

# THE ROLE OF RACIAL HARMONY IN NATION BUILDING

**Abdul Raufu Ambali**

## **Introduction**

Originally, nation-building referred to the efforts of newly-independent nations, notably the nations of developing countries, to reshape colonial territories that had been carved out by colonial powers without regard to ethnic or other boundaries. These reformed states would then become viable and coherent national entities. At a deeper level, national identity needed to be deliberately constructed by molding different groups into a nation, especially since colonialism had used divide and rule tactics to maintain its domination and combine ethnic groups of different cultural background together. In terms of racial harmony, one of the most successful nation-building efforts has been in Singapore, where it has a mixture of Chinese, Tamil, Malay, Eurasian and other races. Another successful type is Malaysia, which has a mixture of Malay, Chinese, Indian and other races.

However, many old and new states were plagued by “tribalism”, rivalry between ethnic groups within the nation, especially in African nations. This sometimes resulted in their near-disintegration, such as the attempt by Biafra secede from Nigeria in 1970, or the continuing demand of the Somali people in the Ogaden region of Ethiopia for complete independence. In Asia, the disintegration of Pakistan into Pakistan and Bangladesh is another example where ethnic differences, aided by geographic distance, tore apart such a beautiful post-colonial state. In African continent, the Rwanda genocide and recurrent problems experienced by the Sudan can also be related to a lack of ethnic, religious, or racial cohesion within these nations. It has often

proved very difficult to unite states with similar ethnic but different colonial backgrounds. Whereas successful examples like Cameroon do exist as well as failures like Sene-gambia Confederation which demonstrates the problem of uniting Francophone and Anglophone territories together (see Osaghae, 1992: 8).

The major confronting problem and challenge of South-South countries today has been that of nation building especially the multiethnic nations. Every African state is a multicultural, multinational and multilingual state. In other words, most of the African states are comprised of several ethnic groups different in terms of size, culture and historical backgrounds. Across Africa, a common experience is the exposure to years of colonial rule. The colonial powers imposed nation-states on societies with large number of ethnic groups forced to combine together. Clearly each ethnic group was not sufficiently large enough to achieve its own state at that period and on the basis of such premise, groups within states were amalgamated and subsequently ranked according to whether they were a nation, a national minority/majority or a tribe. Such an amalgamation of ethnic compositions has resulted to problem of nation building being experienced by many of the South-South countries with special references to African continent after their independence from colonial masters.

To these aforementioned points, the present paper attempts to examine the determinants of and/or prerequisites to nation building with main focus on racial harmony as opposed to the popular ethnicity identifications within nations. The paper equally examines the evils embedded in ethnic identity as opposed to national unity. It then addresses the mechanisms for racial harmony that would hitherto lead to nation building initiative via two potential strategies namely: power-sharing and good governance. Finally, the paper explores the racial harmony's experiment in Nigeria towards nation building.

## **Conceptualizing Nation Building**

According to Francis (1968: 339), nation building as a process could be defined as a *“process of social change culminating in a historical type of politically organized society... moving toward an ideal goal, set and rationalized by ideology...”*

Nation building from this quotation implies as a balanced combination of people’s capacity and infrastructural power of the state with the idea of establishing the state that encompasses them territorially. Nation building is a process more to be described with a flow of national life and not with a series of unrelated ad hoc political events. So, nation building implies the process by which a people develops and enhances its political, social, cultural, economic and even geographical identity

More recently, nation-building has come to be used in a completely different context, with reference to what has been succinctly described by its proponents as "the use of armed force in the aftermath of a conflict to underpin an enduring transition to democracy." In this sense nation-building describes deliberate efforts by a foreign power to construct or install the institutions of a national government, according to a model that may be more familiar to the foreign power but is often considered foreign and even destabilizing. Nation-building is typically characterized by massive investment, military occupation, transitional government, and the use of propaganda to communicate governmental policy. For example, a 2003 study by James Dobbins and others defines nation-building as "the use of armed force in the aftermath of a conflict to underpin an enduring transition to democracy". They compared seven historical cases such as Germany, Japan, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Kosovo, and Afghanistan, "in which American military power has been used in the aftermath of a conflict to underpin democratization elsewhere around the world since World War II". They also reviewed the lessons learned in

those case studies. However, their definition of nation-building is substantially different from those which see nation-building as the province of people within a nation. Though their definition centers around the building of democratic processes those countries, but many argue that the use of the military to bring about democracy may be inherently contradictory to the concept of nation building. At this juncture, I think, whether nation-building can be imposed from outside is one of the central questions in this forum, and whether that can be done by military is a further part of the question.

