

# History and National Integration in Nigeria: An Empirical Overview

Mile Terwase Joshua

*Ph.D , Educational Foundations and General Studies, University of Agriculture, Makurdi, Nigeria*

**Abstract:-In contemporary Nigeria, one would have thought that the rich Nigerian history, its immense human and natural resource endowment, with its democratic attempt so far, a credible effort towards national integration of its society would have been well fostered and achieved. But what one is witnessing so far today, seems to boil down to the fact that we have not yet started and national integration is even a non-issue in national discourse. But the crises that has been sky rocketing the country today so far which made many to call out for all forms of restructuring, have much of its roots traced to this crucial question of national integration. The trust of this paper therefore, is to examine the issue of national integration in Nigeria through an empirical historical perspective with the aim of finding the way forward to the present Nigerian quagmire.**

interests, usually ranging over national matters of welfare, order and defence or security.

According to them, an integrated nation consequently, is characterized by a high level of cooperation between the various groups and sub-groups for the benefit of all the members. It involves the extent of the sharedness of the value symbols of a nation (eg, flag and coat of arms), models of communication (eg. National language) and common experience among the members of the nation. It also, covers all measures, agreements and developments which aim at achieving unity and co-operation among various groups of the nation.<sup>2</sup> To Tahir national integration is the unification of apparently disparate groups, often in conflict into an indivisible whole. He states thus;

## I. INTRODUCTION

The devastating fundamental flaws and gross structural and operational defects of economic and political systems we are suffering are very serious and grave. These certainly have profoundly threatened our integral survival as a sovereign nation. These have even made many a man think that these can be over come by dismembering the Nigeria polity and replacing it with new polities or democratic polarities based on our nationalities and sub- nationalities or even regionalities. This seems to fits in perfectly with the design which western imperialism has in store for us. But the reality of our history, of our contemporary conditions and position in the world make it very abundantly clear that our capacity to exercise our freedoms and rights to ensure our /survival, progress and dignity as a nationality can only be secured on the broad basis of national integration of the Nigerian polity and within the new polity's broader West African and African framework of integration and not otherwise<sup>1</sup>.

A society or groups of people have become integrated or united when individuals in the society are perfect substitute for each other subject only to variations deriving from distinctions of class, status, and occupation. In practical terms, it means that the interest of the members in the community in spheres of national life can be represented by any one individual or any set of individuals and the reservations which people might have about this relate only to relative success or failure and not to any primordial notions of his or their identity. Conversely, the application of strictness, the distribution of rewards and the allocation of resources by individual representatives are not governed by such considerations either.<sup>3</sup>

## II. CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATIONS

It would be futile to conceptualise national integration abstractively, because such an exercise will have little to do with historical reality. National integration has to be understood and defined historically.

Modibbo and Abba in a more radical posture maintained that in a multinational country like Nigeria, national integration means abolishing national oppression and inequality and removing obstacles to the formation of a viable nation-state. It is a question of providing equal opportunities for all nationalities big or small failure of which nation integration remains a mirage.<sup>4</sup>

National integration in simple term is a process whereby political actors in distinct ethnic or linguistic setting of a nation shift or transfer their loyalties expectations and political activities towards a new centre. O' Connel and Beckett however, corroborate this definition much more soundly by clarifying that national integration involves collective inter-related actions to promote certain mutual

Usman in a similar but bolder manner stresses that national integration in Nigeria has grossly failed to bring about nation building especially in the post colonial milieu when he maintained the process is virtually under siege. National integration to him, implies the building of new types of political communities, based on the formal recognition and

empowerment of the sub-national ethnic and communal groups, which have re-emerged to assert the rights of all those subjugate and marginalized by the power structures of the nation state.<sup>5</sup>

Indeed, from the various perceptions of national integration, it's clear that it is a socio-economic and political process which is purely historical. Even it's seemingly religious or spiritual dimension clearly, hinges on and presupposes the existence of 'clear conscience' a social phenomenon. National integration thus, must always be located historically within a socio-economic and political context. Its existence or non existence must always be understood within this context whether we are dealing with national, international or global integration.

