

HISTORY AND THE CHALLENGES TO THE PEOPLES AND POLITIES OF AFRICA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

by

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The topic of this lecture is, *History and the Challenges to the Peoples and Politics of Africa in the 21st Century*. The lecture is being delivered to honour the memory of Professor Kenneth Onwuka Dike, (1917-1983). I am highly honoured to be given the chance to deliver this lecture to honour Professor Dike's memory, because, in my view, he was, the leading figure, among the far-sighted and creative scholars who pioneered the establishment of the foundation for the research and the teaching of African history, in the 20th century, which we are now leaving behind, to enter a new one. So, we cannot find our way in the new century, without some understanding of the significance of his role and his contributions.

The contributions of this unique scholar, and educational statesman, is of world significance, because of the crucial role he played in the building of the moral, conceptual, academic, administrative, and material, capacity for liberating the study of the history, of the societies, and of the cultures of mankind from domination by certain, European, racist, perspectives, premises and dogma, in the crucial decades of the 1950s and the 1960s. Professor Chieka Ifemesia and the Kenneth Onwuka Dike Center at Awka, have, fortunately, started to, systematically, document and publish his writings, with the publication, in 1988, of the book, **Issues in African Studies and National Education: Selected Works of Kenneth Onwuka Dike**.

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This liberation of feelings, and of the mind, with regards to humanity's conception of what constitutes the humankind and the variety of the nature of the historical processes that produces this humanity, over the millennia and over the centuries, was achieved with particular reference to African history. But, given the position of Africa, and Africans, in world history, it has world-wide significance. Its universality was derived from its particularity. This is because of what Africa and Africans had come to stand for in the world, before and after the fifteenth century. For, as that philosopher, and revolutionary with a long-range encyclopaedic vision of mankind, Mao Tse Tung, pointed out, during the height of the Civil Rights struggle of the African-Americans in 1963:

The evil system of colonialism and imperialism was built on the enslavement of Negroes and the trade in Negroes. It will only come to an end with the complete emancipation of the Black People.

The world significance of Professor Dike's contributions have not yet been properly recognised in Nigeria, because of the short-sighted outlook and the slave mentality which has informed so much Nigerian intellectual and political discourse; marked by the swallowing up, hook-line-and-sinker, and the parroting, of whatever is dished out from Western European and North American media and academia about almost everything about mankind.

I have never had the privilege of seeing Professor Dike, but his presence in my postgraduate tutorials, with Professor Abdullahi Smith, was, often, almost, palpable, particularly when we were discussing the development of historiography. Professor Smith worked very closely with Professor Dike in the Department of History, University of Ibadan, and in building the Historical Society of Nigeria, and at many other levels. He retained such deep respect for Professor Dike that, whenever he mentioned him, you could hear a special note of respect in his voice. This left a permanent impression on me, because Professor Smith was, a scholar of exacting standards, and no idle respecter of persons, because of status or connections.

The Organising Committee of this Congress, suggested that I deliver the lecture on the topic of, "The Politics of Power Shift and Democracy in Nigeria". But I felt that it is not fair to deliver a lecture to honour the memory of a person of the status of Professor Dike on a

superficial political slogan like “power-shift”. Even if one were to examine the real meaning of “power” in the history of economies, societies and political systems and how it shifts, or does not shift, one is still left with the misleading, and diversionary, assumptions behind the current usage of this slogan, in Nigeria, that, because a person, or persons, from a nation, nationality, or an ethnic group, hold power, it means that, that nationality, or ethnic group, exercises that power.

Hence, when Generals Buhari, Babangida, Abacha and Abubakar, were the Heads of State of Nigeria, in the period, 1983-1999, the Hausas, the Fulanis and the Kanuris were in power; and now President Olusegun Obasanjo is the Head of state, the Yorubas are in power! The institutional machinery for the exercise of power and its basis in occupational groups, social strata and social classes and their concrete economic and political interests are not perceived with this shallow outlook. This perception of politics is, itself, derived from certain false assumptions about what constitutes nations, nationalities, ethnic groups and polities.

Since the general theme of this 44th Annual Congress of the Historical Society of Nigeria is “History, Democracy and the Challenges of the 21st Century”, it may be of some use if this lecture draws your attention to some issues raised by the study of our history with regards to the very nature of the polities whose democracy is soon going to face the challenges of the 21st century. For, the degree to which this democracy is realised, sustained and grows, is going to depend, very much, on how the question of the nature, and relationships, between the nationalities of these democratic polities are grasped and used in political practice. Already, the national question has become very explosive, involving violent ethnic conflicts, stresses and tension all over this country. A discussion of the future direction of this country and its options in the 21st century has to squarely face this question, at a deeper level than has hitherto largely been done.

