



ETHNIC NATIONALITIES AND THE CHALLENGE OF NATIONAL INTEGRATION IN POST-COLONIAL NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria's independence in 1960 brought hope for nation-building and accelerated development to her people. However, this expectation remained elusive due to the inability to evolve a strong united entity (nation) out of the conglomeration of groups in the country. National integration constitutes a major challenge in Nigeria's nation-building and quest for development. The 1914 British amalgamation brought peoples of different socio-cultural, economic and political backgrounds together. The British conducted this exercise for its colonial convenience without consideration for the diversity of the people. Indeed, the British geared their colonial policies towards satisfying the needs of the loose federation. Therefore, after independence, the challenge of national integration became more manifest in Nigeria, as characterized by mutual suspicion, ethnic and inter-tribal clashes, religious crises, political unrest and the pursuit of ethnic interests. This study examines the dynamics of Nigeria's heterogeneity, the challenge of integration and the prospects of turning the country's diversity into strength. A historical research method, comprising the use of primary and secondary sources, was employed. The study identifies some of the hindrances to national integration in Nigeria including the triumph of ethnic nationalism, continuous domination and marginalisation of minority groups, and ethnic, religious and political crises, all stemming from the country's weak federal system. The study recommends a sovereign national conference to strengthen Nigeria's federalism and the reinvigoration of the nation's integrating apparatuses.

Keywords: Nigeria, National Integration, Minority-groups, Marginalisation, Nation Building

Introduction

The heterogeneity of the Nigerian state is a big factor in the country's nation-building efforts. The country contends with the challenge of a lack of cohesion and tolerance among its federating units. This situation has escalated into unending crises and civil unrest among ethnic groups in the country. Two reasons may be adduced for this: firstly, the British conducted the 1914 amalgamation, which created Nigeria, for colonial administrative and economic interests in disregard of the differences and diversities of the groups in the various regions. British administration in Nigeria in the 20th century can best be understood in its political setting. From 1898 on, the British government sought to establish and maintain a colonial state in Nigeria. This long process involved a number of important steps, including the removal of all African opposition to the imposition, expansion, and



consolidation of British central authority. To achieve this, a succession of British officials employed coercion and diplomacy in former Northern and Southern Nigeria to reduce African opposition to a minimum (Tamuno, 1972). By 1914, Britain had succeeded in making herself the new paramount ruler over most of Nigeria. Even though there were pockets of resistance after 1914 as witnessed in Tivland, Egbaland, Igboland and elsewhere, the British were able to suppress the resistance. (Tamuno, 1980: 392).

Indeed, the British government did not seek the views of Nigerians in the amalgamation of the territories. The primary aim of the British government in the amalgamation was to target the economic benefits accruable from the exercise. Second, since independence, ethnic factors have continued to play prominent roles in Nigeria's socio-economic and political activities thereby placing sectional consideration above national interest. Therefore, instead of the citizens pursuing a collective Nigerian agenda, what is paramount in their disposition is the narrow and primordial sectional agenda of the federating units. Nigeria is a country of many nations. There is thus conflict of interest among the ethnic groups resulting in constant friction. The result is that the country has been enveloped in a myriad of political, socio-cultural and religious crises whose root causes are traceable to ethnic nationalism.

A Brief Geographical and Historical Overview of Nigeria

The Federal Republic of Nigeria is situated on the West Coast of Africa between Longitude 3⁰ and 14⁰ East and Latitude 4⁰ and 14⁰ North of the Equator. It occupies an area of 923,768 square kilometres. The distance from East to West is about 767 kilometres, and from North to South is about 1,605 kilometres. (Udo, 1980: 3). Nigeria is bounded in the west by the Republic of Benin, in the north by Niger and Chad, in the east by Cameroon, and in the south by the Atlantic Ocean. Nigeria's coastal region is mangrove interspersed by a network of creeks and rivers. North of the mangrove belt lays a stretch of tropical rainforest, followed by the savannah region. The temperature is generally high with little variation. Rainfall pattern declines from the coastlands to the savannah region. Nigeria witnesses the wet and dry seasons: the former usually lasts from April to October, while the latter continues from November through March. With a population estimate of about 221 Million people, accounting for 2.61 percent of the world population, Nigeria is potentially the largest single market in Africa. (UN, DESA, 2023)

Historically, Nigeria emerged in 1914 from the British amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates under the leadership of Lord Fredrick Lugard. Prior to this period, the region comprised different nationalities with diverse historical, cultural and political systems. The 1914 amalgamation thus began the process of creating a common identity for the peoples of Nigeria. This fusion of the territories was conducted for British economic convenience without considering the peculiar differences among Nigerian people. The country became independent in October 1960. It became a republic in 1963.

