006:01) ^[1].

By this distinction, we can infer that nation-building is more concerned with the character of relations between citizens of the state while state building focuses on the practical task of building or strengthening the state institution. Although both terms interrelate at certain points, our major aim in this paper is to critically explore the roles of philosophy in nation building hence, we will and in tandem with our scope, save ourselves much controversial polemics about the term-nation building, particularly its' American interpretation. We will rather attempt an exposition of the nature or characteristics of philosophy, which drive open-minded and reasoned discussions that enable evolvement of unity-oriented policies. We will further examine the ethical and moral values inherent in this mother of all disciplines namely, philosophy which makes her a treasure-chest of ethical principles and actions that in turn provide humanity with ethical frameworks that inculcate patriotism and common purpose

among the citizens. Finally, our paper suggests that the unique and objective type of critical thinking engrained in philosophy constitutes a portent tool and necessary ingredient that places the citizenry on a better pedestal for the pursuit of meaningful nation building.

1.1 Understanding Philosophy and Its Historical Nation Building Antecedents

At the mention of philosophy, many people immediately think of a lofty pursuit of abstruse and abstract thoughts riddled with over thinking and deep thoughts that are hardly of any practical relevance beyond its mere abstractions. Omoregbe (2005) ^[7] accuses the Anglo-Saxon's analytic tradition as being responsible for this misconception due to their overemphasis on analysis. He, however, opines that philosophical analysis is only but a means to an end. As he enthuses, the roles played by philosophy in nation building universally lay credence to the fact that philosophy, (far from being an abstract subject that bakes no relevant bread) remains always at the core and base of nation building. This is consequent upon the fact that humanity relies on philosophy for critical thinking and reasoning which enable individuals and societies to both navigate complex issues of life and to make informed decisions in this life. If the influence of philosophy runs this deep as the intellectual foundation upon which societies are built and decisions that engender social harmony are made then, we really need to take a closer look at the meaning of this discipline. What then is philosophy if it is not mere sophistry?

Steinitz in his *Invitation to Philosophy* had this as an answer to this enquiry. For him, "what is philosophy is a philosophical problem. He asks (addition mine): Is the question "what is physics also a problem in physics" Not at all, research in physics cannot provide an answer to this. Similarly, the question "what is agriculture" has no answer in "agricultural terms" (Steinitz, 1994) ^[10].

The implication of the foregoing is that our involvement in asking the above question is already an exercise in philosophizing. While other disciplines are incapable of questioning themselves, philosophy enjoys this singular principle besides its capacity of reflecting on any other discipline. As a discipline, philosophy asks fundamental questions about existence, knowledge, values, ethics thus holding a unique position in shaping the trajectory of nations. By its provision of the intellectual framework to the resolution fundamental questions about the nature of society, ethics and governance, philosophy becomes conceived as a treasure-chest of ideas that are pragmatically instrumentalized. Pythagoras coined the word philosophy as a combination of two Greek words namely: *Philia* meaning love and *Sophia*, a reference to wisdom. This therefore gives Philosophy an etymological significance as love of wisdom, which implies a striving for fundamental truth in itself. As Nnamdi (2010:102-103) ^[6] puts it, philosophy is a comprehensive knowledge of things in their essences, as opposed to the pursuit of a particular and definite knowledge in its particularity... it is an ongoing or continuous process for a total knowledge, an unquenchable desire for understanding of nature and reality of the universe including man himself".

However, this definition of philosophy restricts philosophy to a mere activity – a human act in the exercise of human intellect under the light of reason. As a discipline and in the classical tradition of Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas,

philosophy is "the science of things by their first causes to the extent that it is attainable by the natural light of reason". It is therefore a science of things in their essences as derived from their ideas through the process of reasoning in the study of the primary or first causes. Philosophy therefore strives at the ultimate causes (realizable through reason) on which the causes of immediate observation depend upon. For D. D. Raphael, "traditional philosophy is the critical evaluation of belief, the attempt to give rational grounds for accepting or rejecting beliefs-which we normally take for granted without thinking of any ground for justification" (1970:04).

Similarly put, philosophy as a field of study, is that systemic discipline which seeks through critical evaluation the knowledge of things or natural phenomena, including our beliefs about everything comprising that of man and the world we live in. By the aid of reason, philosophy over the ages has tried to lay a solid basis for our knowledge which is in turn (and as in every other discipline) fundamentally founded on man's assumption that knowledge of reality and the world outside man is knowable, as a naturally given.

