

# **The Problems of Nation Building in Africa Since 1945: An Interpretive and Analytical Perspective of Ali Mazrui's Four-Fold Conception**

**James T. Gwar,**  
Department of History,  
Benue State University, Makurdi.  
&  
**Balarabe Garba Yakubu,**  
Department of History,  
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

## **Abstract**

In the search for nation-building strategies and development alternatives, Africa particularly has fared badly and the circumstances and conditions of the continent and its people have been despondent and tragic. Thus, the African states and its leadership have failed at various stages to lay the fundamental basis for its people's survival, prosperity and human advancement. This has been the result of leadership deficit in identifying and diagnosing the African condition. It is this development that has formed the subject-matter and focus of the paper. The paper's findings reveal that identifying the major problems of Africa in order to find lasting solutions has been what seem an unending intellectual debate and discourse among scholars, policy makers, analysts, commentators and various interest groups and research organizations in the western world, Africa and Asia. The paper advances the position that the leadership of African states must redouble efforts in the period of growing democratization to build orderly, stable and prosperous societies that could sustain the great promise of democracy and good governance. Considered through the historical research method, multidisciplinary approach, positivist and critical social science, and theoretical perspectives on the modern state, this paper also used secondary sources to realize the objectives of its focus. It has demonstrated that this knowledge of post-colonial African predicaments will spur the leadership towards reforms in public policy, identification of the specific needs of human social development, and inter and intra-African cooperation for growth, stability and progress.

### **Introduction**

Africa's objectives for an independent social, political and economic progress and development has been hampered by several problems involved in the building of newly independent nations and the entrenchment of unity, order, harmony, social cohesion and stability in the emergent states of the continent. By 1945 when it became obvious that independence was not far-off for African states, the most important question was how Africa could manage its own independence in terms of the forging of nation-states. Ali Mazrui was of the view that "Europe's greatest legacy to Africa was the nation-state."<sup>1</sup> But what the nationalists inherited in the post-colonial era was a polity caught up in the web of the contradictions between tradition and modernization, the degradation of indigenous culture and values, the upsurge of sectionalism and ethnic nationalism, and the lack of patriotism and unity. This made it difficult for African states to express their sense of oneness and to make concerted efforts towards national integration.

Consequently, beginning from nationalist struggle to the attainment of independence and beyond, African states have not been able to blend and harmonize the European legacy in Africa with indigenous values for the common good of its people or even to galvanize indigenous resources for the developmental needs of its states. Africa has also not been able to achieve the unity and integration of the various ethnic nationalities within its polities in order to create, foster and nurture a truly united nation or state. Africans have consistently displayed unpatriotic tendencies towards their various states and the cherished institutions and values of Africa have not been emphasized but rather relegated to the backwaters of socio-economic and political consciousness. These problems as recognized by Africa's leadership and people since 1945 has been an experience in recurring decimals of state collapse and failure in governance and consequently the inability to attain the minimum level of human social development within the states of the continent. But only by surmounting this uphill task can African states be in line to fulfill the high expectations of the world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

This paper is an effort aimed at achieving the position and stand, interpretive and analytical perspective and viewpoint of the great scholar Ali Mazrui, on the African condition. The paper outlines and presents the nation-building problems confronting Africa since 1945, and put forward an interpretation of the Mazruian formulation of a four-fold analysis to explain the post-colonial African predicament. This paper is also an effort to demonstrate how the Mazruian conception and formulation fits the bill as an explanation of the nation-building problems confronting Africa since 1945.<sup>2</sup> It clarifies the major concept of the discourse, laid a framework of analysis, and outlines the general problems of nation-building confronting Africa since the stated period. The paper expounds upon Professor Mazrui's assertion and conception of the African dilemma and in the final analysis a conclusion of the discourse has been presented.