Meanwhile, even though the features of the pre-1914 ethnic affiliation still survived up till the Twenty-First Century, Nigerian peoples have, over the period, learnt to embrace the spirit of 'unity in diversity'. Nigerian Government established institutions like the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) in 1973, the Federal Character Commission (FCC) in 1996 and the National Orientation



Agency (NOA) in 2005 in its strive to reduce sectional feelings, and to promote unity among the country's diverse peoples. However, even with all these integrating institutions, there has been a daunting challenge to create a united front from diverse groups.

Challenges of Nation-Building in Nigeria

Central to a discourse of national integration and development is the concept of nation. The starting point for group solidarity is the establishment of a nation to serve as the foundation for nation-building and national development. Nation is a Latin word, which comes from the word *Nacci* meaning, "to be born". The word nation therefore refers to a set of people born in the same place. Nation can also be traced to the French Revolution and the Napoleonic wars, which spread the ideals of nationalism to other areas as well as influenced the colonial movement of the 20th century. A nation is a body of people or a group of people that live in a definite territory, usually united because they belong to the same nation. According to Rustow (1972), a nation has come to be seen as the central political concept of recent times. A nation is either synonymous with a state or its inhabitants, or it also denotes a human group bound together by common solidarity. The World Book Encyclopaedia (1992) describes a nation as a large group of people that unite for mutual safety and welfare through a common language, origin, and culture. The French idea of a nation is simply the population of the territory of France united together by the "love of natural soil". The Jewish idea about a nation consists of an independent territory depending on a mixture of a common race and religion. The Germans saw the nation as a racial unit united by the "Aryan race" which made Germans a superior race or people. The Communists see the nation as the idea of the solidarity of the international proletariat i.e. workers all over the world rather than the idea of the unity of all people or any country. The Italians see the nation as a sort of super person. By the definitions mentioned, a nation is founded upon a central unifying force based on the common interests of all the people in a given territory. Such a unifying force propels the people to contribute to the progress of the group. This unifying force also motivates all members to speak with one voice at all times and to give all their weight for the success of the group. Unfortunately, such ground of solidarity has been absent in Nigeria as a nation.

According to Adekanye (1981: 38), Nation-building encompasses the psychological moulding of individuals, a process of injecting into the people of new independent territories, who differ widely in language, religion and values, a new sense of solidarity and shared identity. In the opinion of Amutz (1990), Nation-building is the name given to the group of processes involved in the growth and development of the nation. Indeed, nation-building simply refers to the aggregate of the citizens to promote the growth and development of a nation. It also refers to the attempt to harness all the potentials of the nation: human and material resources for the benefit of the citizens. To achieve these goals, the contributions of individuals in the group are paramount.

We have earlier highlighted that the British colonial administration, lumped several culturally, historically and socially diverse groups together to create a single colonial entity in Nigeria. Consequently, at independence in 1960, Nigeria achieved minimal cohesion among her people. The first major challenge was how to create a nation from these diverse peoples. Therefore, Nigeria's



leadership, after her independence, adopted the federal constitution with the hope of uniting the various territorial sub-sections under one administrative umbrella.

Post-independence experiences however soon demonstrated that more meaningful factors, other than federalism and common colonial historical heritage, had to be utilized in the effort to achieve that degree of national cohesion that would create a politically developed and stable society. The most pressing issues of nation-building, which Nigeria faced, were the question of defining the new nation and the consequent issue of creating an effectively integrated polity. (Ojigbo, 1980) This was because the concept of the nation among Nigerians as in many other third world countries was still largely elusive and fragmentary.

Ethnic Nationalities in Nigeria

Ethnicity is a social phenomenon that manifests in interactions among individuals of different ethnic groups within a political system where language and culture are the most prominent attributes. The formation of dialects was one of the ways in which ethnicity, both small-scale and large-scale, became fixed in Nigeria. (Hanci 7 Odukoya 2016). Ethnicity is natural in almost all societies made up of more than one ethnic group. It is quite natural that members of the same ethnic group feel more comfortable and secure within their cluster because they share common indices of identity such as language and culture. An interaction of this kind can create “a common consciousness of being one in relation to other relevant ethnic groups” (Eriksen 1996:30). This often results in strict group confines, and members tend to guard jealously with the passage of time. Based on this approach, ethnicity thus becomes a process through which ethnic identities are politicized (Eriksen, 1996:30)

Nigeria is a country of many nations. This fact is buttressed by the multitude of ethnic groups in the country with different cultural, social and political backgrounds and identities. According to Awoniyi, Nigeria is Africa’s most populous country with about 400 language groups. Aside from Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba and Ibo, which are the dominant groups, there are numerous minority groups scattered across the country. (Awoniyi: 2). These include the Edo, Urhobo, Ibibio, Efik, Itsekiri, Anang, Ibira, Nupe, Kanuri, Tiv, Idoma, Gwari, Birom, Igala, Ekoi, Ijaw to mention but a few.

