

## **Federalism And The Challenges Of Nation-Building In Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

Federalism is often regarded as the appropriate governmental principle for countries with huge ethno-cultural diversities. Nigeria, with over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups inherited a federal system from Britain in 1960 and successive governments have attempted, with varying degrees of sincerity and commitment, to operate federal institutions that can accommodate the country's ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversities and nurture a sense of national unity. However, the leaders of these governments, at all levels, have failed to fulfil their obligations to offer good governance anchored on equitable political arrangements, transparent administrative practices and accountable public conduct. Indeed, failure to encourage genuine power sharing has triggered dangerous rivalries between the central government and the thirty six states governments over revenue from the country's oil and other natural resources. The defective federal structure has also promoted bitter struggles between interests groups to capture the state and its attendant wealth; and facilitated the emergence of violent ethnic militias, while politicians exploit and exacerbate inter-communal tensions for selfish reasons. Thus, communities throughout the country increasingly feel marginalized and alienated from the Nigerian state. This writer contends that the deeply flawed federal system in Nigeria constitutes a grave threat to national integration, stability and development; and that unless the government properly engages the underlying issues of resource control, power sharing, equal rights and accountability, the country will face an internal crisis of increasing and dangerous proportions. This paper seeks to examine the contentious issues in Nigeria's federal arrangement, and the challenges they pose for nation-building and national stability.

### **Introduction**

There is a general consensus that almost half a century after independence, Nigeria is yet to resolve the problem of nation-building. Indeed, it seems that over the years the centrifugal forces are on the ascendancy. The difficulty in forging a united nation after independence has often provoked doubts and debates as to the viability

of the Nigerian project. Federalism is widely regarded as the appropriate governmental principle for countries with huge ethno-cultural diversities. Nigeria, with over two hundred and fifty ethnic groups inherited a federal system from Britain in 1960 and ever since, successive governments have attempted, with varying degrees of commitment and success, to operate federal institutions that can accommodate the country's ethnic, cultural, religious and linguistic diversities and nurture a sense of national unity. However, these governments at all levels have failed to fulfil their obligations of good governance anchored on equitable political arrangements, transparent administrative practices and accountable public conduct. In fact, failure to encourage genuine power sharing has triggered dangerous rivalries between the central government and the thirty-six states governments over revenue from the country's oil and other natural resources. The defective federal structure has also promoted bitter struggles between interests groups to capture the state and its attendant wealth; and facilitated the emergence of violent ethnic militias, while politicians exploit and exacerbate inter-communal tensions for selfish reasons. Thus, communities throughout the country increasingly feel marginalized and alienated from the Nigerian state. This writer contends that the deeply flawed federal system in Nigeria constitutes a grave threat to national integration, stability and development, and that unless the government properly engages the underlying issues of resource control, power sharing, equal rights and accountability, the country will continue to face an internal crisis of increasing and dangerous proportions. This paper, therefore, seeks to examine the contentious issues in Nigeria's federal arrangement, and the challenges they pose for nation-building, national stability and development. For ease and clarity of analysis, this essay is in four sections, namely, (i) introduction (ii) Overview of Nigerian Federalism (iii) Contending Issues in Nigerian Federalism and (iv) conclusion.

### **Overview of the Evolution of Nigerian Federalism**

That the origin of Nigerian federalism is traceable to British Colonial rule is no longer new. However, opinion varies on the basic reason for its introduction. Some scholars opine that federalism was introduced in Nigeria by the British for administrative convenience. Some are of the view that Britain imposed federalism on Nigeria in order to maintain some control on the country after independence. Others believe that the British colonialists adopted federalism in Nigeria to solve the problem of how to keep the large and ethnically diverse groups of people together. Regardless of the status of each of these arguments, all the viewpoints are useful in tracing the origin of federalism in Nigeria.

