

CIVIL ADMINISTRATIONS AND THE NATIONAL INTEGRATION DEBACLE IN NIGERIA, 1960-2010.

LARRY, STEVE IBUOMO

DEPARTMENT OF HISTORY AND DIPLOMACY, NIGER DELTA UNIVERSITY

WILBERFORCE ISLAND, BAYELSA STATE.

Abstract

Nigeria is a country with large human and material potentials but there has been a problem of togetherness (unity). Nigeria's effort at uniting its people has remained largely unrealized. The integration crisis facing Nigeria is manifest in the minorities question as epitomized by the lingering Niger Delta crisis, religious conflicts, ethnic politics, resource control agitations and so on. The entire social matrix in Nigeria is characterized by inter and intra communal crisis and inter and intra religious strife. Some of these problems are as old as the history of the Nigeria State. Over the years, attempts at building a virile nation has been perfunctory, superficial and inhibited by insincere, visionless, unimaginative political profiteers and uncommitted ruling class. Thus, this study is aimed at examining the role of civil administrations in the integration of Nigeria. The methodology applied in this study is the secondary type. The data is obtained from books, journals and the internet. The study will be historical, analytic and descriptive.

Introduction

Nigeria, a geographical contraption put together by the British imperial power is relatively a new entity. Before 1900, the territory now known as Nigeria and its inhabitants and groups had different identities even though they had interrelated for centuries. However, either British colonization or particularly, the amalgamation of 1914 succeeded in welding these groups together and in giving them one destiny. Writing in 1943, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe, in the preamble to his model constitution defined Nigeria as "the Tribes, Nations and Peoples and in the introduction, as a federation of Aboriginal African Tribes and Nations". Thus, for a proper understanding of what National Integration is, there is need to examine what a nation is. In simple terms, a nation connotes a human group bond together by common solidarity. A group member places loyalty to the group as a whole over any conflicting loyalty (Tinubu, 2004, Larry and Ezeze, 2016). Rupert Emerson has defined a nation as a community of people who feel that they belong together, either in the double sense that they share deeply, significant elements of a common heritage and that they have a common destiny for the future (Larry and Ezeze, 2016).

Basically, a nation is a group or race of people who have a common history, common ancestor, traditions, culture and language. The people of a nation generally share a common national identity which is part of national integration. Some scholars distinguish between an ethnic nation, based on race or ethnicity, and civic nation based on common identity and loyalty to a set of political ideas and institutions and the linkages of citizenship to nationality. Incipient in this analysis is the fact that Nigeria is not yet a nation; she remains "a mere geographical expression". A nation is the community which, when the chips are down, effectively commands men's loyalty, overriding the claims both of the lesser community within it and those which cut across it, potentially unfolding within it a greater society, reaching ultimately to mankind as a whole. (Larry and Ezeze, 2016).

Over the years, Nigerians had sought to build a virile and stable homeland, comprising of multi-ethnic nations. But this has been complicated by Nigeria's successive regimes, both military and civilian. However, our interest here is on the civil administrations. Nigeria was created not by a voluntary union of previously existing, closely related, and freely contracting political entities

containing a heterogeneous population of strangers. Although these strangers had established many economic and socio-political links among themselves long before British rule, they did not recognize themselves as one political community. Nigerians differ as widely and deeply in their culture as do any nation in the world, (Awolowo, 1968). For example, social institutions, religious life and systems of administration and even food habits are so divergent that neither British rule nor Christianity or Islamization have brought about any permanent assimilation.

The Politics of Nigeria's Decolonization

During the decolonization process, the British were so interested in preserving the unity of the country not because they were interested in integrating the Nigerian populace but because of their economic interest, for they prefer to pass the mantle of leadership to the "most obedient servant". Due to the precarious nature of the politics of the 1950s, the British were very much concerned about their economic interest which they have accumulated over the years. The heritage which the British left behind on their transfer of power to Nigerians is paradoxical. They gave us a constitution, but this constitution emphasized our differences rather than promote unity. From 1922 to the eve of independence and beyond, the political parties that emerged were offshoots of ethnic organizations, a legacy of British political engineering. (Lawal, 2001).

