

Review Article

DISINTEGRATION CRIES ACROSS NIGERIA: SYMBOLS OF INSTITUTIONAL DEFECTS IN ANSWERING THE NATIONAL QUESTION

ABSTRACT

The amalgamations of 1906 and 1914 factorized emergence of the geo-political entity called Nigeria. Created from more than two hundred and fifty different ethnic groups, several kingdoms, chiefdoms and loose territories unanimously wear the gown of a nation. National question, however, has been a major issue in the Nigerian context. Since independence till present epoch, the nation has always had contending issues on ethnic, religious and political party representations and shares, thus, revisiting the national question. Allowing Lord Fredrick Lugard rest in peace, this paper looks beyond the problem of the forced unification of different groups into a nation. It x-rays the state mechanisms towards resolving the national question by mitigating the factors for disintegration cries. It points out the limitations of governance in Nigeria, the cause of re-occurring challenges of nationhood. The paper proffers 'answers' to national question and concludes that upholding one Nigeria, ruled with good governance mechanisms is the best option, while mutually agreed and peaceful secession is better than disintegration laced with warfare. With analytical approach, the study adopts use of secondary sources.

Keywords: National question, disintegration, nationhood, governance

INTRODUCTION

One hundred and seven years after amalgamation and six decades after independence, Nigeria is yet to find a last answer to the National Question. National question connotes the totality of issues that can take heavy tolls on national rebirth, integration and development. It has been

defined as the perennial debate as to how to order the relations between the different ethnic, linguistic and cultural groupings so that they have some rights and privileges, access to power and an equitable share of national resources.¹

National question in Nigeria is primarily concerned with group rights, self-determination, truth, justice, fairness and respect for others.² The core of the national question consists of political mobilization and struggles by dissatisfied and aggrieved groups to redress and exact more just and equitable accommodation.³ The national question in Nigeria is multidimensional, involving religious and ideological conflicts, fear of Northern domination, the hegemonic contest among the Yoruba, Hausa-Fulani, and the Igbo as well as the struggles of the ethnic minorities. The failure to address the national question in Nigeria manifests in the suppression of group agitation through state violence, disturbing inter-group clashes, as well as challenge to state/regime legitimacy by ethnic groups.⁴

Political institutions determine the context in which policy-making occurs, and can serve as veritable instrument for resolving the national question. This is done by creating incentives for cooperation and peaceful co-existence among various groups. As such, it's assumed that states faced with tensions arising from reinforcing cleavages (ethnic, religious, linguistic to mention a few) can regulate conflicts, allay inter-group fears and suspicion, and maintain political stability through the manipulation of their political institutions. While there are several institutional strategies for resolving the national question, most classical and predominant form can be found in liberal democracies. With liberal democracy, it is assumed that the state perceives all citizens as members of a common civic nation and endeavors to treat them equally. The nation-state maintains and fosters a single language, culture, identity and public education system that seek to homogenize, integrate and assimilate the population.⁵

Within the Nigerian scope, several factors have been identified responsible for the thoughts on national question and large number of academic submissions has been presented as way out. Amongst them all, Chidume⁶ identified seven, (Ethnic nationalism and party politics, Electoral violence and party politics, Development illusion, democracy and democratization, Development and democracy matrix, Inchoate leadership and political corruption, Security dilemma and challenges, Federalism or functional constitution) and Amuni⁷ identified five (Injustice, Ethnic

egocentrism, Corruption, Lack of good governance and visionary leadership, International dynamics of crises of war and disintegration). This paper shall identify seven challenges of nationhood and provide suggestions for resolving the national question.