Although, nation-building is a normative concept that means different things to different people, but I believe that nation-building is evolutionary rather than revolutionary. That is, it takes a long time and is a social process that cannot be jump-started from outside. Evidently speaking, the evolution of the Italian city-states into a nation, the German city-states into the Zollverein customs union and later a nation, the multiple languages and cultural groups in France into the nation of France, the development of China from the warring kingdoms, took a very long time, and were the result, not only of political leadership, but of changes in technology and economic processes (the agricultural and then industrial revolutions), as well as communication, culture, civil society and many other factors. The United States, at first 13 colonies with diverse origins, came together to form a new nation and state.

### **Why does nation-building matter?**

Nation-building matters to intractable conflict because of the fact that a strong state is necessary in order to provide security, that the building of an integrated national community is important in the building of a nation, and that there may be social and economic prerequisites or co-requisites to the building of an integrated national community. Further, when nation-building implies

democratization, there is the further hypothesis known as the democratic peace hypothesis. Originally explicated by Immanuel Kant in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the democratic peace hypothesis says that perpetual peace can be achieved by developing a federation or league of free republican nations. Representative democracies would bring peace. Political scientists who have explored this hypothesis have focused on one of two versions: democracies of *don't make war against each other, or democracies of don't initiate war at all*. There is certainly evidence of the former and some evidence of the latter in the context of South-South nations, especially in African nations. Sometimes nation-building may simply be used as a justification for the expansion of imperial control. So nation-building matters, but what is meant by nation-building matters even more.

### **What can be done?**

In the context of intractable conflict in Africa and else nations of the world, is nation-building an appropriate method of providing stable peace and a secure community, which can meet the needs of the people? In an attempt to answer this question, the democratic peace hypothesis needs to be referred to. This would mean that the simple creation of democratic nations would not be enough but to strive for peace; peace would also require the creations of some sort of effective governance and laws. So, in this forum I must emphasize that our primary tasks that must be shouldered by every individual nation are:

1. Effort to initiate mechanisms that will contribute to stable peace, and the democratic participation of people within the nation to demand rights.
2. The task to build the society, economy, and polity which will meet the basic needs of the people, so that they are not driven by poverty, inequality, unemployment, on the one

hand, or by a desire to compete/fight for resources and power either internally or in the international system.

3. Finally, the task to formulate a framework that capable of harmonizing between all races through the understanding of evils behind ethnicity, as it engendered group identity, group feelings that could initiate civil war instead of nation building and/or national unity (see Pareto, 1963: 1837).

Some intellectually profiting questions are: is it possible to harmonize between different ethnic groups that made up of a nation? How do we construct/match the idea of ethnic identity and/or with nation building? Since by birth ethnicity is unavoidable in society, what are the mechanisms of harmonizing between ethnic compositions of a country in an attempt to fostering nation building efforts? These intellectual questions pave way for the focus of this paper and would be addressed in the subsequence sections.

### **The Role of Racial Harmony in Nation Building**

With respect to the questions above, the understanding of racial harmony is a pre-requisite to nation building. The role of racial harmony in nation building is to place national unity among citizens above that of ethnic belongings. As such, we must clearly understand the concept of citizenship. The concept of citizenship of a nation embraces a range of positions. Traditionally, citizenship as a status implies individuals with rights and duties constitutionally guaranteed to all members of a society to build their nation. However, that citizenship is about power and its distributions among the people of the state irrespective of their ethnic groups. In the same line of argument, Hill (1994: 4) also contended that racial harmony and sense of citizenship (instead of

ethnic groups) is about the framework of public and thus collective decision and accountability for those decisions.