The origin of the federal system in Nigeria can be traced to the amalgamation of the Southern and Northern Protectorates in 1914. The federal structure began to form in 1939 under Sir Bernard Bourdillon who divided the Southern Protectorates into two. The Richards and Macpherson constitutions of 1946 and 1951 respectively only created a decentralized unitary system. The practice of federalism in Nigeria was officially adopted through the Lyttleton Constitution of 1954 as it was the first genuine federal constitution of the country. The constitution was introduced due to the crises generated by the Macpherson constitution, especially the motion of self-government, and the Kano riots of 1953. These events convinced the colonial

administration that considerable regional autonomy must be granted to the regional governments and that only federalism could hold the Nigerian peoples together.<sup>1</sup> Nigerian federalism became consolidated at independence, and since then, it has been operating in both political and fiscal contexts, although not in full consonance with the basic principles of federal practice. Historically, Nigeria's federal system has oscillated between the excessive regionalism that marked the First Republic (1960 – 1966) and the excessive centralization of the military, and relatively, the post-military era. Nigerian federalism overtime has also undergone structural changes by which the federation moved from its initial three-region structure at independence to a four-region structure by 1964, and to its current thirty-six states structure including seven hundred and seventy - four local governments. These changes have been necessitated by the need for a balanced federation that would give all nationalities self-actualization and fulfillment. However, these changes have increased imbalances in the Nigerian federation as exemplified in continued centralization and concentration of power at the centre with its attendant consequences. True, state and local government creation exercises have helped to spread development across the country to some extent; it is equally true that in spite of the structural changes, the Northern region remains dominant over others so much that it is the decider on matters of joint deliberation.<sup>2</sup>

The dominant and domineering posture of the Northern region over other sections of the country is traceable to the advent of the federal system in Nigeria. Extant sources show that the North's 281,782 square miles constitute three quarters of the country's total land mass.<sup>3</sup> Due to this uneven structure, even when new states are created, the North continues to occupy over 50% of states in the country. Thus, the Northern geopolitical zone enjoys certain advantages in terms of resource allocation and federal appointments, particularly in cases where state representation is adopted as criteria. This arrangement is a clear violation of one of the core principles of federalism, that of relative equality of component units in a federation. The arrangement is also a fulfillment of Mill's Law of Federal Instability which states that no federation can be stable when one part of it constitutes a permanent majority in joint deliberations.<sup>4</sup> Nigerian federalism has thus not been able to adequately promote national integration and development as the country continues to face various protestations and agitations by groups against the current federal structure.

Concerning fiscal federalism, access to political power at the centre is perhaps the most crucial factor in resource distribution and revenue allocation. In such situation, the 'group' that controls political power at the centre ultimately controls revenue allocation and thus has the opportunity to expropriate a larger share to its own advantage to the detriment of the wealth producers. This scenario is exemplified by the consistent and systematic relegation of derivation as the principle of revenue allocation since 1951.<sup>5</sup> Expropriation of the larger percentage of national wealth by the various Nigerian governments, particularly since the advent of military rule,<sup>6</sup> is a clear violation of the federal principle that requires the availability of adequate resources to support both the central government and federating units. According to Kenneth Wheare, if the Central government is able to finance itself while the Regional governments are unable to do so, true federalism will not be possible, no matter how much the latter desire a federal union or enact a federal constitution

because the units would soon find it impossible to discharge their functions, or can only do so by depending on the central government.<sup>7</sup> This viewpoint illustrates one of the grave contradictions in Nigerian federalism whereby the states rely heavily on the federal government that claims the greatest portion of national resources. The recent face-off between the Lagos State Government and the Obasanjo-led Federal Government over the latter's with-holding of the former's Local Government statutory allocations is an eloquent testimony on the evils of excessive concentration and centralization of fiscal and political powers in the federal government.

In all, serious contradictions in Nigeria's federal system such as the colonial factor, military rule, structural imbalance, over-centralization of power in the central government have overtime perpetuated various thorny issues and challenges within the Nigerian federation. We shall now turn to the contending issues in the Nigerian federation.

### **Contending Issues In Nigerian Federalism**

Since the attainment of independence in 1960, a number of national issues have generated heated debates and crises, sometimes threatening the entire fabric of the Nigerian State. These include:

- (i) State Creation and the Minority Question,
- (ii) Military Intervention in Governance,
- (iii) Oil and Minority Agitations,
- (iv) Ethno-religious Conflicts,
- (v) Federal Character Dilemma,
- (vi) Corruption, and
- (vii) Leadership crisis.

