

CENTENARY CELEBRATION OF NIGERIA AND CHALLENGES OF NATION BUILDING

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ABSTRACT

The year 1914 has been significant and contentious in Nigerian history. It was the year that the British imperialism convoluted and foisted the entity Nigeria upon many repository ethnic nationalities, which were independent or semi-independent kingdoms. The British imperialism and colonialism disregarded the capacity and wills of these various nationalities, and without passing through the stages of nations state to nation state. Consequently, the present Nigerian government is rolling out programmes with fanfare, pomp and pageantry to celebrate one hundred years of Nigeria's existence by 2014. This exercise calls for diametric examination and review of Nigeria's historic experiences and political development assessing whether it is necessary to undertake the celebration with huge and elephant expenses. This study articulates and examines several problems, issues and challenges bedeviling the polity. These issues examined under the rubrics of this include: electoral violence, ethnic nationalism, political corruption, identity crisis, sectarian political behavior, human right abuses and violations, democracy and democratization, federalism and functional constitution and development rhetorics. The paper adopts the theoretical framework of group/elite theory in the explanation of the labyrinth issues that are albatrosses to Nigerian Statehood. Finally, the paper makes efforts in suggesting ways that these issues and problems can be addressed rather than setting up a Presidential committee with whooping sum for 100 years celebration.

Keywords: Centenary, Corruption, Ethnicity, Nationalism.

INTRODUCTION

Prior to advent of British imperialism in West Africa, there was neither the name nor any demarcated, single, political unit, with any other name whatsoever; governing the area on which present day Nigeria stands. But what existed in the area now known as Nigeria were many groups of free and independent kingdoms, republics, nationalities, and loosely associated communities" (Idike, 2000:169). These entities and kingdoms were independent of one another with diverse culture, Nigeria is a political unit embracing many culture and language groups. The culture differs as much within Nigeria as do the cultural differences among district nations in Europe (Ikejiani, 2000:1). Some good examples of such independent political groups were the old Oyo Empire, the old Benin Kindgom, Sokoto, Kano and Zaria Emirates in addition to many other republican city-states especially among the Igbo people (Idike, 2000:169-170).

It will be dramatically wrong and unthinkable that some can assert and give the impression that the conglomerate Nigeria before the arrival of the British maintained a common historical and political backdrop. What really existed in that part of Western Sudanese territory were a number of independent national States which were all politically and territorially separate, and in many cases linguistically and culturally different (Orizu, 1944:111). The above thesis indicates that Western imperialism assembled the States without their consent. Nigeria and the concept of a Nigerian nation were entirely British creation as

suggested and coined by Miss Flora Shaw in January 8, 1897 (Nwankwo & ifejika, 1969:9). In 1860 Lagos was captured and annexed in 1861, and by 1900 the colonization of Nigeria was complete when the Royal Niger Company Charter was revoked by the British. In the process of times, two significant changes took place in 1906 and 1914 respectively. In 1906, the colony of Lagos and Southern protectorates were merged to form one territory under a single government and administration, known as the colony and protectorate of southern Nigeria. In 1914 southern and northern Nigeria were amalgamated to form a single colony and protectorates of Nigeria. The fusion of these formerly separate administrative entities into one administrative unit was based on the recommendations of the Lord Selbaoune Committee, a committee set up in 1898 by the Secretary of State for colonies, Sir, Joseph Chamberlain, to map out the future development of Nigeria: (Michael, 1991:158). Nigeria, as we know it today was a product of imperialist design created and contrapted in January 1 1914. Nigeria was formed partly by accident and partly by design, in a state of political servitude under British colonial control (Idike, 2000:170). Between 1860-1960 under the British Suzerainty culminated in exploitation, under development and political balkanization of the polity Nigeria.

As Nigeria approached independence, there was general consensus that the nation should come to independence as a single nation. Independent Nigeria was born on 1st October 1960. But the independent foundation was parlous characterized with ethnic divisiveness and incohesion convulsed and precipitated impasse and imbroglio. Nigeria's independence at the federal and state level experienced a very short honeymoon (Mindt, 2010:659).

