

THE JUNE 12 STRUGGLE AS A PHENOMENON IN NIGERIAN POLITICAL HISTORY

Tunji Omotoso

Department of History, Emmanuel Alayande College of Education, Lanlate Campus, Lanlate

Soji Oyeranmi

Department of History and Diplomatic Studies, Olabisi Onabanjo University, Ago Iwoye, Ogun State, Nigeria

ABSTRACT

Democracy is universally acknowledged as the best form of government as it is inherently emancipatory and guarantees popular participation, freedom in all its ramifications, greater peace and security, protection and preservation of human rights, and many more. Unfortunately however, democracy in Nigeria falls short of all the above mentioned lofty attributes, as it is least emancipatory. Apparently, the problem of ethnic rivalries remain the most virulent factor militating against the entrenchment of democratic ethos/values through which a true and sincere national leadership can evolve to bring the people with differences together and fulfill their collective aspirations. While it is true that the repulsive inter/intra group struggle for elite positions has been entrenched into the Nigeria's political landscape right from the period of colonisation/de-colonization; the events that surrounded the annulment of June 12, 1993 presidential election (locally and globally seen as the fairest and clearest in Nigeria's political history) demonstrated that the ethnic-factor remained the most potent threat to the continuous corporate survival of the Nigerian federation. These events which led to the annulment of the June 12, 1993 presidential elections and the eventual truncation of Nigeria's Third Republic will be the primary focus of this essay. Apart from analysing the historical significance of the election: the essay will evaluate many reasons that were given by the Babangida's led military cabal for the annulment; examine why many political pundits regarded June 12, 1993 as "the dawn on Nigerian Renaissance"; establish the link between the annulment and current dire quagmire confronting the country (especially, ethnic militancy and the Boko Haram

insurgence); draw some lessons from the imbroglio; and suggest some ways forward for the beleaguered country.

PREAMBLE

Arguably, the problem of ethnic rivalry is the single factor militating against all the efforts at evolving and entrenching genuine democratic culture/ethos through which a national leadership capable of bringing the peoples' differences together and fulfilling Nigeria's national aspirations would have emerged. This is because at the periods of political conflict differing factors are always emphasized. As a corollary, like most of the multi-cultural under-developed nations, the most challenging issue facing Nigeria today concerns greatly "the establishment of institutional arrangements that can effectively deal with ethnic diversity and allow population groups to co-exist peacefully and productively". It is due to ethnic-chauvinism, which has become the major driving force of our national polity that Nigerian's many at times (albeit with good reasons) have not only queried the basis for nationhood but also doubted her survival. While it is true that Nigeria's political landscape has been dominated by repulsive inter/intra group struggle for elite positions right from the period of de-colonization till date; the events that surrounded the truncated Third Republic (June 12, 1993 presidential election) clearly demonstrated that ethnic-factor remained the most potent threat not only to democracy but also to the continuous corporate survival of the Nigerian Federation. These events will be the primary focus of this essay. The paper concludes that, the series of soul shattering crises including Boko Haram terrorism which are currently threatening the very existence of the Nigerian State would have been totally avoided assuming, June 12, 1993 presidential election was allowed to stand by the obnoxious regime of Ibrahim Babangida (who against all humanistic logic and analysis still looms larger than life in Nigeria

The influence of ethnic – consciousness on the politics of the 'Third World' especially the modern states of Africa cannot be overemphasized. Virtually all the new states of Africa are pluralistic societies made up of heterogeneous ethnic – groups. Attesting to this historic fact, the social anthropologist and historian, P. L. Lloyd, observed; Africa's new states have many things in common.... All are composed of a number of clearly distinguishable ethnic groups. This is

why it is not quite surprising that in Africa today, there is no country that is not prone to chaos and anarchy due to the bogey of ethnicity and cantankerous inter group relations. Nigeria is no exception.

Evidently, ethnicity often intrudes rudely into Nigerian politics due largely to the ethnic consciousness that has developed over centuries of the colonial and postcolonial history of the beleaguered country. Like most of the under-developed nations, the most challenging issue facing Nigeria today concerns greatly, “the establishment of institutional arrangements that can effectively deal with ethnic diversity and allow population groups to co-exist peacefully and productively”. It is due to ethnic-chauvinism, which has become the major driving force of our national polity that Nigerians’ many at times (albeit with good reasons) have not only queried the basis for nationhood but also doubted her survival. Many advocates (in spite of “so-called success” acclamation that greeted the 2011 general elections) are still clamouring for a more comprehensive and people oriented national conference or better still, ‘conference for all Nigerian Nationalities’ where the peoples would jaw-jaw on the modalities for national cohesion – the only way towards national development. Here, the need to homogenize otherwise heterogeneous groups could not be over stressed especially as people are striving to build a virile nation. But no meaningful nation-building process could take off under the atmosphere of chaos, disharmony and disunity. And if the people must ameliorate the situation then, they must seek what Ojukwu called “Unity of marriage” when differences come together to bring forth increase.