ANSWERING THE NATIONAL QUESTION: THE NIGERIAN GOVERNMENT APPROACHES

In an approach to answer the national question and foster national unity, Nigerian governments, before and after independence, put up certain institutional strategies. Some of which include the under-discussed:

States Creation, Zoning and Power-sharing in Nigeria

Addressing national question in Nigeria brought about demands for the creation of more states in the federation before and after independence. The earliest cases of these demands led to the establishment of the Willink Commission in 1957. The report of the Commission, which came out in 1958, sought to allay the fears of discrimination, domination, and neglect by the minority ethnic groups through the adoption of an important institutional measure: liberal democracy of Westminster model with a guarantee of the fundamental human rights. However, the disillusionment which followed the human rights approach adopted by the Willink Commission is a major impetus for several other demands on the creation of new states in the post-independent era.

With the failure of more states creation in totally solving the perceived problems of marginalization and domination, ‘zoning’ became an alternative strategy. Zoning as a solution to the national question in Nigeria attracted tremendous popularity especially in the 1990s. with this arrangement, Nigeria became divided into six geo-political zones; North-West, North-East, North-Central, South-West, South-East, and South-South. The zoning system sought to alter the existing intra-state and inter-state relations in order to encourage cooperation and co-existence in the federation. In the 1994/1995 National Constitutional Conference, many delegates favored a rotational presidency between the North and the South. However, these recommendations were abandoned following the death of the then Head of State, General Sani Abacha and the termination of his political transition to military rule. Meanwhile, the recommendation of the aforementioned National Constitutional Conference has been criticized for its opacity. Zoning between the North and South has in many ways promoted age-long dichotomy between the two parts of the country, which several regimes in Nigeria have attempted to down-tone, but to no avail.⁸

Revenue Allocation and Fiscal Federalism in Nigeria

In an effort to put the national question at a rest, the governments established set of rules for distributing national resources and ensuring fiscal equity. In this regard, the federal governments over the years appointed experts as heads of commissions and committees for thorough examination and recommendation of acceptable formulae for revenue sharing. Between 1988 and 1989, the federal government regularized the composition, powers and functions of the National Revenue Mobilization, Allocation and Fiscal Commission. This commission has been unable to provide enduring solutions to several complex and contentious issues relating to revenue sharing in Nigeria up to the present time.

Roles of the revenue allocation commissions suffered adversely from a combination of several factors including rapid changes in the personnel of federal, state, and local governments, the creation of new states and local governments, changes in the division of powers and functions under federalism, wage policies and structures for public functionaries at federal, state, and local government levels. Due to the complex nature of the process leading to the distribution of national resources in Nigeria, reaching a revenue allocation formula has become a highly politicized issue. The allocation of special funds to perennially distressed areas has intensified

inter-state rivalry as well as frictions between the federal and state governments. It has been suggested that neither the derivation principle nor any other combination of revenue allocation formulae can provide a sustainable solution to the problem of resource distribution in Nigeria.⁹ This challenge remains with the state in the contemporary time.

Adjustment of the Electoral and Party Systems in Nigeria

Solving the challenge of national question, the government equally looked into the constitutional requirements for the operation of Nigerian party system. Perhaps, that would facilitate a lasting solution. Under the 1960 and 1963 constitutions, decisions favored multi-party arrangements. However, through the process of registration, party members were restricted; in 1979 and 1983, only five and six parties respectively, passed the prescribed requirements. Under the 1989-1993 arrangement, two state-imposed parties were created. The then military government built secretariats for the both parties, drafted their constitutions, and granted them funds for basic operations. Under the 1995 draft Constitution, five parties were recognized. These parties also depended on government for funding without any visible expression of freedom of action.

The structure of the party system in Nigeria is very relevant to the national question.¹⁰ As relevant as the party system is, it has its limitations and implications on the nationhood. Until in the recent time, political parties bring about political borders along ethnic line. This makes national question remain unanswered.