I know this lecture is not supposed to be about the historical works of Professor Kenneth Dike, few, profound, and seminal, as these have been. It is being organised to honour his memory. But, I cannot think of a better way of honouring his memory than by attempting to gain a better understanding from these precious historical works, about the nature of our nations, nationalities, ethnic groups and about this polity known as Nigeria and other polities on our continent.

Two Perspectives

In my view, among Professor Dike's lasting contributions to historical study is the way he provides us with a perspective, empirical evidence and analyses, which challenge the dominant perspective with regards to the nature of nations, nationalities, ethnic group and polities. Before I come to these works, let me set out what these perspectives are.

The basic premise of the perspective which Dike's writings challenges, is that, mankind has always been made up of distinct races, which are distinct biological entities, with distinctive physiological, mental and emotional attributes. Each race is said to be composed of distinct nations, made up of populations of largely the same racial stock, existing as distinct entities on their own territory, with their language, cultures and identities, going back to the beginning of time. This is the racio-ethnic conception of the nation. The terms, "tribe", "ethnic group" and "nationality" are applied to smaller, or more dispersed, racio-ethnic groups, which are yet to attain proper nationhood, as they are seen to be economically, culturally and politically backward, in comparison with the nations of Western Europe, which are presented as representing the standard model of the nation.

This conception of the nation which European imperialism has imposed on the world, since the nineteenth century, is racio-ethnic, because it views the nation as essentially a biological community produced by biological processes and linked together by "blood ties", irrespective of language, culture, religion, territorial location and political loyalty and identity.

The present nationality law of Germany, is one of the best examples of the contemporary legal manifestation of this racio-ethnic conception of nation and of nationality. Under this law, you cannot be a German citizen, unless you have what is called "German blood", in your veins, whatever that means. Once you can prove that you are of German ancestry, and you have "German blood", through the male, or, the female line, you automatically get German citizenship, even if you do not speak the German language, have never been an inhabitant of the territory of Germany and hardly know anything about Germany, or German culture.

Several millions of migrants into Germany, from Central and Eastern Europe, who are supposed to have "German blood" have on this basis, been given German citizenship. But the 7.4 million Poles, Turks, Serbs, Kurds, Asians West and North Africans, working in Germany, for decades, many of whom were born there, and work there, have no other

home and can only speak German and know no other country, are denied German citizenship, because they have no “German blood” in their veins.

Other European countries, like the United Kingdom, have provisions along these lines, in their nationality and citizenship laws, but they are not as brazen as those of Germany.

The racio-ethnic conception of the nation, which informs this position is at variance with other conceptions of the nation found with most other sections of mankind and these conceptions have much deeper and wider roots, all over the world.

These conceptions view the nation as, essentially, a political community, which may be multi-ethnic, and even multi-racial, but whose citizens share closely related historical experiences and are bound by common citizenship and identity, and see themselves, and are seen by others, as a distinct political entity, with defined territorial and other sovereign rights. Some of the conceptions of the nation, within this broad type, emphasise shared habitation and territoriality. Others emphasise common religious faith and cultural values. But, what they all do not insist on is race, ancestry and blood ties, as the European racist, concept of the nation and nationality does.

But, although the racio-ethnic conception of the nation is a peculiar one, it has been imposed on the rest of mankind, together with the concept of “the nation-state”. This, is supposed to be a political community in which this racio-ethnic nation has developed state structures, ruling over a definite territory over which it claims ownership, and sovereign rights.

For most of mankind, this conception of the nation and the nation-state is an aberration. Yet, for most of the period since the First World War, most of humanity has been made to aspire to this peculiar type of nationhood and statehood, emanating from nineteenth century European obsessions and confusion.

Beyond the Nation-State

Before we are even clear about what this nation-state is, which we are expected to develop our post-colonial polities into, it is now widely propagated that this entity known as the nation-state, is no longer viable, or, useful. It is said to have become redundant, and in some areas, like in

Africa, to be destructive of peace, harmony and human development. A number of factors, are said to be responsible for this. One of them is said to be the resurgence of sub-national, ethnic and communal consciousness, identity and organization, which challenge and reject the existing nation-state, and are seeking to retain only formal links with it, or secede from it altogether. The nation-state is also said to be challenged by other “primordial” forces, in the form of fundamentalist, Christian, Islamic, Hindi and Jewish, and other religious, and cultural, movements, which, in the name of the purification and protection of religion and culture, reject the nation-state and its claims to secularity and modernity. The nation-state is said to have helped to create the conditions for these challenges to arise and to become serious, because of what is said to have been its failure in nation-building, in the postcolonial milieu, where it is said to be virtually under siege.

It is in the light of what is said to be the failure of the nation-state, that the future development of the postcolonial societies of Africa, the Carribbeans, Asia and the Pacific, is said to require the building of new types of political communities, based on the formal recognition and empowerment of the national, ethnic and communal groups, which are said to have existed since time immemorial and have re-emerged to assert their sovereign autochthonous rights, which have been subjugated to the power structures of the dominant ethnic groups of the nation-state.