Arguably, the problem of ethnic rivalry is the single factor militating against all the efforts at evolving a national leadership capable of bringing the peoples’ differences together and fulfilling Nigeria’s national aspirations. This is because during the periods of political conflict differing factors are always emphasized. Indeed, at this period, they hardly focus on those things, which are common among the ethnic groups; such as elements of history and culture binding them together, or may act as a basis for cooperation. The exclusiveness of the ethnic groups is always dominant. In most cases, ethnic intellectuals (during struggle for political power) fabricate ethnic homelands, which are much larger than those existed in the colonial era. This is why for so long, the country continues to install mediocres or bullies at the helms of affairs instead of evolving a qualitative and rational leadership that could harness the country’s divergent human resources

and turn them into source of strength rather than weakness to give the people the most desired and well deserved “UNITY IN DIVERSITY”.

With the above brief illustration, it could be rightly established that the seed of Nigeria’s incessant inter-group disharmony and constant conflict was sown in the inadequate attention given to the suffocating and self-destructive ethnic rivalry for political power among the successive political actors. While it is true that Nigeria’s political landscape has been dominated by repulsive inter/intra group struggle for elite positions right from the period of de-colonization; the events that surrounded the truncated Third Republic clearly demonstrated that ethnic-factor remained the most potent threat not only to democracy but also to the continuous corporate survival of the Nigerian Federation.

JUNE 12, 1993 ELECTION IMPASSE AND THE TOGA OF ETHNICITY

Thus far, it has been established that the seed of Nigeria’s failure was sown in the inadequate attention given to the suffocating and self-destructive ethnic rivalry for political power among the successful political actors while it is true that Nigeria’s political landscape has been dominated by repulsive inter/intra-group struggle for elite positions right from the period of de-colonization; the events that surrounded the truncated Third Republic clearly demonstrated that ethnic factor remained the most potent threat to the continuous survival of the Nigerian Federation; which to a great extent remains ` ‘an association of strange bed fellows.’

When soldiers terminated the country’s second experiment in civilian, constitutional rule at the tail end of 1983; Nigerians characteristically joyfully welcomed this overthrow of a civilian regime they had come to view as corrupt and undemocratic. However, it was political reform and reconstruction, not prolonged military rule, they wanted. And due to the fact that the new military regime of Buhari/Idiagbon was not ready for any transition back to civil rule, public opinion turned against them. Hence, Nigerians viewed the overthrow of the regime (considered to be too rigid and extremely repressive) on the 27th August, 1985 by General Babangida as the much needed respite.

Having cleverly studied the prevailing mood of the people, Babangida almost immediately initiated one of the most ambitious, imaginative, complex and expensive transition programme

that has ever been attempted anywhere. As events later unfolded, it proved to be one of the most protracted, controversial, unstable, and unsuccessful. So frequently and fundamentally were its timetables and ground rules changed, so staggering were the corruption, abuse of power, and cult of personality surrounding it; that most Nigerians came to doubt it would ever be completed. It was under this atmosphere of absolute uncertainty that the presidential election was held on June 12, 1993 – an event that was to climax what later turned out to be the highest point of political chicanery/charade.

Indeed, the year 1993 marked a significant milestone in Nigeria's history. In the span of 4 months (between August and November, 1993), Sovereign Nigerian was governed by three different leaders, namely, Gen. Babangida, Chief Shonekan and Gen. Abacha. And as Prof. Alkali rightly submitted, *“Never before in the history of Nigeria as a Sovereign state had such a dramatic turn of events taken place”*.

It all started with the successful organization of 12 June 1993 of a presidential election globally adjudged the most peaceful, fair and free in Nigeria's post-independence political history. The Babangida administration was praised for evolving an 'original' method of election that took into account the problems of political skullduggery and thuggery hitherto characteristic of Nigerian Politics. The election ought to have constituted the crescendo of the government's political transition programme, began in 1987, and therefore, the new foundation for a democratic polity and transfer of power to the democratically elected president. But tragically, this was not to be as the government unilaterally announced the 'annulment' of the election on the 23rd June 1993.

