

The Concept of Nationbuilding: Theoretical Expositions

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Abstract

The concept of nationbuilding probably possesses the weirdest trajectories of interpretation in the social sciences and the associated disciplines and endeavours. Purposeful research undertakings in the affected fields entail properly reconciling the associated contradictions. But it appears as if scholars have given up on arriving at a modicum of relatedness in their different perceptions of nationbuilding. Hence, extant literature seems to be devoid of researches attempting to achieve the necessary conceptual linkages. There is an embedded pedantic hue in the positions of scholars exceedingly maintaining their viewpoints as what ought to be the correct usage of the concept. Others usually approach the conceptualization of nationbuilding from its mere linguistic dimensions. What truly is the meaning of nationbuilding? This paper aims at taking a position on the constructive definition of nationbuilding. The methodology of the work is qualitative and this possesses bearing with an inevitable approach of reviewing related literature. This article considers the inherent scenarios as academically unbecoming. The paper holds unassumingly that nationbuilding means the process of weaving an indomitable new nation out of a diversity of existing national inclinations. The paper's standpoint is envisaged to provoke further researches in the area of searching for similarities among scholars' perceptions of nationbuilding.

Keywords: Nationbuilding, State building, Nationalism, Concept of nationbuilding, Building a nation

Introduction

Concepts are the bases of the ground norms for scholars' scientific investigations in the social sciences. They sometimes serve as building blocks of the intended contributions. The same concepts although, when ineffectually positioned lead to inessential ambiguities. Integral to the nature of concepts is still the possibility of disputations, particularly in the social sciences. There is accordingly a seeming tight spot in these scenarios. However, the regular and standard deployment of concepts is the hallmark of scholarships that effectively joins in the subsisting social science debates. Significant and influential efforts are invariably engendered by such standardized treatment of concepts (Brint, 2017; Hall, 2019; Mohajan, 2018, Tauginienė et al, 2020). The nationbuilding concept in scholarly investigations belongs fundamentally to the social sciences and arguably to the arts and humanities..

The problem of the study essentially centers on the supposition that in extant literature, an unhelpful multiplicity of tendencies exists in the conceptualization of nationbuilding. These characterizations of the concept are perceived in this paper as having transcended the usual disputations, which mark conceptual elucidations among social scientists. Such depictions currently present the concept of nationbuilding as one with indistinct and indeterminate pigmentation. The general objective of the work therefore is to examine the issue of conceptual uncertainties in defining nationbuilding in the social sciences. An additional aim of the paper is to determine if the seeming conceptual indistinctness is attributable to language factors or it probably borders on pedantic tendencies. The structure of the article accordingly contains this introduction, followed by an extensive literature review, a highlight on education and nationbuilding, a section attempting to determine between language issues and pedantic concerns as the central issues in the existing definitional pluralities and then a conclusion.

The Literature Review

A stupendous volume of literature actually exists on nationbuilding. An exhaustive coverage of such studies is accordingly not contemplated in this review. The paper only intends to take samplers in comparatively historical trajectories. Then there is this highly remarkable definition offered by Dobbins (2003, p.17) where nationbuilding is seen as “the use of armed force in the aftermath of a conflict to underpin an enduring transition to democracy”. Nationbuilding and state building are possibly mixed up in this position. However, the later contribution of Dobbins et al. (2007) proves that the earlier viewpoint was not a mix-up. Dobbins et al. (2007, p. xvii) thus posit that “nation-building, as it is commonly referred to in the United States, involves the use of armed force as part of a broader effort to promote political and economic reforms with the objective of transforming a society emerging from conflict into one at peace with itself and its neighbors” Is it then possible that the concept of nationbuilding is differently and uniquely nuanced in the United States? In such regards, nationbuilding becomes something to be planned and executed by foreign powers for the recipient state.

In the viewpoints of Gambari (2008), “nation-building has many important aspects, firstly, it is about building a political entity which corresponds to a given territory, based on some generally accepted rules, norms, and principles, and a common citizenship. Secondly, it is also about building institutions which symbolize the political entity – institutions such as a bureaucracy, an economy, the judiciary, universities, a civil service, and civil society organizations. Above all else, nation-building is about building a common sense of purpose, a sense of shared destiny, a collective imagination of belonging”.