Hosting National Conferences on Nigeria

Historically, it could be asserted that between 1914 and 2014, eleven Conferences were held on Nigeria. That translates to the country organizing a Conference at least once in every decade of her existence. The Conferences include:

1. Accra 1920 which led to the Clifford Constitution of 1922
2. Macpherson Constitutional Conference, Ibadan, 1950
3. London Constitutional Conference, July 30 to August 22 1953 concluded from January-February 1954 (to revise the 1951 Constitution that adopted a federal constitution)
4. Nigerian Constitutional Conference, London, May and June 1957
5. Adhoc Constitutional Conference, September 12, 1966

6. Constitution Drafting Committee (CDC), September 1975
7. Constituent Assembly, 1977
8. Constitutional Review Committee September 1987 (This culminated in the inauguration of the Constituent Assembly which gave birth to the 1989 constitution).
9. National Constitutional Conference, June 26 1994 to June 1995
10. National Political Reform Conference, February to July 2005
11. The National Conference, 2014, April-July 2014

These conferences made modest contributions towards resolving the national question at each epoch during the growth of Nigeria where each conference built upon the previous. However, the conferences were not without challenges. The major difficulty was usually the achievement of the set objectives for the conferences.¹¹

The most recent national conference is otherwise addressed as CONFAB 2014. President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan led administration sought solution to the national question and felt fulfilled with the recommendations and submissions of representatives of religious, cultural, ethnical, political parties' etc groups. In the words of the Northern and Southern delegates' heads, Alhaji Ibrahim Coomassie; *"whatever that was done at the conference was done for one Nigeria"*, and his counterpart, Chief Edwin Clark; *"we went in, came out and conquered"*¹² Nigerians assumed a united state has been achieved.

It's so pathetic, while the recommendations on national restructuring and amendment of the 1999 constitution remain jettisoned; hosting the CONFAB 2014 seems useless. Agitations and rigorous steps towards secession have taken a new approach. If not properly managed, the issue at hand might turn *'Isu ata yanyan'* (upheaval).

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Glaring to the sight of the blind and sounding to the ears of the deaf, is the contemporary socio-political situation at the precipice of disintegration of the country. The house put together by

Lord Lugard is on the brink of collapse. The country has had history of several disintegration cries that question its nationhood and bother on its sustenance.

In May 1953, riot broke out in Kano between Northerners who opposed Nigeria's independence and Southerners who supported immediate independence for Nigeria. The riot that lasted for four day claimed the life of many Southerners and Northerners.¹³ There was also January 1966 coup, led majorly by majors of Eastern origin which resulted in lopsided death of leaders of Northern and Western origin.¹⁴

The counter coup of 1966 led by officers of Northern descent, and the failure of Aburi accord to restore political orderliness, eventually led to the 30 months Nigeria civil war with indiscriminate casualties. Approximately, six million people lost their lives. The war left in its wake destruction, deprivation and anarchy.¹⁵ In 1993, the presidential election widely acclaimed to have been won by Chief Moshood Abiola was annulled by the military. There were riots as a result of the annulment.¹⁶ In essence, there have been various attempts to terminate the amalgamation; Northerners intended to move out of Nigeria in 1953 but were advised against it. Westerners opted for the idea of secession in 1993 but were pacified to stay in the union. Easterners made a bold attempt by declaring the republic of Biafra in 1967, after a three- year Ojukwu war, they were back again in the federation. Presently, the drum beats of disintegration have never been so loud. The Independent People of Biafra (IPOB) is clamoring for a separate state of Biafra out of Nigeria. IPOB has stepped up its activities and this has been a big problem to the state governments in the East and federal government in Abuja. The movement for the creation of Oduduwa republic has gained traction in the West. The activities of Boko Haram in the North East are on the rise again, after a lull. Hardly goes a day without the report of attacks on civilian and military targets, with attendant killings, destruction, kidnapping and hostage-taking. In North West, there is a banditry, brigandage, kidnapping and wanton killing. It has never been so bad! The Middle Belt is the center of the farmer-herder clash.¹⁷ The farmer-herder conflict in the Southwestern sub-region has also led to the quit notice handed over to the herders. It has also fueled the call for Oduduwa republic.¹⁸

This paper therefore, examines the national question in the light of the challenges for realizing nationhood. Looking beyond the amalgamation, as stated earlier, national question in Nigeria revolves around the following factors amongst others.