Meanwhile, Fadeyiye (2001: 52) identifies factors responsible for the formation of a nation to include understanding, common historical ties - tracing descent to common ancestors, cultural ties like common funeral rites, and installation. Others are ceremonies, marriage and naming, common religious observance, willingness to live together and in the case of Africa, the European impact, which facilitated the emergence of nations. The position of Fadeyiye above shows that it is possible to have a single nation even in a heterogeneous society once there is commitment from the uniting entities.

Historically, the British treated Nigeria as if it consisted only of the three major ethnic groups of Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani and Ibo. Indeed, the problems of this trio were equated with the problems of Nigeria. This was a false start in the country’s journey of national integration. According to Afigbo (1989), the elaborate process of constitution-making from 1946-1958 was an attempt to create a stable federal balance between the three regions or to put it more frankly, between the Hausa-Fulani



in the North, Yoruba in the West and Ibo in the East. He identifies two far-reaching developments occasioned by this miscalculation by the British. Firstly, the realisation by the minority nationalities that they were being marginalised in the process of the political modelling of Nigeria. Coupled with the prospect of a more permanent and institutionalized marginalization on the grant of self-government to Nigerians, this spurred them into more concerted action and made them demand greater autonomy and self-determination for their groups. Second, the mobilisation by the minority groups for a vigorous demand for their own regions and the resultant conflict and confrontation it generated between them and the major ethnic groups punctured the myth of homogeneity that the colonial authorities had woven around the three regions. The British thereafter set up the Willinks Commission of Inquiry to look into the Fears of the Minorities and the means of allaying them in 1957. (Willinks Commission, 1958)

Indeed, the minority issue has at various times contributed to the Nigerian crisis through struggles for self-determination. For instance, in 1995, the killing of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a prominent Ogoni Chief, playwright and foremost environmentalist, triggered international condemnation of the then Nigeria military leadership under General Sanni Abacha. Already the issue of Ken Saro-Wiwa, a Nigerian and international playwright, had been of concern to the entire world. Initially, as spokesperson, and then as president, of the Movement for the Survival of the Ogoni People (MOSOP), Saro-Wiwa led a non-violent campaign against environmental degradation of the land and waters of Ogoniland by the operations of the multinational petroleum industry, especially the Royal Dutch Shell company. Indeed, the 1995 Commonwealth Heads of Government (CHOGM) at Auckland suspended Nigeria from the Commonwealth of Nations because of this killing in Ogoniland. (CHOGM, Auckland, 1995). Apart from the minority issues, Nigeria has recently witnessed an upsurge in ethnic militancy and separatist movements as indicated by the activities of the Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB), and the Oodua nation movements.

The issue of disparity in the level of educational development between the north and the south was also very germane in fueling ethnic diversity in Nigeria. For instance, in the south before 1951, there was a remarkable increase in the number of Western-educated elites and a large outflow of population from the homeland to other parts of Nigeria. Therefore, like settlers in other parts of the world, the emigrants possessed a business acumen and devotion to hard work, which often aroused uneasiness and resentment between the settlers and their host. In the case of Nigeria, the educated people of the south tended to move out more, and they had greater economic advantages over the uneducated hosts. Looking at the colonial education policy, the Muslim northerners were the least equipped to compete in Western education, and thus, a greater level of easiness appeared to have developed among them about the presence of the immigrants from the south, the majority of whom were Igbo and Christians.

Even though the Macpherson constitution provided for regional autonomy, it also created a central government with a council of Ministers. This further heightened ethnic competition because each of the regions henceforward increased their struggle for the control of the central government. The regional experiment by the British was carried further by the Littleton constitution of 1954, which was emphatic about the need to allow each region to have its own premier: western, eastern and



northern regional premiers with the powers to deliberate on internal issues concerning their respective regions. This goes to indicate that Nigeria's journey to one nationhood was still far away.