### **Conceptual Clarification: What is Nation-Building?**

Nation-building has been defined as the conscious efforts of a people to create and forge a nation out of diverse ethnicities and cultures, and the harnessing of the

human and natural resources of that nation for the socio-economic and political development of its social space. Basil Davidson sees nation-building as a new form of nationalism aimed at national integration and “the creation of a new nationality for a people who understands that their destiny can only be realized through brotherhood, solidarity and unity.”<sup>3</sup> Yaro Gella has defined nation-building as “the historical and cultural consciousness and the convictions of a people to foster a nation out of their collective experience and to nurture it to greatness.”<sup>4</sup>

The above conceptualization of nation-building indicates that it is the coming together of peoples and varying creeds, cultures and nationalities to form a new and greater nation for their common hope and aspirations of development and greater glory. Thus, the concept of nation-building is a study in the development of the national consciousness of a people and their struggle to achieve progress and to propel their own society to a higher plane.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Theoretical Foundation: Political Order, Political Development and Decay**

The theoretical foundation for the study of nation-building and its problems concern the assumptions and postulations in the study of how political order is maintained, the development of a state and the moment of decline, degeneration or decay. According to Samuel P. Huntington in his 1968 book, *Political Order in Changing Societies*,<sup>6</sup> the creation of a political order in the form of a strong state must be prioritized above economic and social modernization. Whenever these, that is, economic and social modernization, outran the creation of a solid political order and development, decay sets in. According to Professor Huntington, this was the cause of coups, counter-coups, revolutions and civil wars in Africa and other developing nations and new states.

This idea of the maintenance of political order first served to successfully challenge the assumptions of the classic modernization theory of thinkers such as Karl Marx, Emile Durkheim, Ferdinand Tonnies, and Max Weber, who sought to analyze momentous changes using only social and economic factors based upon the experience of the industrial revolution. Unlike the modernization theory, Huntington was convinced that not all good things about a particular system go together. For example, even democracy in particular without a strong and unified state was not always conducive to political stability and therefore not an end in itself for the enhancement of the nation-building capacities of leaders.<sup>7</sup>

The theory maintains that the different dimensions of development such as the entrenchment of liberal democracy, the rule of law, social development or the development of a civil society, economic growth, social mobilization, legitimacy, and accountable government needs to be separated from one another. This could pave the way for a political order with a strong state that is unified and able to enforce laws, with an equally strong and cohesive society that is able to impose accountability upon the state. This balance will make a democratic society to work successfully and to achieve the aims of state-building.<sup>8</sup>

**The Problems of Nation-Building Confronting Africa Since 1945**

In the pre-independence era which began earnestly in the period of militant nationalist struggle in 1945, Africa's nation-building problems commenced with the ethnic scramble for power and positions in the civil service of the colonial administration. The struggle for power and wealth in Africa during this period was also along ethnic lines as witnessed in pre-independence Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, and several other African states, leading to what Richard A. Joseph has described as "prebendal politics."<sup>9</sup>

African leaders after independence lacked the ability, know-how, understanding or wherewithal to adopt structures and institutions inherited from the colonial masters for the developmental needs of their various nations. Thus, the African states have continued to emphasize top-down forms of government that have been quite detrimental to the collective yearnings of their people and for the cause of nation-building. Therefore, the lack of national unity has been rife along with socio-economic and political integration. As a consequence, this has led to secessionist tendencies, social tension and the fragmentation of otherwise united entities and polities. It was this disunity, lack of harmony and national cohesion that plunged Nigeria into a civil war from 1967-1970, Ethiopia against Eritrea beginning in the early 1990s, and the Sudan, Congo and Angola in the earlier period.<sup>10</sup>

Nation-building efforts by African leaders have also been hampered by issues of religious intolerance, extremism and fundamentalism. These have crippled the national development and human social advancement of African states such as Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Sudan, Nigeria and others, especially in terms of social integration, national security, peace, unity and cooperation. In their book, *Nationalism and New States in Africa*, Ali A. Mazrui and Michael Tidy, have among other factors asserted that cultural imperialism, underdevelopment, the inability to harness and develop the continent's resources, and the dependency status, as well as the leadership deficit within African states acts as a great impediment to nation-building strategies in Africa.<sup>11</sup> In the same vein, the lack of patriotism whereby politics and leadership has been perceived as an avenue for the acquisition of power for selfish and self-centred ends and not for national service or the advancement of the national interest remains an obstacle and clog in the wheel of all calculations towards the nation-building of African states.<sup>12</sup>