Injustice

There is great injustice, suppression and oppression in the country. It has become a state of might is right. The poor and the minority are marginalized. Individual and community rights are trampled upon with impunity. This poses challenge to realization of ideal nationhood. It aggravates the clarion call for war and disintegration. At the state level for instance, save the ongoing recruitment, in the history of Kwara State, Nigeria, no employment into Teaching Service Commission has been carried out using the standard approach of testing applicants' prowess in area of application. At the national level, it's obvious that the present administration, for instance, has severally been accused of nepotism and favoritism in appointment of national office holders.¹⁹ This as observed questions the level of equity and equal rights enjoyed by persons of Hausa-Fulani ethnic group as against others within the nation.

Ethnic nationalism, party politics and bias

The national question has been a concern since inception of political party formation in Nigeria. Nigerian Nationalism degenerated into ethnic nationalism; micro-nationalism or sub-nationalism. The growth of ethnic nationalism and the subsequent emergence of political parties based on tribalism rather than national interest have been responsible for the failure of the state in attaining nationhood.²⁰ The formation of Nigerian Youth Movement (NYM) in 1936 was by Samuel Akinsaya, H.O. Davies, Ernest Ikoli, Dr. J.C. Vaughan and Obafemi Awolowo. The breakup of NYM was because of an inbuilt fusionist 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.

The Jam'iyyar Mutanen Arewa (JMA) metamorphosed into the Northern People's Congress (NPC). These three Political Parties operated from the ethnic background of their formation.²¹

A trait of national question which is impetus to the call for war and disintegration in Nigeria is ethnic bias. There is competition among the major tribes to lord it over the smaller tribes. We ignore the crimes and wrong doings committed by the member of our tribes. If it is from another tribe then we condemn and cry out from the roof top. Most actions taken in the country are first looked at from the prism of ethnicity.²²

Wide spread of institutionalized corruption

Corruption is not just a great albatross that has held down the progress and development of this potentially great country, it's equally a neck-bottle to realization of the desired nationhood by it. Corruption is as old as the country. It is an umbrella for various vices such as bribery, fraudulent practices, cheating, scam activities etc.

All the speeches of the military takeovers have hinged the reason for the military putsch on corruption of the ruling government. Each successive government accused the previous of massive corruption. The consequences of massive corruption is the unbridgeable gap between the rich and the poor, the haves and the have nots, stunted growth of the economy, inflation, unemployment, loss of hope, despair and frustration. Indeed, in a state where corruption thrives nationhood becomes a mirage.²³

Bad Governance and lack of visionary leadership

The lack of good governance and visionary leadership in Nigeria has contributed to the clamor for separation. Taking the post-Westphalia treaty as a scope, it would be observed that states have attempted to be governed by various forms and governmental system; monarchy, oligarchy, autocracy, dictatorship, democracy to mention a few. These different forms of government also entail different structures. It's therefore important to note that any adopted system is as good as the quality of the people operating the system.

Governance in Nigeria has been a real nightmare; it has been a crass failure. The governed are also not blameless. We have tried our hands at the parliamentary and presidential systems of government with the same woeful result. There is disconnecting between the leaders and the led.

The nation is bereft of visionary leaders like the Asian tigers, who project a vision for their country and actualize it. The only time we had good leaders was during the struggle for independence. Those leaders really made their marks when they took over the reins of government.²⁴

The present government has failed to guarantee the basic requirement for the existence of any state and that is the security of lives and property. We have fought *Boko haram* (a terrorist group in the northern part of Nigeria, terrorizing citizens beyond religious and ethnic boundaries) over the years with no tangible success, yet billions of dollars have been reportedly spent on the war. We cannot even account for the purportedly purchase of arms and ammunition. The clash between herders and farmers has reached an all-time high. Banditry and kidnapping are the order of the day. Failure of government in providing security by defeating the northern origin terrorist group makes most common word in the state disintegration.