Within the period of six years, the western coalition crisis, the census controversy, ethnicity, and the 1964/65 General Election violence orchestrated the military intervention in 1966, which terminated the First Republic. Nigeria emerging from excruciating colonialism and imperialism fell under the deluge and sledge hammer of military rule between 1966-1999 with intermittent civilian rules. Within this period in the political annals of Nigeria, political structures and institutions have been atrophied and debilitated leading to too many problems rocking the polity (Aro, 2013:424-436). The cumulative and net effects of these problems continue to reecho and dis-equilibrate the polity.

The present Republic under the administration of President Goodluck Jonathan has not faired and weathered these political problems and challenges. Some of these teething and nagging problems include: sectarian political behavior, security challenges, micro nationalism, federalism and functional constitution and political democracy. The centenary celebration is an ideal that should be handled with caution, and not wasting our resources without paying particular attention to our enduring political development debacle. The discourse shall proceed to discuss these issues and challenges amidst the centenary celebration mien and milieu with pomp and pageantry.

CHALLENGES OF NIGERIAN NATION BUILDING

The year 2014 marks one hundred years of the British amalgamation of Northern and Southern protectorates to form one political entity known and addressed as Nigeria. The political peregrination right from 1914 had been tortuous and convoluted. The colonial overlords did not consider the disparate ethnic and cultural differences of four hundred ethnic groups. The negligence of these centrifugal forces have continued to be an albatross towards the political development of Nigeria. Ethnicity had engendered the conflagration of civil war,

between 1967-1970 and multitudinous religious crisis and riots. At the moment the nation is being bedeviled by Boko Haram mayhem and terrorist pyromania.

A nation under these excruciating circumstances should concern itself on how to manage her internal problems, and coming out robust than busying herself with ceremony and fanfare that do not contribute in solving these issues and challenges. At this juncture, We shall outline and discuss those issues and challenges confronting Nigeria while she tinkers with the chimera centenary celebrations.

ETHNIC NATIONALISM & PARTY POLITICS

Nigerian Nationalism suddenly degenerated into ethnic nationalism, micro –nationalism or sub nationalism. The emergence of ethnic nationalism is consequent upon the existence of so many ethnic nationalities in Nigeria has created ethnicity as intractable problem in the polity. Nigeria has been embroiled with identity crisis right from the time of amalgamation of Northern and Southern Protectorates in 1914 by Frederick Lord Lugard. Nigeria is composed of over 250 ethnic groups agitating for recognition and sometimes autonomous from the Federation (Aro, 2013:424-436). The growth of nationalism and the subsequent emergence of political parties based on tribalism rather than national interest have been responsible for the root causes of the civil war (Madiebo, 1980:9).

The formation of Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in 1936 by Samuel Akinsaya, H.O. Davies , Ernest Ikoli , Dr. J.C. Vaughan and Obafemi Awolowo. The breakup of NYM was because of an inbuilt fissionist tendency, it was unable to consolidate the various anti-colonial pressures. It became riddled with internal dissensions and subsequently, an unwholesome rivalry between Ernest Ikoli and Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe over who stands for a vacant legislative council seat finally culminated in the demise of Nigerian Youth Movement in 1941 and convulsed into the formation of tribal unions that metamorphosed into the three various political parties. The departure of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe led to eventual formation of two cultural Unions, the Igbo State Union and Egbe Omo Oduduwa. These were the inner wheels of the political parties. The National Council of Nigerian Citizens (NCNC) and the Action Group (AG) were formed in 1944 and 1948 respectively marking the inception of ethnic politics in Nigeria (Uwakwe, 2004:73). The Jam'yyar Mutanen Arewa (JMA) metamorphosed into the Northern People's Congress (NPC). These three Political Parties operated from the ethnic background of their formation.

The 1959 and the 1964 General Elections contested by these political parties fostered and blossomed tribalism and ethnic nationalism. The NPC was Hausa –Fulani dominated, the NCNC was Igbo dominated while AG became the darling of the Yoruba. Misgiving, mistrust and distrust reigned supreme among the nationalists who paid attention to their ethnic affiliations rather than national interest and cohesion. The inability to manage the convulsions of ethnic politics became the Pandora box that imploded the First Republic. The subsequent military intervention in Nigeria politics and the cataclysm of the civil war in 1967-1970 were fissures and off-springs of ethnic nationalism.