The other challenge to the nation-state, which is said to have made it unviable and redundant, is said to come from, what is called “globalisation”. This, is said to be the process, starting from the 1980s, which, as a result of certain economic and technological changes, particularly in the organisation and structure of transnational corporations and in satellite and computer technology, is said to have integrated almost every part of this planet, in a way in which has never been done before. The development and application of digital technology and of fiber optics, among other technological advances, have made it possible for information to be communicated and processed in massive amounts, and in seconds, from any part of the world to another. This, together with the new corporate business organisation, in the high-tech, finance and services, sectors, is said to have created a single global economy, which has simply bypassed, the horizon, the frontiers, and the regulations of even the most developed of the model nation-states.

For the nation-states of Europe and North America, the future, beyond the nation-state, is said to be in the regional organisations they have already formed, particularly the European Union and the North

American Free Trade Area, and the harmonisation and eventual integration of these. For those of us in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean and the Pacific, the future is said to be in restoring sovereignty to the autochthonous nationalities of what is called the nation-states and arranging for either a peaceful break-up of this nation-state, or, some confederal arrangement. Any failure to face up to this future, and to act now, to break-up the existing nation-state, or set up some confederal arrangements, is supposed to inevitably lead to the intensification of ethnic conflicts, to civil war and possible ethnic genocide.

This projection of the future, is, as far as we are concerned in Africa, most alarming. For, while Europe and North America, are moving towards integration, into more cohesive, broader, and powerful political and economic communities, we either dismantle the existing polities, called nation-states like Nigeria, India, Pakistan, or Indonesia, and allow the component nationalities to set up sovereign nations-states, on their own, or transform into confederations, or run the risk of sinking into chronic civil wars. Whichever of the three alternatives prevails, we appear to be doomed to further economic cultural and political retardation and to further, and more permanent, subjugation to the large and integrated power blocs of Europe and North America. The consequence of this projection of the future and the alternative possibilities it sets before us is, to undermine our confidence in our ability to control our destiny. It also paralyses our will to stand up and face up to the challenges of the 21st century. But is this projection of the future meaningful? Is it based on the realities of the historical development of political communities here and in the rest of the world?

We have, therefore, no alternative, but to critically analyse this projection of the future, going right down to the basic premises and concepts that informs it. And this is where Professor Dike's contribution is crucial, not only for enabling us to study the history of mankind on our own terms, but also for what his scholarly inquiry has brought out in his own historical studies, one of which was only published after his death in 1983.

The Mingling of Peoples

In his doctoral thesis, completed in 1950, and published in 1956, as, **Trade and Politics in the Niger Delta, 1830-1885: An Introduction to the Economic and Political History of Nigeria**, he saw migration into the Niger Delta, due to overpopulation and land hunger in the hinterland and as a part of the trading systems there, which included slavery and

slave trade, leading to the emergence of communities which transcend the old tribal entities. He stated that:

“The seaboard trading communities which emerged with this commerce transcended tribal boundaries, their history belongs both to Atlantic and tribal history”.(p.20)

Dike puts a lot of emphasis on the ethnic heterogeneity of the population of the Niger Delta, even going to the extent of arguing that:

“...in the peopling of the Delta no one Nigerian tribe had monopoly, Benis, Ijaws, Sobos, Jerkris, Ekoi, Ibibio Efik and even the northern Nigerian tribes were represented.”(pp.30-31)

This, according to him, produced polities, which would not be regarded as tribal. He said:

“Moreover, city-state is more appropriate designation than tribal state, since the period of migration disorganised the tribal entities and the slave trade further accentuated the mingling of peoples. In the 19th century, therefore, the delta states were grouped not by considerations of kinship but by contiguity and in the period under survey, citizenship came increasingly to depend not on descent, but on residence”.(p.31)

Dike was not making these points in order to posit some Igbo claim over the Niger Delta. He recognised that, before the migration of the Igbo-speaking peoples into the Niger Delta, whatever impact it may have had, there had been earlier migrations by other peoples. He cites and contests the statement by the eminent 19th century African scholar, Dr. James Africanus Horton, that:

“Iboland is separated from the sea only by petty tribes all of which trace their origin from the great race.”(pp.30-31)

He even went beyond Africanus Horton to contest that position, which apparently was held by other writers. He said:

“The mistake of ascribing Ibo origins to all the Delta people was common among 19th century writers. It can only be accounted by the great influx of Ibo migrants which blurred the lines of earlier migrations.” (pp.30-31)

According to Dike, this “mingling of peoples” in the Delta, had far-reaching impact even on the legal system, an essential determinant of the nature of citizenship in a polity. He said:

“The mixture of people often meant that African law and custom vanished and a new law and order was evolved based partly on African precedent and experience and partly on the lessons of the contact with Europe.” (p..34)

But in **Trade and Politics**, Dike seems to take it for granted that there was a pre-colonial Igbo nationality. He flatly referred to the Aro as:

“a section of the Ibo tribe.” (p.38)

Although pointing out that the issue of Aro origin was not a settled matter, He said the Igbos looked up to Nri as their ancestral home.