Gambari (2008) further deposes:

Nation-building is therefore about building the tangible and intangible threads that hold a political entity together and gives it a sense of purpose. Even in these days of globalization and rapid international flows of people and ideas, having a viable nation remains synonymous with achieving modernity. It is about building the institutions and values which sustain the collective community in these modern times.

A comprehensive interrogation of the thesis of Gambari (2008) would yield the result of profound similitudes between nationbuilding and national development, whereby the viability and modernity of the nation in question become synonymous with nationbuilding. Similarly, Atake and Dodo (2010, p.20) thinks that “nation building entails proposals designed to bring about long-term political stability, rapid economic development and visible social justice”. Here, it is left for the reader to conclude if the entailed proposals are for plural societies or all types of states. Mylonas (2010, p.83) then defines nation-building as:

The process whereby ruling political elites attempt to make the political and the national units overlap. To achieve this overlap, these elites construct and impose a common national identity on the population of the state. Legitimacy in the modern state is connected to popular rule and thus majorities. Nation-building is the process through which these majorities are constructed.

Mylonas (2010) therefore sees nationbuilding as the deliberate construction of a national identity. This is particularly relevant where colonial “divide and rule” practices had led to the emergence of ethnically heterogeneous countries and the need to mold the different ethnic groups in such new populations into a cohesive nation had arisen. Lumun (2012, p.55) also sees nationbuilding as “a process of bringing diverse groups together to develop their common land”. Then according to Ajayi (2013, p.139), “in simple terms, nation building refers to a conscious and deliberate attempt to forge a common and mutually agreeable identification with a nation by multiethnic and disparate communities”. Ojoajogwu (2014, p.73) further submits that “nation building is a state of developing the nation as well as making the citizens of a nation comfortable, and religion provides a platform for such”.

With reference to Agbese et al. (2007), Egharevba and Iruonagbe (2015, p.45) suggest that “nation building is all about promoting the collective well-being of the people through meeting their needs, interests and aspirations and its hallmarks would be the pursuit of liberty, social justice, progress and prosperity for the people by government and its institutions”. Here, nationbuilding begins to resemble good governance. However, citing Gambari (2008) Egharevba and Iruonagbe (2015, p.45) soon adds that “nation building is about building a common sense of purpose, a sense of shared destiny, a collective imagination of belonging”. This of course suggests the attempt to integrate a plurality of identities previously held disparately.

In another interesting contribution, Oyewole and Adegoke (2018, p, 25) depose that “nation-building is the intervention in the affairs of a nation-state for the purpose of changing the state’s method of government”. These researchers further assert that:

Nation-building can be compared to building a house or a family. To be successful in this project, a builder needs several resources that will be properly managed. What are these resources necessary for building a nation? These resources can be classified into two: material and human. The material resources are the natural resources the proposed nation is endowed with, while the human resources are the values, knowledge, skills and competencies that the people of the nation possess (p.25).

Oyewole and Adegoke (2018, pp. 25-26) still add that “the purpose of nation-building is to ensure that the resources of the nation are properly harnessed, managed by its people and utilised for the sustainable development of the nation and to enable its people to leave together in harmony and to allow peaceful coexistence with other neighbouring nations”. Nation-building, contends Oyewole and Adegoke (2018, p.26) “takes time to be achieved and it is a continuous process which has to be constantly reviewed depending on the changes in the immediate and global environments. These changes can be spurred on by socio-cultural, economic, political or technological factors”. Oyewole and Adegoke (2018, p.26) further argues that “the two most notable objectives of nation-building are establishing a representative government and setting conditions which will allow for economic growth and individual prosperity”. Oyewole and Adegoke (2018, p.33) then concludes that “that nation-building is more successful if the state has had an experience in self-government for several years amidst a viable economy”.