The Ethnic Factor in the Fall of Nigeria's First Republic

The fragility of Nigerian nationhood became manifest as early as the First Republic eventually culminating in the truncation of the country's maiden democratic government, the First Republic, by the military in January 1966. Indeed, according to Lasisi, the genealogy of the fall of the First Republic and the military coup is understandably traceable to the events preceding the independence. A major challenge, ab initio, was the fear of the minority of domination by the larger groups. The three governing parties in the three regions: the Action Group (AG) in the West, the Northern People's Congress (NPC) in the North and the National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) in the East, were sectional and tried to dominate one another.

In fact, Lasisi (2003) maintains that this fear of the minority group among the Ijaw, Efik and Ibibio in the East, Mid-west in the West, and the middle-Belt in the North, led to their agitation for separate states. The Tiv riots of 1964, which disrupted train services from Jos to Enugu, was one aftermath of this fear of domination.

The national census of 1962-64 was another issue of importance in the discourse of the challenge of integration in Nigeria. Census figure is a fundamental factor in determining the sharing of political power and the direction of government policies including the allocation of national resources and revenue. There was the allegation that the census was highly corrupted in favour of the North. The census gave the Northern region 174 of 312 seats in the House of Representatives. The eastern region got 73, the west 62, and 3 to Lagos. (Lasisi, 2003: 4). The exercise was however cancelled after it was adjudged to have been massively manipulated.

Dynamics of Nationalities in Contemporary Nigeria

According to Emerson (1963), "an old recipe has it that to make a rabbit pie, you must first catch the rabbit; similarly, to engage in nation-building, there must be a nation". "He continued, this is likely to be more hazardous and uncertain than any other task" Rather than creating a Nigerian nation, what has been more popular is ethnic nationalism. Loyalty and allegiance seem more attached to ethnic and tribal groups than to the Nigerian nation. This is evident in the proliferation of various forms of local assemblages attached to the various ethnic groups. Indeed, major events like economic, social and political activities are pursued on ethnic divide. This often leads to rivalry among the major groups and increased agitations of the minority groups against the domination of the major groups as witnessed during the first republic. Some critical incidents followed this shaky foundation in Nigeria's nation-building and determined the course of subsequent events. These included the brazen rigging of the 1964 general elections, the coup d'état of January 1966, the July counter-coup, and the Nigerian Civil War from 1966 to 1970.

The return of democracy in 1999 has ushered in an increase in the spate of ethnic and communal conflicts with devastating consequences for Nigeria and its people. The exit of the military seemed to open the lid on the bottled emotion among the various ethnic groups and the freedom provided by the democratic rule offered the people the much-awaited opportunity to vent their aggression,



ethnic violence and communal conflicts. Indeed, within the first three years of the return to civilian rule in 1999, no less than 40 violent ethnic and communal clashes occurred. The high point of this ethnic intolerance was the emergence of ethnic militias: the Odua People's Congress (Yoruba), the Egbesu Boys (among the Ijaw and named after *Egbesu*, Ijaw god of war), Indigenous People of Biafra, (IPOB) the Yan Banga in the north to mention but a few.

Some Indices of National Integration in Nigeria

Literally, integration means the welding together of various parts to form a whole. For the purpose of this paper, national integration refers to the bringing together of different diverse groups who were formerly independent to form a larger corporate political entity with a wider outlook transcending their former ethnic boundaries. National integration could also as an attempt to bring together the different potentials of the nation (men and natural resources) for the common goal. This shows that national integration is a veritable tool for the development of Nigeria. There is a need to harness the potential of the various peoples for the good of the country.

Some of the factors that could promote national integration in Nigeria include-

The Economic Factor- economic interdependence is a strong factor of integration in Nigeria because there are peculiar productive efforts prevalent among the various units. This factor promotes the interaction among the people since none seems to be self-sufficient. Indeed, this economic dependency dates back to the pre-colonial period and is determined by the geographical peculiarities of the various regions in the country. Thus, each of the diverse groups in Nigeria has peculiar economic potentials that contribute to national development if properly exploited. The pre-colonial and colonial economies are glaring examples of how economic interdependence sustained the country. The palm produce of the East, cocoa in the West and groundnut in the North all contributed (combined) to earn foreign revenue for Nigeria. Indeed, the colonial economy thrived on these products and the British encouraged the local producers to increase their volume throughout the colonial experience. It must be emphasized also that some products are not wholly consumed in their place of production but transported to other parts of the country. For instance, while southern Nigeria depends more on the north for the supply of cattle and sheep, the latter depends on the former for cola nuts, a product mostly planted in the south. The beef requirement of southern Nigeria is met by the constant supply of animals from the north of the country in a trade relation that involves the transit of thousands of cattle, sheep and goats from north to south. The south also depends largely on the north for the supply of vegetables like tomatoes, pepper, onions, carrots and cucumber; and fruits like apples, star apples, velvet apples, mangoes, sugar cane and guavas. The South also depends on the North for the supply of hides and skin for various uses including consumption and industrial uses. This is a typical example of economic interdependence, which promotes national integration. Indeed, this interdependence in the food chain helps to promote unity and tolerance among the people of Nigeria. Therefore, the country witnesses constant demographic exchange based on trade and commerce leading to a symbiotic relationship among the diverse groups.