### **State Creation and the Minority Question**

The issues surrounding state creation worldwide revolve around general socio-economic development, particularly in developing countries where the quest for rapid development is often anchored upon ethnic affiliations. The twin issue of state creation and minority question is as old as Nigeria. In fact, since the colonial era the Minority Question has been a recurrent decimal and has been responsible for many crises of nation-building in the country. Various Nigerian nationalities have always hinged their developmental aspirations on ethnic identities, with the majority ethnic groups (Hausa, Yoruba and Igbo) having recorded much greater success in development in relation to their minority counterparts.

As early as 1957, the minority groups in the three regions (North, West and East) demanded the creation of more states for an effective federal structure, and these agitations led to the establishment of numerous political parties such as the Benin and Delta Peoples Party formed in 1953, Midwest State Movement (1956), Calabar-Ogoja River States Movement (1954), United Middle Belt Congress and the Borno Youth Movement.<sup>8</sup> However, the 1957 Constitutional Conference did not resolve the problem of the minorities, instead it passed it on to the Willinks Minorities Commission which although accepted that there were bases for minority fears, but nonetheless opposed the idea of the creation of new states at the time. On March 27,

1967, in the face of imminent secession by the East, the Federal Military Government disbanded the old regions and in their place created twelve states, six each in the North and South. The states were ostensibly created to promote political stability and to establish a convenient administrative system. The new Federal system, with its smaller and more sub-national units, was designed to correct the structural and administrative imbalance of the country and minimize future political friction. Within the framework of smaller units, it seemed impossible for any state to consider itself adequately self-sufficient and almost entirely independent. As Gowon put it:

The main obstacle to the future stability of this country is the present structural imbalance in the Nigerian Federalism. Even decree no. 8 or Confederation or loose association will never survive if any one section of the country is in a position to hold others to ransom.<sup>9</sup>

There is need to point out that the state creation exercise was flawed in many respects. First, the exercise was decided and implemented in haste, involving many compromises. A number of principles were enunciated, such that no state should be able to dominate the federation, each should form a compact geographical area, and boundaries should reflect administrative convenience, the facts of history and the wishes of the people. Yet, some strange-bedfellows were grouped into the same state, and the Boundary Adjustment Committee that was set up could not find any enduring solution to the problem. As one study has put it, 'some states, such as the North Eastern, were administratively unwieldy and ethnically incompatible.'<sup>10</sup> Not surprising therefore, the creation of states created new minority groups and this strained inter-ethnic relationship. Above all, the North-South polarization remained. In its primary objective (political stability), the state creation venture was an immediate failure as it was this decision that sparked off the secession of the eastern region (Republic of Biafra). The division of the region into three states left the Ibos of the new East-Central State cut off from direct access to the sea and without the out fields of the Niger Delta, which were within the territory of the proposed Rivers State. The Ibo 'nation' was left with only one-sixth of the oil, as Port-Harcourt, with its harbours, refineries and manufacturing industry, was now in Rivers State. The Ibo political leadership therefore, saw this move as a deliberate attempt to sever the Ibo heartland from the oil and from the sea. Biafran secession followed, with the Eastern region hoping to influence the West into doing the same, thereby landlocking the North. However, the twelve-state creation policy in the long-run was not a mistake for the Federal Military government. It gained the support of the non-Igbo minority groups by giving them greater autonomy. So, some two-fifth of the population of the seceding territory supported federation. Elsewhere, other minorities were also re-assured. The new form of federation created enough vested interests in national unity to give the federal authorities the power they needed to crush the secession.<sup>11</sup>