The Formation of Nations and Nationalities

But over three decades later, after an intensive study of the history of the Aro, with Professor Felicia Ekejiuba, published in the book, **The Aro of South-eastern Nigeria, 1650-1980: A Study of Socio-Economic Formation and Transformation in Nigeria**, Dike went beyond “the mingling of peoples,” to assert that there was nothing like an autochthonous pre-colonial, Igbo nation, race or tribe, and that Igbo is a nationality formed in the twentieth century. Dike and Ekejiuba said:

“...it is often forgotten, or merely mentioned in the footnote, that Igbo is a modern ethnic category which many of the constituent groups have only recently and often reluctantly accepted as their ethnic identity, often on political and administrative grounds. During the period covered by our study, the now twelve million or more ‘Igbo’ distributed over 30,000 square miles of territory east and west of the Niger were variously referred to either as cultural groups

*(e.g. the Nri, Isuama, Ezza, or Otanzu), or by the ecological zones in which they are found (e.g. **Olu** or **Oru** i.e. the riverain people or **Adagbe**, people of the flood plain); **Enugu**, people who live on the hills, **Aniocha**, people who live on heavily leached and eroded solids; **Ohozara**, people of the savannah; or as occupational groups such as **Opi egbe** (people who fashion guns), **Ndiuzu** or **Umudioka** (blacksmiths, artists and carvers). Since Igbo was used at this time pejoratively to refer to the densely populated uplands, the major sources of slaves, and by extension to slaves, it is not surprisingly that many of these groups have been reluctant to accept the 'Igbo' identity".(p.6)*

This study of the Aro, which was one of the numerous research projects into Nigerian history started under the leadership of Dike from the University of Ibadan, in the 1950s and the 1960s, took him beyond seeing the Aro merely as a section of a pre-existing, autochthonous, Igbo nation, to a realisation of the historical process of the formation of the Aro and also of the Igbo nationality, which it has come to be a part of. Dike and Ekejiuba write in terms of the Igbonisation of the Aro, stating that:

"Even though the Aro are now considered Igbo ethnically and administratively they have not always been so regarded."(p.2)

From "the mingling of peoples," Dike has, in the course of the Aro study, come face to face with the complex realities of the historical process of the formation and transformation of nations, nationalities, ethnic groups and polities. He and Ekejiuba grasped this and point out that the findings of the Aro study has wider implication for contemporary Nigeria. They said:

"...the story of the emergence of the Aro...supported by demographic, linguistic evidence and contemporary alignments clearly stress the multi-ethnic base of the Aro. From this perspective, Aro history should be seen as an experiment in poly-ethnic state formation, a precursor of the contemporary incorporation of many multi-ethnic groups into one political unit. A central problem of the Aro history must therefore

focus on the processes through which diverse groups and individuals have been welded together into a people with a sense of common identity and commitment to being an Aro. The related conflicts and controversies which are concomitant teething problems of the processes of incorporation into a national identity must not be submerged into the search for consensus, harmony and stability dictated by the brand of social theory the scholar adopts. The implications of the experiment for the Aro system as well as its relevance for contemporary relationships in modern Nigeria are important.” (p.5)

Dike and Ekejiuba should not be misunderstood over the issue of whether or not, an Igbo nationality exists today. They clearly recognise that it does, but, that far from this nationality existing before the colonial entity of Nigeria, its emergence is part of the process of the emergence of a Nigerian nationality out of that particular experience of colonial domination, of the independence struggle and of post-colonial developments, contests and conflicts. What they bring out, is that the Igbo nationality is the product of historical processes, just as the Aro were also products of historical processes. They call for detailed local studies so that:

“The historical process by which these various groups have become ethnically Igbo during the past eighty years can be highlighted, the shared traits and common traditions abstracted and the problem of using Igbo as an ethnographic entity demonstrated by such studies. Such studies will also demonstrate the problem posed by the use of single entities as Igbo religion or political system.” (p.7)

Significance

What Dike and Ekejiuba have found out and brought out clearly about the historicity of the process of the formation of the Aro and Igbo nationalities, and how recent it is in the case of the Igbo, is very much in line with what scholars elsewhere in Africa and the world have found out and brought out about most the nationalities of mankind. These discoveries were, of course, made possible by the national liberation

struggle fought and won on the terrain of historical studies by Professor Dike and others at the University of Ibadan and elsewhere in Africa and the world. They are, however, specially significant for Nigeria, and for many parts of Africa, because of the recent resurgence of ethnic politics and violent ethnic conflicts and even ethnic genocide, which obstruct and undermine democracy and economic and social progress in many parts of the continent.