Furthermore, there are countless products of indigenous industries across the country, which contribute to national integration. Some of these are the iron and metal industry, weaving, pottery, ceramics, woodwork, leatherwork etc. Nigerians have demonstrated high dexterity in these areas.



For instance, Rodney (1972) particularly mentioned Benin, Kano and Yorubaland as important centres of cloth weaving in Nigeria. Products of these industries transcended their cultural boundaries, sometimes even finding their way outside Nigeria. There is also a reasonable population of migrant businesspersons and merchant groups among the different groups. For instance, there are Ibo private businesses in the west and north, Yoruba in the east and north, and Hausa in the west and east. This interrelationship based on the economy is a strong factor of national integration in Nigeria.

Socio-Cultural Factor: - this is concerned with cultural and religious tolerance among Nigeria's diverse groups. Nigeria's constitution provides for secularism not favouring one religion over the other(s). This should be a strong point for national integration because every citizen is free to practise a religion of his/her choice without fear of molestation or force. Furthermore, intermarriage between cultures could promote natural integration.

The Nigerian government in its bid to promote socio-cultural integration established the National Youth Service Corps in 1973. This scheme encourages cultural integration through the posting of youth corps members to places other than their ethnic origin for compulsory national service. This has reduced cultural and religious prejudices among Nigerian youths. Other programmes are the establishment of unity schools, organizations of national sports festivals (rotated among states of the federation), the teaching of the three major Nigerian languages in schools, and the promotion of inter-religious conferences among Christians and Muslims.

Political Factor: - this is by far the most decisive in the struggle for national integration in Nigeria. This is because leadership tussle has remained the bane of Nigeria's development. Ethnicity plays a constant negative role in national issues, particularly in choosing leaders in the country. National integration can be enhanced through balanced representation and equal opportunity for diverse groups in political positions in the country.

Indeed, the most outstanding features of the Nigerian federation so far have been the struggle for supremacy by the three ethnic majority groups-Hausa-Fulani, Igbo, and Yoruba, and the campaign of the marginalized ethnic minorities for political self-determination and autonomy. Even though, Dr Goodluck Ebele Jonathan, from a minority Ijaw ethnic group ruled Nigeria as a substantive president from 6 May 2010 to 28 May 2015, there is still a general feeling of domination, deprivation and mistrust for the major ethnic groups among the minorities in the country.

In addition, politics in Nigeria has been transformed into a zero-sum game where defeat becomes unacceptable and victory must be achieved at all costs. This fact is visible in the elections witnessed in the country since 1999 based on how some election results were either upturned or annulled. A free, fair and credible election can only be achieved when equal opportunity is given to all the federating units in the country to participate in politics. Politics of bitterness in which election is seen as a must-win is counterproductive to national integration efforts. Indeed, the absence of justice and fair play in the political system further heightened the desperation of politicians, who employ all forms of strategies to win including vote buying, the use of political thugs, bribery of election officials, and manipulation of results in order to win.



The Nigerian government and people took steps in the constitution to mitigate ethnic and religious bigotry in the country's political space. For the avoidance of doubt, the 1999 constitution provides that for a presidential candidate to be recognized as duly elected as president of Nigeria, he or she must win a simple majority (scored the highest number of valid votes in the ballot). In addition, the candidate must score 25 percent of the total votes cast in two-thirds of the states in the country including the Federal Capital Territory. Section 134; subsection 2, of the 1999 Constitution states:

A candidate for an election to the office of President shall be deemed to have been duly elected where, there being more than two candidates for the election, - he has the highest number of votes cast at the election; and he has not less than one-quarter of the votes cast at the states in the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory, Abuja. (FGN, 1999)

Thus with these constitutional provisions, the political parties and their candidates must have adequate and visible geographical spread across the length and breadth of the country. This way, political parties and their candidate would not rely on their section as being sufficient to win the election. It also implies that no tribe, ethnic or cultural group, however large could solely win a presidential election for its region without the support of the other groups. Furthermore, by virtue of this constitutional provision, no single group, tribal or religious, can win the presidential election by the votes from its adherents only.

