

Nigeria's Federalism, Unity and Development

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Abstract

Since 1914 when the incongruous people from different parts were brought together in the name of amalgamation, the country Nigeria has not actually been acting as one Nigeria. Though the country came together with the principle of federalism and its workability, the empirical study has shown that there is no unity in diversity as earlier envisaged. The typical Nigerian is a self interest person of me, I and myself, very nepotic and ethnic oriented personality.

Index terms— federalism and unity in diversity in nigeria, socio-economic development, political development.

1 I. Introduction

igerian state is an agglomeration of diverse ethnic nationalities that were brought together by British colonial subterfuge. This variegated entity emerged with the British colonial authority's merger of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914. It was indeed a merger of convenience for the British colonial authority who sought to consolidate their socio-political and economic interest by the merger, but largely a marriage of inconvenience for the indigenous peoples who were never consulted before the merger.

It has been a century since the emergence of Nigeria as an entity and over fifty four years of which has been in its post colonial governance. However, the country continue to grapple with the recurrent issue of ethno-religious antagonism and disharmony.

While it is not misplaced for plural societies to be confronted with the issue of unity in diversity. Nigeria's narrative continues to be so intractable and perennial. The preponderance of centrifugal forces in the Nigerian polity cannot be overemphasized as evident in the rise of ethno-religious militia groups; wide spread display of narrow and parochial political sentiments; abuse of office for sectional gain: widespread corruption and official graft etc. The design of Nigeria's political architecture on the 'template of federalism was intended to create unity in the midst of' diversity that would in turn galvanise and promote development in the socio-political and economic landscape of the country.

In this paper an attempt will be made to investigate whether federalism as practiced in this diverse entity called Nigeria has been able to create the much needed ethno-religious harmony or better still unity in diversity needed For the socio-political and economic development of the country. To achieve this aim, this paper will be segmented thus: background to Nigeria's federalism, theoretical underpinning of the subject matter, federalism and Nigeria's and unity in diversity and finally conclusion and recommendations.

2 II. Background to Nigeria's Federalism

The Nigerian state is a British colonial contraption that was formed with the merger of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914. Prior to British colonial forage into the area now called Nigeria, the diverse ethnic nationalities operated largely as distinct autonomous groups. (Awa, 1976; Noli, 1978; suntokun,1979).

Nigeria's heterogeneous groups were never consulted before a union was foisted on them. The British colonial forceful integration of the Nigerian peoples was further attenuated with the colonialist egregious policy of divide and rule. The British colonial policy of divide and rule pitted one ethnic group against the other and the subsequent cataclysmic effects of that egregious policy on the Nigeria state is that it laid a fertile ground for ethno-religious disharmony to fester. (Noli 1978). Economic scarcity occasioned by the British colonialist disarticulated economic practices also deepened on the manipulation of primordial fault lines for sectional interest especially amongst the emerging indigenous ruling class from the fold of the nationalist (Onimode. 1981:168).

2 II. BACKGROUND TO NIGERIA'S FEDERALISM

The polarization of ethos amongst the Nigerian peoples meant a political arrangement that would effectively manage the ethno-religious fault lines that mushroomed during colonial rule became inevitable. Hence, the clamour for such a political arraignment as deduced from the statement of the British colonial representative in Nigeria -Sir Arthur Richard in 1946 during the deliberations on the 1946 constitution:

It is only by the accident of British suzerainty which has made .Nigeria's one country. It is still far from being one country or one nation socially or even economically, socially and politically there are deep difference between the major tribal groups. They do not speak the same language and they have highly divergent customs and ways of life and they represent stages of culture (quoted in Osuntokun 1979:99), This line of thought was also at different times echoed by Nigeria's nationalist notably Chief Obafemi Awolowo and Sir Tafawa Balewa.

In the opinion of Awolowo. a strong advocate of federalism-Nigeria is not a nation,, it is a mere geographical expression, there are no Nigerians in the same sense there are English or Welsh or French: the word Nigeria is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria from those who do not (quoted in Osuntokun 1979:99).

Balewa-. Since the amalgamation of Southern and Northern provinces in 1914. Nigeria has existed as a country only paper-it is. still far from being united, Nigeria unity is only a British inheritance for the country (quoted in Osuntokun, 1979:99).