International dynamics of cries of disintegration

Geographical and political status of Nigeria in the international system is an important dynamic of the impending disintegration. Nigeria serves as a counter weight to the policies of many developed countries in Africa. No foreign power wants a powerful Nigeria to survive. The world is aware of the great potential of Nigeria and doesn't want Nigeria to have a global power. We may recall the effective role Nigeria played in the abolition of apartheid in South Africa and the liberation of Southern African countries.²⁵ Niger-phobic perception of our francophone neighbors, who all have close relationship with France could not be over-sighted. France does not want Nigeria to remain effective.

Lack of historical consciousness

Another factor responsible for so much violence, aggression and instability in the state and influencing the national question is that we have so little consciousness of a time perspective. Nigerians act and react to issues as if there is only today, no past, no plan for building the future from the experience of yesterday. Not surprisingly, we hardly ever consider what kind of a future we are building for our children and generations yet unborn. The nation suffers which has no sense of history.²⁶ Nigerians have obliterated the pioneering works of the K. O. Dikes, Ade-Ajayis, Biobakus, Ayandeles, Adam Smiths and other nationalist historians.

History is not merely a background to the present but shapes the current events in their proper perspective and insisting that those who are ignorant of the past are as condemned as well as the innocent others who are served the results of unhistorical recommendations.²⁷ It's thoughtful to align with the submission that claims that our implying disintegration falls into the mould of a distortion, mutilation and faking of our history by force of circumstance through ignorance or self-interest.²⁸

Nigerian government and citizens, especially historians, must come out of their ethnic cocoons with a renewed commitment to the Nationhood project. Historians should not ply their craft in tandem with the divisive politics of the political elite. Political elites rely on the intellectual wing of their fiefdom to perpetrate historical parochialism, an appalling sentiment which stokes disintegration rather than historical patriotism.²⁹ Answering the national question for present and subsequent purpose, Nigerian history should be taught. From the family, the cradle of socialization; through the school; to other spheres of the society, Nigerian history should be taught. At the school level- primary to tertiary, a refined curriculum of history should be designed and taught by qualified manpower with the hindsight of our history. Traditional and religious institutions have roles to play in repositioning the importance of history to national integration. Traditional leaders and elders should be encouraged for the preservation of historical evidences and transmit same to the younger generations and scholars.³⁰

Unfortunate role of the media

The negative role of the media's broadcast of misleading and crises orchestrating headlines cannot be over emphasized. Being a private media outfit shouldn't imply full authority to media houses. Unchecked activities of the media had made it unleash more havoc on the state in the contemporary period. Recently, the media misinformed the masses on the reaction of MURIC - an Islamic Human Right organization- to the death of Pastor E.A. Adeboye' son. While the content of the write-up contains condolence, the headline states that the Muslim organization gives reason why the senior pastor's son died.³¹ This is an example of how today media causes religious and ethnical bigotry within the state, thus, escalating the tension of national question. The effect of social media in the continuous bridge-building between ethnic groups in the state cannot be over emphasized. The broadcasts of *D.J switch* - a lady of Eastern origin- have been

observed to have wrongly led to the burning down of Lagos during the *End-SARS* protest of 2020.³²

It should be emphasized, here, that with failure of the Nigerian state to provide a formidable and all inclusive government, free of corruption and operated on the premise of equality and transparency, with check and balances of the activities of both public and private institutions, national question would persist and nationhood shall remain a dream to motherland.