Our Voyage into party politics began in 1922, with the emergence of the Clifford's Constitution which introduced elective principle into the country, though restricted to Lagos and Calabar. By this, the stage was set for massive political activities in Nigeria. By the same 1922, the first major political party emerged. This was Nigeria National Democratic Party (NNDP) led by the late Herbert Macaulay. Other parties later emerged from various socio-cultural organizations in existence then, they include, the Action Group (AG) which was an offshoot of *Egbe Omo Oduduwa*. It was founded in 1951. The Northern People's Congress

(NPC) also emerged from *Mutene Arewa* and the National Council for Nigeria and Cameroon (NCNC) which later became the National Council for Nigerian Citizens.

The emergence of these three ethnic based dominant political parties led to the polarization of the country along narrow ethnic lines, while the various constitutions that were put in place at that time emphasized this division (Ikime, 2006). The British also played a prominent role in emphasizing this division. For instance, the Clifford Constitution introduced the elective principle to Lagos in 1922, to the exclusion of Northern Nigeria. While in 1946, the Richard Constitution broke the country into regions based on ethnic lines, each region was mutually distrustful of the other. With the emergence of regional politics, came sectional loyalties which, according to Osaghae "were built on the bogus theory of regionalism" (Osaghae cited in Lawal, 2001) that is, everybody should struggle for what is good for his/her region to the detriment of national unity.

Apart from various administrative policies put in place in different regions, Britain's reaction to the victory of the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroon at the 1954 federal elections was typical of British official policy towards Southern Nigeria (Lawal, 2001). While the British were not favourably disposed to the leadership of Nnamdi Azikiwe, attempts by the leaders of Northern People's Congress and the Action Group to form a political merger in order to prevent NCNC from taking over the central government was also truncated by the British. Writing in 1954, Macpherson has this to say about the aborted plan, "if not restrained by his party, Abubakar might rush them into a merger in a moment of heat. Pressure was then brought to bear on the Emirs through Sir Brian Sherwood Smith who in turn persuaded Belewa and the NPC to drop the merger plan with Action Group" (Macpherson cited in Lawal, 2001).

There was a replay of the 1954 scenario in the 1959 elections. In the 1959 elections, no party won majority seats to form the central government. It was this quagmire that led to the attempt by Action Group led by the late Abafemi Awolowo and NCNC led by the late Nnamdi Azikiwe to form a coalition after the election. Like his predecessor, Sir James Robertson did not want for this talk to materialize before he invited his "over pampered son", Tafawa Belawa to form the federal government (Awolowo, 1947). The politics of the years 1952-1960 gave a foretaste of the problems of inter-ethnic, inter-regional, inter-party relations that independent Nigeria was likely to battle with.

The First Republic and National Integration

Obviously, the post independent national integration problem in Nigeria is traceable to the colonial polity and the emergence of regional politics encouraged by the British. The First Republic was just a continuation of power struggle among nations competing for political space. These nations as represented by the three dominant ethnic groups (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) were the principal actors that undermined national integration process in the First Republic. The leading nationalist figures that emerged during the decolonization process (Obafemi Awolowo, Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe and Ahmadu Bello) found themselves championing regional causes as a better way to canvass for votes and to win elections than appealing to national consciousness. The three leading political parties used their regional strength to push development programmes, especially in the majority areas of their respective regions. At the national level, politics became largely a contest for the control of national resources, patronage, jobs and development projects.

Between 1960 and 1966, the Nigeria West-Minister system of administration further exacerbated the already tensed political atmosphere created by the pre-independence political arrangement. For instance, the president served as Head of State and Commander-in-chief

of the Armed Forces, yet his office was largely ceremonial. The Prime Minister actually ruled as the Chief Executive. This created a clash of personalities that generated political upheavals and threatened the unity of the Nigeria State (Olusanya, 1980).