This retrogressive and destructive politics is generated and sustained by myths and fairy-tales that the present nations, nationalities and ethnic groups of Africa have existed for thousands of years, as distinct biological, cultural and political entities with autochthonous, sovereign rights over defined territories; and that they only agreed to give up these rights at independence, to join the new nation-state, but which they are now re-claiming back.

But, the fact of the matter is, that starting right from the study of the history of Egypt over about the last ten millennia, where the primary historical source material has such incomparable richness and time-depth, it has been realised that not only nations, nationalities and ethnic groups, but even racial groups, are products of the historical process and are formed, unformed and transformed in the course of historical development. The attempt to impose the racial categorisations developed by European imperialist scholarship on the history of Egypt and even of Greece, for example, has been shown to have no basis in the primary evidence available. Those looking for Negroes, Caucasians, Aryans and Semites in ancient Egypt, have been shown to be chasing mirages derived from their own complexes and obsessions.

This is the case right across the continent, right down to the Cape, where even the vehemence and violence of the Inkatha Freedom Party and its *impi* militia, has failed to hide the fact that the Zulu nation was formed in the 19th and 20th centuries and is still being formed and transformed with considerable plurality, heterogeneity which Inkatha propaganda wants covered-up.

In Central Africa, in spite of the sensational misrepresentation in the news-media, the civil wars there, are not really ethnic or racial conflicts in any meaningful sense of these terms. The Hutu and the Tutsis of Rwanda, speak the same language, **Kinyarwanda**, with regional and not sub-ethnic variations. They occupy the same territory and belong to the same economic, social and political system. They are, more or less, social estates, with a certain level of occupational specialisation, in a

richly fertile, but very densely populated land of permanent cultivation and intensive pastoralism, containing all the ingredients for conflicts once the political leadership decides to ignite it.

The French social geographer, Dominique Franche, has, in *Le Monde* of 12th November, 1996, taken up the issue of the supposed racial differences between Hutus and Tutsis in a way which is illuminating. She says that:

“The Hutus and Tutsis do not form two different ethnic groups...They speak the same language, share the same culture and religion...the idea that Hutus and Tutsis were physically different was first aired in the 1860s by the British explorer John Speke...Anyone who attempts to pinpoint these differences is likely to get it wrong. The only accurate available data was gathered by a German anthropologist in 1907-08, who found a 12cm difference in average height between Hutus and Tutsis. Now, that's exactly the same difference that existed in France between a conscript and a Senator in 1815. The differences in height can be explained by their different lifestyles and eating habits, and by the fact that Tutsi nobleman, unlike Hutus, do not till the land...The trouble is that all anthropological work on the Tutsis used to focus solely on those Tutsis who belong to the court of the Rwandan King. They did not have the same physical traits as people living on the outer confines of the kingdom who are now also called Tutsis.”

The type of stereotyping of peoples which Dominique Franche exposes here is widely used to distort the complex realities of society and history in Africa and all over the world in order to serve particular racist and ethnicist political agendas, with very destructive and retrogressive consequences.

The Challenges

For us, on the African continent, the year, 1999, is especially significant because it marks the end of the first century in our history when we were conquered, occupied and subjugated by foreigners, from one end of our continent to another. In earlier centuries some of these

foreigners who came to conquer us this century, had been invaded and conquered and subjugated by Africans. They also had invaded and conquered parts of Africa. But the twentieth century, which is coming to an end in a few weeks, is the first century in which all our continent came under foreign domination, in a form which has been systematic and intensive. The resistance to this foreign domination was never extinguished by the conquest. But the struggle to regain our sovereign rights of self-determination and to take control of our destiny, took off decisively, over most of the continent, in the decades of the 1940s. In spite of the dedication and sacrifices of those who conducted and led this struggle for our independence, the victories won in the fifty years, since its upsurge in the 1940s, have been significant, but limited. The limited nature of these victories is being brought out forcefully, by the crises our countries have sunk into since the 1980s, at almost all levels of existence. Millions of Africans are being killed and devastated by wars, famines, ethnic conflicts and severe economic recessions. For the first time, it is being widely recognised that our very survival is threatened by powerful internal and external forces and processes.

In order to clearly understand the nature of these forces and processes which are undermining our capacity to take control of our destiny, and be able to promote and defend our well-being and dignity, we have to grasp the nature and the forms of the historical process of the formation of our nations, nationalities, ethnic groups and polities. This is because, many of the devastating conflicts, disabling fractures, and debilitating stresses and tensions, are ignited and fuelled by political conceptions and political practices derived from the racio-ethnic conception of nationhood and of the polity. Professor Dike and his colleague Professor Felicia Ekejiuba, have contributed to the building of our capacity to develop this grasp of the real nature of the historical process of the forming, unforming, reforming, and transforming our nations, nationalities, ethnic groups and polities.