Coupled with these disillusionment on the legitimacy of the Nigerian state was the bare faced ethnic antagonism between notable leaders of the major ethnic groups. Of note was the brinkmanship between Dr Nnamdi Azikiwe and Chief Obafemi Awolowo following the former's highly sectional rhetoric recorded in the West Africa Pilot edition of 1947-It would appear that the God of Africa has created the Igbo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of the ages... the martial prowess of the Igbo nation at all ages of human history has enabled them the role of preservers... The Igbo nation cannot shift its responsibility .from its manifest destiny. (quoted in Osadolor, 1998:52).

Chief Obafemi Awolowo responded to what he felt was Azikiwe's ethnic chauvinism by saying; It seem clear to me that (Azikiwe's) policy was to corrode the self respect of the Yoruba people as a group to build up the Ibo as a master race (quoted in Osadolor, 1998:52).

Inter ethnic rivalry was indeed rife and pervasive especially between the three major ethnic groups-Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo. The need to design a political arrangement to douse. This unhealthy ethnic rivalry cocooned in embedded economic interest became so desirable. Thus, federalism became that political arrangement through which fear of domination of one ethnic group by the other could be allayed. As a political arrangement that makes room for the division of power within a state between the component regions and the central government federalism could not have been more apt for a plural society like Nigeria, hence, its acceptance by the British colonialist and the Nigerian political elites (Osuntokun, 1979;Obiyan, 2010).

To this end, between the period of 1947 to 1953 the Nigeria state witnessed a lot of debates midwived by the British colonialist as regards the formation and adoption of federalism in the country (Osadolor 1998: 39). The Macpherson constitution of 1951 was shunted because of what the nationalist felt was its undue rigidity. Consequently conferences were held in London and Lagos in 1953 that eventually ushered in the Lyttleton constitution of 1954 which adopted full federalism for the country. (Osuntokun1979:107).

However, the adoption of federalism in 1954 was not without acrimony as the federal system adopted was seen as defective because one region (north), was bigger than the other two regions (west and East) combined, this made Chief Obafemi Awolowo a strong advocate of Federalism to label it "an abominable disrupting and divisive British heritage" (Osuntokun, 1979:91).

Chief Awolowo's vituperation may not be out of place, because a defective federal arrangement can actually create more problems than the solutions it was intended to create as the political philosopher John Stuart Mill pointed out-There should not be any one state so much more powerful than the rest as to be capable of vying in strength with many of them combined. If there be such a one and only one, it -will insist on being master of the joint deliberations, if there be two they will be irresistible when they agree and whenever they differ, everything will be decided by a struggle for ascendancy between the rivals (Ijalaye, 1979:141).

Beyond this structural imbalance that characterised Nigeria's federalism from the outset, the thorny issue of minority groups cry of marginalisation and unbridled domination by the major ethnic groups equally flared up which prompted the setting up of the Willinks commission of 1957 to address the grievances of the minority groups.

At this juncture, it must be said that discussion on the evolution of Nigeria's federalism cannot be complete without highlighting the impact of military rule. The inability of the political class who succeeded the British Colonialist on October 1st, 1960, to manage their differences for the harmonious co-existence of the Nigerian state eventually led to a coup d'etat on Jan 15, 1966; counter coup in July 1966 and eventually a bloody civil war from 1967-1970.

The military who retained power after the war ended in 1970 were to later reconstruct Nigeria's federalism from the appreciable autonomy it gave the regions from 1954 to 1966 into a largely centralized system with less autonomy for the component units.. The military as an institution typifies an ideal Weberian bureaucratic model that would not just fit into the practice of true federalism.

3 According to Elaigwu (1979:157):

Basically Military federalism in Nigeria has two conspicuous features. The first is the military superstructure: military regime in which institutions of popular participation are suspended. The military hierarchy of autonomy, the head of the federal military government appoints all state governors who are responsible to him. This negates the traditional principle of federalism and fits the Apter's model of mobilization

The military tinkered with Nigeria's federalism with little or no accountability to the people and consequently to the detriment of preserving diversity and the same time maintaining unity which federalism was intended to create in the first place, which made Ijalaye (1979: 144-145) to corroborate Elaigwu's earlier assertion.-

The instability of Nigeria's federalism has also been promoted by the trial and error approach of the governmental system under the military rule. Military rule by its very nature does not favour an ideal federalism since the unified command of the army has not been trained for such a system of government. The military incursion into governance only led to the entrenchment of federal structure with a very strong centre and a weak component units that eventually became subservient to the central government.