Ibraheem (2018, p.4) submits that “the process of nation-building involves the intervention in the affairs of a nation-state for the purpose of changing the state’s method of government”. However, it is not clear who is intervening in the affairs of the nation state, whether patriotic citizens or externally interested parties. Citing Deutsch and William (1963), Umoh and Adeyi (2019, p.3) highlight that “originally, nation-building referred to the efforts of newly independent nations, notably the nations of Africa but also in the Balkans, to reshape territories that had been carved out by colonial powers or empires without regard to ethnic, religious or other boundaries”.

Joseph and Anikelechi (2019, p.9) opine that “nation building is all about creating and combining the integral parts of a sovereign state to ensure peaceful coexistence and sustainable development”. They argue that “these integral parts comprise different institutions - educational, legal, economic, social, cultural, religious as well as political entities and it is the meaningful and purposeful development and transformation of these institutions that evolve into nation building”. Joseph and Anikelechi (2019, p.9) accordingly considers nationbuilding to be “the process of developing people of diverse histories, languages, traditions, origins, cultural and religious orientations towards coming together within the boundaries of a sovereign state with shared values, identities and symbols as equals, to stem the apparent divisions and foster unity as well as a common sense of belongingness”.

Citing Mylonas (2007), Anyanwu (2019, p.66) maintains that nationbuilding “is the process whereby a society of people with diverse origins, histories, languages, cultures and religions come together within the boundaries of a sovereign state with a unified constitutional and legal dispensation, a national public education system, an integrated national economy, shared symbols and values, as equals, to work towards eradicating the divisions and injustices of the past; to foster unity; and promote a countrywide conscious sense of being proudly [one nation], committed to the country and open to the continent and the world”. Anyanwu (2019,

p.66) adds that nationbuilding “entails a parallel process where the ruling political elites maintain and reinforce differences with ‘nations’ in surrounding states and eliminate differences within their own boundaries”. Then to “maintain and reinforce differences with ‘nations’ in surrounding states” as canvassed by Anyanwu (2019) actually reads more like nationalism than nationbuilding.

E. Egbule (2019, p.75) believes that “one of the facets of a progressive process of nation building is religion” and that “over the years, religion has contributed immensely to nation building and development in Nigeria”. Some other scholars would really disagree with this position on the immense contribution of religion to nationbuilding in Nigeria over (Adebayo, 2014; Nwosu, 1996; Oshewolo & Maren, 2015; Oyetunbi & Akinrinde, 2021). According to Nwosu (1996, p.141) in particular, “generally speaking, one of the major factors that have raised and continue to raise question about the unity of Nigeria is religion”. An awareness of the possibility of such disputations must have made E. Egbule (2019, p.75) to add that “however, in contemporary time, many have questioned the ability and credibility of religion in enhancing national development, sustainability and nation building in Nigeria”.

E. Egbule (2019, p.75) further argues that “religion transforms individuals who build the nation” and on the specific meaning of nation building submits as follows:

Nation building is a process of exacting a national identity. It is a process with a definite objective and deliberate effort. It is exacting because it demands time, patience, focus and unity in work. It brings people with divergent origin, history, religion, culture and language together. It defines a people with territorial boundary, unified constitution and legal framework. It brings coherence through national public education system, integrated economy, and shared values and symbols. While fostering unity, it promotes a conscious sense of being proactive and catalyses commitment to one’s country (p.81).

Making references to Echekwube (1999), Ilega (1986) and Krieger (1993), E. Egbule (2019, p.82) further understands nation building “as dealing with the societal and political aftermath of conflict and establishment of new government and social compacts and conversely an attempt by a people towards intelligent and well (organized) ordered society that goes from being good to the point of being perfect, and associates the goal of civilization, the production of basic needs of people and happy life to nation building”.

P.O. Egbule (2019, p.104) then adds that “nation building as a concept can be viewed as conscious efforts by government, agencies, institutions and individuals towards the socio-political, economic and infrastructural development of a nation”. There is also the additional position that “nation building refers to a concerted effort to bring people together for the purpose of achieving common objectives and it is a planned and determined effort to bring people together for the purpose of achieving common goals” (P.O. Egbule, 2019, p.105). Citing Omolade (1998), P.O. Egbule, 2019, p.105) additionally sees nation building as follows:

an attempt to promote the survival of a nation and to build a virile and dynamic nation and an attempt to harness all the potentials of a nation’s, human and natural resources for the benefit of the citizens of the nation. It also involves the

contributions of individuals, groups and organizations in the realm of politics, economics, religion, socio cultural integration understanding.