The Component Units

In the particular case of our country, Nigeria, those who go around asserting that distinct nations, nationalities, and ethnic groups which have existed for thousands of years before colonialism, are the component units of the Nigerian Federation, like Wole Soyinka, should know, and their audiences should realise, that these assertions have no basis in history, but are recently concocted fairy-tales.

In the first place, the evidence we have from the primary sources shows that the sovereign polities of the pre-colonial Nigerian area were not each made up of distinct nations, nationalities, or ethnic groups. Virtually none of the nationalities, and ethnic groups which have come to be formed in 20th century Nigeria was to be found within one sovereign polity or even a confederation of sovereign polities. We had the Alafinate of Oyo and its successor states; the various Lower Niger Kingdoms, and hinterland Confederations, City-States and the Aro State in the south-eastern Nigerian area. We had the Akuship of Wukari, the Obaship of Benin, the *tor agbande* of the Tiv and *ako* of the Igbirra Tao. We had the Sheikdom of Borno and its principalities; and the Sokoto Caliphate and its emirates and many other polities. These sovereign polities emerged and were established on territorially-based economic and geopolitical imperatives and geographically specific, linguistic, cultural, religious and ideological roots and networks. From their foundations they were marked by considerable ethnic heterogeneity.

Significant ecological, demographic, economic and technological changes, going back to the fifteenth century, had, by the eighteenth century, created even greater heterogeneity in the composition of the population of these polities.

These transformations, challenged the political order at a very fundamental level, particularly where claims to autochtony were significant in the political system. Most of these polities could not effectively and quickly enough develop new social and political institutions to cope with the challenge posed by a much more heterogeneous population. They were unable to move the political order forward, to create a broader basis for incorporating most of the free migrant and servile inhabitants of the polities as citizens. Attempts to do this, in the form of the Jihad movements and in the establishment of new and more meritocratic political institutions and trading systems, was part of the upheavals that characterised our history here in the late 18th and in most of the 19th century.

The British conquered these polities and destroyed their sovereignty, turning their citizens into colonial subjects largely because of the debilitating failure to forge new, and more incorporative, and economically productive political orders. This sovereignty which was lost to the British was not recovered by any of the successor entities of these pre-colonial sovereign polities and the new ethnic groups and nationalities which came to identify with them formed in colonial Nigeria. This sovereignty was fought for and recovered by organisations

and movements whose identity and aspirations were Pan-Nigerian and Pan-African.

It was the Universal Negro Improvement Association and the *Negro World* of Marcus Garvey; *The West African Pilot* of the great Zik of Africa; and the West African Students Union led by Folake Solanke; the Nigerian Trade Union Congress, galvanised by Michael Imoudu; the Nigerian Students Union, and the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons, who fought and recovered this sovereignty and independence, not any ethnic or tribal organisation. These ethnic and regionalist organisations largely worked on the side of the British against the struggle for independence, led by the NCNC, in the crucial years of 1944-1951.

The component units of the Nigerian Federation in the period leading up to the independence, and at independence, won effectively by 1951 by these pan-Nigerian organisations, were the three Regions and one Capital Territory. Even for the Ibadan Constitutional Conference of 1950, when the British deliberately refused to allow the NCNC to contest the series of elections leading up to the conference as a political party, the representation was not ethnic in any form. It was based on districts, provinces and regions. It was based on territorial units within which any Nigerian living there could participate.

At subsequent Constitutional Conferences, after 1950, the representation was based on political parties, some of which were national and some regional. They went and negotiated at these conferences as NCNC, NPC, AG, NEPU, UMBC, NDC, etc, etc, and not as representatives of regions, or of ethnic groups.

The sovereign rights lost to the British conquerers was recovered by Nigerian political movements and mass organisations and restored to a sovereign Nigerian Federation whose component units at independence were four territorial units; the Northern Region, the Western Region, the Eastern Region and the Lagos Capital Territory, and not any ethnic groups or nationalities.

Right now, on the eve of the 21st century we have a Nigerian Federation, whose component units are thirty six territorial states and a Federal Capital Territory. The governments of these states were elected by Nigerian citizens who live and have registered to vote in each state irrespective of their ethnic origin or religion. These governments are constitutionally and lawfully accountable to all these Nigerians living in

their states and are responsible for their security and welfare, irrespective of their ethnic origin or religion.

The land in these states, by law, as enshrined in the *Land Use Act* entrenched in the Constitution, belongs to the people of Nigeria and is held in trust by the governor of the state. Sovereignty over this land and its mineral resources belongs to the people of Nigeria and is exercised by the Federal Government as a result of the actual historical process which recovered that sovereignty from the British conquerors, through the independence struggle which was part of a broader struggle for national liberation by the peoples of the rest of Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Pacific. This sovereignty was not recovered from the British by negotiations with any tribal tin-gods on behalf of any ethnic group.