With respect to power, different attitudes to citizenship notions lie beneath the problem of integration among races in the political sociology of South-South nations at large. Perhaps, this is where racial harmony plays its potential role to nation building of any country. The principle of racial harmony and status of citizenship towards nation building is not only a question of popular access to health-care systems, education institutions and the welfare, but also a traditional theoretical debates over the conditions of social integration and social solidarity that can only be achieved via a sound mechanism championed by those in power.

### **Mechanisms for Racial Harmony Leading to Nation Building**

This section attempts to offer answer to the second question raised earlier. At this juncture, two ideas attract my attention. These are mechanisms of power-sharing among races and good governance.

Power-sharing is a term used to describe a system of racial harmony in which all major segments of society are provided a permanent share of power. This mechanism is often contrasted with government vs. opposition systems in which ruling coalitions rotate among various social groups over time. The basic principles of power sharing as traditionally conceived include the followings:

- (a) grant coalition governments in which nearly all political parties have appointments;
- (b) protection of minority rights for groups;
- (c) decentralization of power; and

(d) decision-making by consensus.

Today, there is a more expanded meaning of power sharing whereby a wide range of options exist for engendering consensus and compromise in a deeply ethnic divided societies as the case in many African and Asian countries. I believe that one of the most important tasks for those presently in power in those countries is pairing thoughtful assessments about the causes and dynamics of a racial conflict with wide range of power-sharing options that could potentially ameliorate tensions through consensus-oriented governance. Power-sharing solutions must be designed to marry the principles of democracy with the need for racial harmony and nation building in a deeply divided society by ethnic groups. Power sharing as mechanism to racial harmony involves a wide array of political arrangements, usually embodied in constitutional terms, in which the principal elements of society are guaranteed a place, and influence, in governance. *From South Africa to Sri Lanka, from Bosnia to Burundi, from Cambodia to Congo,* it is difficult to envisage a post-war political settlement that does not, or would not need to, include guarantees to all the major antagonists' ethnic groups that will assured them some permanent political representation, decision-making power in the post-war peace. In many situations, the international community works proactively to encourage parties to adopt power sharing instead of waging war. In Afghanistan, for example, following the fall of the Taliban, international mediators worked hard at the Bonn negotiations in December 2001 to ensure that the transitional government under interim (now permanent) leader Hamid Karzai was broadly representative of the major ethnic groups in this highly diverse and long-conflicted country. In Ivory Coast, French mediators have brokered a pact in early 2003 to end that country's civil war; rebel commanders eventually took up power and political appointments in a revamped cabinet.

Therefore, power-sharing among ethnic groups is a fundamental mechanism to achieve racial harmony, integration, solidarity leading to nation building as a whole. It should be noted that such mechanism lies, predominantly, at the heart of inter-ethnic politics that is aiming to achieve political stability, economic development and growth.

### **Power Sharing Mechanisms for Racial Harmony and Nation Building**

Power sharing could take different forms such as autonomy, consociational, and integrative approaches. It is important to shed light on types of power sharing mechanism that could be used for racial harmony and/or leading to nation building of a country. Autonomy, as eminent scholar Yash Ghai (2000) states "is a device to allow an ethnic group or other groups claiming a distinct identity to exercise direct control over important affairs of concern to them while allowing the larger entity to exercise those powers which are the common interests of both sections." *Autonomy* form of power sharing is often seen today as a reasonable way to balance the claims of states for territorial integrity by ethnic groups and the claims of rebel forces for secession in many conflict countries such as Azerbaijan (Karabagh), Sudan, or Sri Lanka. Among the forms of autonomy is symmetrical federalism, in which all units enjoy similar powers, and asymmetrical federalism that might provide enhanced powers to a particular region. As far as racial harmony is concerned, *autonomy* as a form of power sharing is totally rejected in this paper as it worsen the notion of nation building under discussion and pave more ways to racial identity and/or ethnic groups' identity in a multilingual society.