Nation-building in Africa has suffered further set-backs in its implementation due to corruption, general inefficiency in government and lack of accountability and probity in all sectors of the economy, society and polity of African states. Political instability as a result of military intervention in African politics inhibits the growth and cultivation of democratic culture and the creation of a dynamic civil society. African history is replete with the occurrence of coups d'etat from Guinea Conakry to Uganda, Congo to Egypt, Guinea-Bissau and Nigeria to Algeria. Thus with instability and decay setting into the fabric of the general society, the African leadership and followership continually fail to realize the potential for cohesion, integration and state-building. Political instability has therefore served to usher in a period of economic and social chaos, the backward slip of integrative efforts and

forces, and the continuous lack of maturation of socio-economic and political institutions.<sup>13</sup>

Since the independence of African states, African leaders have flagrantly disregarded indigenous institutions and values that aim implicitly towards national development. This has made self-reliance measures and inward looking calculations impossible. Therefore, national resources have not been adequately harnessed to achieve the national development of Africa's states which continue to seem tragically hopeless and helpless. The nation-building plans of African states have further been crippled by the frustrating inability of African leaders to fulfill the promises, assumptions and tenets of true democracy and constitutional rights of their people.<sup>14</sup> World Bank Group's "Leadership, Conflict, Security and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa," 2-3. African leaders have continued to negate the principles contained in David M. Potter's essay, "Democracy and Abundance," in Locke, Gibson and Arms, eds, *Toward Liberal Education*, (London: Longman Group of Publishers, 1972), 461- 472. See also A. A. Mazrui.

These democratic and constitutional rights can be located in various sectors of the polity such as the development of the crucial sector of agriculture, education, health, security, the environment, and the growth of the local content of science and technology. Most nations of the world have paid constant attention to these for the common and public good of their citizens. In all these, African countries have continued to be left in the lurch. But the aforementioned nation-building problems are by no means exhaustive as Africa's contemporary history continues to unfold in all its complexities and vagaries.

#### **The Mazruian Four-Fold Formulation of the Nation-Building Problems of African States**

In his book, *Cultural Engineering in East Africa*, Ali A. Mazrui summarizes Africa's nation-building problems to a four-fold analysis. His assertion and intellectual conception, inter alia, includes the following:

The problems confronting African states are four-fold: How to indigenize what was foreign; How to idealize what was indigenous; How to nationalize what was sectional or ethnic, and; How to emphasize what was African.<sup>15</sup>

This formulation to a very large extent captures the vagaries of the nature and character of the nation-building problems that have bedeviled the African states since 1945. Mazrui's first formulation of Africa's nation-building problems is that of "how to indigenize what was foreign." This implies that African states have been unable to reconcile the relationship between what was foreign and what was domestic, between what was modern and what was traditional, or decaying and changing. Thus, the clash between foreign and indigenous cultures made the task of building a nation out of diverse cultures and groups a herculean one and a near impossibility. Many countries of Africa such as Nigeria, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Uganda, Guinea-Bissau, Somalia, Rwanda, Burundi, and others have not been successful in devising nation-building strategies to cope with the cultural diversity of its peoples especially in the form that it took after colonial domination. The possibility of modernization and continual maintenance of the smooth

functioning of indigenous and traditional values has remained a major nation-building problem of African states. For indigenous cultural values have been eroded and replaced by imperialist and alien forms of national orientation.<sup>16</sup>

The second Mazruian formulation under the four-fold package is that Africans lack the wisdom, knowledge and understanding on “how to idealize what was indigenous.” This assertion holds true for many African states as no attention has been paid to the task of enhancing the position of Africa’s socio-economic and political institutions and values wherever necessary and making them effective for nation-building in an age of growing dominance of westernization and globalization. To this end, African leaders do not seem to realize the substance in the assertion that “development comes from within or it does not come at all.”<sup>17</sup> So there has been blatant disregard for the continuous refining of traditional African institutions, systems and methods of socio-political action, conflict resolution, and peaceful co-existence and cooperation to suit the contemporary needs of state-building.

