

RESOLVING THE CRISES IN THE NIGERIAN FEDERALISM AND THE 2015 ELECTIONS

¹Ogoma Daniel Ebum

¹ Lecturer, Department of Political Science & International Relations, Landmark University, Omu-Aran, Kwara State, Nigeria.

Manuscript ID: RCMSS/IJPCS/1410011

ABSTRACT

Every Society is faced with one problem or the other. Whatever is the problem, the goal of every government is to solutions to them. One way by which leaders try to solve these problems is through federalism. This paper looks into the origin and practice of federalism in Nigeria. It is argued that the system has not produced the desired results because the various military and civilian rulers have not done enough to make it work. The paper also argues that, contrary to the view of some writers, the Nigerian federal system was not an imposition of the former British Colonial Masters; rather, it was adopted with the full participation and endorsement of Nigerian leaders then, and for the interests of the generality of Nigerians. As the 2015 election gathers momentum, care must be taken so that the country will not fall a victim of self-fulfilling prophecy of disintegration.

KEY WORDS: Federal System, Federal Character, Power Sharing; Military Rule

INTRODUCTION

Nigeria, the United States of America, Switzerland, India, Germany, Canada, are some of the countries in the World that are practicing a federal system of government. Some of these countries have many things common which includes; a large population, diversity of culture, different religion, diverse economic resources, and so on. While the system has helped some of these countries to solve or reduce some of their lingering social, economic, religious and political problems, there are some factors militating against the success of the system in some other countries like Nigeria. For instance, in Nigeria, the fear of domination of one region by the other is lively. Marginalization and tribalism are still noticeable. The level of development in the country is still low. Agitation for state creation is on the high. Religious conflicts are still common in the country. Yet, these are some of the issues federalism is expected to resolve in the country. It has even got to a point where concerned Nigerians are asking whether the system is a curse or blessing to Nigeria. This is because, the system, as it is being operated in the country, seems to create more problems than it intended to solve

Our first assignment in this paper would be a discussion on the meaning and some essential features of a federal system of government. We shall later trace the genesis of the system in Nigeria. Then, we shall look into why the system has not achieved its desired results in Nigeria. The paper also looks into some efforts at resolving issues in the Nigerian federalism such as the Federal Character principle and power sharing mechanism. Finally, we shall make some recommendations on how the system can work effectively in Nigeria.

FEDERAL SYSTEM OF GOVERNMENT, WHAT IS IT?

Scholars of great reputation have written volume on this topic, and they have given diverse definition to the concept. In some cases, these scholars do not agree with one another as to how best the concept can be defined, yet, they are all competent authorities. The reason for these diverse definitions may not be unconnected with cultural and social background colouration. We shall consider some of these definitions. According to Akpeninor (2007: 41) "*Federation is a union comprising a number of potentially self-governing states or regions united by a central government.*" He went further to say that "*It can be considered the opposite of the unitary state.*" Appadorai, (1975: 495), submits that;

A federal state is one in which there is a central authority that represents the whole, and acts on behalf of the whole in external affairs and in such internal affairs as held to be of common interest; and in which there are also provincial or state authorities with power of legislation and administration within the sphere allotted to them by the constitution.

To distinguish a federal state from other states, the author goes ahead to enumerate some basic features of a federal state, saying: "These then are the essential features of federation: the division of powers, the supremacy of the constitution, and the rigidity of the constitution." (1975: 496). For Utim Benjamin, (2005: 2)

Federation is a constitutional arrangement in which law making powers and functions are divided between the central and state governments in such a way that each, within its respective sphere of jurisdiction and competence is equal, independent and co-ordinate to the extent of the federating states voluntarily surrendering some functions exigent on perceived capacity and desire to a central government for their collective good.

According to Michael Ogu (2011: 2) federalism is simply put: "*the pursuit of development by central and other integrated independent units of government.*" K. C. Wheare, (1963: 10), had defined federalism as "The method of dividing powers in so that the general and regional are each within a sphere co-ordinate and independent." Wheare is generally regarded as the father of federalism. The definitions considered earlier are only instances of Wheare's definition. Wheare himself, an American, was influenced by the history of American federalism. We shall adopt his version of federalism because other definitions after his are merely responding to it. As mentioned, Wheare's was influenced by the history of the American federal system of government. The 13 independent states of America came together in the famous Philadelphia Conference of 1787 and voluntarily agreed to form a federation, releasing some of their powers to a central government on matters of general interests.