By this singular bizarre act of cancellation, Nigeria was dragged into her most perennial political crisis since the civil war. As a matter of fact, the country remained on her knees throughout this period as Larry Diamond argues:

This was a period when Nigeria came to a historical crossroad, when it might have reversed structural pathologies of statism and prebendalism ... Instead, it became a period of collapse into praetorianism and economic

destitution, into a plundered economy, a nearly worthless currency, and a politics virtually bereft of rules and institutions ...

This stemmed from the growing frustration of the people before the election and their eventual strong and unexpected resistance of the annulment.

As many political pundits have expressed it, June 12, 1993 in a sense marked the dawn on 'Nigerian' Renaissance. In the words of Prof. Adebayo Williams:

On that historic day, the people in the geographical space called – Nigeria voted for an authentic Nigerian nation. June 12, 1993 was the clearest expression of the national will.

And to my mind, it was a day that ought to have changed their world as the people demonstrated very clearly that truly unity is a possibility in diversity. In his own account, Prof. Wole Soyinka also attested to this fact when he stated that:

June 12 marks the day when all sectional differences were cast aside – in the main – and the Nigerian people were united to overthrow the well-endowed machinations to thwart the goals of democracy.

The voting pattern on 12 June that suggests that the election was not based on religious and ethnic bigotry actually confirms this.

Coupled with the readiness of Nigerians to enthrone democracy as reflected in the peaceful conduct of the election was the personality of the acclaimed winner of the election – Bashorun Moshood Kashimawo Olawale Abiola – who was seen as one of the few detribalized Nigerians and philanthropist of no equal. He helped build mosques, churches, boreholes, gave a lot of scholarships at secondary school, polytechnic and university levels (3,750 as at then). And in recognition of this service to humanity he was rewarded 235 chieftaincy titles all over Nigeria. And what happened was that in every locality in Nigeria, Abiola was local and he had won the

hearts of the people even before he contested. This was one of the reasons why the people immediately accepted his purported victory at the poll nationally and internationally – as the international observers that monitored the elections acknowledged the victory.

The most relevant question to ask at this juncture is: if the June 12 1993 presidential election was free from allegations of electoral malpractices, corruption and clash of personalities, why then did the military cabal willingly wished away the first veritable attempt at building the Nigerian nation (albeit politically)?

Not too many people agreed with the reasons given for annulment which include: safeguarding the good name of the judiciary and electoral manipulation as there has been wide suspicion among people that the Babangida administration was not truly ready to hand over power to the civilians and even if it was ready nothing suggests it wanted to do so objectively. Bashorun M.K.O. Abiola was generally believed to have won the fairest, freest and most peaceful election in Nigerian history, yet Babangida refused to hand over to him, thus raising the sensitive, long standing question of the North versus South. Thus, there was a general consensus that beyond the allegations of political corruption and electoral fraud, the annulment of the election appeared to have been motivated by ethnic considerations.

At the highpoint of the Nigerian crisis, there was the well coordinated attempt to rubbish the June 12 struggle as a Yoruba affair especially as Chief Abiola was from the Yoruba tribe which the “Hausa-Fulani accused of controlling both the economy and the bureaucracy. To them, it would be suicidal for the northerners to fold their arms and allow power to be shifted to the South as it will amount to losing everything. According to Andy Akporugo:

The assertiveness with which the average northerner of today claims political power as compensation for the great ascendancy which the South has attained in the acquisition of skills and economic clout, is of course absolutely pathetic. Yet the “birthright complex” has become systematically entrenched.

Different regional groups such as: Eastern Forum, Middle Belt Elders, Northern Consultative Group, Western Leaders Forum, Eastern Progressive also emerged and tried to sectionalize the stalemate. While the Southerners protested against the government decision, most Northerner leaders stayed mute. In fact, the government introduced another dailies belonging to Southern proprietors and state governments. In the view of the Western Leaders Forum, the Yoruba people “have been governed by others in a united Nigeria” and “should not be denied the right of governance in undivided Nigeria”. The forum also condemned in strong terms the discriminatory proscription of certain media houses (including Abiola’s own Concord Group) all in Western Zone from Benin City to Lagos.

