

NATIONAL INTEGRATION AND DEMOCRATIZATION PROCESS IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper interrogates the problematic of national integration confronting contemporary Nigeria which is regarded as an indelible mark of unity of purpose. No doubt, the issue has attracted diverse interests from various parts of the country, and generated robust and scholarly debates essentially among the social scientists on how to curb the challenges that it is posing to the country's democratization process. Methodologically, this paper relies heavily on the secondary sources of data and descriptive analysis. It reveals that the major contending issues serving as anathema to national integration in Nigeria include the manipulation of religion by both political and religious leaders, the continuous agitation for resource control, lack of trust among the various ethnic groups which had led to ethno-religious and political conflicts in Nigeria, revenue sharing formula, complaints of domination and marginalization cum minority/majority syndrome, activities of the various militia groups from all parts of the country, the common practice of bribery and corruption which has eaten deep into the fabrics of the Nigerian society and a host of others. The paper recommends among others that there is the need to convey a truthful and genuine sovereign national/constitutional conference that would offer the Nigerian people the opportunity to discuss the various challenges confronting the nation. It is expected that the conference would offer the country a brand new constitution that would favour the general populace as against what we have today as a constitution of the ruling class.

Keywords: National Integration, Democracy, Democratization, Challenges.

Introduction

National integration is an important part of national development due to the fact that its existence in a social system depends largely upon the balanced relationships in historical, political, socio-cultural, transformational and economic forces. In the opinion of Drake (1989), if one of these components (integration) is neglected or becomes out of balance, disintegrative forces may emerge that can remarkably threaten a state's stability. He assets

further that if a state is no longer in existence or its existence is marked by persistent turmoil, the issue of national development becomes moot (Drake 1989).

According to Ojo (2009), in a social system where people in different geographical areas and of different ethnic, socio-cultural, religious and economic backgrounds do not generally feel themselves to be united or to function as one nation, development cannot be fully achieved. That is to say, the relationship that exists between the absence of irredentism in pluralistic social systems and the success of national development in the system is therefore, symbolic. This in the opinion of Drake (1989), the nature of the relationship requires cohesive forces to ensure the continued existence of the country as one political entity which is also politically stable.

It is therefore, worrisome to note that after the amalgamation of the Northern and Southern protectorates in 1914, the nature of Nigerian relationships has been faced by centrifugal tendencies of ethnic and religious differences. The problematic of tribalism and regionalism that led to the political crisis in the beginning of 1960s which metamorphosed into the civil war of the late 1960s is no doubt, living with Nigeria as an institutional basis of instability in the polity.

There is no gainsaying that Nigeria is divided along ethnic and religious lines accompanied with serious distrust, antagonism, suspicion and a host of other factors which have had serious consequences on the stable democratic governance, socio-economic and political development, unity and the survival of the country. In light of the aforementioned quagmires, Ifeanchio & Nwagwu (2009) opined that Nigeria's efforts at achieving national integration have remained largely unrealized. They opined further that the history of democratization in Africa in general and Nigeria in particular has remained the history of national disintegration. The rising profile of minority question, religious intolerance cum extremism, indigene/settler conflicts, youth restiveness, resource control agitation, militancy, ethno-politics and many other factors are serving as anathema to Nigeria's national integration. It is against the foregoing that this paper interrogates national integration and its challenges on Nigeria's democratization process.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

At this stage the study looks at the concepts of the basic variables under investigation, particularly national integration, democracy and democratization. The term national integration has been conceptualized from different perspectives by different scholars. It is seen as nation-building, national unity, national cohesion, national loyalty and national ones. To Ojo (2009), integration as a concept is common to social science disciplines and means different things to different scholars. He identified three aspects of integration such as economic integration, socio-cultural integration and political or national integration. For instance, Duverger (1976) defines national integration as a process of unifying a society which tends to make it a harmonious city, based on an order its members regard as equitably harmonious. This position refers to a situation whereby members of a

community formed a united front to live together in peaceful co-existence. According to Jacob & Tenue (1964:9), national integration is a relationship of community among people within the same political entity...a state of the mind or disposition to be cohesive, to act together and to be committed to mutual programmes.

Some conjectural attempts will be made at explaining the common but complex and almost abstract concept of democracy. Any meaningful attempt at understanding democracy must proceed from the ancient definition of democracy as peoples' rule. The Greek words *demos* and *kratia* means people and rule or authority respectively. Thus, democracy refers to 'rule by the people'. This began in the first half of the 5th century B.C. among the Greeks thus beginning with what Dahl (1989), calls the transformation from rule by the few to rule by the many. The Encyclopedia Britannica (2003) defines democracy as the "philosophy of government in which supreme power is vested in the people and exercised by them directly or indirectly through a system of representation usually involving periodic free elections. Today, democracy has come to imply universal suffrage competition for office, freedom of speech and the freedom of press and the rule of law". According to Mba in Ali and Ismaila (2012), democracy is defined "as the government that is based on popular participation and desire to bring economic life under public control". New Webster's Dictionary defined democracy as the government of the people exercised through elected representatives.