However, pressure from minorities did not cease with the defeat of Biafra. The case for a further sub-division of the country was actively canvassed by ethnic groups

fearing or experiencing discrimination or domination and hoping for greater rewards from a measure of self-government. As an illustration, the Yorubas of Oyo and Ibadan who had formed the bulwark of the political opposition in the Western region up to 1966 feared discrimination after the return to civil rule scheduled for the late 1970s. Similarly, the people of Minna and Abuja in the North Western state complained of unfavourable discrimination in appointments to government posts and the provision of public services in favour of the Sokoto Emirate. The Igalas sought separation from Kwara State, the Lere from North-Eastern, the people of Southern Zaria from North central, the Urhobo, Isoko and Itshekiri peoples from the Midwest, the Ijebu from the West, and so on. In a nutshell, wherever there was a group different from the dominant political force of the area, there was pressure for the creation of more states. Thus, there were subsequent state creation exercises in 1976, 1987, 1981 and 1995 resulting in the present thirty-six state federation, emerging primarily from separatist agitations. The overall consequence of the continuous balkanization of the Nigerian federation is that political and fiscal power have become overcentralised in the Federal Government which continues to distribute resources, favours and sanctions as it wishes, while most of the thirty-six states are mere appendages of the centre that cannot survive for weeks without federal allocations.<sup>12</sup> Yet, agitations by minority elements of all kinds for the creation of additional states have continued unabated.

### **Military Intervention in Governance**

Military intervention in politics, until recently, was rampant in many Third World countries, including Nigeria. This is because the military regards itself as the only national institution capable of resolving the social, political and economic problems of the country under civilian rule. In Nigeria's fifty years of existence as an independent state, civilian rule has existed for only twenty years, while the military have held sway for thirty years. Evidently, the nature and impact of military rule on the Nigerian state overtime has continued to generate serious concern as to the justification of the involvement of the military in Nigerian governance. The military have in the past recorded modest progress in promoting national integration. But as it stands now, there seems to be a general concensus in Nigeria that the incessant military interventions in the country's administration since January, 15, 1966 constitute serious contradictions and distractions in the nation-building process.

In view of observable and objective evidence, military rule in Nigeria is both an aberration and a retrogressive phenomenon. As an illustration, the military institution represented by its leadership is a sub-class of the national controlling elite. Based on the inter-relationship within the class, military intervention in politics is a stop-gap on latent public outcry against government. Each time there is the possibility of a mass revolt by the people against oppressive and scandalous leadership, and each time the masses became restless and ready to effect a change in leadership due to the inability of the ruling class to respond adequately and effectively to popular demands, the military would intervene.<sup>13</sup> The military leadership, having toppled the previous government, use state power to restore normalcy, maintain an uneasy calm, law and order and return the country to the status quo ante. The usual abortion of the imminent mass revolts via military coups

make the military organization an obstacle to revolutionary progress, though coupists often promise an overhaul of the system in their maiden broadcast to the nation after seizing power. Experience has also shown that the leaders of successful coups may even execute some hastily conceived and cosmetic populist policies to legitimize their illegal seizure of power and therefore win public sympathy to their cause. But in spite of all the justifications that the military might cite for seizing power from a former government, there is usually the continued use of the old, decadent, corrupt and bankrupt socio-economic and political strategies with some nominal modifications and amendments.<sup>14</sup>

Specifically, the greatest damage done by the military to Nigeria's political system is the over-centralization of power coupled with the erodement of democratic values in the Nigerian federation. It is a well-known fact that, given the nature and command structure of the military institution, military rule is antithetical to both federalism and democracy. There is indeed an enormous weight of scholarly evidence<sup>15</sup> supporting the view that thirty years of military rule consistently altered Federal-State relations in favour of the former to the extent that Nigeria ultimately became more of a unitary state than a federal one. Worse still, subsequent civilian regimes have not been able to muster the necessary political will to return the country to true federalism.

### **Oil and Minority Agitations**

Agitations by ethnic minority groups, particularly in the Niger Delta, over the allocation and control of oil revenue, compensation for environmental degradation arising from oil exploration, and political marginalization, appear to be the greatest challenge to nation-building and national stability in Nigeria, in recent times. Oil, the mainstay of Nigeria's mono-cultural economy, has been a source of persistent discontent and turmoil since the colonial era.