It is these characteristics of philosophy as an unprejudiced, unbiased, objective, critical enquiry into the fundamental nature of things that render her an admirable maiden in the hall of fame of beauty pageantry of knowledge. While science is limited to the empirical, philosophy is all encompassing, hence, an attempt to jettison her will lead to untamed and dehumanized science and technology which becomes a self destructive epistemological weaponry in the hands of man. To overturn such catastrophe, our only option is to humanize. Taming the sciento-technological endeavour is a challenge of humanization while man, in Troequer's perspective "towers in astonishing over the visible, which most hidden sources of energy, he is able to tap, but he knows that all the time, he is in danger of allowing himself to be mastered and crushed by the very forces he had thought to control" (1961:7). This is what Omoregbe (2005:222) ^[7] calls the paradox of the human situation – the fact that science has no answer to man's basic problems and cannot provide the way out of the human predicament". This is the reason the humanities have always not only resorted to philosophy to moralize man but also to provide him with the critical template for human and societal advancements.

In relation to nation building, philosophy has right from the ancient to the present time historically and consistently influenced the direction of nations particularly as it relates nation building. Western philosophy, which began among the Greeks in the 6th Century had early philosophers, (the Ionians) focus on unraveling the universe in terms of understanding the unity and diversity of things. Being struck by the unity amidst so much diversities in the universe as well as continuity amidst ceaseless changes, they began their reflection which ended in their identification of change as the only permanent reality in the universe. Their accounts for the reasons behind change differ but when Socrates in the 4th Century BC came to the scene, the cosmological orientation of the philosophical enterprise changed and the focus was now on man. Subsequently, St. Augustine, Blaise Pascal, Soren Kierkegaard all towed the line of Socrates. Especially in Kierkegaard, the existentialism of man became the major emphasis while Hegel dedicated his time to the Absolute Spirit. Existentialists thought occasioned by the philosophical activities of Kierkegaard centered philosophy around the human person, his existence, problem of that

existence and their constraints. From this ancient time of the Greek city states onward to the Chinese dynasties, we find that philosophy dictated the pathways for nation building. Thinkers like Confucius, Aristotle, Plato examined questions bordering on moral virtue, social order and the role of the state. Their ideas laid the foundation for early nation building efforts, which emphasized the necessity of wisdom, justice, harmony and social order and control within the human community. While Confucius achieved that in China, Plato did that in ancient Greece, Kautilya did same by shaping political systems, ethical principles and the social structures that are responsible for growth and stability of today's China.

The same illuminating role of philosophy surfaced during the enlightenment period which witnessed a revolution of ideas, and thought, which in turn informed the trajectory of nation building across and beyond Europe. Thinkers like John Locke, Jean-Jacque Rousseau, Voltaire have in their different climes influenced ideas relating individual rights, social contracts and the pursuit of reason which is behind intellectual movements that inspired revolutions and shaped the principles on which modern nations stand. For instance, John Locke and Montesquieu's ideas influenced the constitution of America for ages. Onward to Africa, we have witnessed the influence of philosophical consciencism, which is an ideology of de-colonization by Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Julius Nyerere's Ujamaa philosophy which promoted family hood or brotherhood as a tool for national integration and Tanzania's and by extension, Africans, Thabo Mbeki of South Africa's pan africanist views, Nnamdi Azikiwe's nationalistic perspectives on politics, Nelson Mandela of South Africa's peaceful resistance against apartheid policy and so on influenced the political climate of their nations.

2. Articulating the significance of Philosophy in Nation Building

By significance here, we mean the place or roles the enterprise of philosophy plays in nation building. It is our position in this paper that nations are made up of persons who live in a shared community. The building of any nation is a direct function of how well or otherwise the individuals that constitute that nation are built. How then do we build people if not through raising their awareness about their common problems and what their unity can afford? What else do we do to build a people than imparting in them a sound ethical and moral orientation which will drive their harmonious living of their dream? The virtue of common purpose, justice and equity among the people and the enhancement of their spiritual, economic, political well-being can also encourage the critical consciousness of the individual citizenry against violence and any other uncomfortable situations that enslave and bring pain and hurt. As noted by Omoregbe, the narrative and moral character of human society is derived from the nature of the human being himself, who by the fact of being both social and rational is a moral being (1990:198). Hence, Udoidem (1992:111)^[12] adds that "since the same social and rational nature of man is the basis of the human society, one can say that society and morality are mutually constitutive and inseparable. In the same vein, one can say that moral values are ineluctably related to the building of a human society or nation.

However, the type of nation building which this work

emphasises is that which entails the task of construction of a cohesive and unified nation out of diverse individuals with diverse tongues. The challenge of fostering a unity of purpose – a sense of collective identity, establishment of a workable government system and the promotion of social order and control constitute a complex challenge. This collective task of shaping a nation's identity, institutions and the making of policies that drive development and well being is no simple process. Bruno and Ojimba report this difficulty thus: "History has demonstrated the difficult effort needed to unite a people under a government and to create among them a stable cultural, economic, political and social community (2018:30). The process has been especially strenuous, where people to be united include diverse large groups distinguished by their customs, linguistic systems or separate identities.