The impact of the Nigerian military on the practice of Federalism in the country can indeed not be 'over emphasized, the thirty six states of the federation, quota system federal character principle and the 1999 constitution that ushered in our nascent democracy are some of the legacies of military rule in the Nigerian state.

4 III. Theoretical Framework

The Nigeria state is a multicultural cultural, society with diverse ethnic and religious groups. These diverse group of people have varying interest as the country strive towards nation building and democratic governance. To this end, this work, will be investigated through the prism of group theory. Nigeria's emergence was not negotiated by its indigenous peoples, it was done through the fiat of British colonial rule of the country. Consequently, the various groups that make up the entity called Nigeria have been at serious competition with each other, oftentimes to further their own narrow socio-political and economic interest.

Group theory owes its origin to the theoretical postulation of Arthur Bentley a major player in the behavioural school of thought in political science. Bentley felt societies are made up of groups who struggle with each other on the basis of interest articulation and pursuit.

In the words of Bentley:

The phenomena of political life which we study will always divide the society in which they occur, along lines which are very real, though out of varying degrees of definiteness. The society, itself is nothing other than the complex of groups that compose it (Quoted in I-Haye, 1983:19).

5 Quoting Bentley further:

An interest, as the term will be used..., is the equivalent of a group. The group and the interest are not separate. There exist only one thing, that is, so many men bound together in or along the path of a certain activity (Quoted in Haye, 1983: 17) It will be difficult to overemphasize how group conflict overheats Nigeria's body politics. Instances of one ethnic or religious group manipulating primordial sentiment' to score cheap political points against opponents are rife. The net effect of group conflict on Nigeria's federalism is that it continues to fan the embers of ethno-religious disharmony to the detriment of the harmonious co-existence of the diverse peoples in the country.

This ethno-religious disharmony has equally been exacerbated by the corrupt ridden economic conditions that characterise many post colonial African states such as Nigeria as Himmelstrand quoted in Anifowose (2011:31) observed:

The Nigerian tribalism of recent years is mainly a political tribalism stemming not from primordial ethnic loyalties as such but from politically exploited and reinforced reactions to contemporary African societies, conflicts of an economic nature involving different ethnic groups became infested with tribalism as a result of the competitive strain of modern political and economic structure.

The furtherance of interest just like Bentley posited is the bases for this group conflict and this has even become much more pronounced in plural societies with colonial antecedents like Nigeria that has not done much to renegotiate the basis of its existence as a single indivisible entity .

Sadly to say, post colonial Nigeria continue to see the narratives of ethno-religious antagonism festered due to its widespread elevation to the front burner of our national discourse by self serving leaders masquerading as the champion or protector of their various ethnic or religious groups.

The lukewarm altitude of the leaders of the various competing ethnic and religious groups in Nigeria to building a united country with a strong corporate identity has been clearly pointed out by Anifowose (2011:37).

When tribalism is exploited over issues in such away as to affect adversely the interests of the groups involved in political and economic competition, deep passions are aroused and violent conflict may ensue. This assertion is substantiated by Nigeria's experience at various stages of her history. In Nigeria, political parties became based on ethnic groups and regions. Politicians appealed to the based loyalties of their tribes-men and consideration of principle and ideology had no place.

It must be said there is no society without group conflict, group conflict indeed decides the past, present and future of a country. However, it leaves much to be desired when group conflict is consistently anchored on narrow and parochial interest as in the case of Nigeria.

The resultant effect is chaos, disharmony and sometimes war.

6 IV. Federalism and Unity in Diversity in Nigeria

We will begin this segment by first looking at the concept called federalism. Federalism as a concept dates back to millennia when ancient societies such as in Israel and the Greek city state practiced one form of corporation to boost trade or to secure themselves from external aggressor. However, the study of contemporary federalism began with the United States of America (USA) which adopted a federal constitution in 1787.