In the Second Republic 1979-1983, the formation of political parties were ethnic driven and clouded. The five political parties that featured during the period bore ethnic colorations and tinges. The parties were the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), the Nigeria's Peoples Party (NPP), Great Nigeria Peoples Party (GNPP), and the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP).

Also in the botched Third Republic 1992-1993 experienced the formation of two political parties namely: the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and the National Republican Convention (NRC). Chief MKO Abiola on the platform of SDP and Bashiru Tofa on the platform of NRC were campaigning with ethnic biases. The soul of the Third Republic was murdered on the altar of ethnicity when Gen. Ibrahim Babangida annulled 1993 Presidential Elections on the ground that his ethnic party (NRC) was defeated at the polls. The election was adjudged free and fair within the domestic and international context; so there was no justifiable and sufficient reason for the annulment.

At the demise of the Third Republic, multiple parties came on board during the reign of Gen. Sani Abacha. The following parties emerged as the United Nigeria Congress Party (UNCP), the Democratic Party of Nigeria (DPN), the National Centre Party of Nigeria (CPN), the Grassroot Democratic Movement (GDM) and the Congress for National Consensus (CNC), which were at one point ridiculed by the Late Attorney General and Minister for Justice, Bola Ige as the five fingers of a leperous hand. (Uwakwe, 2004:74) The sudden demise of Maximum Dictator Abacha Sani saw the end of these aforementioned parties.

In the build up towards the emergence of the Fourth Republic, the emergence of three Political Parties as Peoples Democratic Party (PDP), Alliance for Democracy (AD) and the All Peoples Party (APP). The choice of Olusegun Obasanjo on the Platform of PDP was hinged on ethnic consideration to placate the agitation of the South Westerners over the annulment of 1993 June 12 Presidential Elections. Ethnicity has been the motive force controlling the party politics along ethnic affiliations. It soars high and stands as the tinder box that is capable of shipwrecking the Nigerian polity. Care must be taken by the present Nigerian State to weather and nip in the bud the omnibus phenomenon of ethnic nationalism in order to ensure the continuous stay of Nigeria's corporate entity.

ELECTORAL VIOLENCE & SECTARIAN POLITICAL BEHAVIOUR

Political behavior describes specific types of behavior namely: that pattern of behaviour in society which relates to power, in order to increase power, to protect power, to modify power or use power in advancing the individual or the collectivity from any already given power position (Adeleye, 2013:21). Political behavior of the people is based on the growth of their political culture. Voting is the most potent of all symbols of popular rule and therefore a powerful ingredient in the legitimacy of regime (Okolie, 2004:19).

Generally, the history of electoral politics in Nigeria has not been encouraging. Electoral politics has always be a source of unrestrained resentments, irrational actions and political instability (Ake, 1990:1). The General Elections of 1964/65, 1979, 1983, 1993, 1998/9, 2003, 2007 and 2011 were reflections of the nature and character of the political behavior of Nigerians rooted in electoral violence and ethnic chauvinism. The voting behavior has not shifted from sectarianism to secularity characteristics of most liberal democracies in the comity of nations. Nigeria as a modern state should imbibe the attributes of modern states within the circle of international system.

At the dawn of the Fourth Republic, President Obasanjo took the reins of power with the toga and cloak of President emanating from a warped and bias electoral system. All elections conducted under Obasanjo were all bizarre in terms of electoral fraud and violence. The reoccurrence of electoral fraud and violence continues to characterize the Nigerian polity today. The 2011 General Elections were not left out in terms of violent electoral behavior.