Further referring to Atake and Dodo (2010), and Okorodudu (2006), P.O. Egbule (2019, p.105) noted that “nation building is the process of politically socializing the people into becoming good citizens of the political order and making the citizens feel they have a stake in the community worth fighting for. Furthermore, “it is a process aimed at promoting peace and progress, reducing conflicts as much as possible while laying a solid foundation for economic development, and political advancement for the realization of national prosperity” (P.O. Egbule, 2019, p.105). According to Mylonas (2020):

Nation-building may be defined as the process through which the boundaries of the modern state and those of the national community become congruent. The desired outcome is to achieve national integration. The major divide in the literature centers on the causal path that leads to national integration. Thus, nation-building has been theorized as a structural process intertwined with industrialization, urbanization, social mobilization, etc.

Mylonas (2020) further highlights that nationbuilding has been theorized “as the result of deliberate state policies that aim at the homogenization of a state along the lines of a specific constitutive story—that can and often does change over time and under certain conditions; as the product of top-bottom processes that could originate from forces outside of the boundaries of the relevant state; and as the product of bottom-up processes that do not require any state intervention to come about”.

Oyetibo (2012) in Solaru and Ogungbade (2020, p.124) submits that “nation-building implies a vast extent of human relationships and attitudes ranging from the integration of diverse and discrete cultural loyalties, the development of a sense of nationality, the integration of political units into a common territorial framework with a government to exercise power as well as the integration of individuals into an organization for purposive activities”. Oyetibo (2012) in Solaru and Ogungbade (2020, p.124) argue that “nation building aims at the unification of diverse people within a state in order to remain politically stable and viable. To achieve this, its processes involve major infrastructural development that foster social harmony and economic growth, as well as the development of behaviors, values, language, institutions, and physical structures that elucidate history and culture, concretize and protect the present and insure the future identity as well as independence of the nation”.

Aputazie (2021, p.1) submits that “the process of building a nation is what is directly transferred to mean nation-building”. This is a position that is neither easily acceptable as syllogism nor simply dismissible as sophistry. Aputazie (2021, p. 2) further posits that “it is understood that nation-building exerts a strong influence on the state’s economic, political, judicial, and social sectors”. Supposedly citing Calhoun (1993, p. 224), Aputazie (2021, p. 2) still asserts that “nation-building can be used negatively to destabilize the democratic process as this explains why post-colonial states experience dominant party systems and other political problems”. However, Calhoun (1993) on “Nationalism and Ethnicity” (Annual Review of Sociology, pp. 211-239) appears to have been misleadingly cited as the ostensibly quoted area of the paper seems to be missing in the referenced work. In any case, the contribution of Calhoun

(1993) was specifically on nationalism and ethnicity. Nationalism and nationbuilding are not synonymous. The former is an ideology and the later a course of action or courses of actions.

Education and Nationbuilding

The relationship between education and nationbuilding is highly germane in these interrogations, necessitating this concisely specific focus. Extant literature actually contains highly valid and significant attempts at establishing a nexus between education and nationbuilding (Bray & Cooper, 1979; Paglayan, 2021). Hence, Nwogboji (2018) argues that “education strongly and significantly correlates with nation-building. That is to say, a nation cannot be built without quality education. Through education, professionals (accountants, lawyers, doctors, etc.) are properly groomed to contribute positively towards the growth of their nation”. Dzvimbo et al. (2018, p.37) add that “education has been the most effective tool in nation building as it transforms a country’s socio-economic, technological, political and cultural outlook”. Incidentally, the foregoing positions rather read like references to “qualitative education for manpower development”, in the course of national advancement. Nationbuilding and national development are actually different concepts in the social sciences and related disciplines. Hon-Chan (1977, p.2) had then very validly asserted that “in the context of nation-building, the chief instrumental value of education lies in its capacity to lay the groundwork for integrative behaviour”. In other words, “in the context of nation-building, the chief instrumental value of education” is not human capital development and the production of professionals.