The post June 12, 1993 era revealed the rekindling of ethnic rivalry between the Igbo and the Yoruba. It would be recalled that ever since the period of de-colonization, the Igbo political elites have been perceiving the Yoruba nation as Igbo’s natural rival in the Nigerian political game. Hence, rather than supporting the struggle for the enthronement of democracy based on June 12 electoral victory of Abiola, they chose to embark on ethnic vendetta because of what they called “betrayal of the Yoruba people” during the civil war. This accounted for the prominent roles of Nzeribe’s Association for Better Nigeria (ABN) and Uche Chukwumerije’s wild unparalleled propaganda outreach.

The abortion of Nigeria’s Third Republic also established a historical fact that in Nigeria, especially in the political arena, forces of ethnicity are more potent than religious cleavages. A pointer to this was the fact that Chief Abiola at the point of his landslide electoral success was not only a Moslem but also the second in command of the Supreme Islamic Council of Nigeria (headed by Sultan of Sokoto) which was the highest ruling body in the Nigeria Umma (Community of Islam) and the most venerated Islamic body in the country. Yet there was no concrete solidarity for Abiola. It was even argued that if the then Sultan of Sokoto, Ibrahim Dasuki, being regarded as the political godfather of Babangida had intervened meaningfully, the June 12 mandate would have been returned to Abiola.

June 12 1993 was no doubt a historic moment for Nigeria, but it was an anti-climax of sorts in the annals of not only the country’s political history but that of the world. It was the first time in

the world legal history, when a citizen of a country was given mandate through the ballot boxes by his people and would not only be denied the access to the office by a military junta but also charged for treason in the same country. It was a day, when a concrete foundation and ground norm for civil and civilized conduct and for orderly succession would have been established. Unfortunately, the day never survived as the people had their say, but tyrants had their way. The determination of Nigerians to be free in the words of Prof. Adebayo Williams “only unleashed a fiercer determination to tighten the chains of servitude”²² by the powers that be.

While it is true that Nigerians rose stoutly against the cancellation; much of the mobilization or opposition against the annulment of the presidential poll however, remained largely confined to the South-Western States of Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo States. This geographical bias, in part, reflected the special sense of ethnic injustice felt by the populace in the South-West at the aborting of the presidential victory of a Yoruba candidate by a Northern-led government. This ethno-regional grievance ultimately contributed to a resurgence of the sectarian sentiments and resentments that Abiola’s nationwide victory appeared to have momentarily transcended. As Africa Watch described the situation in a statement in August 1993:

The tragedy of present crisis is that Nigerian citizens, who in the election seemed to have overcome a legacy of ethnic conflict by crossing ethnic and regional barriers to vote Mr. Abiola, have been forced once again to narrow their sights and put their ethnic identities first, rather than their citizenship as Nigerians

Thus, since the dramatic annulment of the Abiola mandate on June 23rd 1993, Nigeria almost became a nationalities’ warfare of sorts. Worse to the extent that, save for very isolated pockets, virtually all the ethnic nationals played along with Babangida’s eight years of ominous politics. The damage on the polity has become almost irreparable. The result, a mutilated political process, a truncated federal system, arrested development and threatened corporate existence. In short by a process of Northern hegemony - political and military – in the abysmally poor social

engineering of unbalanced ethnic arithmetic – Claude Ake’s statement that politics has underdeveloped Africa seemingly finds its fullest expression.

As the controversy raged, within few weeks, tens of thousands of Nigerian have fled the cities for their home villages, towns, and cities fearing the outbreak of widespread ethnic violence. Southern rage had been ignited, and anti-Hausa sentiments were increasingly given voice. In the North, Hausas, who supported Abiola, had been stung by the raging anti-Hausa backlash and were withdrawing back into their regional leanings. This was largely responsible for inability of Nigerian to enforce their mandate, as they were ferociously divided as against the most united front of the then ruling cabal who successfully ran away with the people’s victory.

Part of the responsibility for this ethnicization of the election imbroglio according to Rotimi T. Suberu also lay with the belated and ambivalent response of the national federation of trade unions, the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC), to the political crisis – contrary to all expectations, and its own deep stake in the pro-democracy movement, the NLC failed to galvanize nationwide opposition to the government’s assault on the democratization process. Instead, its president, Pascal Bafyau, subsequently repudiated a widely publicized June strike threat, by the NLC. A “moderate” unionist and apparent crony of Babangida administration, Bafyau had in fact, once advocated the extension of the transition programme. In essence, it was left to the state branches of the NLC, and such radical affiliates of the Congress as the fifty thousand strong National Union of Petroleum and natural Gas Workers (NUPENG), to mobilize mainly southern base segments of the labour movement behind the anti-military campaign.