This system of governance, no doubt, hindered national integration. This is because the political parties that emerged that were supposed to serve as platforms for national integration were ethnically and regionally controlled. Most of them were glorified ethnic pressure groups. In this arrangement, the minorities were totally emasculated thereby ensuring national alienation instead of integration. The absence of a truly national political party and a national elected chief executive who owed allegiance to the state and its people rather than a regional based ethnic party greatly weakened the process of national integration (Abdulrasheed, 2007). Due to greed for power, the so called nationalists through their actions and inactions did more than any other Nigerian at that period to keep Nigerians apart.

Furthermore, the political parties and their leaders that emerged in the First Republic jeopardized the task of national integration by the prevalence of ethnic chauvinism, bigotry and extreme intolerance emanating from the activities of political leaders cum nationalists. Little wonder, therefore, that the period up to the usurpation of power by the military was characterized by various forms of political intolerance and abuse of democratic processes. The political structure that was instituted in the First Republic ensured that the minority was totally emasculated. While their request for a separate region under the British was ignored, the Nigerian government did nothing to assuage their feelings; they were alienated, marginalized and brutally exploited. In all these, the end result was lack of commitment to national integration (Suberu Rotimi, 1990).

National Integration in the Second Republic

The second republic refers to the second civilian regime in the country, to which the military relinquished power on October 1, 1979. This

regime lasted till 31 December, 1983, when it was overthrown by the military. Civil rule returned to Nigeria in 1979 following five stages of transition program anchored by the Murtala-Obasanjo military regime. In order to prevent regionalization of political parties and promotion of ethnicity and its attendant result on national integration, as witnessed in the decolonization period and the first republic, the military administration inserted some clauses into the 1979 constitution that would compel moderation on the part of political parties and would serve as a platform for national integration and ultimately promote the emergence of "true Nigerians" (Osaghae, 1998).

There is a relentless geographical logic to Nigerian politics that condemn the country to a triangular contest of north-east-west. All the pronouncements since the collapse of the first republic in January, 1960, including the division of the country into 12 and then 19 states seemed as ephemeral as the nation entered the 1979 electoral process with its three major parties being regarded as north-west-south with all its attendant consequences on national integration (Osaghae, 1998).

Furthermore, an attempt by the government to use the 1979 constitution to forge unity among the different nations in Nigeria only succeeded in aggravating rather than reducing it. The 1979 constitution paved way for indigene/settler dichotomy, which include the adoption of the principle of Federal Character and Distributive Pool Revenue Formula as enshrined in Section 14 (3) of the 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. The pursuit of the federal character principle has proved inadequate for effective national integration in Nigeria. It is argued to be the heart of corruption among high office holders, who see their appointment as privilege, not responsibility. In the same vein, the federal character principle subverts the principle of justice and fair-play to the individual citizen. It sacrifices national progress and development on the altar of ethnic sectionalism as mediocrity takes

precedence over meritocracy in the conduct of public affairs.

Like the first democratic experience, from 1960 – 1966, the use of ethnicity by politicians as a political tool to foster their political fortune, brought the country close to dismemberment before the military came calling again in December 31, 1983 to terminate the corrupt second republic. Thus, began a second phase of military adventure in Nigerian politics. However, it is important to add that, all constitutional provisions that was made to ensure national integration, despite their short comings were never implemented. The government was only interested in top party members and few northern oligarchies for economic welfarism. The citizens were never catered for, so, they became disillusioned. The regime was so corrupt. Government policies were geared towards individuals, instead of raising the standard of living of the populace. Put differently, the pre-occupation of the ruling elite in the second republic was not how to foster unity among the general populace but how to use state power for primitive accumulation. National integration became secondary while corruption became the symbol of the administration.

National Integration in the Third and Fourth Republic

The second phase of military rule spanned through a period of sixteen (16) years (1983 – 1999) and witnessed an endless transition to civil rule programme. During this period, the economic base of the people was wiped out and the social life was reduced as a result of the debilitating effects of the notorious Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP). As the state could no longer fulfill her statutory obligation to the citizenry, Nigerians began to question the relevance of the state and their commitment to nationhood became suspect. It was during this period that Nigeria experienced its moribund Third Republic which featured only two governments imposed political parties, the defunct Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republication Convention

(NRC). Contrary to tradition, the two parties, to a large extent, appeared to have lived above the troubled waters of ethnic and sectional chauvinism and had the prospect of integrating the diverse ethnic nationalities that make up the Nigerian State. However, the result of this experiment threatened the foundation of the Nigeria State. While the result of the presidential election produced a president of Yoruba ethnic extraction, the election was annulled by the military junta of General Ibrahim Babangida, with the northern oligarchy's approbation as opined by Akinola (2009).