The immediate post-independence era witnessed an attempt by Isaac Adako Boro to establish the Republic of the Niger Delta following the failure of the 1957 Constitutional Conference to resolve the problem of the minorities. From this period up to the early 1990s, minority agitations over resource distribution and control were characterized by peaceful demonstrations and externalization of demands. Many peaceful protests and demands for justice and equity were registered without success. Similarly, the oil producing communities often resorted to litigation, which usually ended in unfavourable verdicts.<sup>16</sup> Letters were also written to the various post-independence administrations on the Niger Delta problem. Due to the failure of these efforts, the agitators moved further by making representation to government at all levels to make their letters effective. However, in most cases, apart from the usual warm reception and empty promises no tangible achievement was recorded.<sup>17</sup> During the period also, demonstrations were staged in the Niger Delta and other places during which pamphlets and banners were displayed to further draw attention to the increasing crisis in the region. Letters were delivered in the affected state capitals, Abuja and Lagos in order to gain government attention.

Externalisation of agitations by the oil minorities soon emerged mainly as a result of increasing centralization of the ownership and control of oil, and the politicization of the revenue allocation system by the Federal government to the detriment of the oil-



producing minority states. In flagrant violation of the principles of fiscal federalism, Decree 51 of 1969 gave the Federal government complete ownership of all petroleum resources in Nigeria. The Offshore Oil Revenue Decree No. 9 gave the Federal government total control over the entire revenue accruable from offshore oil wells in the coastal waters adjoining the oil minorities, thereby cutting them off finally from direct oil revenue, and deepening their dependence on the majority groups for a share of the oil wealth. The oil-producing minorities, thus, became alienated from their own resources, and this intensified the struggle between them and the Nigerian State, which, through its over-centralization of political and fiscal power sought to exploit and dominate them alongside their strategic resources. Furthermore, the Federal government abandoned derivation as the principle of revenue allocation in favour of the principles of equality and population of states, in response to the shift of the country's source of wealth from agriculture to petroleum, and the desire of the major ethnic groups to continuously control national revenue.<sup>18</sup> Oil minority agitations assumed a very militant and violent character from the early 1990s which ushered in the emergence of ethnic militias and the attendant violent protestations against economic and political marginalization by the Federal government. The new wave of violence is traceable to Gen. Babangida and Gen Abacha regimes' chronic intolerance for unfavourable public opinion; and the Odi massacre carried out by the Obasanjo civilian government. It must be emphasized that the character of the regimes, particularly those of Babangida and Abacha deepened the contradictions and crisis of the Nigerian federation, culminating in the rise of ethnic militias such as the Niger Delta Peoples Volunteer Force (NDPVF), Niger Delta Vigilantes (NDV), Egbesu, Ijaw National Congress (INC), Urhobo National Union, Martyrs Brigade, Niger Delta Liberation Army (NDLA), Chikoko Movement, Coalition for Militant Action in the Niger Delta (COMA) and the Movement for Emancipation of the Niger Delta (MEND). Peaceful protests of the previous decades consequently gave way to violent militancy. In recent years, the agitations have become increasingly militant and radical, including calls for self-determination and outright secession, all of which have had negative socio-political and economic effects on the country's nation-building process. First, the violent confrontations constitute a serious threat to personal freedom and the security of lives and property. This is because the activities of ethnic militias often caused widespread killings and destruction of property, while government's responses to the crisis through military operations led to civilian deaths and the destruction of many communities with its attendant socio-economic consequences. Second, violent agitations have also resulted in huge loss of national revenue due to large-scale vandalization of oil facilities, disruption of oil exploration, and widespread oil bunkering. Third, increased violence in the Niger Delta has undermined Nigeria's international image, as many outsiders hold the general view that security has broken down in the country as a whole, and not in the Delta region alone. National insecurity and instability is, by far, the greatest threat posed to Nigeria by violent agitations for resource distribution and control by the oil minorities. Escalating violence and attacks by ethnic militias in the area during this Fourth Republic constitute serious threats to the country's democracy, security and nation building.



### **Ethno-Religious Conflicts**

Whereas federalism is widely acclaimed as the appropriate governmental principle for societies with vast ethnic, religious and cultural diversities, the Nigerian federation has been be-devilled with bitter ethno-religious crises since independence. Even in this fourth Republic where democratic processes were initially thought to be more disposed to mediating the country's diversities peacefully, violent ethnic conflicts have been more rampant, thereby slowing down national progress and threatening national unity and stability.