Democratization is a relatively new political concept for the analysis of public agents in any democratic setting in the 21st century. This accounts for why political analysts in different fields of endeavour gathered to construct vast empirical theories in accordance with the global politics on the process of democratization which came into being in the advanced countries via evolution that took various political patterns. It is worthy to note that democratization is a relative term to democracy. To this end, Huntington (1991:13-16) conceptualized democratization as a period or evolution that comes in form of growing waves which systematically transcends in the arena of world politics. Suffice it to say that democratization can also be regarded as a group of democratic transition from non-democratic regimes to democratic regimes. This is why Alumona (2010:98) opined that democratization is a process that occurs over a period of time, where the state and the entire populace are the major actors who must show commitment to ensure that sustainable democracy operates well in the entire society.

For the purpose of this study, theories of integration will be relevant to the work due to the fact that it helps to establish an understanding of the different aspects of Nigeria's problems. It is worthy of note that no theory is capable of providing a completely unique and comprehensive framework for analyzing Nigeria's multidimensional problematic of disunity and less industrialized. Therefore, theories of integration provide explanations for various stages and style of the challenges of national cohesiveness. Duverger (1976) asserts that integration is the process of unifying a society which tends to make it a harmonious city, based upon an order its members regards as equitable harmonious.

Coleman and Rosberg (1994) view integration as the progressive reduction of cultural and regional tensions and discontinuities in the process of creating a homogenous political community. Looking at from a different perspective, Etzioni (1965) opined that a community is cohesive when: (1) it has effective control over the use of the means of violence, (2) it has a centre of decision making capable of effecting the allocation of resources and rewards and (3) it is a dominant focus of political identification for a large majority of politically aware citizens. Suffice it to say that the objective of national integration is to provide cohesiveness to give room for qualitative and quantitative development oriented social change to take place.

Nigeria's Efforts Towards Enhancing National Integration

It is fundamental to note that efforts have been made to create systems, institutions and programmes of government geared towards promoting national integration right from the colonial period due to the fact that Nigeria is regarded as a host of unwilling and variegated partner. However, a number of scholars such as Ojo (2009), Bulama (n.d), Akpan (1990), Ugo & Ukpere (2012), and Adenike & David (2013) have enumerated some of these efforts to include the following:

The colonial administration in Nigeria in 1954 using the instrumentality of the Lyttleton constitution introduced federalism into Nigeria as an integrative mechanism. The colonialists must have been swayed by the opinion that such a system of government was necessary to preserve both integration and stability in a deeply divided country like Nigeria. According to Osaghae (1987), whenever events seemed to demand that a compromise be effected between the necessity for unity and co-operation on a wide territorial basis on one hand and the need to accommodate the legitimate claims of sub-national groups for self-rule on the other, the temptation is to proffer a catch-all management formula such as federalism. While federalism has been applauded as a silver bullet to the ethnicity problem in Nigeria, the skewness and perversion of this typology of governance has frustrated the benefits it could have provided the nation.

The creation of state and the land use decree were put in place to strengthen Nigeria's unity. Prior to the Nigerian civil war, as a way to strengthen the reversion of the country to federalism, General Yakubu Gowon resorted to the creation of more states in a bid to keep the country united. Gowon felt the problem facing the operation of regionalism in the three regions was that "the regions were so powerful as to consider themselves self-sufficient and almost entirely independent. The federal government which ought to give the lead to the whole country was relegated to the background. The people were not made to realize that the federal government was the real government of Nigeria. In order to strengthen the federal government, the regions were taken to the slab of sacrifice resulting in the creation of 12 states in 1967. Subsequently, the creation of states curtailed the domineering tendencies of the major ethnic groups and secured some measure of autonomy for the minority groups. Members of the major ethnic groups now find

themselves as minorities in some new states, while those who have hitherto been minorities in the old states now find themselves as majorities in some new states. In the opinion of Bulama (n.d), the old regional hegemony by three major tribes in their respective regions is now a thing of the past. Between 1960 and 1996, creation of states within the federal system comprised 3 regions (1960), 4 regions (1963), 12 states (1967), 19 states (1976), 21 states (1987), 30 states (1991) and since 36 in 1996. The Land Use decree on its parts vest all land in a state Governor of the state that holds the land in trust for the use and common benefit of all Nigerians. The rationale being that the Governor can allocate land to any applicant irrespective of his or her state of origin. But in reality, Nigerians are discriminated against from buying certain pieces of land because of ethnic and religious consideration.