From the above analysis, it could be deduced that the collapse of the Third Republic involves to very great extent what novelist Chinua Achebe has described as “Nigerians greatest weakness – their inability to face grave threats as one people instead of as competing religious and ethnic interest” What could have been a great step forward for Nigeria – a free and fair election, culminating in the inauguration of the first truly democratically elected president – was needlessly overturned. This not only returned Nigerians to their primordial inter-group rivalry but also elevated ethnicity once again to the center of nation building crisis in Nigeria and the cantankerous inter-group relations continue unabatedly.

WHY IS UNITY SO ELUSIVE DUE TO ETHNIC-POLITICS?

The problem of ethnicity has indeed made the issues of national cohesion and nation building very hectic and knotty in Nigeria. The nature of the crisis was actually captured by Alhaji Tafawa Balewa when he stated that, “no problem is more urgent and more difficult of solution than the problem of national unity”. This according to him was because the apostles of tribalism had been having their own way since independence”. Instead, for this problem to subside, it continues to dominate the national politics. Thus, Usman and Abba once submitted:

Violent communal conflicts have become prominent feature of contemporary Nigeria; within the past fifteen years, the country has witnessed many of these in: Numan and parts of Adamawa (1986); Kafanchan and other parts of Kaduna (1987); clashes in Wukari, Takum and other parts of Taraba state (1990); The Tafawa Balewa massacres (1991); the Zango-Kataf bloodshed (1992); and the Andoni and Ogoni (1993)

In a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural entity like Nigeria, even with the purest of hearts, the tendency will always be there for the different ethnic and sub-ethnic groups to nurture political rivalry and resort to compare their lot in the commonwealth to those of other ethnic groups at every available opportunity. This has always been the case of Nigeria since the amalgamation of the various groups into one country.

This is why Nigeria in real sense still remains a nation in the making. If she will be transformed to a full fledged nation then, all the reluctant tribes, kingdoms and empires grouped together into one Nigeria, have to develop together to a point where each and every Nigerian regards the country as his or her own without being reminded of it. This is the only way to enhance nation building. As one writer argued:

The process by which people learn and develop collective memories and orientation to the extent of

regarding each other as one, the process by which conditions for such learning is made possible, the process of creating, the learning situation are all in part the process of nation making.

Adequate solutions for the ethnic problem of Nigeria must stem logically from a rigorous scientific analysis of the causes of the emergency, persistence and growth of ethnicity in the country. On the basis of the proceeding analysis the following are some of the major causes:

First is the colonial-type socio-economic scarcity and inequality, which are the consequences of the “peripheral capitalist system of economic organization imposed by colonialism and inherited from colonial times”. Others include: the use of ethnic base for political competition; the use of regional governmental apparatus for ethnic competition; political, social and economic policy difference which run along communal lines; differences in the traditional ways of life, the absence of national consciousness and the emergence of a section of the population which benefits from the allocation of resources along ethnic lines. Therefore, any programme for the creation of national consciousness and national unity should be judged by its effectiveness in eliminating the impact of these factors.

As reflected in the thought of Prof. Jide Osuntokun, creation of states cannot overcome the difficulties posed by these factors. Instead, it has been aggravating the inter-ethnic situation by hampering the emergence of national consciousness in favour of state consciousness; continuous emphasis on the division of the national cake than baking of such cake. He stressed further:

... The constant miniaturation of states through unreasonable states creation has further divided the country. We need to go back to basics and take another look at the unwieldy 36 states structure of this country and 774 local governments. This country is simply over-administered. The cost of administration is simply killing Nigeria. ...

The energy and attention dissipated and focused on the question of state should instead be deployed in favour of activities, which will ameliorate the impact of the factors and bring about development.

Thus emphasis should be placed on a drastic reduction of colonial-type scarcity and inequality through a revolutionary developmental programme which among other things satisfies the demands of each citizen for a minimum of socially reasonable standards of: nutrition, drinking water, free and qualitative education, free health care, employment, clothing, care for the aged and the needy and effective participation of all levels in national activities to which the people are entitled as a matter of social policy. By combating socioeconomic insecurity, which arises from scarcity and inequality, such a revolutionary onslaught, will nullify all negative implications of ethnic identification. Otherwise, the vast majority of the population will remain an easy prey to the machinations of the self-appointed champions of ethnic interests.