Language Issues and Pedantic Concerns as Probable Central Matters in the Existing Definitional Pluralities

It therefore appears as if some scholars have concluded that nationbuilding is a word that should merely be interpreted literally and accordingly devoid of social science technicalities. Hence, they equate anything that has to do with progress in an existing state or nation, as having to do with the building of the nation (nationbuilding). This tendency stands on one side. There is on the other hand, the class of scholars who have continued to frame their research contributions on the continuing assumption of technicality in the conceptualization of nationbuilding. Invariably, there is an embedded pedantic hue in the positions of each side, in being exceedingly bothered about what ought to be the correct usage of the concept. This gives rise to some conceptual vicissitudes for nationbuilding, entailing both language factors and pedantic matters.

Lexically denoted, a pedant is someone that is too concerned with rules and details, somebody who unduly emphasizes unimportant details and rules. Invariably, being pedantic also refers to being too concerned with formal rules and details, being too concerned with what are thought to be correct rules and details, e.g. in language. The issues here border on what ought to be the correct usage of the concept of nationbuilding in the relevant disciplines. Are they matters of language, pedantry or robust academic discourses? Connor (1972, p.319) had previously complained as follows:

Scholars associated with theories of “nation-building” have tended either to ignore the question of ethnic diversity or to treat the matter of ethnic identity superficially as merely one of a number of minor impediments to effective state-integration. To the degree that ethnic identity is given recognition, it is apt to be

as somewhat unimportant and ephemeral nuisance that will unquestionably give way to a common identity uniting all inhabitants of the state, regardless of ethnic heritage, as modern communication and transportation networks, link the state's various parts more closely.

Indeed, Weinstock (2004, p.51) has suggested that nationbuilding refers to the various attempts in a multiethnic country to “cope with the dual demands of social cohesion and the recognition of diversity”. Citing Hippler (2005) Falode (2019, pp. 181-182) posits that:

Nation-building is, on the one hand, a process of socio-political development which allows loosely knitted communities to become a common society with a nation-state corresponding to it. It also connotes the different dimensions through which diverse segments of the society is fused into a functional whole. It has within it, economic integration, cultural integration, political centralization, bureaucratic control and democratization, and establishment of common citizenship.

Falode (2019) also distinguishes between vertical and horizontal dimensions of nationbuilding. With reference to the Nigerian context and citing Elaigwu (1985), Falode (2019, p. 181) sees the vertical dimension as “the progressive acceptance by members of the polity of the legitimacy and the necessity for a central government, and the identification with the central government as the symbol of the nation” while “the horizontal dimension involves the acceptance of the other members of the civic body as equal members of a corporate nation”. It appears as if nationbuilding should be an unambiguous terminology, devoid of semantics and pedantic hues. It seems to be in the final analysis, the process of weaving an indomitable new nation out of a diversity of previously existing national inclinations. It further seems to be a domestically-driven process as different from the uniquely American position which practices nationbuilding as “the use of armed force in the aftermath of a conflict to underpin an enduring transition to democracy” (Dobbins, 2003, p.17).

Conclusion

This contribution has attempted to demonstrate that nationbuilding probably possesses the weirdest trajectories of interpretation in the entire social sciences. The paper has merely scratched the surface of the problem as there exists, some possibly inexhaustible volume of literature on the divergent viewpoints and understandings in nationbuilding conceptualization and focus. Conceptual disputations and divergences in opinion are undoubtedly inherent in academic matters. However, in the case of the notion of nationbuilding, some of the positions are completely unrelated to the other perspectives. The seeming conceptual indistinctness is attributable to both language factors and pedantic points in this paper. This article considers the embedded scenarios as academically awkward and it is accordingly, unassumingly held in the work that nationbuilding means the process of weaving a very strong new nation out of a diversity of previously existing national inclinations.

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