ROADMAP TO NATIONHOOD: OPTING FOR THE IDEAL PROTOTYPE

Sitting for another round table conference, as proposed and to be sponsored by Elder Statesman, *Afe Babalola*,³³ to diagnose Nigerian problem before taking practical and pragmatic steps to allay the fears of those who are calling for war and disintegration shall be a waste of resources. Arresting the country from going into war and shatter into smithereens could be achieved by revisiting the information embedded on the pages of previous CONFABs' reports and communiqués with implementation of the resolutions therein. In response to the words of May Agbamuche that, *"those who are angling for the implementation of the report of the National Conference are better advised to look towards the National Assembly. We are not in doubt that our country desperately needs a new constitution but there must be the political will power to do so successfully"*,³⁴ this paper affirms that Nigeria leaders need no soothsayer to inform them that the present structure of government has failed us. There is the dire need to adopt other formidable structures of government. It could be given any nomenclature: restructuring, true federalism, confederacy or regionalism

It's high time Nigeria borrowed from countries who have different nation-states as its components and who have successfully fashioned out a governmental system making use of this nation-state structure. Ideal prototypes are the United Kingdom with England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland. Another good example is the United Arab Emirates which is an amalgamation of seven *shaykhdoms* (Kingdoms). UAE is a federation of seven constituent monarchies: the emirates of Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujairah, Ras al- khaymah, Sharjah and Ummu-Quwain.³⁵ According to convention, the ruler of Abu Dhabi is the President of United Arab Emirates and head of state.

Despite holding the title of president, the country is not governed as a presidential republic. The ruler of Dubai is the prime minister of the United Arab Emirates and the head of government. All responsibilities not granted to the national government are reserved to the individual emirates. A percentage of revenues from each emirate are allocated to the UAE central government. A system such as the federalism of the United Arab Emirates will lessen the disintegration cries in Nigeria.

Reducing the tension of and averting the reappearance of the national question, the Nigerian government should in addition opt for boosting the symbolic power of the state. The development of the symbolic power of the state, aside reduction of the amount of resources required by the state to enforce compliance to institutional rules, would enable it to win the consent, support and unquestioned loyalty of its citizens. One sure way of improving the symbolic power of the state is by intensifying the national orientation and mass mobilization programs. This programs which shall lay more emphasis on the younger generation of Nigeria, enabling them seek to project the application of logic of appropriateness in the course of national life. Through this process, the Nigeria State would attempt to transform into a Nigerian Nation by replacing the particularistic group and individual identities with some form of popular national identity and consciousness that would give all groups in the country a sense of belonging.³⁶

Nigeria can stem the slide into anarchy. She should re-strategize on the war of insurgency. The Service chiefs should come-up with new approaches and stratagems. The herder-farmer conflict can and should be brought to an end. States that have shown their willingness to commence ranching should accelerate action on the program. Punishment for crimes and infractions should be meted out immediately without fear or favor. This will serve as deterrent to others. Nigeria must hearken to bring back her citizens who are now refugees in other countries and rehabilitate those who have become permanent denizens of internally displaced people camps.

CONCLUSION

While this paper opines that the challenges of nationhood in Nigeria could be ameliorated by putting the above recommendations into practice, it posits that peaceful and mutually pursued

disintegration at the failure of the above is preferred to warfare-laced secession. War is not a tea party. It does not discriminate on religious, ethnic or political party lines. Bullets do not spare Imams, Pastors or shrine custodians. Academics, farmers, large and small scale traders would be confined without moving an inch. Any attempt to move like a living-soul could warrant instant invite to eternal oblivion. War is brutish and non-discriminatory.

In Nigerian history, there is a single record of civil war, it's so pathetic, we still relay the story of human misery of how over three million individuals became victims and how uncountable citizens were subjected to starvation and deprivation. If *Sunday Igboho*, *Nnamdi Kanu* and other agitators for forceful disintegration enquire from the people of Liberia, Libya, Rwanda, Syria, Somalia, Iraq and Yemen their experience about war, they shall be refurbished with a lengthy horrible account. In war, we are all losers. Both government and the governed should trend carefully.

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