Political, social and economic policy differences and imbalances across communal lines should be remedied by giving the Nigerian masses ‘over dose’ of political education. This is the surest way to uplift the people; to develop their brains with ideas; change them and make them into worthy human beings. In fact, Nigerian leaders often believe with criminal superficiality that to educate the masses politically is to deliver a long political harangue from time to time. They think that it is enough that the leader or one of his lieutenants should speak in a pompous tone about the events of the day for them to have fulfilled this bounden duty to educate the masses politically.

Now, to educate the masses politically means to try, relentlessly and passionately, to teach them that everything depends on them; that if the country stagnates, it is their responsibility and that if Nigeria will go forward it is due to them too. It also means awakening their spirit of collectivism by appealing to them to shed their primordial ethnic affiliations and join hands and heads in the national project. This no doubt will arouse their consciousness and by so doing, prospects for nation-building will be enhanced as Fanon once demonstrated that: “the living expressing of the nation is the moving consciousness of the whole of the people ... Otherwise, there is anarchy, repression and the resurgence of tribal parties”³⁹. Therefore to educate the masses politically is to make the totality of the nation a reality to each citizen by making the history of the nation part of the personal experience of all the members of such a nation.

Realistically, if Nigeria must move out of the present doldrums and transit herself to the community of powerful nations not only in Africa but also in the world – differences in the traditional cultures of the people should be de-emphasized and similarities emphasized. The key to this is to develop among the people `positive historical consciousness'. The people must be made to understand that the greatness of any nation depends largely on its diversity as Yoruba would say; “*igba ikan ni mole*” (it takes 200 termites to build their home). Nigerians should also realize that though they have certain latent differences in their cultures and pasts, the history of the Nigerian entity could not be understood in isolation from the many pasts of several people and civilizations. As Prof. J.F. Ade Ajayi rightly postulates:

Those pasts were linked at many points and over several periods of time in myths of origin, exchange of peoples, trade, crafts, religions and other ideas, linked not into one, a network of interlocking relationships. Nigeria was not a mere geographical expression, a creation of the British.

In fact, Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi re-echoed this in June 2001 when he contended that the contentious artificiality of the Nigeria, which necessitated the conclusion that the country is a mere geographical _expression (by Chief Obafemi Awolowo in 1947) is not peculiar to the country. He based his point on Europe which he claimed has gotten its map drawn and redrawn due to massive nationalism by revolutions which Africa has not experienced since the treaty of Berlin in 1884 and to that extent Nigeria, even in 1947, was not the youngest artificial state in the world.

The point must also be made here that Nigerian history did not begin in 1914 or 1960 or with the British conquest, or with the coming of the Portuguese: that Nigerian was the history of Nigerian peoples from the earliest time to the present. As demonstrated by Joseph H. Greenberg, in his studies in African linguistic classification; the majority of Nigeria’s inhabitants speak one of the large groups of languages. This showed that the peoples are not complete strangers to one another.

Nigerians should also be reminded that ethnicity which has turned out to be a damning reflection of their collective underdevelopment was injected into the polity by the British in order to ensure everlasting exploitation of the beleaguered country. Therefore, the people must realize that for the country to break away from the tenacious shackles of the neo-imperialists; they have to play down their ethnic differences so that the diversity of the country could be a source of development. By so doing, the unfortunate orientation of the national population of the division of national cake would be shifted to an emphasis on the production of the national cake.

Furthermore, Government rather than applying wait and see measure, as it is often the case in the previous handlings of ethnic conflicts, should be pre-emptive and always take prompt preventive action. In other words, there is a need for government in Nigeria to always be determined in its effort to seek and identify at the earliest possible stage, situations that could produce ethnic conflict and take corrective policy measure to remove the sources of rancour. Also instead of the frequent resort to settings up judicial commissions and tribunals and coercive responses, which are the features of conflict management in Nigeria – there should be standard techniques to ensure lasting solutions to ethnic conflicts.

Like many of its advocates, I also believe that for the issue of ethnicity to be properly addressed in Nigeria, there is a serious need for a constitutional conference by whatever names it is called. More than ever before, there is a need for a well structured forum; where Nigerians can air their grievances and fears; where Nigerians can resolve their differences, trade concessions, agree on the rules and structure under which they wish to co-exist; where a binding constitution will emerge, representing the wishes of Nigerian, unimpeded by any authority. No authority can be higher than the will of the people. That is what will make a constitutional national or supreme⁴⁵. And as Rev. Father Hassan Kukah once remarked “... *Only a sincere dialogue and genuine political will can change the course of events ...*”.