Following the annulment of June, 12, 1993 presidential election and the subsequent stepping aside of the 'evil genius' after handing over power to an unconstitutional Interim National Government headed by Ernest Shonekon, brought about civil disturbances in the country, thereby causing further disunity in the country.

Events thereafter, such as the sack of the Interim National Government by General Sani Abacha and the inherited democratic structures, formation of five political parties crafted to fulfill the Abacha ambition of transiting into a civilian president, his sudden encounter with death on June 8, 1998 and the eventual assumption of office by General Abdulsalam Abubakar are now part of our troubled historical trajectory and has been well documented.

What is, however, important to note for now is that, since 1960 to date various civil administrations in this country have made little effort to engender national integration. Rather, the series of ethnic/sectional mobilization strategies of various administrations often aggravated the level of polarization among the people. (Abdulasheed, 2007). This tendency was a contributory factor to the truncation of the first and second republics and has made the task of national integration among disparate Nigerian people difficult. Although the third republic was not ripe enough to reveal its inner linings before it was terminated, yet there was nothing to suggest that political leaders and

civil society would not have gone the way of earlier ones considering the manner at which ethnic-religious sentiments coloured people's perception and reactions to the June 12, 1993 presidential election and the subsequent political developments.

Nigeria, Africa's most populous country opened another chapter in her historical journey to democratic rule with the inauguration of Nigeria's former military Head of State, turned 'democrat' Chief Olusegun Obasanjo on May 29, 1999. The frenzied joy at that time was really understandable taking into consideration the fact that, the country was coming out of oppressive and uninterrupted 16 years of military maladministration, characterized by unprecedented level of corruption in the 21st century Africa. (Isiaku Badmus, 2009). During the period, Nigeria as a state and society witnessed serious repression and gross violation of basic civil rights. It is important to note that the immediate pre-1999 period saw the country in a situation of total anarchy and was on the verge of disintegration especially under the late maximum ruler, General Sani Abacha.

The expanding democratic space given by the country's transition to civil rule has unleashed a host of hitherto repressed and dormant political and ethnic forces. In Nigeria during this period, one of the most worrisome and critical of these new brand of forces, which suggest that each of the groups must struggle for what rightly belongs to it, as in the case of the Niger Delta agitation, underlies the emergence of ethnic nationalities and identity movements. As stated above, these movements seeking to protect and advance different ethnic interests according to Osita "contested not just the political space and the democratic dividends, but also resource control as part of the liberation of the political environment and an indictment on the new and previous administrations for their inability to manage various ethnic groups and ensure adequate distribution of the commonwealth (Osita, 2002).

Given the circumstance under which the fourth republic began and the compromises and alliances that produced the initial three political parties, there was high expectation among Nigerians and the international community that the Obasanjo regime would be able to synthesize and reconcile the multitude of competing sectarian interests into a broad national value that would eventually produce an integrated Nigeria and the Nigerians we have been searching for. However, unfolding events thwarted this high optimism as the political scene became characterized by frequent discord, inter-communal rivalries, and resurgence of factional cleavages, unprecedented level of corruption, subversion of true federalism, further alienation of minorities, especially those of the Niger Delta region through obnoxious laws and policies such as the onshore/offshore dichotomy suit, further weakened the cord for national unity and put a question mark on the sustainability of the Nigerian state.