Within and across these states, nations, nationalities and ethnic groups are forming, unforming, reforming and transforming. A Nigerian citizen belonging to Lagos State, is a Lagosian, who speaks Yoruba, but may not be of Yoruba origin and does not necessarily belong to the Yoruba ethnic group. A Nigerian citizen of Kano State, is *Dan Kano*, who speaks Hausa, but may not be of Hausa or Fulani origin and is not necessarily a *Bahaushe* or a *Bafulatani*. These Nigerian citizens are becoming a substantial proportion of the electorate among the younger generation and the more economically active and productive sectors of the population.

What Professor Dike and his colleague have achieved from their study of the Aro is to develop a perspective in which we can grasp the process of the making and unmaking of nations, nationalities and ethnic groups in our history and right now before our eyes.

Demarcating the Units

Those who are advocating the restructuring of the Nigerian Federation into a Federation of nationalities and ethnic groups have failed to grasp the substance of the historical process which has produced our ethnic groups and the Nigerian polity. Not only do they repeat blatant falsehoods about how Nigeria came into being, they seem oblivious of the impossibility of demarcating the boundary between most of the ethnic groups of contemporary Nigeria and their neighbours. These nationalities have actually no boundaries, as they intermesh into one another at the level of language, culture, identity and territory. Any attempt to carve out the territories of Nigerian ethnic groups, or even sub-ethnic groups, to create ethnically based federating units, will lead to violent conflicts and sustained border wars, because there is no basis for these boundaries at

the ethnic level, given the mosaic nature of the ethnic and cultural geography of Nigeria and most of Africa.

Do those so vehemently asking for the restructuring of Nigeria into a federation or confederation of ethnic regional units know the ethno-geographical realities on the grounds, in the farmsteads, the hamlets, the villages, the hunting grounds, the fishing grounds, the creeks, the pastures, the marshlands, the markets, and the towns and cities of this country? Where do you mark as the territorial boundary between the Igbo regional unit and that of the Igala or that of the Idoma? Where do you mark on the ground the territorial boundary between the Nupe and the Yoruba, or the Nupe and the Edo, or the Edo and the Yoruba, for example? What about the boundaries between the Kanuri regional unit and the Hausa regional unit? Or, that between the Yoruba and the Ijaw; or between the Jukun and the Tiv, or the Jukun and the Chamba and Kuteb? Where do you set as the limits of the territory of the Edo in relationship to the Urhobo, the Ijaw and the Itsekiri, that is leaving aside the impossible problem of demarcation on the ground between these three ethnic groups on their own? Where do you mark the territorial boundary between the Fulbe and the Bata, and the Kanuri and the Fulbe, or the Kanuri and the Bura? What about the Efik and the Ejagham and the Ogoni and Andoni? Or do you set the historical base of the demarcation such that those who migrated into Nigeria only in the second millenium, like the Fulbe started doing from the 11th century, shall have no regional federating units since they have no rights to any territory?

Where do you set the historical baseline, with regards to the demarcation of the boundaries in order to sort out amicably the conflicting territorial claims? Do you take the present ethnic-geographic situation as given and work on that, or do you go back to an earlier period? Which year should be the historical baseline? 2000 A.D? 1960 A.D? 1900 A.D? 1800 A.D? 1500 A.D? or 1000 A.D? or even earlier?

How do you stop pogroms and ethnic cleansing to change the ethno-geographic situation before the ethnic regional units have their boundaries demarcated? How much disruption, devastation and dislocation of the lives of Nigerians are we going to accept in order to attain this “final solution” of the Nigerian problem-the restructuring of the federation on the bases of ethnic regional units, which is so vehemently called for?

The application of this ethnic principle for the political and administrative organisation of the country, will not stop at the boundaries of the new ethnic regional units. Whatever the amended constitution provides, the people will forcefully demand its application right down to the local government, district and village levels. We have already experienced the intensity of the disputes over the demarcation of local governments and districts boundaries and the location of their headquarters, when operating largely on the territorial principle. This intensity and confusion will multiply one-hundred-fold when the whole federation is restructured on the ethnic principle.

Is this the way we want to enter the 21st century, driving each other around, and killing one another, fighting over our grandparents ancient claims over land in the 11th, 18th, and 19th centuries?

Then, there is the question of disinheritance and disenfranchising tens of millions of Nigerians who have made other parts of Nigeria their homes, and who will clearly become second-class, or non-citizens, in these ethnically constituted federating regions. The economic and social costs caused by the problem of indigeneity in access to land, education and other economic and social assets is already high and disruptive. One can only imagine what will happen to the millions of Nigerian citizens who have made Kaduna, Kano, Jos, Port Harcourt and Lagos, their homes who will automatically have their national citizenship, status destroyed, once the Nigerian Federation ceases to be composed of a territorially based states and is restructured into a federation, or confederation, ethnically-based regions, as is being advocated by some parochial, vested interests. These interests, mortally fear the challenges of the 21st century, particularly at the level of the social, economic and demographic changes which will completely finish with their type of ethnic politics.