*Consociational* form of power sharing for racial harmony is often referred to as "*Group Building-Block Approach*". It is a looser form of autonomy. The option is in essence relies on accommodation by ethnic-group leaders at the political center and guarantees for group

autonomy and minority rights. This approach is "consociational" in that *it encourages collaborative decision-making* by parties in conflict. The key institutions are federalism and the devolution of power to ethnic groups in territory that they control; minority vetoes on issues of particular importance to them; grand coalition cabinets in a parliamentary framework, and proportionality in all spheres of public life (e.g., budgeting and civil service appointments). The Bosnia's 1995 Dayton Accord is a good example of this approach in practice. However, this form of power sharing for racial harmony is equally rejected in this paper for three reasons. *First*, with respect to broad-based coalition among ethnic political parties, elites may initiate another conflict to bolster their power at the center. *Second*, in terms of principle of minority or mutual veto on matters of importance to the group in consociational power sharing, this mechanism might reinforce the ethnic divisions further in society rather than promoting cross-cultural understanding. *Third* reason is the popular principle of proportionality in this mechanism, which often leads to divisions in society. It does not provide incentives for building bridges across community lines.

The last form of power sharing that is much more favoured in this paper is integrative approach or mechanism. In contrast to *Consociational* power sharing, the integrative approach eschews or avoids ethnic groups as the building blocks of a common society. As a distinct set of options for power sharing, this approach rejects cohesive ethnic or other groups (such as "confessional" or religious factions in Lebanon) as the building blocks of society. Integrative approach features options that purposefully seek to integrate society along the lines of division. This approach can be called "centripetalism," for racial harmony leading to nation building because it tries to engineer a center-oriented spin to political stability, and economic development of a country. It also seeks to build multiethnic political coalitions of political parties

to create incentives for political leaders to be moderate on divisive ethnic themes, and to enhance minority influence in majority decision-making (see Donald Horowitz, 1985 for more). The elements of an integrative approach include electoral systems that encourage pre-election pacts across ethnic lines, non-ethnic federalism that diffuses points of power, and public policies that promote political allegiances that transcend groups. Some suggest that integrative power sharing is superior in theory, in that it seeks to foster ethnic accommodation by promoting crosscutting interests.

With respect to integrative power sharing approach discussed in the preceding section of this paper, several principles can be deduced. Firstly, it paves ways for elite's incentives and mass moderation on divisive ethnic or racial themes are fostered along the line of nation building. Secondly, it allows for intra-group contestation and inter-group moderation in electoral contests along the objective of nation building. Third point is that it encourages minority influence and not just representation. However, this integrative power sharing is also associated with some induced-problems and these problems cannot be rule-out along the minds of those in power in the South-South nations and African countries in particular. The first likely problem is the absent of leaders who can rise above the fray of inter-group enmity. The second is that people may be unwilling to vote for candidates who are not from their community due to lost of trusts in leadership context. The third is that political leaders and key public figures may not be willing to respond to the incentives for moderation, preferring that minority representation remain token or symbolic due to inappropriate governance in practice. A central question that has yet to be fully explored is the terms under which power-sharing, consensus-oriented forms of democracy can evolve into more flexible institutions that can foster racial harmony and nation building. The only condition and best formula is seeing in this paper lies under the second mechanism of good

governance I have mentioned earlier. This mechanism would be examined in the following section.

### **Good Governance Mechanism for Racial Harmony Leading to Nation Building**

The concept of "governance" is not new. It is as old as human civilization itself. By "governance" we means: *the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented (or not implemented)*. Governance can be used in several contexts such as corporate governance, international governance, national and local governance. Recently the terms "governance" and "good governance" are being increasingly used in development literature. Bad governance is being increasingly regarded as one of the root causes of all evil within our societies. Hence, the focus and the emphasis of South-South nations must be increasingly on the notion of 'good governance' and best practices (see Surendra *et al* 2004: 34).