Another policy aimed at uniting the country was the National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) established by Decree No. 24 of 22 May, 1973. The scheme helped to enhance the interaction among the young educated citizens in the country posted to different parts which give them the opportunity to live and serve in some developmental capacities in states different from their places of origin. This scheme also offers them the opportunity to understand the cultures, languages and the lifestyle of their host communities better. It is important to note that while the applicants help to develop various parts of the country via their one-year compulsory service, they also understand better way of life of their brethren from other parts of Nigeria especially their strengths and weaknesses. In spite of the aforementioned advantages of the scheme, it has been faced with some fraught due to ethnic consideration, favouritism and cronyism in posting corps members, exposure of the corps members to security risk which was witnessed especially during the 2011 general elections in some parts of Northern Nigeria and the 2015 general elections in some parts of the South-South states essentially Rivers state. In the opinion of Ojo (2009), another dimension to the problem facing the thriving National Youth Service Corps in Nigeria is the problematic nature of citizenship, indigeneship and settler status in Nigeria. He opined further that in this sense, many Nigerian Youths have experienced more of frustration rather than integration because after serving in a particular state other than theirs, they do not expect to get jobs where they have thanklessly undergone the NYSC scheme because in many cases, they would be tagged as non-indigenes and would be forced to go back to their states of origin to avoid being discriminated against. Worthy of note is that in some states where few are employed, they are employed as contract staff owing to the fact that they are not indigenes of the state.

The Federal Character principle initiated by the Federal Government was a nation-building policy targeted at uniting the country. According to Ugoh & Ukpere (2012), the main aim of introducing the policy was to achieve the fair and effective representation of the various components of the federation in the country's position of power, status and influence. To Adenike & David (2013), the Federal Character principle was later enshrined in the 1979 constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria with the goal to accommodate

the diverse linguistic, ethnic, religious and geographic groups in the decision making, socio-economic and political apparatuses of the state. Much more importantly, the federal character policy was geared towards fostering unity, peace, equal access to state's resources and promote the integration of the less privileged states for better improvement and good living conditions in the country. Despite the strengths of the policy it has widely been criticized for introducing crass mediocrity into the public service, not strong enough to curb ethnicity, corruption, cronyism, and above all, the process has been politicized. The operationalization of the federal character has been viewed by many as encouraging disunity and instability rather than integration.

One fundamental thing that was seen as a policy to help in enhancing national integration in Nigeria was the relocation of the country's Federal Capital Territory from Lagos to Abuja. To Bulama (n.d), tribal related problems formed part of the reasons that led to the choice of Abuja as the new Federal Capital Territory. He explained further that the underlying tribal considerations were vividly enunciated in the report of the committee on the location of the Federal Capital Territory. Arguing in the same direction, Ojo (1998) opined that both politics and administration of the new Federal Capital Territory have not been helpful. He stated further that the arrangement is so haphazard that the chairman and some members of the committee that recommended the new federal capital territory have openly lamented that the essence of the new capital has been jettisoned. The whole essence of the concept of the new federal capital territory as a symbol of unity and nationhood has been completely put into abeyance.

Another government's efforts at uniting or integrating the country into a whole include the introduction of revenue sharing formula which is targeted at solving the problem rocking the Niger-Delta region as a response to calm the agitation for resource control. There is 13% special derivation accrued to the oil producing states from the federation account as enshrined in the 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the establishment of the Niger-Delta Development Commission (NDDC) and the creation of the Niger-Delta Ministry all geared towards assessing the effect of the policies on the general socio-economic framework of the region, evidence of growth spurts is beginning to be seen in states such as Akwa Ibom, Delta and Bayelsa. In spite of these efforts, there have been series of complains and lamentations of alleged neglect and domination emanating from the region which could be as a result of embezzlement and mismanagement of public funds on the side of both political and traditional rulers in the region.

Aside the aforementioned measures taken by government to enhance national integration in Nigeria, others include the introduction of the policy of National Integration as enshrined in 1979 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria which has been viewed by many as a deliberate effort to tackle the challenges facing the practice of true Federalism. The introduction of a unified Local Government System is another measure for ensuring national integration and the introduction of Unity Schools under the control

of Federal Government which primary aim is to enhance unity in diversity cum integrating the people together.