I have in this lecture, directed so much attention on Nigeria, as if it is not just only one-quarter of Africa. I have wanted a broad coverage of the continent, but did not find time, or the means, to go and work at the library of the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs, unfortunately the only library in the country where relevant material on historical and contemporary developments in Africa is available. But, I want to draw your attention to the fact that most of the civil wars devastating Africa today, in Sierra Leone, Liberia, the Congo Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda and Burundi, Ethiopia, Sudan and Somalia, were ignited by attempts to institutionalise or operationalise ethnic differences in the political systems with, selfish, and even, sometimes, with good intentions.

It was not just what Samuel Doe did with the ethnic composition of the Liberian Army, or what Mobutu did with the Banyamulenge, but right across, the attempts to shift from territorially-based principles of political organisation, operation and of citizenship to ethnic-based, has sparked-off protracted and violent conflicts, and shall continue to do so.

Conclusion

For Nigeria and the rest of Africa, the challenge that history throws to our peoples and polities in the 21st century is to learn its lessons and look at what is happening now in the context of the historical process that has brought it about.

We have to realise that every polity is produced by historical processes which, while they form part of larger, continental, and global processes, they are also specific to it. There is nothing like an “ideal nation-state” or a “true federation”. These are just the inanities of a slave mentality.

If the goal is the welfare and dignity of the people and their capability to fully exercise their democratic rights and also exercise a measure of control over their destiny, then it is necessary to recognise that these nations, nationalities and ethnic groups are never monolithic, fixed and separate entities. They are each unique, complex, multifaceted and inter-connected and intermeshed at various levels and always changing at various levels and at different paces. Therefore, while ethnic identity exists and will continue to exist and play a role in the organisation of political systems, it is only one out of several dimensions of human existence and human political activity.

For democratic institutions to be built, for example, it is essential that national political parties, trade unions; professional and business organisations, farmers, herders, fishermen and tenants organisations; and women and youth organisations are built, forged, and strengthened, with powerful roles in the political system. Where these national organisations are weak, democracy can hardly survive and take root because ethnic politics will grow and flourish. And ethnic politics has no time for democracy.

If there is a Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People, and you, as an Ogoni, do not share its goals, you are simply a traitor to the Ogoni cause. There is no room for democratic choice and freedom of association where politics is built on such organisations. You are either

with your people or you are with their enemies. This is the fascist, anti-democratic, imperative of all racist and ethnic politics.

A Zulu who does not accept the leadership of the Inkatha is simply a traitor, because it is not a matter of the democratic freedom of conscience and of association; its supposed to be a war situation, where all the Zulus have to come together to fight the enemy and to survive and regain their lost glory. That is at the root of the violence in Kwazulu Natal.

How can a true descendant of Oduduwa refuse to support the Egbe Omo Oduduwa and its Action Group and other such organisations, if he is not a quisling of other tribes? He cannot. He has to be made to realise his treachery and recant or be punished. If there is a Leader of the Yoruba, then all Yoruba, including President Obasanjo, have to accept his leadership or stand to be accused of treachery and insubordination to the Yoruba *Fuhrer*, in the person of Chief Abraham Adesanya. Like all racist and ethnic politics, there is no room here for the democratic freedom of conscience and association for the individual citizen. This type of politics is essentially fascist and is rooted in violence and the threat of violence. These types of organisation flourish when national political parties and national organisations of citizens based on occupational groups, age, gender and territoriality are weak.

It is also necessary to realise that the countries of our continent are themselves so interconnected, that for democracy to grow and survive in them and for economic revival and development, their level of integration, at the level of political parties, and other organisations of citizens has to be accelerated. The protocols of ECOWAS already, provide for an ECOWAS Parliament. This has to be made functional very early in the 21st century. With it, functioning, and with a common currency and closely coordinated budgetary and trade policies, the bases will be built for the necessary defence arrangements for dealing with military, or, any violent, threat to democracy on an ECOWAS basis. This is only an initial step. Together with SADCC, a base can then be built for the African High Command, in a strengthened OAU which can on a self-reliant, pan-African basis, prevent and crush coups and provide prompt and effective peace keeping operations and deal with humanitarian disasters of whatever type.

All this will set us firmly on the road to the forging, early in the 21st century, of the African Common Market, already provided for in the Treaty of Abuja of 1992; and within the first decade, the establishment of

a continental Union of African States. It is only with these progressive internal political developments, and within the process of pan-African solidarity and integration, that the peoples and polities of Africa can face up to the challenges of the 21st century. Thank you.