History is the totality of the changes and experiences which humanity has undergone; the study of which is also known as history. History thus, refers to both the events of the past and their study. But by studying these events, no matter how distant in the past, the historian is hoping to promote some contemporary interest important to himself, his class or his nation;<sup>6</sup> accordingly, the relationship between the events of the past and the interest of the historian in studying them defines the purpose for studying history. For it is in this symbiotic relationship that the relevance of history generally is established, in confronting national issues of contemporary concern and problems and in helping to illuminates a better appreciation and understanding of society. Historically speaking, national integration in Nigeria is quite inseparable from Nigerian history. Thus any deliberations over Nigerian national integration question outside the context of Nigerian History, in its substance and in its motion would be superficial and sterile. For it is within this historical context that its scientificity or potential reality would be well captured.

### III. THE PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES

There is a fundamental but problematic conception of the concept of a nation which European imperialism has romantically imposed on us which views the nation racio-ethnically based on race, ancestry and blood ties. This conception is at variance with other conceptions which rightly and historically view the nation as essentially a political community, which may be multi ethnic and even multi-racial, but whose citizens share closely related historical experiences and are bound by common citizenship and see themselves and are seen by others in a distinct political entity with defined territorial and other sovereign rights.<sup>7</sup> Many a conception of the nation within this broad type, emphasize shared habitation and territoriality while others emphasize common religious faith and cultural values. Similarly, there is also a problem with the imposed racio- ethnic conception of nation state which is supposed to be a political community in which this racio-ethnic nation has developed state structures ruling over a definite territory over which it claims ownership. Historically, English nationalism was, amongst other things, expressed in the form of Chauvinism overseas. This took the process of

demoting nationalists and multi-national empires into tribes and geographical expression and relegating them, subjectively and objectively, to the very primitive stages of humanity: the simplest stage of social organization without class differentiation and potential organization, tribe. Into this stage the Yoruba, the Hausa, the Tiv, the Igbo, the Idoma and so forth were consigned without any compunction. These Eurocentric conceptions has no historical reality and are not only wrong but are also imbued with explosive contestations and are mutually conflictual thus, problematic in enabling and encouraging our understanding of national integration in Nigeria. Thus it is necessary to be clear from the beginning as to the nature of what we are talking about here. National integration in Nigeria is not an abstract thing existing in the minds of some people. It is not a figment of somebody's imagination. But like the integration of other countries, of other polities and indeed of all communities at all levels, it is not just made up of legal and constitutional enactments. As Usman clearly contends, it is made up of a network of human relationships. These relationships are real. There are ecological, economic, social, cultural, psychological and political relationships.<sup>8</sup> But the problem which Nigerian history has clearly revealed is that these relationships are being progressively problematic, highly strained and adversely battered by the intensity and scale of the decline in the living conditions of almost all the people of Nigeria, except a handful. This has been the basic problem of national integration in Nigeria.

An examination of the national integration issue through the various epochs of Nigerian history shall suffice here. Before colonialism, there existed in what became Nigeria, democratic republics, confederations, city states and feudal kingdoms and other polities of subsequent historical epochs. These disparate communities and polities had throughout out history fragmented and integrated in the course of the complex patterns taken by various forms of political contest many of which involve the issue of large scale integrations. But by the end of the second decade of the 20th century, all the polities of the area that came to form Nigeria had lost their sovereignty and became subjugated by British colonial domination which destroyed the composition of the various groupings of sub-nationalities or of separate and disparate nationalities. The colonial policy of divide and rule was also thoroughly instrumental in further dismembering these nationalities as Usman pointed out;