It must also be recognized that in a multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-national state like Nigeria, there will be a need for Federalism. In fact, genuine federalism is the only glue that can hold together on multi-national state (such as Nigeria) as it is grand sounding and it is equitable in balancing relationship between and among groups.

CONCLUSION

Yes, it is true that, somehow, the genuine agitation has paved way for sheer criminality, especially Boko Haram terrorism (which has led to wanton destruction of lives and properties in the Northern part of Nigeria); kidnapping for megabucks, which began in the Niger Delta but has spread to other parts of Nigeria. Yes, it is true that the road map to the real emancipation of the massively impoverished Nigerians is almost lost among the ethno-religious militants. Yes, it is true that, political patronage kept this crisis alive in the country more than any other factor. But it is also a stark reality that, human conditions in the Nigeria remained among the worst in the world. And if militancy has achieved anything for the suffering masses, it is the global awareness generated which was clearly unprecedented in the annals of the country. But this is far from fulfilling the yearning of the people. So, the onus really lies with governments at all levels in Nigeria and other stakeholders to find common ground to move the people away from daily despondency to all pervasive penury of body and soul. Focus should now be on a just and sustainable political order and ways in which this can be brought about, giving due weight to the fears, needs, and aspirations of the various social and interest groups of the country.

This writer is firmly convinced that the greatest danger to Nigerian unity is the tenacity of those who refuse to allow for the restructuring of Nigeria. While stressing the need for the restructuring of the country, Dare Babarinsa, in his book, House of War, suggested that Nigeria should be restructured in to seven regions each containing one dominant group. These include: Hausa-Fulani, Yoruba, Igbo, Kanuri, and minorities in Middle belt, East and West, with each region controlling its resources. This is necessary because it will be an act of deception for anyone to argue that there is nothing wrong with the current revenue allocation formula in the country.

To take adequate care of the resource control saga, Nigeria should return to true federalism as practised before the military intervention. What the country is practicing now is nothing short of a unitary form of government. Unitarism in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural environment is a recipe for disaster. It exacerbates friction and tension between and among groups. What nation groups need in Nigeria is space to breath, autonomy in handling basically local issues and

adequate space not to step on each other's toes. Nigeria is not an island unto itself. There is nothing uniquely Nigerian. The world is full of multinational states, which have been huge successes such as the United States of America, Switzerland, Italy, France, Germany, Britain and so on due to the practice of true Federalism and those multinational states such as Yugoslavia, the Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia who have failed because of their refusal to practise true Federalism.

Finally, the struggle against ethnic chauvinism should be the responsibility of the vast majority of Nigerians who have remained largely silent, remote from the political and economic seats of power and merely marginal to the realm of income distribution. It should not be waged under the leadership of that segment of the population, which benefits from contemporary inter-ethnic situation. Such leadership includes: the Nigerian businessmen, rural potentates, the top echelons of the civil and the military bureaucrats, landlords who in connivance with the advanced capitalist nations, notably-Britain and other Western powers are feasting fast and fat from Nigeria's bad situation to the detriment of the Nigerian masses.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1) Larry Diamond et-al (1997) (eds) : *Transition without End: Nigerian Politic and Civil Society under Babangida*, London, Lynne Reinner, 1997, p. 1.
- 2) Ibid.
- 3) Cited from the general introduction to a publication by the Presidential Advisory Committee titled: *Nigeria in Transition Years: 1993 – 1999* which was edited by Prof. M. N. Alkali.
- 4) Having watched closely the misery that Military rule has exposed Nigerians to in all spheres of life; the annulment of June 12, 1993 Presidential Poll remained the most devastating and destabilising political crime, the soldiers committed. Not only because it dampened the hope that election represented but because it returned the country into the "dark ages" at least politically.
- 5) See Larry Diamond et. al., op. Cit. P. 2.
- 6) *The News Magazine*, 4 August 1997, p. 34.
- 7) *The Comet*, Tuesday, 30 May 2000. P. 3