Since governance is the process of decision-making and the process by which decisions are implemented, an analysis of governance focuses on the formal and informal actors involved in decision-making and implementing the decisions made and the formal and informal structures that have been set in place to arrive at and implement the decision. Government is one of the key actors in governance. Other actors involved in governance vary depending on the level of government that is under discussion. In this paper, all actors other than government and the military are grouped together as part of the "civil society". It is argued that every individual actor hoping for nation building must exercise or utilize good governance mechanism at all cost whatsoever.

Good governance is characterized by eight major features or elements that must be put in place to enhance racial harmony in all multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural nations of the

South-South and to ensure actualization of nation building efforts among the people. These characteristic features are: participation, sound rule of law, transparency, responsiveness, consensus-oriented decision-making, equity and inclusiveness, effectiveness and efficiency as well as accountability (see Samsudin *et al* 2004: 18).

To shed light on these features, first participation by both men and women is a key cornerstone of good governance. Participation could be either direct or through legitimate intermediate institutions or representatives. It is important to point out that representative democracy does not necessarily mean that the concerns of the most vulnerable in society among ethnic groups would be taken into consideration in decision making. Therefore, participation needs to be informed and well organized. This means and includes freedom of association and expression on the one hand and a constructive organized civil society on the other hand. Second, good governance requires fair legal frameworks that are enforced impartially among races or ethnic groups. It also requires full protection of human rights, particularly those of minorities. Impartial enforcement of laws, in good governance practices, requires an independent judiciary as well as incorruptible forces (i.e., police or guards) in the country. Third, transparency means that decisions taken over matters of concerns among ethnic compositions and their enforcements are done in a manner that follows rules and regulations. In addition, it also implies that information about socio-economic affairs of the country is freely available and directly accessible to those who will be affected by such decisions and their enforcements. Such feature also calls for provision of enough information in an easily understandable form(s). Fourth, good governance requires that institutions and processes try to serve all stakeholders within a reasonable timeframe. Fifth, good governance mechanism for racial harmony requires mediation of the different interests in society to reach a broad consensus in society on what is in the best

interest of the whole community and how this can be achieved. It also requires a broad and long-term perspective on what is needed for sustainable human development and how to achieve the goals of such development. This can only result from an understanding of the historical, cultural and social contexts of a given society or community. Sixth, with respect to equity and inclusiveness feature of this mechanism, it must be noted that a society's well being depends on the corrective actions taken in ensuring that all its members feel that they have a stake in it and do not feel excluded from the mainstream of society regardless of their racial origins. This requires all groups, but particularly the most vulnerable, have opportunities to improve or maintain their well being. Seventh, good governance as a mechanism for racial harmony leading to nation building implies that institutions put in place should produce results that meet the needs of society while making the best use of resources at their disposal. The concept of efficiency in the context of good governance also covers the sustainable use of natural resources and the protection of the environment. Lastly, accountability feature is a key requirement of good governance. Not only governmental institutions but also the private sector and civil society organizations must be accountable to the public and to their institutional stakeholders. Who is accountable to who varies depending on whether decisions or actions taken are internal or external to an organization or institution. In general, an organization or an institution is accountable to those who will be affected by its decisions or actions regardless of racial belongings of those concerned. Accountability cannot be enforced without transparency and a sound rule of law in place (see Samsudin et al 2000: 48). From the above discussion one should understand that good governance mechanism for racial harmony and nation building objective is an *ideal* that is difficult to achieve in its totality. I doubt if any country and society in the world have come closer to achieving good governance in its totality. However, to ensure nation

building, actions must be taken to work towards this *ideal* with the aim of making racial harmony a reality rather than a dream in every single South-South nation.

### **Racial Harmony Experiment in Nigeria and Nation Building**

Racial harmony experiment in Nigeria context has to some extent led to the feeling of solidarity and ability to galvanize people in common tone. Racial harmony has overshadowed the notion of ethnicity and has been taken as a force towards nation building's objective especially in the development process. A central area in which racial harmony has been used to further the development process is that of educational sector of the country. In most regions today there are many schools named after particular ethnic groups or jointly established/ventured by various tribes living in the same community and no other tribes are restricted from attending those institutions of learning. With the efforts of racial harmony of the post-civil war in 1967, the development agenda setting and notion of nation building moved so rapidly that communities and/or groups comprise of various ethnic tribes became torchbearers in the founding and running of schools. The government appears to acknowledge this role and partner with them in providing staff and other kinds of assistance. In many of these cases, common descent is used as rallying point and as a reason why people must come together (see Nnoli, 1995: 2).