More-over, the indigenous human and material resources of African states have not been adequately tapped for the developmental needs of Africa and its states and people. According to Okon Edet Uya, Africans neglected indigenous institutions out of the false assumption that nation-building could be achieved only through foreign methods like western education, the monetary economy, urbanization, and the like, which would “detrribalize or denationalize the African.”<sup>18</sup> But African leaders at the same time showed through their actions and policies that they lacked full knowledge of these same foreign methods. Thus, Africa’s almost complete dependence upon western ideas and methods as well as its values for governance rather than what could be generated indigenously has been a great impediment to nation-building within African states. The then Zaire under Mobutu Sese Seko and Malawi under Kamuzu Banda were examples of African states which sidelined indigenous cultures and values for complete external influence.<sup>19</sup>

In the third summation of his four-fold conception of the nation-building problems confronting African states, Professor Mazrui states that one aspect of the problem was “how to nationalize what was sectional or ethnic.” History has demonstrated that since 1945, African states have failed to transform the largely ethnic nationalistic consciousness that carried them through towards political independence to a new state-conscious patriotism as a basis for the creation of a national sovereign identity.<sup>20</sup> The failure of the African states to achieve the national integration of its diverse groups and peoples for a broader and more cohesive nation has invariably led to disunity, stresses and tensions, social anarchy, ethnic cleansing, civil wars, among other negative developments inimical to the cause of the desired progress.

The inability to nationalize sectional or ethnic differences in order to effectively build a nation was one of the causes of the civil wars in Nigeria, Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan, Liberia, Sierra Leone, among several other African states. It has also contributed to what scholars like Professor Mazrui and Patrick Wilmot has described as failed states such as clan-structured Somalia during the reign of its dictator, Mohammed Siad Barre.<sup>21</sup> It was the same inability and failure that led to the ethnic crisis between the Acholi and the Langi, and the Kakwa on the other hand, leading

to the emergence of the most brutal regime in modern black Africa: Idi Amin's Uganda.<sup>22</sup>

The fourth formulation laid down by Professor Mazrui was that African states were further plagued by the dilemma of "how to emphasize what was African." This formulation also holds water as a factor in the nation-building problems starring African states in the face. Since 1945, African nationalists swallowed the ideas of western culture hook, line and sinker, and with the attainment of independence in the 1960s, they became the lackeys and Trojan horses of western imperialism and neo-colonialism. Consequently, patriotism for African states has been eroded and love of country has been jettisoned and post-independence nationalism has experienced its lowest ebb. This situation has led to the contemporary underdevelopment of African states by the Africans themselves as greater emphasis is laid upon western systems, which are not even adequately understood, to the neglect of African values, institutions, and mechanisms of governance. It was this lack of patriotism and interest in the institutions and values of Africa that led Kamuzu Banda of Malawi into an alliance with the racist white minority government of South Africa, and Mobutu Seso Seko's investments, not in Africa, but in Belgium, Switzerland, and Southern France.<sup>23</sup> African leaders have since taken corrupt practices to record heights in recent history. Thus, the leaders of African states have continually failed to project the image and values of Africa, to tap from the vast indigenous African historical experience, and to enhance the productive capacities of its human, material and natural resources to achieve higher levels of state-building and development.<sup>24</sup>

### **Conclusion**

This paper brought out some of the challenges and major problems of nation-building in Africa that have clogged the wheel of socio-economic growth and political progress and development of African states since 1945. It has made efforts to distend the stomach of knowledge evident in Ali Mazrui's profundity and depth, eloquence and erudition of Africa's seemingly tragic conditions and circumstances. This situation about Africa, the continent and its people has been captured by several other western scholars who lament about the inability of Africa's leadership to pull the states of the continent out of the quagmire of despondency and hopelessness.<sup>25</sup> Professor Ali Mazrui's four-fold conception and formulation of the nation-building problems confronting African states furnishes great ideas about the nature and character of Africa's failures in its nations' march to socio-political and economic growth, progress and development as well as the advancement of its overall institutions of governance and order. Mazrui's solid explanations however may not be completely exhaustive. His four-fold formulation focuses on an outline of developments within Africa but the forces of foreign influence, conspiracy and aggression cannot be exonerated in the long and chequered history of Africa's quest for development. These too represent a significant challenge that must be surmounted by the leadership of African states.<sup>26</sup>