Loyalty to the Nation: - loyalty is an ingredient of patriotism. This factor will make people, irrespective of their ethnic or cultural background, put interest and national objective of Nigeria above sectional interest. Loyalty means faithfulness, truthfulness, sincerity and commitment to one's nation. Absolute loyalty to Nigeria will enhance national integration because citizens will not do acts that could jeopardize national interest.

Unity in Diversity: the Nigerian Experience

As mentioned earlier, the 1914 amalgamation put together diverse groups with distinctive cultural, social and political backgrounds. Nigeria thus has to contend with the challenges inherent in this colonial creation. Two schools of thought have emerged in the course of sustaining the Nigerian nation. First, those who believe that putting together such diverse peoples with different origins would continue to bring problems, therefore suggesting a breakup or reversion to the pre-colonial status. This school of thought maintains that each section should go its separate way. The second school believes that the multiplicity of ethnic groups and cultures is indeed a source of strength, given the potential and endowments of each of these federating units, thus the group upholds the slogan "unity in diversity," calling for a conglomeration of all the economic, social and political potentials of all ethnic groups in Nigeria. Meanwhile, an assessment of the prevailing circumstances reveals that this remains an illusion. In fact, events witnessed since independence show that the theory of unity in diversity remains imaginary in Nigeria. The following are some of the hindrances to unity in diversity in Nigeria:-

Ethnicity Crisis: - This refers to violent clashes between one ethnic group and another. Nigeria has demonstrated a very high propensity for ethnic conflicts in the past four decades. Ethnicity plays a



vibrant role in dictating the social and political identities of the majority of Nigerians. In other words, Nigerians tend to identify themselves in relation to their ethnic affinities, rather than other national unifying factors (Osaghae & Suberu 2015:8). According to a survey conducted by Lewis and Bratton, almost half of Nigerians (48.2%) labelled themselves with an ethnic identity compared to 28.4%, who categorized themselves concerning class and 24% who identified with a religious group (Lewis & Bratton 2000:27; Osaghae & Suberu:2005:9). This implies that ethnic affinities are stronger than other consideration and it portends a major threat to national coercion in Nigeria.

One major cause of the ethnic crisis in Nigeria is the feeling by some ethnic groups that the successive governments are insensitive to their plights. The fears expressed by the minority groups in the years preceding independence, as mentioned earlier in this paper, remain active and breed suspicion and intolerance. The aggrieved ethnic groups persistently lament their neglect and unequal treatment by the government, denial of political participation, socio-economic advancement, infrastructural development and employment opportunities to mention a few. Perhaps, this is why Tyoden, (1996), concluded that one of the central problems of Nigerian federalism has been its inability to carry its minority nationalities along in the operation of the federal system.

The ethnicity crisis in Nigeria could be traced back to the eve of political independence when political parties were formed. Indeed, the parties formed were merely ethnic or regional associations, lacking national outreach; for instance, Action Group for the West, Northern People's Congress for the North while the National Council of Nigerian Citizens was for the East. Therefore, due to ethnicity, none of the political parties of the First Republic had a national geographical spread. To that extent, the leaders of these parties pursued ethnic interests instead of national interests. Ethnicity further manifested in the coup of January 1966, the attempt later by General Agunyi Ironsi to replace federalism with a unitary system, and the Gowon led coup of July 1966 which culminated in the apogee of ethnicism- the civil war. The Kafancha-Kaduna conflicts of the 1980s and 1990s, the Kaduna Sharia riots of 2000 and the Jos riots of 2001 (Osaghae & Suberu 2005:19), displayed the alarming dimension that ethnic disturbances assumed after independence.

Furthermore, the ethnic crisis took a more alarming dimension with the emergence of ethnic militias. These are armed groups within Nigeria's ethnic nationalities poised for the pursuance of the "course of their peoples". A few of these are the Oodua People's Congress (Yoruba) Egbesu (armed group of Ijaw nation), the Yandaba group in Kano, Arewa People's Congress, Movement For the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB) in Eastern Nigeria, and Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND) to mention but a few.

These ethnic armies are antagonistic to one another and their actions continue to heat up the Nigerian polity. Their emergence has escalated ethnic crises in the country. Yusuf (2004) identifies a few of the crises resulting from these ethnic militias since 1999 including the Shagamu Mayhem (Yoruba/Hausa), the Ife/Modakeke conflict, the Zango-Kataf ethnic conflict, the Jukum/Tiv ethnic conflict, Ogoni/Andonis ethnic conflict, September 1999. A more recent was the Yoruba/Hausa clash in Sasha Ibadan in 2021.