Poverty is a dominant factor in the rising trend of ethno-religious conflicts in Nigeria. Poverty, which is manifested in both unemployment and deterioration of social infrastructure, provides the bedrock for ethnic conflicts. Many people are unemployed. Many functional factories are not working to full capacity, leading to retrenchment of workers and an increase in the unemployment figure. Those who escape retrenchment and are still working find it increasingly difficult to collect their salaries, as some employers sometimes owe their workers salaries amounting to many months or atimes years.<sup>19</sup> Most families, therefore find it difficult to feed themselves or cater for other essential needs like shelter, clothing and healthcare. Due to this pathetic scenario, family norms and values have collapsed across the country, as most parents can no longer adequately control their children, kith and kin. This situation provides ample opportunity for ethno-religious conflicts because the jobless youths and hungry children become ready tools of selfish leaders in fomenting trouble and causing conflicts across the country. The promise of a meager amount of money with little enjoyment makes the youths ever willing to undertake such a venture. They are overwhelmed by the available goodies and booties without serious consideration for the consequences of their actions.

Furthermore, prolonged military rule manifested in the forceful suppression of the ethnic aspirations of many minority groups, while the monopolization of power by the majority groups stimulated violent conflicts afterwards. In addition, the shift of Presidential Power to the South led to some agitations, which were given religious coloration, and these agitations also elicited reactions from some elements in the South who continuously clamoured for a favourable system of revenue distribution and resource control. Ethno-religious conflicts in this era have been further heightened by the citizen/indigene syndrome, Land ownership and the indigene/settler debacle have always generated security concern in the country, particularly in the Fourth Republic. Even within the same ethnic group, the problem of who owns the land, who is an indigene and who is a settler, are sources of violent disputes. For example, the Ife and Modakeke are Yoruba, while the Aguleri and Umuleri are Igbo, yet land disputes among these sub – ethnic groups have been intense and devastating in terms of large scale destruction of lives and property. In addition to intra – group conflicts, inter – ethnic conflicts have been on the rise in recent times, especially between the Urhobos and Itshekiris in Delta State, Tivs and Jukuns in Benue State, Ijaws and Ilajes in Ondo State, Jukuns and Kutebs in Taraba State and the Hausa – Fulani against Northern Minorities in most of the Northern States.<sup>20</sup> The wave of religious violence across the country, particularly in the North, is due to the politicization of religion by the selfish ruling elite who

manipulate religious emotions of the masses for selfish personal and elitist objectives. But, Nigeria, as an heterogeneous and multi – religious society, must promote its secularity at all cost. Moreover, the less the government involves itself in religious matters, the better for national development, nation – building and peaceful co – existence.

### **The Federal Character Dilemma**

Federal character and its application is another contentious issue in the Nigerian Federation. Federal Character, which was a key provision in the 1979 Republic Constitution, has been a major source of tension in Nigerian Federalism. According to its enacting law:

The composition of the federation or any of its agencies and the conduct of its affairs shall be carried in such manner as to reflect the federal character of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that government or in any of its agencies.<sup>21</sup>

Put simply, Federal Character is a euphemism for ethnic balancing. It is an instrumentality for ensuring unity in diversity by balancing official appointments between groups and within the officer corps of the armed forces.<sup>22</sup> There is need to emphasize that the controversial idea of Federal Character, which has become an integral part of Nigeria's federal system, is not peculiar to Nigeria. For example, the United States of America too applies it in the form of "Affirmative Action" and India too as "Quota System" in several areas.<sup>23</sup> However, what has happened in practice in Nigeria since 1979 is that the conflicting interpretation and faulty implementation of the Federal Character principle elicited results that were almost completely opposed to the aims of promoting national unity and loyalty. Clearly, these problems contributed immensely to the contradictions and disharmony that have since marred inter – governmental and inter – group relations in the country.