The description above is fittingly applicable to the Nigeria situation hence, this paper while exploring the services of philosophy to nation building recognizes the primacy of the development of good social-moral orientation which is considered a *sine qua non* for the growth of any nation. We therefore attempt this exploration by identifying the following as roles philosophy plays in nation building.

2.1 Enhancement of ethical and moral principles

Philosophy couches a critical element necessary for the development of sound morality, the absence of which makes a society morally bankrupt. This is because immorality breeds unbridled corruption and heightened irresponsibility. The foregoing, constitute big obstacles to national development. A corrupt nation is a retarded nation and is despised in the comity of all nations. However, only an ethical re-orientation which philosophical ethics offer has the most portent power to restore sanity by ensuring that self discipline and orderliness abound in the society. These are factors that help galvanize the society into a community. Nation building only gets celebrated when community and common purpose is achieved. Ethics and moral philosophy therefore provide the ethical framework necessary for reasoned decision making which propels nation building. Questions of justice, fairness and moral responsibility, which are at the very heart of governance and policy making are taken up by social and political philosophy. Similarly, philosophical theories such as consequentialism, deontology and virtue ethics offer different perspectives on how to approach complex ethical dilemmas and enrich our understanding and joint pursuit of nation building.

2.2 Philosophy and Education

Education draws out from ignorance, enlightens and creates an awareness that adapts us into our prevailing cultures as well as opens up vistas of re-evaluation of previously held beliefs and knowledge. By its encouragement of critical thinking, the student is challenged to think beyond the given and beyond the surface level thereby exploiting its merits to resolve complexities of life. By equipping the student with critical thinking skills, they become active citizens who learn to challenge social norms, question the status quo in order to bring about the evolvement of better social changes which are of much beneficence. Philosophy therefore empowers citizens themselves to drive development. It is in this regard that Lyotard (2003)^[5] enthuses that "philosophy must restore unity to learning, which has been scattered into separate sciences in laboratories and in pre-university

education. It can only achieve this with a language game that links the sciences together as moments in the becoming of spirits in other words, which links them to a rational narration, or rather meta-narration (261).

2.3 Influence of Philosophical Movements on Cultural Shifts

Cultural shifts give expression to new paradigm and new worldview which render the old anachronistic. This is strictly based on the dynamism of human nature. Philosophical schools of thought and movements play a vital role in driving cultural shifts. The instance of The Enlightenment era which saw the rise of reason, individual rights and the pursuit of knowledge as a guiding principles brought innumerable innovations and inventions on which today's science and technology thrive. That philosophical movement also laid the ground work for the modern democratic societies just as existentialism in the 20th Century challenged the traditional notions of meaning and authenticity thereby influencing art, cultural norms and literature. It is therefore the instrument of philosophy that propels intellectual revolutions which change the worldview of societies.

2.4 Post War Pursuit of Unity and Harmony

With the end to the Nigeria civil war, there arose the need for a philosophy which will once again cement the warring factions into a unity. Thus the mantra of "no victor, no vanquish" and the 3R's namely, "Reintegration, Reconstruction and Reconciliation" were invented. The extent this rhetoric succeeded is another question but it must be noted that philosophy provides nations with peace templates. For instance, after the devastations of World War II, Germany through the philosophies of Karl Jaspers and Hannah Arendt were able to control the ethical and moral implications of the Nazi regime, which emphasized divisiveness and hatred. This paved way for a critical examination of history and a commitment to human rights. The philosophical mantra of guilt, responsibility and reconciliation played an important role in rebuilding Germany and in the cultivation of a remembrance culture.

2.5 The Place of Philosophy in Decision Making and in the projection of a National Identity

Philosophical deontology being a moral theory, which is duty and principle based, provides a framework for decision making in nation building. This theory holds that some actions are inherently right or wrong regardless of their consequences. It also emphasizes that individuals have their inherent rights and duties. By so doing, deontology ensures consistency, fairness and respect for individual rights in the process of nation building. On the other hand, philosophical ideas inform the formation of a sound, shared sense of belonging and reasoned values within every nation such that concepts such as liberty, equality and justice become necessarily integral to the formation of a nation's identity. The right language to navigate cultural heritage, diversity and values that knit individuals together including the language used in diplomatic affairs are still sourced through philosophy as studied under philosophy of language. A cursory look at the foregoing also shows that philosophy engenders democratic values.