In addition, in order to buttress and facilitate racial harmony, some projects now demand community involvement as a precondition. For example, University Basic Education Project initiated by Obasanjo (ex-President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria) administration demands up to 40 percent community, regardless of ethnic compositions that made up such community, input as a precondition for benefiting from the self-help projects. In effect, the racial harmony and inter-ethnic groups serve as a force in springing up nation building and development.

Another potential success of racial harmony experiment in Nigeria aftermath of the post-civil war (Biafra) of 1970, which still continuing until today is the efforts and mutual understanding among different ethnic compositions in rebuilding roads, markets and other facilities such as installation of electric power lines to their communities. The racial harmony shows the determination of people to overcome setbacks and to move ahead in life with the primary of objective of nation building. In other words, racial harmony and mutual understanding has inspired the communal spirit of nation building as opposed to civil war and/or racial segregations or ethnic identifications, regardless of ethnic belongings, and has enabled several areas to obtain safe water, electricity and medical facilities for healthy life (see Ekekwe, 1996:28).

With the objective of Nation building in mind, the second and most crucial aspect of efforts towards racial harmony lie in the government's contribution through key appointments. In principle, of course, efforts have been made to give all citizens irrespective of ethnic background a sense of participation in governance. However, effective governance, side of the issues in Nigerian and majority of the African nations, is lacking. I mean to say that part of the crucial challenge facing efforts towards racial harmony among ethnic groups which is hitherto a precondition to nation building and development agenda is the failure of the states fulfilling their contract with the citizens. First, most of the eight required elements are not in place to enhance governance that would create or buttress further mutual understanding among the multilingual, cultural groups that made up the country. In fact, unless the governance issue is well reformed to normal with all its elements being observed that racial harmony leading to nation building can be witnessed in that parts of the South-South world. Good governance, in addition to power sharing

mechanism discussed earlier, is equally true and/or precondition to actualization of political stability, racial harmony that is leading nation building for all South-South nations.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, nation building is a process more to be described with a flow of national life and not with a series of unrelated ad hoc political events. To me nation building implies the process by which a people develops and enhances its political, social, cultural, economic and even geographical identity. These can only happen through racial harmony and peace as the stepping stone. Thus nation building is more than building the physical structures of a state entity. Politically, nation building entails the ability of the nation to sustain itself as a sovereign and ensure freedom and liberty to its people. A successful nation is one that lays a mechanism or system which is smooth for the succession of power to every succeeding coming generation and which include all races in every aspect of life.

When it comes to the economic context, nation building is ensuring sustainable development through appropriate racial harmony mechanisms such as working policy packages that foresee power-sharing, good governance and trust among all ethnic compositions. This will bring peace and tranquility among the races. Ultimately, the prioritization and optimization of any resources that a country possesses are the essential prudence for sustenance as an economic entity and must be managed through “good governance” that entailed the various feature elements highlighted in this paper. Good governance would create a favorable climate for our own and foreign investors. One of the measures of nation building is the enablement of free civil society through effective governance, mutual understanding between various ethnic groups. The system employ to achieve racial harmony and/or nation building must create avenue for check

against abuses of power vented in all government's agencies. The people of different ethnic groups living by birth in the same country can only trust those that are free of power appetite and demonstrate good governance. The process of nation building must be participatory and open to constructive correction and/or democratic expulsion of failed actors in a peaceful manner if the end is to be worth attaining in any part of the South-South nations. Finally, good governance, in addition to power sharing mechanism discussed earlier, is peculiar to African countries but equally true and/or precondition to actualization of political stability, racial harmony that is leading nation building in all South-South nations.

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raufambali@salam.uitm.edu.my