Wheare further gave some basic features of a federal system of government to include the following:

- There must be at least, two levels of government.
- Each level of government must be independent.
- The levels of government must derive their powers from the constitution.

- There must be a Supreme Court that will adjudicate between the two governments in time of constitutional crisis.
- There must be financial autonomy for the two levels of government.
- During the constitutional amendment, none of the governments should be seen as inferior.

For Wheare, therefore, any state that is able to meet these basic standards can be said to be a federal state, if not, such a claim is a ruse. Wheare's standards have been accused of being too legalistic and structural. The reason being that, it is argued, it is possible for a state to possess those features highlighted by Wheare, yet, it may not be federal. This argument contains some elements of truth, however, his point is that, there is no state that is federal that does not possess these features, and we believe that Wheare was only laying a blue-print for a federal system of government.

WHY COUNTRIES ADOPT A FEDERAL SYSTEM

Omotoso, (2010: 141) wrote: "The attraction for federalism bothers on its perceived integrative tendency which makes it capable of serving heterogeneous societies in situation of crisis." Countries adopt a federal system as a way of solving some problems which are general. For instance, the preamble of the American Constitution has this declaration:

We the people of the United States, in Order to form a more permanent Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defence, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this constitution of the United States of America.

Nigeria adopted a federal system of government because of her large size and her diversity. Nigeria houses peoples of diverse culture, religion and language. Apart from the dominant Yoruba, Hausa/Fulani and Igbo, it has been estimated that there are over 250 minority groups in Nigeria. These peoples have different religion such as Christianity, Islam and the African Traditional Religion. According to Obafemi Awolowo, (1947: 48-49),

If a country is bilingual or multi-lingual like Nigeria, the constitution must be federal, and the constituent states must be organized on linguistic basis; any attempt to experiment with a unitary constitution in a bilingual or a multi-lingual or multi-national country must fail in the long run.

A federal system can also be adopted in order to enhance strong military defence and mutual economic benefits. When resources are pulled together, strong defence is possible and the economic welfare of the people is improved upon.

HISTORY OF NIGERIAN FEDERALISM

The history of Nigerian federalism is a history of Nigerian politics, and to a larger extent, it is correct to say that the Nigerian federalism is a brain child of the British government. Following the partition of Africa among the colonial powers at the famous Berlin Conference of 1884/85, the present day Nigeria was formally ceded to Britain (Ayanele, 1998:209). Britain then

established her authority on the area, especially after the fall of Benin in 1897. The various kingdoms and empires lost their initial independence as they came under the subjugation of the British rule. In 1906, the Crown Colony of Lagos was merged with the Southern Protectorate. What is later known as Nigeria was at this time known as the Southern and the Northern Protectorate. In 1914, Lord Fredrick Lugard amalgamated the two protectorates, and the name, Nigeria was adopted for the country. Then, a central government was put in place to take the control of the whole country.

The government of Nigeria did not change structurally and significantly until John Richards became governor and introduced a new constitution which was called the Richards Constitution of 1951. The constitution introduced what has been dubbed regionalism. Bernard Bourdillion had created western and eastern region from the old Southern Protectorate in 1935, meaning that Nigeria had three regions, including the northern region. Richards then created an assembly each for these regions. However, this could not be regarded as a federal structure because, according to Ayanele (1998; 160), the regions were not empowered to enact laws. They were to make annual estimates for their region, sent representatives to the central government in Lagos and to advise the governor on any matter he referred to them. Referring to this period in the history of Nigeria, Akpeninor (2007: 43), wrote: "Until that point, the constitution had a unitary tendency in creating three regions and delegating some powers to them, the Richards constitution became the forerunner of the later Federal constitutions."

Nigeria continued to make progress in the quest for a well-ordered society. In 1950, at the Ibadan Conference where all the major regional leaders of the country representing their people were present, after a lot of deliberations and compromise, some decisions were taken, chief among which was the desire for a federal system of government. Again, similar decision was also taken at the London Conference of 1953 and the Lagos Conference of 1954. At this time, the regional leaders showed more commitment to the practice of federalism because they made some compromise without which it could not have been possible for the system to take-off. Commenting on the determination on the parts of the regions, Richard Sklar, (2004:3-4), wrote:

Northern leaders forsook their preference for a virtual confederation of autonomous regions by which they hoped to protect a traditional system of authority exercised by Muslim emirs in the Northern provinces. In return, the eastern leaders agreed to retract their demand for either a unitary form of government or, at the very least, a strongly centralized federation. ... However, the western leaders were obliged to cede control of Lagos, the country's primary commercial Centre and principal port, which was designated as the federation's capital city and its environs, federal territory.