The concept of federalism has so many definitions and perspectives. However, the concept of federalism cannot be divorced from one cardinal principle which is to preserve diversity while at the same time maintaining unity. In the words of Watts. (1999; ??) Federalism is basically not a descriptive but a normative term and refers to the advocacy of multi-tiered government combining element of shared rule and regional self rule. It is based on the presumed value and validity of combining unity and diversity and of accommodating, preserving and promoting distinct identities within a larger political union.

Intellectual edifice of the study of contemporary federalism began with the scholarly effort of K.C. Wheare who sees it as a political arrangement that devolves power in a state between the central government and the component units.

Federalism has equally been subjected to scholarly debate whether as a design or a process. K.C. Wheare's theoretical postulation on the concept of federalism has been seen as overly legalistic and typical of a design. Wheare defined federalism as "... the method of dividing powers so that general and regional governments are each, within a sphere. coordinate and independent".

He went further to illustrate how this framework should operate. Wheare: First of all since federal government involved a division of functions and since the states forming the federation are anxious that they should not surrender more power than they know, it is essential for a federal government that there be a written constitution embodying the division of powers and binding all government authorities throughout the federation. From it, all state and federal authorities derive their powers and any action they perform contrary to it are invalid.

(cited in Dare 1979:27-28).

However advocates of federalism as a process and also as a tool for managing sociological elements in a plural society like Carl Friedrich and William Livingstone differed with the overt preoccupation with legal and institutional framework of the design template of K.C. Wheare.

7 According to William Livingstone -

The essential nature of federalism is to be sought for, not in the shading of legal and constitutional terminology, but in the force-economic, social, political, cultural-that have made the outward forms of federalism necessary... the essence of federalism lies not in the constitutional or institutional structure but in the society itself. Federal government is a device by which the federal qualities of the society are articulated and protected (cited in ??are 1979:29).

What this implies is that the sociological factors such as diversity in culture, religion, ethnicity, race etc. that made federalism important in the first place cannot be sacrificed on the altar of purely constitutional and legal connotations. However, it will be largely implausible to outrightly jettison Wheare's legal and constitutional framework as out of place, since it is pertinent to have legal and constitutional backing for the negotiated sociological variables so as not to be easily manipulated, circumscribed or even circumvented for the self-serving interest of any group(s) in the federation.

8 In the words of Jinadu (1979:19)-

The classical or juridical (Wheare), process and sociological formulations of federalism are not mutually exclusive. This is the point about the reference to the sociological dimensions of Wheare's federal government. This is also why it was suggested... that sociological variables take on meaning and significance within the legal framework provided by a federal arrangement.

From the foregoing, federalism may well offer that mechanism for managing the primordial differences inherent in plural societies. Nigeria's experience with federalism as a tool for managing the country's ethno-religious diversity is still very much less than ideal. Nigeria's federalism is overly and overtly legalistic and also less endeared to sociological variables. It has been argued that Nigeria only experienced true federalism just between the period of 1954-1966 and that ever since it has been a practice of pseudo-Federalism. The consequences of this anomaly in our practice of federalism is that it has increased the preponderance of virulent identity politics detrimental to our national integration as posited by ??abawale (2001) The phenomena of ethnic militia is a logical derivative of the process of defederalization which Nigeria has experienced since 1966. The consequence has been an explosion in the negative use of ethnicity across broad spectrum of society. If measures are taken to re-federalise Nigeria, ethnic militia will lose their appeal and become redundant.

The overwhelming emphasis on constitutional and institutional elements and the relegation of the sociological variables to the background in Nigeria's Federalism was suppose to manage our sociological narratives by offering a platform through which the diverse nationalities that make up Nigeria can express themselves. It is however, unfortunate that Nigeria practices federalism only in name but not in reality. The overwhelming centralisation of power negates the basic tenet of federalism, which is to decentralize power that grants appreciable autonomy to the component units to manage their affairs and resources.