2.6 Enhancement of Cultural Identity.

The preservation and shaping of cultural identity is richly encouraged by philosophy. Culture, being a tapestry that unites a nation is a phenomenon its' importance cannot be down-played. By shaping of our beliefs, values, philosophy fosters unity and social cohesion among diverse people as in the Nigeria case. The culture of football is now the only patriotic front which unites Nigerians in a common purpose. Philosophy also becomes the lens of the microscope through which we examine and appreciate different cultures other than ours. It teaches us to value diversity and understand the complex interplay between individual and collective identities. The celebration of cultural differences encourages the citizenry to create a society where mutual respect and understanding abound.

2.7 The Wealth of Philosophical Dialogue toward Social Cohesion

In a world with different and sometimes conflicting values, ideologies, ethics and epistemologies, philosophy holds the power of the tie that binds. By encouraging critical and constructive thinking and logically reasoned conversations, empathy and understanding and willingness to find a common ground are fostered in dialogues. Through the use of philosophical dialogues, nations are placed on a better pedestal to make room for diverse and dissenting voices. These are accommodated due to shared values for purposes of mutual respect, unity and social cohesion in a world that has become a global hamlet.

For the purpose of space, we are pausing the identification of the services of philosophy to nation building at this point but before we conclude, there is the need to point out that we have challenges inherent in philosophy which give rise to its misconceptions.

3. Limitations of Philosophical Influences on Nation Building

One of the problems, philosophy faces before a first time visitor to the discipline is the problem of answer variation. This is because every philosopher gives a different answer to the same questions hence, a neophyte to philosophy gets confused. Being a critical discipline, philosophy thrives fundamentally as a reflective activity, which employs logic and analysis in all its undertakings. In the process of this reflection on the meaning of reality in general and human life in particular, the philosopher asks different questions. In fact, unending questions which may seem strange to a non-philosopher. Yet a good understanding of the nature of philosophy reveals that disagreements about the nature and scope of philosophy itself is part of the philosophical endeavour. It is in the nature of the critical tool of philosophy and its ability for self reflection that brings the disagreements and criticisms we experience is philosophical discourses and there lies the wealth of philosophy hence, philosophy is unprejudiced, critical, unbiased, objective and self-evaluating. Criticism and disagreement therefore are part of philosophy but all these pose a gargantuan challenge to the man on the street. This demand is the challenge of rigour. It takes intellectual rigour and patience to have a firm grasp on the intricacies of philosophy. More often than not, one who is not capable of abstract and critical thinking will consider philosophy an impossible discipline but doing that

amounts to limiting creativity. We can now appreciate the difficulty that could be encountered in using philosophy as a sole tool for nation building. But do we abhor pills because some of them are bitter or do we avoid injections when we are sick because the needle hurts our skin? The answer is NO. Therefore to reduce the difficulty involved in the application of philosophy as an instrument for nation building, this paper strongly maintains that philosophy be made accessible and relatable to the public. This is the reason for our suggestion that the orientation of critical consciousness with its associated critical thinking are topnotch creative tools since it is only when we reflect on the status quo that we can torpedo it and replace it with a reality that best serves humanity until better and novel heuristics are developed.

Besides the role of philosophy towards nation building as above identified, it is also pertinent to recognize that adopting only the instrument of philosophy for nation building without appeal to other epistemological models such as religion, science and technology etcetera amounts to philosophical naivety which may lead to epistemological loneliness. It is so apparent that the moment we assume that all we know is all that is, we will be left in the dustbin of ideas and suffer the punishment of losing the beauty of interdisciplinary and cross-cultural studies. However, when our suggested critical consciousness with its attendant critical thinking are ingrained early enough in the citizenry, such citizens will not only be able to identify interest-serving ideologies, but will be placed on a better pedestal to uncover and demystify any supportive, dangerous and enslaving rhetoric or narrative which promote injustice, poverty, disintegration, violence and subsequently, fan the flames of social disunity.

4. Conclusion

We have in this paper undertaken a critical exploration of the roles of philosophy in nation building. We rolled off the ground in our research by examining philosophy as a treasure-chest of ethical principles that knit together a people into a community that strives internally for the building of their nation. Our nation building discourse in this paper focused more on what citizens can do for themselves in contra-distinction to the external perspectives of nation building championed by America and her allies. We also noted the difference and the commonality between nation and state building. Thereafter, we detoured to undertake a historical survey of nation building by first shedding some light on the meaning and nature of philosophy and subsequently, outlining how nation building in many societies have been championed by philosophical ideas of thinkers, both in the West and in Africa. Beside this, we articulated the roles philosophy play in nation building which include its roles in formation and enhancing of ethical principles; educational roles, its influence on cultural shifts, encouragement of dialogue that leads to social cohesion, enhancement of cultural identity, decision making pursuits of unity and harmony. By way of our conclusion, we laboured to point out the boundaries and limitations of philosophy in ensuring nation building before rounding off our research with a brief summary couching the highpoint of our research namely, our suggestion of an intensive critical consciousness and critical thinking awareness and orientation.

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