Professor Mazrui's conception, formulation and summation on the nation-building problems of Africa since the period of militant nationalist struggle for



independence in 1945 remains a significant contribution and groundwork for the understanding of the obstacles to the march of African states towards their national sovereign identity and their struggles on the road to greatness and glory. This attainment the states of the African continent hopes would galvanize resources towards the realization of the ultimate objectives, fondest aspirations, hopes and dreams of Africa and its people in their quest for overall progress and development and a more readily assured, certain and reliable future.<sup>27</sup>

### References

- Abdullahi, A. Decline and Fall. *African Concord*, Vol. 5, No. 38, (1991), 9.
- Bayart, J.F., Ellis, S., and Hibou, B. 1999. *The Criminalization of the State in Africa*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Coser, L. A. 1956. *The Functions of Social Conflict*, New York: The Free Press.
- Davidson, B. 1992. *The Blackman's Burden*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited. African Leaders Must Learn From History. *Foundation Lecture Series*, (Dakar: The Centre of Development and Strategic Studies, 1993): 4-13.
- Fukuyama, F. 2011. *The Origins of Political Order: From Pre-human Times to the French Revolution*, London: Profile Books Limited 2004. *State-Building: Governance and World Order in the Twenty-First Century*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Gella, Y. Cultural Heritage and National Self-Reliance. Darah, G. G., ed., *Seven Years of Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida*, Vol. 4, (Lagos: Daily Times of Nigeria Publishers, 1993): 12.
- Gwar, J. T. & Yakubu, B. G. 2016. Pan-Africanism, the African Union and Africa's Development in the New Millennium. *Lafia Journal of African and Heritage Studies*, (LJAHS), (1): 367-374.
- Joseph, R. A. 1985. *Democracy and Prebendal Politics: The Rise and Fall of Nigeria's Second Republic*, Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited.
- Kissinger, H. A. 2002. *Does America Need a Foreign Policy?: Toward a Diplomacy for the Twenty-First Century*, London: The Free Press.
- Kwanashie, G. A. 2003. ed, *Politics and Political Power Relations in Nigeria*, Kaduna: DAT Publishers Limited.
- Kyemba, H. 1977. *A State of Blood*, London: Hodder and Stoughton Publishers.
- Lopes, C. 1987. *Guinea Bissau: From Liberation Struggle to Independent Statehood*, London: Zed Books Publishers and Boulder, Colorado: West-view Press.
- Mazrui A. A. & Tidy, M. 1994. *Nationalism and New States in Africa*, London: Methuen Publishers Limited. Africa in Political Purgatory: The Crossroads between Collapse and Redemption. *The Guardian Annual Lecture Series*, (1994): 48-64. 1986. *The Africans: A Triple Heritage*, Boston, Mass: Little and Brown Publishers.
- Ndlovu-Gatsheni, S. J. 2014. "My Life is One Long Debate: Ali A. Mazrui on the Invention of Africa and Post-Colonial Predicaments," (Ali A. Mazrui Memorial Event Public Lecture, Delivered at Albert Wessels Auditorium, Hosted by the the Centre for African Studies, University of the Free State, (UFS), Bloemfontein, South Africa, 30<sup>th</sup> October, 2014): 1-17.



- Nettleford, R. 2002. Crossing Boundaries: The African Diaspora and the New Millennium, New Challenges for Development. *Canadian Journal of Development Studies*, Vol.23, Issue 3, (2002): 409-426.
- Potter, D. M. 1972. Democracy and Abundance. Locke, Gibson and Arms, eds., *Toward Liberal Education*, London: Longman Group of Publishers.
- Uya, O. E. 1984. *Perspectives and Methods in Studying African History*, Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- World Bank Group, "Leadership, Conflict, Security and Development in Sub-Saharan Africa," in *World Development Report 2011*, (Washington, DC: World Bank Group Publication, 2012): 1-3.