National Integration and the Challenges on Nigeria's Democratization

In 1960 when Nigeria became an independent state, the challenge of national integration remained one of the greatest and as such, it called for serious concern. It has been observed that prior to and even after the attainment of independence, the major challenge that has been bedeviling Nigeria as a country has been the issue of ethnic conflicts which is posing serious threat to the democratization process and this has the tendency to hinder nation-building and national integration. Other factors such as religious crisis, political conflicts, prebendal politics, bribery and corruption, tribalism, the unending general insecurity and the rising profile of terrorism which have become prominent features of the Nigerian state are to a great extent, threatening the country's democratization process.

To Tersoo & Ejue (2014), ethnicity and corruption are the major impediments to Nigeria's integration. They stressed further that Nigeria is a country of over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups with different backgrounds. Worthy of note is that constructive regional differences were practiced during the first republic which paved the way for a strong institutional base for group sentiment and ethnicity. In the opinion of Tersoo & Ejue (2014), the political arrangement in the Nigeria's first republic was regionally based and local and ethnic issues became highly politicized. Each region was administered by political parties organized along ethnic lines that vowed to protect the people's interest and had nothing to do with other regions of the country. The above situation however, entrenched deeply the crisis of ethnicity which later led to regional and sub-regional agitations in Nigeria. In the opinion of Hassan (2006), May 1999 marked the return of Nigeria to democratic rule from autocracy with the operation of multi-party system, the development which he argued that it fostered ethnic conflict across the country. He continued by arguing that Nigerians could no longer accommodate one another as a result of sentiments which fuelled ethnic massacres and the rise of militant regional organizations became the new order. This position justifies the ethno-religious conflicts witnessed in some states in Northern Nigeria as a result of the introduction and implementation of Islamic (Shari'a) Law in spite of the fact that the decision was opposed and protested by the Northern Christians. For the fact that ethnic conflict has assumed a more disturbing and destructive posture in Nigeria puts the country's democratic process in a serious dilemma.

It is pertinent to note that democracy and national integration as it implies are contested terrain in the context of polity in Nigeria (Tersoo & Ejue 2014) or any system of government that strives to survive. So far, the Nigerian federation has been played by instability of war and other numerous outbreaks of ethnic violent. In spite of all these quagmires, Nigeria has not disintegrated due to the fact that there have been serious efforts and design institutions that can promote democracy and national integration. One other

factor working against Nigeria's national integration is the foundation laid by the colonial power by not given room for the formation of a common national identity and lack of consensus which resulted in the many political problems that are making one ethnic group to be against another.

In Nigeria for instance, attempts have been made at different points in time to bring to an end the challenge of national integration so as to keep Nigeria as one indivisible entity. This was justified by Onyeoziri (2002:2) who asserted that loyalty to the Nigerian state remains at best reluctant while stability has continued to elude the system. He opined further that inter-communal or ethnic hostility and even open violence have increased while the constant complaint of marginalization tells its own story of the declining sense of belonging that exist in the land. These are eloquent systems that the policy of federal character is not producing the desired effect. And it is easy to think of many reasons why. In the same vein, Olufemi (2005:67-68) observed that while the geo-political divide and mutual suspicion between the North and the South have been resilient factors in Nigeria's political life, at no other time had the structural contradictions in the polity degenerated into multiple fratricidal and seemingly irreconcilable conflicts than in the period of the Fourth Republic since 1999. He observed further that the depth and dimension of this development are reflected in the rise and popularity of ethnic militias such as the Odudua People's Congress (OPC), Arewa People's Congress (APC), Egbesu Boys, Ijaw Youths Congress, Bakassi Boys and sundry militant organizations canvassing competing ethnic claims. Observing further he said, it goes without saying that this spectre of ethnic militias is a poignant indicator of the level of discontent with the governing formula that many perceive to have worked to their disadvantage. Suffice it to say that in the presence of all these challenges, the process of consolidating and sustaining Nigeria democracy in this fourth republic will continue to remain an illusion.

Again, the absence of national integration in Nigeria was captured by Onyeoziri when he stated that both the events that built-up the civil war and the handling of that political crisis were strong testimonies of the lack of broad national consensus and nationalists' identities that should form the constituent elements of an all-Nigerian culture, (Onyeoziri, 2003:37).

On the issues that affect national integration in Nigeria, (Ojo 2009:22) opined that the most obvious conditions include ethnic cleavages, economic underdevelopment or dependence, and a weak sense of nationhood arising from a short period of independent statehood. To Enaruna (2014:68), the adoption of a federal system of government was supposed to address these serious conditions such as ethnic cleavages, but it does not seem to have worked well, stating that a federal system is even a difficult system to manage. As observed by Osaghae (2006:1), although, several explanations have been proffered for federal failure-domination by one or a few constituent units, authoritarianism, economic underdevelopment, lack of constitutionalism, etc. he observed further that the point cannot

be denied that by its very nature of delicate balancing and competing claims, federalism is an inherently difficult system to manage.