It was the 1954 Lyttleton Constitution that finally enthroned federalism in Nigeria. Powers were constitutionally divided between the central and the regional governments. Each region had a bicameral legislature and equal representation at the Federal Executive Council. The regions controlled the Marketing Boards and resources under them. Election matters were handled by the regions. Above all, each region had a constitution, apart from the federal constitution (Irahor, 2011: 3). Describing this era, Nuhu wrote:

“Indeed, so far, the golden era of Nigeria’s was attained. At least, at that time, there was the true operation of the principle of fiscal federalism that apparently enhanced the remarkable potential of economic viability of the regions.” (2004: 50)

In 1966, the military government of General Aguyi Ironsi upturned the Nigerian federalism his Unification Decree of number 34, abolished the federal system and planted in its place, a unitary system. The government of Gowon, however, reversed the order with the promulgation of Decree No, 8 of 1967. General Gowon went ahead to create 12 states from the existing four regions (Mid-western region was created from the smallest region, Western region, in 1963). In his speech, he showed a commitment to federalism. He said:

To this end, I agree with my colleagues in the Supreme Military Council to the promulgation of the Decree No. 8 which completely decentralized this country and even went further than the Republican Constitution as it existed before 15th January, 1966.(Gowon: 1967)

HOW A FEDERAL SYSTEM IS FORMED

There are two major theories on the formation of a federal system of government: the aggregative and the disaggregative theories. These theories coincide with the view of Richards Sklar (2004: 41) that: “Some federal unions have been formed ‘from the bottom-up’ by pre-existing political entities; others have been created ‘from the top down’ by federating the governments of previously unitary states.”

We have an aggregative federal system when previously independent states or regions come together to release and handover some of their authorities to a new central authority to exercise power on their behalf for their own good and benefits. In other words, the new government is a creation of the independent states. A good example of this system is the United States of America. In 1787, 13 independent states came together at the famous Philadelphia Convention and founded a federal state known today as the United States of America. The American federal system is therefore a form of the “from the bottom-up” federalism.

The disaggregative federalism is found in a place like Nigeria. From what we have said earlier, the administration of Nigeria from 1914 to, say, 1946, was purely unitary. The complaints of Nigerians, home and abroad (Okungbowa & Epku: 2012, 127), largely necessitated a federal system as a way of finding lasting solutions to the problems confronting the country. Roberts and Simbine had written that:

... when socially and culturally distinct people find themselves together in the same polity through circumstance of history, to live peacefully together, they have to strike a balance, which must be acceptable to all the parties involved. Federalism, the system which shares power in such a way that each recipient unit assumes a separate existence and commands relatively exclusive authority over some clearly specified sphere of state activity, in principle, ensures such a balance (Omotoso, 2010; 141-142).

The Ibadan Conference that was held in Ibadan in 1950 provided the opportunity for Nigerians through their leaders to determine their fate. What we had in the case of Nigeria was that, there

was already in place a highly centralised government and structure. But after series of negotiation, it was agreed that the central authority should release some of its powers to the new states. We therefore have a “from the top down” federal system in Nigeria. That is, we have a central or national government that relinquishes some of its powers to the federating units. In this arrangement, power is seconded by central government to its component units, unlike where power is given to the central government by the federating units as in the case of America, which makes the system there to be in the form of “from the bottom-up”. An important fact students of comparative politics must note is that, while the central government of America is the new state, in Nigeria, the central is the old government and the federating units are the new ones. The point being made here is that, in the case of the Nigerian federalism, it is the government at the center that creates the regional or state governments, whereas, in the American federalism, the federating units are the creators of the central government.