The post election crisis emanating from 2011 General Elections cannot be forgotten in a hurry in the annals of Nigerian politics. Many Nigerians died in scores of hundreds especially the Youth Corps members serving in the Northern parts of the country. This proves the fact that Nigeria is still wobbling on the foundation of sectarian voting behavior. The reason for this act is traced to ethnic nationalism owing to the view that particular candidate from a given ethnic origin never won as believed by his tribal men. The conduct of election in Nigeria is always the acid test on the survival of Nigeria. A nation with this prevalent behavior should be wary of unexpected consequence capable of undoing the conglomerate. It is obvious that under the atmosphere of electoral violence, human rights violations and abuses take toll on the citizens. The question of insecurity, political assassinations, death, arson, refugee problems and displacement that are rife in today's Nigeria attest to the magnitude of human rights violations and abuses. Sectarian political behavior, human rights violations, and electoral violence are the umpteen tasks and challenges facing the contemporary Nigeria.

DEVELOPMENT ILLUSION, DEMOCRACY & DEMOCRATIZATION

Traditional and contemporary societies are characterized with essence and reality of the phenomenon of development and governance be it democracy or monarchy. Development is a universal concept that applies to all and sundry in the contemporary history. Nigeria as a State has been grappling with the forces and nitty –gritty of development from her evolution to the contemporary time. At independence, several development plans had come and gone without due impact and outcome. This shows that Nigeria is yet to come to terms fully with the concrete evidence of development. What then development is as obtained in the contemporary world?

The category of development has been riddled with obfuscation, obtuseness and byzantine criss-crossing diverse intellectual conceptualization and persuasions. At this juncture, we attempt at defining the concept of development and situating it within the parameters of contemporary reality in Nigeria.

Development implies at level of the individual increased skill, and capacity, greater freedom, creativity, self discipline, responsibility and material well being (Walter, 1972:1). Development takes place through the interaction of the individual with physical environment. Nigeria as State cannot be said to have embraced development since the State has alienated the individuals from the structures and institutions that aid basic interactions with the environment. The basic truth is that development has failed in Nigeria. Contemporarily, since the citizens are poor, unemployed and without the indexes of human capital development, scientific and traditional skills are thrown away attesting to Nigeria's underdevelopment.

The critical issues of poor infrastructure, roads, electricity, water, and housing attest to the fact that Nigeria is underdeveloped in the 21st century. Development is cumulative and aim at increasing the welfare of the people in social and political environment. Obasanjo and Mabogunji argue that development involves:

- a. knowledge and understanding
- b. Information. Statistical and non statistical
- c. Technological creativity; and
- d. The right kind of organization and skills (Obasanjo & Mabogunji, 1991:5)

Situating Nigeria in the above paradigm, one will not hesitate to subscribe that it is in bad state of development be it economic, social and political development.

DEVELOPMENT AND DEMOCRACY MATRIX

“Democracy is intended to engender development, while on the other hand development is expected to sustain and enhance democracy, thus, the major hindrance to the institutionalization of democracy in the Third World countries is basically their respective states.

“ Many factors have been offered to explain the apparent failure of the development enterprise in Africa ; the colonial legacy, social pluralism and centrifugal tendencies, the corruption of leaders, poor labour discipline, the lack of entrepreneurial skills , poor planning and incompetent management, inappropriate policies, the stifling of market mechanism, low levels of technical assistance, the limited inflow of foreign capital, falling commodity prices and unfavourable terms of trade, and low levels of saving and investment. These factors are not irrelevant to the problem. Alone or in combination they could be serious impediments to development”.

The basic factors enunciated above are rife and prevalent in Nigeria depicting the apparent failure of development. The question remains that a nation with the above problems should pay particular attention to addressing them rather than executing centenary celebration with fanfare and costly elaborations. Our simple advice is that centenary celebration is not our national day, and should not be tinkered and toyed with amidst these mammoth indexes of underdevelopment”. (Obasanjo & Mabogunji, 1991:85)

The relationship between democracy and development cannot be overemphasized. A good democracy and democratization can engender effective and functional development. The composite character and nature of Nigerian polity has not created a favorable milieu for democracy, and therefore development is substantially a mirage.

Clark M.I. argues that Nigerian situation is pictured thus

“Nigeria is home to many nationalities or ethnic groups. They are the repositories of all that is authentic and distinct in Nigeria. Nigeria is also the home of many religions: Islam, Christianity and African Traditional Religion. The second truth is that Nigeria has been in crisis position since independence chiefly as a result of conflicts emanating from ethnicity or the forces of reproductive symbolism. This has immobilized political will and, therefore social and economic development of Nigeria” (Ikejiani, 2000:1).