These precolonial polities or nationalities of nembe land, and of the Oba of Benin, the dares - Islam of the Sokoto caliphate and of Borno; Urhoboland, Tivland, the Idoma nationality, the Katafland, Kasar Kebbi or Kasar Yawuri, for example, all ceased to exist.<sup>9</sup>

What replaced these in reality as Usman further explained was the British colonial territory of the colony and protectorates of Southern and Northern Nigeria which was not however

inhabited by citizens or nationalities of the kingdom of EKO (Lagos) or the Mwaghavul Chieftdom, for example, but by colonial subjects of the British.<sup>10</sup> There after, in the struggle for independence this struggle was accordingly embarked upon, not by Ijaws, Urhobos, Tivs, Hausas, Kamuri's Yorubas, Idomas, Numana's, or Ogonis, but by Nigerians, who were also Ijaws, Urhobos, Hausas, etc. Thus, our profound integrated historical response to colonialism produced among us Nigerians who organized and led a struggle which produced Nigeria on first October, 1960, and which sustained it there after. But today however, straining relationships are threatening this hard earned foundation for national integration process, which was collectively fought and won since independence. Accordingly, from independence when the country has emerged out of the trauma of colonial domination up to date the history of Nigeria has been about the creation of capitalist classes as, and no serious attempts have been poised to face the challenges of national integration in the process. Infact it is barely few months from now Nigeria will be forty nine as an independent country (1960-2010) and yet national integration has not been an issue on the national agenda. Even as various democratic experiments have been performed and are still performing (1960-1966; 1979-1983; 1990-1993; 1999-day) as we can observe in our present regime, the clarion calls to heed this crucial matter is seemingly bleak. There has been endemic military intervention in the politics of the country as well as civil war (in what about one million Nigerians lost their lives), endemic political crises and conflicts with loss of hundred of lives and properties; there has been unprecedented monumental income that a veritable boom of the petroleum resources, have brought to the country with additional outstanding revenue windfalls, which made the Nigerian economy rather suffers equally monumental mismanagement and a catastrophic down turn which as we observed, dislocated virtually every sector of national life. Mangvwat linked this major problem to the nature of capitalism being constructed in Nigeria which is neo-colonial and dependent, which made the quality of life of most Nigerians fall short of what it is supposed to be<sup>11</sup>. It is against all this composite empirical background that an explanation is sought for the syndrome of this problematic that has bedeviled Nigeria and her effort at national integration inspite of its political independence over four decades and the enormous human and material resources at its disposal. There is no doubt that the historical process of incorporation and subordination of Nigerian country by the industrializing nation of the west over centuries did not only entail the siphoning of vital resources, both human and material, but also the obliteration and reorientation of the socio-economic and political structures of the societies in order to better serve these purposes. On the part of these societies so subjected, the process often involved a high degree of acculturalisation with all its implications in terms of the formation of value and idiosyncrasies. This again has affected many in terms of their divided loyalty to their nation's indifference to national integration process.

From critical observation, it is clear that one or two crucial imperial challenges to national integration which would make the process likely unviable and redundant is "globalization" as well as the new corporate business organisation, in the high-tech, finance and service sectors, which have created a single global economy, which has simply by passed, the horizon, the frontiers and the regulations of even the most developed of the model integrated nation-states. These imperial processes must be taken seriously.

However, the fundamental question, is whether the effects of this western imperialism on Nigeria, are sufficient to explain the endemic stagnation or even outright retrogression that is being experienced by Nigeria today. For it is now common historical knowledge that one of the most serious manifestations of the economic catastrophe that has befallen this country is institutional collapse. Apart from public corporations like the Nigerian railway corporation, the Nigeria airways, the NITEL, oil refineries etc. which has a direct bearing on the economy. Social institutions like the judiciary, education and health, not to mention some of the military and security forces and outfits as we can clearly observed, are all sliding fastly towards the precipice, this without any direct touch of these imperial processes. There has been economic growth without development internally allowed by us. Politically, there is virtually no trust and predictability to confronting these problems. These problems have grave consequences for social justice, political stability, peace and evaded or combine to made elusive, attempts at national integration.