- 8) The SDP Victory was unprecedentedly national in scope. Only in two of the thirty states (Sokoto and just barely Kebbi) did Chief Abiola failed to obtain one-third of the votes required in two thirds of the States in order to be elected. This was an indication of the popularity cum acceptability of SDP flag bearers. Most striking was the Chief Abiola's victory in Tofa's State of Kano.
- 9) This was contained in a speech delivered by the late M.K.O. Abiola at a public meeting organized by the Africa Research and Information Bureau at the New Nigeria Forum London on August 14, 1993.
- 10) Of the 3,000 observers accredited by government to monitor the election, 135 came from foreign countries. To the last person in the monitoring teams, the consensus was that the election had been well conducted, free and fair and therefore credible.
- 11) See Bola A. Akinterinwa "The 1993 Presidential Imbroglio" in Larry Diamond op. cit p. 258
- 12) Ibid.
- 13) Ibid
- 14) Olawale Oshun: *Clapping with one Hand, June 12 and the Crisis of a State Nation*, London Josel Publishers, 1999, p. 259
- 15) *Guardian* 25 October 1992, p. A5.
- 16) See their full page Advert in *Sunday Guardian*, 29 August 1993, p. 229
- 17) Having forgotten everything or probably learnt nothing from the civil war – Ibo's psyche having been brutalized and fixated by the alleged refusal of Awolowo to honour the purported agreement with Ojukwu to excise Yorba nation from the Federation, to majority of the Ibos, June 12, 1993 Imbroglio presented a "golden" opportunity for vengeance against the Yoruba people. And here lies Nigeria's collective failure
- 18) For the details of ABN nefarious activities, see Bola A. Akinterinwa op. Cit pp. 272-275
- 19) See Olawale Oshun op. Cit pp. 29-30

- 20) K. Amuwo : *General Babangida, Civil Society and the Military in Nigeria: Anatomy of Personnel Rulership Project*, Traudux et Documents, No. 48 CEAN, IEP Bordeaux. P. 41
- 21) Richard Akintola: *Abiola, Democracy and Rule of Law*, Rich Konsult Lagos, 1997 p. 1
- 22) *The News Magazine*, 4 August 1997, p. 34.
- 23) Rotimi T. Suberu: “Crisis and Collapse. June – November 1993” in Larry Diamond op. cit. p. 385
- 24) See “Human, Rights and Political Developments in Nigeria” testimony of Holly Barktalter on Africa, on August 4, (1993) p. 6.
- 25) For details see Kunle Amuwo: “Waiting for the Godot: Will there be Nigerian Fourth Republic IFRA lecture series, 2000.
- 26) C. F. Naomi Chazan “Africa’s Democratic Challenge” *World Policy Journal* 9, No 2. (spring 1992); 302
- 27) See “Nigeria contradicting itself” an article published in *The Newswatch Magazine* 28 June 1993, p. 14. Ironically had also been a leading contender for selection by Abiola as his Vice President
- 28) See Rotimi Suberu op. Cit. P. 286.
- 29) Chinua Achebe “The High Price of Patience, “*New York Times*, 27 July 1993, p. 13.
- 30) See Olawale Oshun op. cit. P. 40
- 31) Quoted in J O. Akintunde, “The Denise of Democracy in the First Republic: A casual Analysis”, *ODU* Vol. 4, Ife, July 1967. P. 12
- 32) *Ibid.*
- 33) Y. B. Usman and A. Abba: “The misrepresentation of Nigeria: The facts and the figures”, Center for Democratic Development, Research and Training (CCDDRT), Zaria, 1997. p. 36.
- 34) Daily Sketch, 30 October, 1965
- 35) J. P. Mackintosh *Nigerian Government and Politics*, London, Allen and Unwin, 1966. p. 486

- 36) The Comet
- 37) Ibid.
- 38) O Nnoli: *Ethnic – Politics in Nigeria*, Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishing Co. Ltd, 1980 p. 285
- 39) Frantz Fanon: *The Wretched of the Earth*
- 40) J. F. Ade Ajayi: *Milestones in Nigerian History*, Ibadan, Longman Publishers, 1980. P. 21
- 41) The Guardian, 6 July 2001.
- 42) See J.F.A Ajayi op. cit. P. 21
- 43) Michael Crowder: *The Story of Nigeria* London, Faber and Faber, 1972, p. 204
- 44) Pita O. Agbese: “Managing Ethnic relations in a heterogeneous society: the case of Nigeria” ”in John M. Mbaku (eds.) *Ethnicity and Government in the Third World*, England, Ashgate Publishing Ltd. 2001 p. 127
- 45) The Guardian 6 July 2001.
- 46) Tempo Magazine, 28 February, 2002
- 47) Ibid
- 48) Dare Babarinsa: *House of War: The Story of Awo’s Followers and Collapse of the Second Republic Ibadan and Lagos*, Spectrum Books Ltd, and Tell Communications Ltd, 2003. P. 279
- 49) Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi (Former Nigeria’s Minister of External Affairs) made this assertion in an article titled “Nigeria : A Mere Geographical Expression?” Published in the Guardian of 6 July, 2001