The failure of development manifesting in poor infrastructure, bad roads, failure of electricity and abundance of social problems in the polity is attributed to analysis given by Clark M I above. Nigeria has to overcome the problems of ethnicity and its attendant centrifugal forces before democracy and development can be achieved meaningfully. It is actually wasteful to embark on centenary celebration and building a Centenary City meant for the political class who has arisen in social status courtesy of corruption and prebendalism. It is not mass and people centered programmes. It is axiomatic that any advice given to the present government not to celebrate centenary jamboree falls on the deaf ear, but the truth must be told always.

INCHOATE LEADERSHIP & POLITICAL CORRUPTION

The challenge of good leadership in Nigeria has been a refrain and talked about just like the English Weather by Nigerians. The factor of ethnicity and its attendant centrifugal forces contributes to making good leadership and good governance a mirage in a polity where we have abundant human resources. Tribalism, patron client debacle, cronyism, chauvinism, political corruption are centrifugal forces that immobilize the political will and economic development. On this topical issue Achebe has this to say:

“The trouble with Nigeria is simply and squarely a failure of leadership. The Nigerian problem is the unwillingness or inability of its leaders to rise to the personal examples which are the hallmarks of true leadership” (Achebe, 1981:14)

Achebe’s analysis depicts the pathology of leadership problem in Nigeria, and its attendant issues of poor infrastructure and underdevelopment amidst the plethora of natural resources. Leadership question creates the problems of godfatherism, corruption, poverty, terrorism, political violence, abuse of franchise and disenfranchisement, dependence verse independence of electoral commission (both at State and Federal levels), stunted national development, class and ethno-religious problem” (Ani, 2011:68). Until and when the albatross of bad leadership is obliterated in the polity, Nigerian cannot develop diametrically. Another omnibus and octopus problem is the ingrained and enduring phenomenon of political corruption. Corruption is now an acceptable value system, promoted and eulogized among the citizens. Attainment of political position enhances one’s opportunity to unbridled wealth accumulation: this has enthroned patronage and spoils system in the political system. The flood of political corruption remains quite intractable begging for a radical departure from the status quo. The emergence of Economic and Financial Crime Commission (EFCC) and Independent Corrupt Practices and other Related Offences Commission (ICPC) to fight the ugly trend and menace of corruption has not yielded positive results.

The reason is simple that who tend to fight corruption are involved the vortex and matrix of corruption. The State Pardon granted to some Nigerians recently by President Goodluck Jonathan has moral implication viewed from the trajectory of the crimes associated with those who received the State Pardon.

At the State and Federal echelon, the issue of corruption remains the major problem. Since 1999 to the present day, corruption had swept many Principal Officers of the National Assembly; an ill wind that blows Nigeria no good. We shall not delve into naming and categorizing sectors that have been crippled by corruption, but establish that corruption is systemic emanating from our prevailing value system. The dominant value system in Nigeria is one that glorifies and endorses corrupt and illegal means as necessary, normal and sufficient means to ends” (Umez, 2000:53). The fight against corruption should be surgical and total.

SECURITY DILEMMA & CHALLENGES

The ethnic and religious composition of Nigeria makes it volatile to insecurity and violence. The several riots in the Northern Nigeria from 1953 Kano riot to the present Boko Haran onslaught emanate from ethnic jingoism, chauvinism and religious fundamentalism. The Kaduna religious riots of 2000, Jos ethno-religious killings are all typical examples that

ethnicity and religion are responsible. The Nigeria Biafra war was fought on the altar of ethnicity.

The present security problems where some States in the Northern Nigeria are made desolate courtesy of everyday bombing by the marauding Islamic sect Boko Haram defines Nigeria as a terrorist State. The group is hell bent on overrunning the Nigerian security apparatuses thereby winning the war of totally Islamizing the polity. At inception in 2009, President Musa Yar'adua demonstrated capacity and capability in tackling the sect, but the present leadership appears rudderless in the fight against the menace of Boko Haram. As Nigeria prepares for 2015 General Elections, one wonders how elections can be conducted in Nigeria especially in the affected States of Borno, Gombe, Kano, Yobe, Bauchi and Kaduna.