The fundamental historical challenge arising from the foregoing as Hamman<sup>12</sup> clearly posited else where<sup>12</sup> and as we can critically observe has been the question of how long will a nation of Nigeria's size, population and resources be free from direct colonial or imperial bondage before her intellectuals stop attributing all its travails to the forces of imperialism rather than to its autonomous domestic enemies who are daily becoming more visible and terribly real? In all historical reality, is it not time we focus historical search light on this subject more on the internal situation than on the external? Is it not virtually stating the obvious to say that the internal contradictions are more critical to the nature and degree of impact of external forces on any given society? Up till now can we not easily draw a line between what represents the interests of imperialism and what does not but is only using imperialism as a scapegoat to promote self-interests?

An observation of Nigerian situation in recent times clearly reveals that the yawning gap between the rate of growth of the Nigerian economy and the rate increase in wages and the living and working conditions of the masses of Nigeria has been the most basic source of injustice in the socio-economic system. It has also been the most serious fetter to genuine national integration. Not with standing the manipulation of ethnicity, regionality and religion by the

political elite. This basic injustice constitutes the most objective threat to national integration.

It is a historical fact too that successive regimes, civil and military in Nigeria have through willful and criminal neglect deprived Nigerian masses of their basic freedoms—freedom from want and poverty, education and health care, movement, speech and security, etc. all of which combine to make them vulnerable to political manipulations by demagogues in both uniform and mufti. This constitutes serious impediment to national integration and true democracy and even goes further to challenge the integral survival of Nigerian nation. It is a basic threat to national integration because the greatest challenge to any social formation is mass injustice. A situation in which the masses are held to ransom unjustly by a tiny but parasitically powerful group, national integration becomes questionable. For national integration becomes only possible in the presence of justice within the context of a given socio-economic formation.

For above all, it is this mass injustice that possesses severe challenges and has heralded calls for dismemberment by various interest groups and nationalities in Nigerian recent past. It should be remembered that in the late 1970s when religious and communal riots became rampant in Nigeria, there was no national policy on these beyond the generalized policy of national integration. By national integration was meant the integration of the various nationality groups and religions of Nigeria into a single united and virile nation-state. The class dimension of national integration that is to say, the national question — was not raised, let alone addressed. The national question was thus posited merely in terms of war against corruption, tribalism, nepotism and regionalism. Yet, the fact of the matter was that the very group shouting against these evils were its very perpetrators, namely, the new elite competing over the spoils of the modern sectors of the economy and government of Nigeria. One is thus, not denying the fact that there are very articulate and well-connected Nigerians who look forward to ruling over oil — rich chiefdoms built around a few oil wells or becoming heads of Muslim or Sharia confederacies or Christian theocracies, the ‘leguhumes’ of Nigeria etc; when Nigeria is dismembered like the statelets of Lebanon, Somalia, Ethiopia and Yugoslavia.

#### IV. THE WAY FORWARD

National integration question is first and foremost, a question of solving vital problems of social development, abolishing national oppression and inequality, eliminating obstacles to the formation of nations and assuring freedom for the development of peoples including achievement of factual equality and internationalism in national relations.

Moreover, while equality and rights of each nationality must be upheld, those nationalities that are relatively lagging behind be given extra opportunities in order to eliminate obstacles for the development of their peoples. Such extra incentives like quota system and federal character

are therefore, not irreconcilable with a just solution of the national integration question. This however, must by no means affect the rights and opportunities of the other nationalities or regions in whatever manner. It is only with this spirit of understanding that we can achieve a just integration. It must moreover, be emphasized that this cannot be achieved in a exploitative environment which promotes antagonism between nationalities and divided society into the oppressed and oppressors.