The recent kidnapping and acts of terrorism have made ethnic militancy assume a more dangerous dimension because each ethnic group accuses the other of being responsible for the crimes in their



area. While for IPOB, the goal of creating an Ibo nation is rife in their mind, the Yoruba have recently demonstrated the desire for the Oodua nation, even this was largely heightened by recent killings at the Oke-Ogun area, which was allegedly carried out by the Fulani. There was also the Fulani-Yoruba clash at the Sasa market in Ibadan, which claimed many lives and properties.

Religious Crisis: - this is another hindrance to national integration in Nigeria. While the two prominent religions of Islam and Christianity preach against the killing of humans by fellow human beings, some so-called adherents of these religions indulge in the dastardly act of killing members of the opposite religion. Religion has become a cover for many ethno-political violence in the country. Different interest groups have employed religion as a political instrument to garner mobilization. Examples include the February 2000 Kaduna crisis over an attempt to adopt the Sharia legal system, a similar crisis was witnessed in Sokoto. The most recent of these crises is the Boko Haram extremist crisis in north Eastern Nigeria.

Marginalisation and State Creation: the cry of marginalization is widespread in most parts of Nigeria, even within the people considered as the dominant groups in the country. This is often based on two indices. First, the concentration of political appointments and other government positions in certain regions to the exclusion of other people. Second, there is the concentration of infrastructural development in certain areas within the same region to the neglect of other areas. Thus, it must be emphasized that marginalization also takes place among people of the same ethnic nationality within the Nigerian area because some sections dominate the political, economic and social affairs of the locality. Therefore, major decisions on political, economic and infrastructural developments are often dominated by these powerful elites to the exclusion of the other members of the group. In fact, marginalization is a major cause of friction in the polity, and further thwarts the realization of national integration in Nigeria.

The concomitant emergence of minority and separatist groups was a Two-edged sword, which cut at the already fragile cohesion. The less developed areas and minority ethnic groups feared the domination, real or imagined while on the other hand, the relatively developed areas did not want their affluence diluted or their traditional status lowered, through merger with economically depressed and lower groups.

The question and agitation to create more regions/states besides the territorially structured ones came into being in order to solve the problem of ethnic minorities, which were marginalized and oppressed. The Nigerian government has adopted state creation as a means to solve the problem of marginalization and to bring the government closer to the vast majority of the people. Indeed, since the creation of the first set of states in the course of the Nigerian Civil War in 1967, several state creation moves have been successful. Indeed, Gen. Gowon's creation of 12 states in 1967 was one of the major achievements of the Federal government because it weakened the strength of the so-called threat of Northern domination and allayed the fears of the minorities. The exercise of more state creation contributed to unifying the nation during the challenging period when Nigeria was on the brink of fragmentation.

The creation of more states by Gowon in 1967 (12 states) and Murtala (19 states) in 1976 generated confidence in both the minorities and federalists, a confidence that the government needed in order



to carry out its objectives of unifying the country successfully. The exercise, apart from bringing the government closer to the people, also generated confidence in the minority groups and increased cohesion in the polity.

Political Problems: - Perhaps the most outstanding factor in the discourse of national integration in Nigeria is the political issue. To start with, there is a political imbalance in the country, dating back to the colonial period. The domination of politics by the majority ethnic groups and constant struggle among the trio to hold on to authority at the centre has not only led to the neglect of the other groups, thereby creating rivalry and mistrust. Indeed, Nigeria seems to form political parties based on ethnic lines. The current political dispensation is a testimony to the dominance of ethnic politics in Nigeria. Even though there are several political parties, the three outstanding candidates are from the three dominant groups in Nigeria. However, the Nigerian constitution requires that for a presidential candidate to be declared winner, in addition to scoring the highest number of votes, he must have scored at least 25% of the total vote cast in 2/3 of the states in the country. This means, that none of the candidates, can win the election with only the votes of his region, regardless of how massive his margin of victory in the region is. It also means that regardless of the religion, of the candidate, to win, he needs the support of people of other religions. This is a good arrangement that compels politicians to be a nationalist, rather than a sectionalist.

Perhaps certain issues need to be articulated in order to understand the gravity of Nigeria's political problems. First, economic problems of poverty and unemployment pauperize the people making them susceptible to the whims of "political businessmen". Even ethno-religious crises are means to an end, the end being political motives. For instance, the ethnic militia and religious extremists recruit their members from the pool of disgruntled unemployed youths across the country. Also contributing to political problems are issues of poor infrastructure, under-development, and environmental degradation especially in the Niger Delta where the bulk of Nigeria's revenue comes from.