The issue is that the State should prioritize security, and create adequate structures to address the problems of insecurity, if our corporate Statehood should be preserved and maintained. Security operatives should be overhauled and government should exhibit a hard posture towards tackling the phenomenon of insecurity. Security is people's relative feeling of being free from economic, political, social, cultural and psychological fear. Insecurity is people's relative feeling of the presence of economic, political, social cultural and psychological fear (Onoja, 2012:448). Nigerians deserve utmost security to enable them be free and go about their legitimate businesses in any part of the federation. Nigerians are no long concerned about the worst form of insecurity which is economic resulting from the prevailing poverty situation, but are praying the government to protect them physically preferring to wallow in the economic poverty than the present security environment.

FEDERALISM/FUNCTIONAL CONSTITUTION

“Federalism is that form of government where the component units of a political organization participate in sharing powers and function in a co-operative manner through the combined forces of ethnic pluralism and cultural diversity. Delicate arrangements of this kind, were carefully worked out, provide sufficient room for the co-existence of centre-seeking and centre-fleeing forces” (Tamuno, 2003:13).

The assertion and thesis above show how a successful federalism tend to exist. It is historically known that Nigeria federalism was politico-social contraption of colonialism and imperialism. It was actually foisted on Nigeria with the instruments devised by Niger Committee of Lord Suboune in 1898, laying the groundwork for the amalgamation of Nigeria in 1914 by Lord Lugard. The constitutions of Benard Beurduillon and Lord Milverton evolved the idea of federalism and subsequently pursued by other colonial governors leading to the political independence in 1960.

But because salient questions associated with this kind of Nigerian federalism have not been resolved; they tend to present centrifugal challenges such as: ethnic nationalism, State creation, national question and citizenship question. In order to correct the structural defects attendant to Nigerian federalism, previous governments embarked upon State creation: 19 States in 1976, 21 States in 1987, 30 States in 1991 and 36 States in 1996. These attempts were aimed at dousing the political tension in the polity; but the agitation for the creation of more States continues to gather momentum owing to the fact that every group wants a State of their own. We advocate that more States should not be created, but creation of more local governments on equal basis across the States of the federation. When this is done, the present States should be collapsed and local governments taking the places of States with equal

allocation from the federation account. This will ensure diametric and holistic development in every nook and cranny in Nigeria. This view should be pursued to make Nigeria better.

Another problem attendant to Nigerian federalism is lack of working and functioning constitution. From 1922 constitution to the present 1999 constitution, workable constitution has eluded the country. Several constitutional conferences held under the military regimes never produced working constitution acceptable to Nigerians. The present administration under the auspices of the National Assembly is tinkering with the amendment of the 1999 constitution. The question is how far will this attempt go to give Nigeria a better constitution that serves the peculiar needs of the country?

CONCLUSION

The historical peregrination of Nigeria between 1914 and 2014 has been tortuous, eventful and creates a lot of ripples. The conglomeration of over 250 ethnic groups amounted to amalgamation without unity. This has been dangerous and costly to the people of Nigeria. The present government attempt to lavish money on One Hundred years centenary celebration makes mockery of nation with these untold problems to galloway and gambol about in the name of celebration. We opine that massive and plethora public opinions should be mounted in order to nip in the bud this ostentatious spending by the political class sans proper examination and finding panacea to our excruciating issues and challenges threatening the country is enough to give a worthy sleepless night let alone finding time for wasteful party. The paper has dissected and x-rayed the various issues and challenges facing the current Nigeria. These challenges which the paper has addressed include: ethnic nationalism, electoral violence and sectarian political violence, development-democracy matrix, inchoate leadership and political corruption, security dilemma, federalism and functional constitution as the major issues that must be resolved before Nigeria will grow politically and economically. Nigeria has the avalanche of human and material resources, and all factors threatening her should be extirpated and expunged forthwith. Nigeria is our beautiful bride and must be treated with utmost care.

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