Furthermore, the major thrust of the economic policies pursued by the Obasanjo regime was very antithetical to national integration. The regime's economic policy was also anti-people. The regime did little or nothing to integrate various contending forces; rather it was busy suppressing various agitating communities in the Niger Delta, either through naked use of force or through obnoxious parliamentary legislation. Some of his numerous policies that are inimical to national integration will surface here; while the Niger Delta people thought they have seen the end of state-sponsored terrorism, the Obasanjo administration reminded them of their minority status with the military action carried out by the Nigerian state in Odi, Odiana, Okerenkoro etc. in Bayelsa State. The Tiv will not forget in a hurry the genocidal action of the Nigerian State in Zaki Biam, Benue State and his flagrant disregard for rule of law as epitomized in the Lagos State Vs Attorney General of the Federation as regards the creation of Local Government Councils in Lagos State. The bombardment of the Niger Delta region by the Yaradua's administration and the northernization

of public office in Nigeria and the non-representation of some ethnic groups in federal establishments only remind us of the fact that, minorities' rights are not sacrosanct even in the fourth republic.

Conclusion

Nations do not arise overnight. Before a nation can be recognized as an observable fact, not just as an ideal, it must possess a national character and a national spirit. To achieve this, it is not necessary that people should lose their ethnic, religious or linguistic identities. In the case of Nigeria, man can still be Hausas, Ibos, Yorubas, Ijors or Tivs, but they must feel themselves to be a part of a political society whose symbols transcend those of the tribal or regional society which individual Nigerians may belong. It is never easy, nor can the pace be forced unnaturally to achieve a true sense of harmony between the different societies to establish common interests, and to establish a single loyalty to the symbols of the new supra authority the state.

For Nigeria, achieving national integration seems like a mirage with almost every ethnic group that made up the Nigerian state complaining of marginalization or neglect in one form or the other. More so, while political parties all over the world serve as vehicle for social mobilization, in Nigeria, right from 1923 to 2010, the various political parties that compete for democratic power seem to be agents of disintegration and demobilization. This is because they were regionally based or controlled by the northern oligarchy or southern feudal lords. Till date, many Nigerians do not feel quite at home with the national project and are waiting for the day they can truly have a sense of belonging and give their loyalty to the entity called Nigeria.

References

- Abdulrasheed Muhammad (2007). *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa*. Vol. 4, No. 9, P.43.
- Agbu, S. (2002) "Ethnic Militias and the Threat to Democracy in Post Transition Nigeria.

- Sweden: Uppsal. www. Wikipedia.com. Accessed 7th May, 2019.
- Akintola, G. O. (2009). "Leadership and Post-Colonial Nigeria Predicament". Ibadan School of History Monograph Series, Vol. 1, No.1.
- Awolowo, O. (1947). *Path to Nigerian Freedom*. London: Faber and Faber.
- Awolowo, O. (1968). *The People's Republic* OUP
- Ikime, O. (2006). *History, the Historian and the Nation*. Ibadan: HEBN Publishers Limited.
- Isiaku, B. "Ethnic Militia Monuments and the Crisis of Politics in Post Military Nigeria". www. Wikipedia.com. Accessed 10th May, 2019.
- Lary, S.I & Erezene, H.B.,(2016). "The Odi Invasion of 1999 and its Consequence of National Integration in Nigeria", *African Focus: An International Journal of Human and Sustainable Development*. Vol. II, No. 2, pp. 99-101.
- Lawal, O.A (2007). *Britain and the Transfer of Power in Nigeria, 1945 – 1960*. (Lagos: Lagos University Press)
- Lawal, K. (1991). "Britain and Decolonization Process in Nigeria". Ph.D Thesis, Department of History, University of Ibadan.
- Olusanya, G.O., "The Nationalist Movement in Nigeria" in Obaro, Ikime (ed) (1980). *Groundwork of Nigeria History*. Ibadan: HEBN Publishers Limited.
- Osaghae, E. (ed) (1998). *The Crippled Giant: Nigeria Since Independence*. Indiana: Indiana University Press.
- Suberu R. (1990). "The History of Nigerian Federalism" Ph.D Thesis, Department of Political Science, University of Ibadan.
- Tinubu, B.A. "That This House May Not Fall" A Paper Presented at the Annual Zik Lecture, 6th April, 2004.