According to Olufemi, the feeling of deprivation and alienation runs deep in the region and this is responsible for the simmering and widespread insurgency in the area. In fact, the major youth organizations had called for a boycott of the 1998-99 transition exercise, insisting on political restructuring through a Sovereign National Conference. From the standpoint of ethnic nationality groups, federalism has not worked in Nigeria as evidenced in the complaints of over-centralization of power, ethnic domination, marginalization and repression (Olufemi 2005:69).

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the previous analysis, discussions have centred on political system, problems that made it difficult to achieve national integration and its effect on democratization process in Nigeria. From the civilian to the military regimes, there have been domination and exploitation of the people by the elites which had led to the impoverishment of the people and created a de-link between the leader and the led, hegemonic politics continued even after the proclaimed democratic ideals. The question that follows is thus; how could a country like Nigeria achieve national integration and democracy be sustained in a polity where domination and exploitation of the poor are order of the day? The answer to this question is consensus-building.

Consensus-building as a panacea for national integration in Nigeria is the agreement between the ruler and the ruled, elites and the masses. To move the country into the path of national integration that could lead to development and sustainable democracy, consensus-building is a *sine-qua non* to the development of human potentials. It respects the rights of the people and provide means by which poverty can be eliminated in the social life and provide minimal development for sustainable democracy. Consensus-building could be operated through seeking national integrated programme which are discussed below. National integration is the means whereby component parts of the nation are integrated into a whole for the development of the country, national integration involving civic education, achieving regional economic parity, national language policy and balancing political power.

The first is civic education. Despite massive outlays for education by most Nigerian governments, what has become political socialization or the use of educational system to in still national identity and awareness in school children has been largely neglected. Citizenship education including civil rituals of reciting national anthem, exposure of national political leaders and study of other ethnic groups to increase tolerance can significantly strengthen the fabrication of national society. In their critical early years, school children can develop foundation for the diffuse support necessary to maintain nation-building.

Secondly, achievement of national economic parity. Government efforts to encourage balanced economic and educational development are essential if genuine national cohesion is to be fostered. Obviously, such an objective is not easy to attain because it usually involves the tax revenue collected in the wealthier portions of the country to the poorer sections, a process that really has the support of wealthier ethnic groups. Moreover, balanced development may necessitate sacrificing some national growth for the sake of regional growth because investment in the power sector of the country will really yield greater returns. Unless effort is made to achieve balanced development growth, disparities in regional development will be almost inevitably mean that certain ethnic groups within the country will prosper while others will feel neglected and impoverished.

Thirdly, national language policy. With the extreme linguistic fragmentation characterizing the vast majority of African countries, language policy is a critical determinant of a country's ability to promote national unity. Nigeria has over 250 languages, inherent diversities create formidable obstacles to national integration. The United States of America, Australia, Russia and Indonesia have demonstrated the value of a country by promoting a common national language to foster communication. National language policy could act as an integration process that will make the people to know more of themselves.

Fourthly, there is need for balanced political power. The distribution of political power has been recognized as a key element in balancing pluralistic pressure against the need for national integration. The federal arrangement under which Nigeria gained independence was conceived as a means of satisfying desires of the country's three largest ethnic groups (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) to control their destinies while remaining parts of a large political unit remain marginalized. However, the almost perpetual streams of political crisis has followed from independence till date, at the national level, the Northern region was able to dominate. While within the Western and Eastern regions, the minority ethnic groups complain bitterly about the predominance of the large ethnic groups or communities. Attempt to solve these problems must reflect the political philosophies of key decision-making leaders or government must decide to try to decentralize governmental operations and decision-making as a means of placating traditional bodies and assuring the country's ethnic groups that their interests would not be neglected. The leaders must promote inter-ethnic reconciliation and equilibrium rather than effort to obliterate ethnic destruction and forge complete national unification. The institutionalization of various means of balancing political power among state's constituents' ethnic groups is part of what is required, along with sensitivity among government leaders regarding the implications of inter-ethnic relations of the government decision-making, (Ekeh and Osaghae 1989).

There is also the need to call for a true sovereign national conference that would offer the Nigerian people the opportunity to discuss the various problems facing the nation. It is expected that at the end of such conference, a brand new constitution that would operate

and protect the interest of the majority of the populace as against what we have at present that protects mostly the interest of the elites would be drafted.

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