The over centralization of power in the Nigerian federation continue to exacerbate primordial fault lines as one group compete against the other for the purpose of controlling the centre: this has become a very disintegrative factor to managing our diversity as Obivan (2010:309) argues-A major factor in group conflict in the country is the quest to control the national purse through the mechanism of state power at the federal level. Given the enormous resources at the centre therefore, groups do not see any need to concentrate on the sub national units, as lack of access to the federal power makes many of this subunits unenviable.

This in effect, means that even though in law, Nigeria is a federal state, in reality, it does not provide the real basis of a federal state. This situation reduces the effectiveness of federalism in Nigeria to serve as a federal solution to the great diversity in the country.

Aside from the structural imbalance of Nigeria federalism that has thrown up intense and divisive politics of primitive manipulation of primordial fault lines, the bastardization and mismanagement of the Nigerian economy from the post 1966 period till date has further fuelled disharmony in the country. The Nigerian masses are daily confronted with the challenges of poor governance that has seen their standard of living dropped consistently. This has thrown up all sort of violent clashes between diverse groups in the country. One of the major underlying factor precipitating this violent clashes owe its origin to economic scarcity that has become so pervasive in Nigeria's corrupt ridden mono-product economy.

This has become one of the major disincentives to the viability of federalism as a tool for managing Nigeria's diversity. Federalism is a means to an end and not an end in itself hence the socio-political and economic factors are extremely important to its viability and sustenance. The mismanagement of the sociological variables, especially the economic Front may well not be isolated from the continuous clamour for state creation which to a large extent is at best self serving as -Nnoli (1978:191) Posited-The most ardent of advocates of new states or regions have always been aspirants to high positions in the political, administrative, professional and business fields who have failed to attain positions of pre eminence attain such heights in smaller constituent entities.

The mismanagement of the Nigerian economy is certainly a sad tale and a strong impediment to the attainment of unity in the midst of diversity that the country finds The impoverishment of the Nigerian masses through unemployment, massive infrastructural deficit and the endless devaluation of the naira has more than anything else open the floodgate of resentment, disillusionment and violent clashes between the country's diverse ethno-religious groups. It has equally increased the fold of centrifugal forces some of which have taken up arms against the Nigerian state such as the Niger Delta militants and the Boko Haram extremist.

The perennial failure of leadership in Nigeria is also an insidious factor precipitating the numerous anomalies the country has come to represent. In the words of Obiyan (2010:311):

-The failure of leadership in the country and the failure of the state to make itself relevant to the needs of the masses have not only worsened inter-group conflict but also weakened national integration. The pauperisation of the masses has weakened the citizen, confidence in the state. This creates sundry problems for the state.

The settler versus indigene dichotomy is another egregious issue that continue to imperil the viability of our present form of federalism as an effective tool for creating unity in diversity in Nigeria. It is saddening that a Nigerian born and bred in one part of the country is still refers to as a settler rather than an indigene of that area. This continue to create ambiguity on the identity of the Nigerian.

Hence, the continued festering of narrow and parochial politics of ethnic bigotry in Nigeria. The ambiguity on the notion of citizenship in Nigeria is further blurred by the constitution which ironically sanctioned a common national citizenship but at the same time espoused the idea of indigeneity. Section 42 subsections (1) (2) (3) of the 1999 constitution states inter alia:

(1) A citizen of Nigeria of a particular community, ethnic group, place of origin, sex, religion or political opinion shall not by reason only that he is such a person:

(a) Be subjected either expressly by or in the practical application of any law in force in Nigeria or any executive or administrative action of the government, to disabilities or restraints to which citizens of Nigeria of other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religions or political opinions are not made subject; or (b) Be accorded either expressly by, or in the practical application of any law in force in Nigeria or any such executive or administrative action any privilege or advantage that is not accorded to citizens of Nigeria of at the national, regional or state levels, and who belongs to other communities, ethnic groups, places of origin, sex, religion or political opinion:

(2) No citizen of Nigeria shall be subjected to any disability or deprivation merely by reason of the circumstances of his birth.

(3) Nothing in subsection (1) of this section shall invalidate any law by reason only that the law imposes restriction with respect to the appointment of any person to any office under the state or as a member of the Nigerian police forces or to an office in the service of a body, corporate established directly by any law in force in Nigeria.