Moreover, way forward to the problem and challenge we are facing today has to also do with rightful constitutional arrangement and enshrinement of the secular principle for the management and administration of Nigeria as well as the moral and political will of the respective operators to sincerely and truthfully work the system as Oyegun lamented;

“Nobody today consciously desires the break up the federal republic of Nigeria. The danger only comes from the extent to which we as a people have degenerated. We have been corrupted beyond measure --- are a nation that has been held captive by a thoughtless and utterly selfish machiavellian ruling elite which has wielded power without concern for the people or for our destiny as a nation; but more, for the benefit of self and friends--- rather the nation has been held captive by a rather small group of power elites that cut across the length and breadth of this country who are permanently congregated under conservative banners be it political or military and whose virtually uninterrupted access to power has brought the nation to its Knees”.<sup>13</sup>

In the same way Tukur also lamented, cautioned and pointed out that, there are many fundamental and deep rooted problems afflicting Nigeria, some of the problems are inevitable, but with understanding and competent management all could be contained; as disintegration will not solve any of them. On the contrary, fresh and bigger problems will arise with disintegration”.<sup>14</sup>

To marginalize and mete all sorts of injustices on sections of the country or some ethnic groups in the political and economic life of the country is a negation of the principle of national integration, which must be resisted. In this wise, Tubiyele rightly noted that;

The unity we want in a plural society like Nigeria is not unity without dissent; neither is it uniformity or unanimity. Unity in a democracy does not connote the avoidance of controversy among the people nor does it mean lack of opposition. But all must be maintained within the lines of national integration and development of common father land.”<sup>15</sup>

We must also plan to evolve a society free of exploitation of man by man, a society free of parasites. The social and historical content of class and class struggles of the Nigerian specific historical situations must also be addressed and this is not the idea of class struggle in its absolutist terms as some “socialist metaphysicians” advocates for, as the only solution. Moreover, this is a question which is aimed not to absolutize the universality or singularities of humanity, but the duality and at the same time organicity of the two: the dialectical relationship between two positions, and hence the need to understand properly the importance of the concept of unity in diversity.

Moreover, it should also be noted that as long as the euphoria of independence lasted, this question shall remain trivial and of little importance for as we can cull from history; the Congo debacle of the 1960s for instance, was blamed on imperialism on the one hand and on tribalism on the other, and much of the analysis attendant on this problem was made to remain very banal, pedestrian, demotic and superficial. Thus, the point here is that political independence without social emancipation tends to leave too many problems unsolved and brings dissensions and threats to integration process in the neo-colony. Furthermore, chauvinism territorial, regional religious and in whatever form which tends to be posited as the solution would only worsen the situation. Thus, one crucial point to be noted in all seriousness is that, the national/nationality question, with all that it denotes and connotes, cannot be easily resolved within the neo-colonial situation. The cabal of imperialist, comprador and chauvinist forces will not allow this easily to happen. For in the epoch of imperialism, the national question must no longer be approached as if capitalism was still on the ascendance. This is the more so because in the epoch of imperialism, nations are not just confronted with the question of national minorities but even more important the nationality question as well, and as the situation becomes more complicated by imperialist forces through the peonage system of debt repayment and servicing now being cemented by the so-called international monetary fund and the world Bank, the nationality question is bound to come to the fore in either its democratic form or its chauvinistic garb. It is hard to portend how any meaningful national integration process or nationality life will be maintained under such circumstances and within the ambit of the dastardly, if not frightening, petty bourgeois incompetence, but one thing is clear: Much as forces of the imperialized world fear the national integration question because, inter alia, they lack the necessary tools to directly handle it, the matter would therefore inwardly be resolvable. It should however, not be left to counterfeit and pseudo-intellectuals alone to handle. There is too much at stake to allow that to happen. Nor the matter can be avoided by hiding under the banner of proletarian class struggle and internationalism in the abstract. For chiliastic expectations have their problems. They belong to the realm of eschatology rather than that of history. But as the saying goes, much as preachers continue to harangue ungodly behaviour, sinners

abound. In this particular problem and challenge of national integration, we are therefore left with no option than to tread the path of justice and harangue godly behaviours. For there is clearly an organic relationship between national integration and justice, a relationship akin to that between “the chicken and the egg” revealing dialectically the nature of a socio-economic and political context of a country and within which concrete solutions and the way forward could be viably attained.