### **Corruption**

Corruption is a global phenomenon but it is more prevalent and destructive in the Third World countries. That corruption in Nigeria has become an endemic problem threatening the country's socio – economic and political development is common knowledge. While acknowledging the threat of corruption to the Nigerian State, Hon. Ghali Umar Na' Abba, former Speaker of Nigeria's House of Representatives declared in 2003 that"

While we cannot rule out the incidence of corruption and bribery in almost every facet of our society, it is particularly resident in the infrastructure areas in ministries or monopolistic parastals saddled with the task of making

infrastructure available to the public – water, telecommunication, electricity (NEPA), roads and railways (NRC).<sup>24</sup>

In that same year, a Central Bank of Nigeria Director stated that “the avalanche of frauds and unprofessional / unethical practices in the industry in recent years is eroding public confidence in the system”<sup>25</sup> In 2004, Transparency International (TI), the world – acclaimed anti – corruption watchdog, ranked Nigeria as the third most corrupt country in the world, after Haiti and Bangladesh. It also stated that billions of dollars are lost to bribery in public purchasing, particularly in the oil sector of the economy. Furthermore, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) declared that Nigeria has maintained a seventy percent rise in poverty in spite of an income of over two hundred billion dollars in oil revenues since 1970, and her per capital income has hardly improved ever since.<sup>26</sup>

Corruption in Nigeria is, primarily, a political problem. The incidence of corruption in a nation is as a result of the lack of political will on the part of the political leadership and the inability of the state to maintain law and order. Thus, business corruption is a fall – out of the failure to tackle political corruption, which casts doubts upon the moral uprightness of the state as a whole and on the political will of the leadership to manage the affairs of the nation. It follows simple logic that where there is absence of political corruption is where the state operates under a high ethical order and upholds, protects and enforces the rule of law on itself and on its citizens. Under the rule of law and justice, the state machinery works for the good of all and there will be no stealing of public funds, inflation of contracts, forgeries, and mismanagement of money in banks, industries and government bureaucracies. In a nutshell, as it has played out in Nigeria, political corruption and business corruption are two sides of the same coin. In this regard, it is important to note that the seedy financial scandals exposed in the Fourth Republic involved several financial institutions. For example, former Inspector General of Police (IGP) Tafa Balogun’s financial frauds involved the laundering of billions of Naira under different names in different banks. Similar method was also employed by government officials involved in “Ikoyigate”, a reference to the shameful fraud involving the sale of government properties in Ikoyi, Lagos, and other financial scandals that rocked the Fourth Republic across the Local, State and Federal Government units, including the Presidency itself.<sup>27</sup>

Electoral fraud is another dimension of the corruption syndrome in Nigeria. The massively rigged General Elections of 2003 and 2007 are undoubtedly the most fraudulent in the country’s political history. By the conduct, nature and outcome of the polls, the Nigerian state clearly demonstrated its expertise and will to be corrupt, the will to corrupt the polity and the business society, coupled with the lack of will to enforce the relevant legislations against electoral and financial crimes. The electoral frauds perpetuated by the state and some political parties in 2003 was acknowledged by many international observers. The European Union Election Monitoring Mission stated that the elections were marred by serious irregularities and fraud in many states. According to the United States-based International Republican Institute (IRI), the 19<sup>th</sup> April presidential and gubernatorial elections

suffered in some parts of Nigeria as a result of numerous uncorrected administrative and procedural errors combined with many observed instances of obvious premeditated electoral manipulations”.<sup>28</sup> The Commonwealth Observer Group also observed that:

In parts of Enugu and Rivers State, proper electoral processes appear to have broken down and there was intimidation. In Rivers State in particular, our observers reported widespread and serious irregularities and vote rigging. The official results which emerged from Rivers State bore little relation to the evidence gathered by our observers on the ground.<sup>29</sup>

These statements are indeed bullet holes in the corruption – riddled political history of Nigeria. The scenario is even more pathetic when one considers the debilitating impact of fraudulent elections and the resultant governments on national development and nation building. Corruption begets corruption. A corrupt and unethical politician who emerges from a corrupt election cannot govern well.