This problem contributes greatly to the grievances of the people of the area and makes national integration a mirage. Indeed, Nigerian leaders continue to lose the trust of the governed thereby weakening the state system and reducing the credibility of the government. In the opinion of Albert (2011), Nigerian leaders had several windows of opportunity in the 1999 transition programme to buy back trust for the Nigerian state and its institutions. The country was considered by members of the international community (USAID, DFID, Ford Foundation, etc.) as a post-conflict society worthy of recovery assistance. It was assisted in running the 1999, 2003 and 2007 elections. However, not much has actually changed in Nigeria since the 1999 transition. The euphoria, which greeted the inauguration of President Olusegun Obasanjo on May 29, 1999, soon gradually evaporated when the much expected features of democratic governance, such as rule of law, social justice, economic recovery, infrastructural development, public accountability and transparency, free, fair and credible elections, remain elusive even under a democratic leadership. In fact, Yagboyaju, (2010) observes that the administration of Chief Olusegun Obasanjo refused to lay the solid foundation required for a new Nigeria in 1999. According to him, the administration flagrantly disobeyed court orders and was knee-deep in all manners of financial crimes.



This trend has been followed by his successors, whereby the courts and law enforcement agencies have largely been used as political tools against perceived opponents.

National integration apparatuses

In the bid to integrate the diverse people of Nigeria and turn the country's differences into strength, the Nigerian government established certain agencies and instructions. These include the National Youth Service Corp in 1973, Unity Schools, Federal Universities, Federal Colleges of Education, Federal Polytechnics, Federal Research institutes and other Federal Educational Centres, Federal Civil Service including the establishment of the Federal Secretariat Complex in all states of the federation to draw personnel from various parts of the country. Others are the National Orientation Agency and the National Sports Festival.

To ensure equitable distribution of positions and allow fair representation of the various groups in the country, the Federal Character Commission was also established with the mandate to monitor and ensure equity and fairness in the appointments into federal offices and parastatals in the country.

Conclusion

The preceding analysis has shown that the socio-cultural, political and religious tolerance required for national integration is still lacking among the diverse groups in Nigeria. Ethnic bigotry has been very strong among factors debilitating the unity of Nigeria. The common trend has been the struggle for supremacy among the major ethnic groups of Hausa, Ibo and Yoruba on one hand, and the fight for survival and relevance by the other groups. Nigeria's national integration is further hampered by factors such as the struggle by the minority groups for relevance, religious intolerance, corruption, and struggle over resource control, and more recently, the emergence of ethnic militias. Politicians, community and religious leaders often exploit the ethnic and religious dichotomies in Nigeria to promote their cause. This situation has resulted in bloody ethno-religious crises at different periods, usually with devastating consequences, loss of hundreds of lives and properties. Therefore, there is an urgent need to restructure Nigeria's federalism to reflect mutual respect for the ethnic, religious and cultural diversities in the country, strict adherence to the secular nature of the Nigerian state and most importantly, respect for the rule of law and justice in sharing the resources of the nation. It is only then that the slogan "unity in diversity" can come into play in the country.

Recommendation

The following suggestions are considered useful in promoting national integration in Nigeria.

- i. There is a need to redefine Nigeria's federalism through a National constitutional conference. The component units need to agree on the terms binding their corporate existence and this will form a working manual for the country's unity.
- ii. There should be justice and equity in sharing the resources of the country keeping in mind the derivation formula so that no area will feel cheated or disadvantaged.
- iii. The economic and material resources of all the regions should be strengthened so that every region will contribute to the GDP of the country. This will reduce overreliance on oil revenue and avert the constant tension in the Niger Delta.



- iv. There is a need to strengthen the country's democratic institutions to reduce areas of conflict and promote peace during and after elections. Elections should not be a "do or die" exercise, the win-at-all-cost syndromes should be removed from our politics.
- v. There is a need for the emergence of a new political class that will be patriotic, nationalist and progressive in handling the affairs of the country.
- vi. There is a need for public education and enlightenment for Nigerians on the dangers of ethno-religious crises reminiscing on the bitter consequences of the Nigerian civil war and the series of ethnic and religious crises the nation has witnessed.
- vii. Ethnic militia should be discouraged while the national security apparatuses should be strengthened to promote the security of the lives and properties of Nigerians.
- viii. Instruments of national integration such as the NYSC, Unity Schools, Federal Civil Service, National Sports Festivals, National Orientation Agency, and Inter-Religious Conference, should be reinforced.

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