## REFERENCE

- [1]. Usman Y.B. (1994) Nigeria History and Nigeria Unity: beyond fairy tales. History Dept, ABU, Zaria. See also Temu, A.J. and Swai, B. (1981) *Historians & History*, London.
- [2]. O’Connell, J. and Beckett, P. (1977) *Education and power in Nigeria*. London. (1985) (ed) *Education and Nation Building in Africa*. London. Pall mall press. See also Gibbon, P. (1979) *Imperialism and the National Question Some Errors and Some Theses’ Utafiti: Journal of FASS University of Dares Salaam*.
- [3]. Tahir, I. (1990) “Constitutional and Political safeguard as for the enhancement of national unity.” In Tukur. M. (ed) *Administration and Political development: prospects for Nigeria*. Zaria. Institute of Administration, ABU.
- [4]. Modibbo, M.A. and Abba, A. (1986) *Education and National Integration in Nigeria: problems and prospects*. National Seminar on the National Question. Abuja.
- [5]. Mangvwat M.Y. (1990) *History, class and the National Question*. 10th Annual Congress of the HSN.
- [6]. Tahir, I. (1990) “Constitutional and Political Safeguards for the Enhancement of National Unity”. In Tukur, M. (ed) *Administrative and political Development: prospects for Nigeria*. Zaria: Institute of Administration, A.B.U.
- [7]. Usman, Y.B. (1999) *History and the Challenges to the peoples and polities of Africa in the 21st Century*. 44th Annual Congress of the Historical society to Nigeria, Abuja. See also Cottrell, R. (1982) “The White Man will just have to pick up his burden again”, *The Daily Telegraph*, London.
- [8]. Mahmoud Hamman (1994) *History and Development in Nigeria: Beyond the legacy of imperialism*. 38th Annual Congress of the H.S.N. ABU Zaria.
- [9]. Oyegun J.O (1994) “What Type of Conference.” *Nigeria: the state of the Nation and the Way Forward*. Mahdi et al (ed) Kaduna: Arewa House.
- [10]. Tukur. M. (1994) in Adamu, S. “the Nigerian press and Nigerian Unity”. In mahdi et al (eds) *Nigeria: the state of the Nation and the way forward*. Kaduna: Arewa House. See also Owen. R. and Sutcliffe B. (eds) (1972) *Studies in the Theory of Imperialism*. London.
- [11]. Mangvwat M.Y. (1992) *The Settler factor As an Aspect of the National question: Evidence from History*. Guest Speech on the Occasion of Pus Kaat (Mwaghavul Day). Mangu.
- [12]. Barogo Yolamu, R. (1997) *Ethnic Pluralism and Democratic Stability’ -The. Basis of Conflict and Consensus in Iyovbaire* (ed) *Democratic Experience*.
- [13]. Haruna Dlakwa (1996) *Ethnicity in Nigerian Polities: Formation of Political Organisations and Parties*. In Okafor, F.U. (ed) *New Strategies of curbing Ethnic and Religious Conflict in Nigeria*. Enugu, Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- [14]. Liddel Hart (1972) *Why Don’t We Learn From History?* London. See also Aghiri, A. (1980), *The Recent Stage of Imperialism and Non-Alignment*. Dares Salaam.
- [15]. Mangvwat Monday Y (1996) “Bourgeois Crisis in Nigeria”. *Newswatch Magazines Past and Present*.
- [16]. Akpan, N.U. (1986) *Ethnicity and Nigeria’s Political Future” Part Two and Three*, New Nigeria, Kaduna.