### **Leadership Crisis**

The various challenges of nation – building, some of which have been detailed upon earlier on in this paper, have been compounded by the leadership crisis. Though, the leadership challenge, like the Sword of Damocles, hangs above all nations, the issue has however assumed a crisis dimension of monumental consequences particularly in Less Developed Countries (LDCs). Nigeria is a nation born in hope and optimism but has lived in anxiety for most of its fifty year – history due to the country’s failure to produce a nationally acceptable leadership that transcends ethnic, regional and religious boundaries, and that can unite its diverse peoples for mobilization towards national development. In the light of this, it is valid to support the argument that the basic problem with the Nigerian federation is the failure of leadership. All other factors of disunity, instability and under –development have been nurtured and given momentum by leadership failure. Criticisms against Nigerian leaders across Local, State and Federal government levels are many and justified. These include corruption, unpatriotism, selfishness, despotism, tribalism, and religious bigotry. Nigeria’s political history since independence has shown clearly through her various conflicts, coups and counter – coups, as well as a civil war, that the Nigerian ruling elite (both civilian and military) are divided along many lines, particularly along tribal, ethnic, religious and regional lines. This has led to inter – elite rivalries, mutual suspicion and status conflicts among the ruling elite. Thus, government and politics in Nigeria has been characterized by deadly competitions and conflicts of hostile subcultures arising various danger signals that occasionally threatened the continued existence of the country. Under successive Nigerian leaderships, almost every issue has been politicized and interpreted to serve as a weapon of political domination or intimidation. As a consequence, various issues like elections, census, state creation, religion, political appointments, revenue sharing and lately, resource control have ignited serious socio – political crises. This tragic situation has compelled some observers to conclude that for Nigeria to resolve her leadership

debacle she needs heroes in the form of men with extra – ordinary talents.<sup>30</sup> But this raises further problems: who are these heroes? Where, how and when shall they be found? This, in my opinion, is the crux of the Nigerian dilemma.

### **Conclusion**

The preceding discussion shows that the operation of Nigerian Federalism since 1960 has not yielded meaningful socio – economic and political development. Instead, half – hearted practice of federalism has resulted in over – centralization of fiscal and political power, creation of un – viable and federally dependent State and Local Governments, military intervention in governance increased corruption, ethnicity, and intense minority agitations over oil revenue. This paper acknowledges that the aforementioned problems of nation – building all have their roots in the 1914 amalgamation of Nigeria and colonial rule as a whole. However, while it is fruitless to resist the argument that the imperialistic motive behind the amalgamation made it more of a liability than an asset, it is also farfetched to hold colonial rule solely responsible for the near – failure of the Nigerian project. To lay all the difficulties of nation – building in contemporary Nigeria on British imperialism is to suggest that inter – group relations among pre-colonial and post- colonial Nigerian peoples have been completely cordial and harmonious. The point we are making is that the British colonizers left Nigeria fifty years ago, enough time for the Nigerian state to institute a concrete national agenda and strategy to remedy the defective federation she inherited from the British towards achieving genuine national integration and development.

Therefore, we contend that the failure by the various post – independence Nigerian leaderships to evolve an equitable mechanism for the distribution of political power and economic resources is at the root of the Nigerian problem. We maintain that there is an immutable nexus between the desire of Nigerian peoples for equitable access to power and resources on one hand, and the plethora of obstacles to nation – building, on the other. Thus, the prospects of genuine nationhood and development in Nigeria lies in a swift adoption of true federalism, not the type that super – imposes unitary tendencies and contradictions on the practice of federalism. The problems of nation – building in Nigeria would start to receive proper attention only under a truly federal system of government and the great potentials of the country would be best realized within the framework of true federalism. Some segments of the Nigerian federation are genuinely afraid of a return to true federalism as they view it as a prelude to the break – up of the country. But on the contrary, we believe that a true federal structure will consolidate Nigerian unity. It will give each nationality a breathing space and sense of belonging, allow for healthy competition and an opportunity to develop according to the ability and resources of each federating unit. A lopsided and unjust federal arrangement does no one no good, ultimately, as the bitter experience of Ethiopia and the defunct Federal Republic of Yugoslavia have shown. Those who are currently opposing a return to true federalism in Nigeria should know that they are laying land mines for future generations. Well meaning Nigerians must collectively resist this.

In conclusion, since the National Assembly and the Presidency have continually displayed lack of political will to effect fundamental structural and institutional

reforms in the federation, calling a Sovereign National Conference will be a good starting point. In this regard, we propose a six-region federal structure anchored upon the subsisting geo-political zones of the country. This should be complemented by clear-cut constitutional arrangements that would guarantee adequate fiscal and political powers for the regional and local governments to allow them operate as viable units of administration, rather than mere appendages of the central government.

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