However a lacuna at the same time is espoused in the same 1999 constitution in section 318 (11) paragraph (vi)-Belong to its grammatical expression when used with references to a person in a state, refers to a person either whose parents or any whose grandparents was a member of community indigenous to that state.

The settler-indigene dichotomy has in recent times assumed a very dangerous dimensions in such states like Plateau, Nasarawa, and Kaduna owing to rampant economic scarcity and its manipulation by the political class for the purpose of bettering their narrow socio-political and economic interest.

The institutionalization or certain policies and principles such as: quota system. federal character and the National Youth Service Corp (NYSC) has done very little to incorporate the 'Nigerian people because of the aforementioned prevailing anomalies.

9 V. Conclusion and Recommendation

Nigeria's chequered political history has been characterised by inter-ethnic conflicts to the detriment of building a common identity that would catalyse its socio-political and economic growth and development.

The emergence of federalism to manage these inter-ethnic conflicts for the purpose of unity in diversity still remains a mirage. It must be said, there is hardly a federal state that is not confronted with the contending issue of centrifugal and centripetal forces. From India. Canada. Malaysia, to Brazil just to mention these few, have had to and would continue to contend with intergroup conflicts. However, these, aforementioned federal states have been able to manage their difference and diversity to the extent of building, a strong corporate identity. Diversity -should not be a problem. it can indeed be a big plus it properly manned.

However, it has not been so in Nigeria as its peoples continue to be divided along the fault lines of ethno-religious cleavages. No doubt the history of Nigeria's emergence was never negotiated by its diverse nationalities, notwithstanding, we can reinvent ourselves and it will only start when there is a thorough overhaul of our body politics.

According to late political economist Bade Onimode-Development means fundamental structural transformation from an outmoded social svstem to a new one through a determined struggle against the conservative retrograde forces of the status quo. It requires a basic reorganisation of the economic, political and social structure of the stagnant society through an all out mobilization of all its creative resources. This is required in Nigeria to liquidate imperialist domination, terminate capitalist exploitation, transcend technological rigidities, and wise the consciousness of the masses ??Onimode 1981:166 Our independence leaders missed it when they could not overcome the pettiness of identity politics and the military equally missed it when they could not sit the Nigerian peoples on a roundtable to renegotiate the terms of their existence as an entity when the country's civil war ended in 1970. It is however, incumbent on the present political class to look beyond their narrow interest to reform the Nigerian state by renegotiating our continued corporate existence.

Our present system of federalism must be jettisoned for the pre-15th January 1966 federalism that gave premium to principle of derivation and also appreciable autonomy to the component units. Invariably, this would reduce the enormous power and resources at the centre and also tame the mad rush to control power at the centre for self serving purposes.

It would also douse the unending clamour for more states, since states would be made to generate their own resources. Hence, only viable and self sustaining states will exist because creation of more states has only amplified the majority-minority question which has only succeeded in stoking the flames of ethno-religious disharmony in the country.

The Nigerian state must also diversify its economy and engage its people, especially the youth in productive ventures by so doing they will not become willing tools in the hands of manipulative politicians to torment ethnic strife. Fiscal federalism will help reduce economic scarcity ,tame corruption, strengthen institutions of governance and also help the country unlock many of its hidden potentials because states will generates their own resources and by so doing it will stir up innovation, invention and sound financial intelligence that would help drive growth and development in the long run.

The settler-indigene dichotomy should also be addressed through a constitutional amendment that gives people the right to claim where they were born or a place they have stayed or an appreciable number of years provided they choose to. And above all leadership must he improved upon and corruption that denies the majority their rightful share of the common wealth dealt with. The led must also wake up from their passivity to move this country in the right direction and again we must reflect the change we want in this country because truth be told, there is no perfect society anywhere, what we have are people striving to build a near perfect society. We believe, if these aforementioned reform are sincerely carried out, federalism as a political solution to managing Nigeria's diversity for the purpose of creating unity and a strong corporate identity that would drive our socio-political and economic growth and development would be realizable.

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²Nigeria's Federalism, Unity and Development
³© 2015 Global Journals Inc. (US) 1Nigeria's Federalism, Unity and Development practice of federalism has done more harm than good.
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