Some scholars have argued that the Nigerian federalism is a creation of the British colonial master, and that the system is a failure in Nigeria because it was an imposition on the people (Osadolor, 1998, referenced by Omotoso (2010)). These scholars therefore hold the British government responsible for the failure of the system. Iraboh, in particular, was convinced that the British imposed federalism on Nigeria when he wrote:

The British deliberately imposed the federal system on Nigeria in order to maintain a neo-colonial control of the country after independence. Since federalism is more or less an evidence of some form of disunity, political weakness and an uneven economic development, the British deliberately wanted to keep the federating units as apart as possible so as to meddle in the internal affairs of Nigeria to their own economic and political advantage after they would have granted her independence. (2011: 3)

The nearest valid argument to back this claim is the allegation that the British divided the country unevenly, so much so that the northern region was larger both in population and territory than the combination of the east and west. (Iraboh, 2011: 3) However, a contrary view to this claim by Peter Ekeh submits that:

Thus, there is a temptation to assume that the formulation of Nigerian federalism was borrowed from more mature and older federations in the west. Quite to the contrary, Nigerian federalism was totally homegrown from domestic circumstances of social formations of new ethnic configurations that emerged from the experiences of negotiations for self-government in the decade of colonization in the 1950s. (2004: 19)

The questions that must be answered are: why was the system a success from 1945 up to 1966? And, after Independence, what have we done to right the wrong of the past even if we agree that the colonial masters created the problem? After all, the problems that are associated with the Nigerian federalism that we mentioned earlier were not as pronounced as they are now before the 1966 military take-over. Our history needs to be re-read in order to be fair in our assessment of the colonial rule. This will also help us to know where to look for solutions to our problems. The truth is that, the advent of the military into the Nigerian politics in 1966 eroded the federal system

and actual practice of the system in the country. This is because, by its virtue, military regime necessarily operates a form of unitary system where orders flow from the above. The government of General Aguyi Ironsi, with decree no 34 of 1966, abolished the federal system in the country and planted in its place a unitary system.

THE PRINCIPLE OF FEDERAL CHARACTER

One concrete effort made in the Nigerian constitution of 1979 to fight marginalization and to allay the fear of domination of one ethnic group by the other was the establishment of the *federal Character Commission*. The Commission was also enshrined in the 1999 Constitution of the country. The third schedule, part 1, item c of the constitution sets out the power and mission of the Commission thus:

- (a) Work out an equitable formula subject to the approval of the National Assembly for the distribution of all cadres of posts in the public service of the federation and of the states, the armed forces of the federation, the Nigeria Police Force and other government security agencies, government owned companies and parastatals of the state (b) promote and enforce compliance with the principles of proportional sharing of all bureaucratic, economic, media and political at all levels of government.

The principle of federal character was aimed at resolving the lingering problem of marginalization. According to Onifade & Imhonopi (2013; 78):

The federal character principle was later enshrined in the 1979 Constitution of Nigeria with the goal to accommodate the diverse linguistic, ethnic, religious and geographic groups in the decision-making, socio-political and economic apparatuses of the state. The policy also aimed to foster unity, peace, equal access to resources and promote the integration of the less advantaged state for improvements and good conditions of living in the country.

It was principally intended to give a sense of belonging to all the peoples that and parts that make up the federation by ensuring that none of the parts is marginalized against or neglected in the sharing of the available resources and political positions in the country. To this end, for instance, it became mandatory the every state must be represented in the Federal Executive Council by at least, a minister. Also, at the Senate, each state, regardless of the geographical size or population, has three Senators representing it.

RESOLVING THE CRISIS: POWER SHARING AND POLITICAL ZONING

Power sharing in politics is a way by which political leaders in a country agree within themselves to share elective and non-elective positions in a country among the different ethnic groups that make up the country. This political arrangement is usually common in a country that houses people of diverse ethnicities like Nigeria. It is usually not documented because it is against the provision of the constitution which allows every qualified person to aspire for any political position in the land. This non-documentation of the power sharing in the constitution opens the process to some abuse. However, circumstances at times make it the best option, especially where

one ethnic group is capable of holding on to power for a very long period of time. Awopetu & Ajinde (2012: 13) have this to say on power sharing:

In societies where power sharing is properly practiced, the basis for it is to minimize as much as possible democratic competition within acceptable boundaries in order to avoid intergroup violence that would have resulted from differences of opinion along ethnic lines.

Power sharing and zoning formula, if properly planned, and if the planners are sincerely ready to make it work, will go a long way to solving some of the crises that occur in a multi-lingual federal systems like Nigeria. But, like other systems, (political and economic) if the people are not prepare to make the system work, it will not. This is bane of power sharing principle in Nigeria. Ideology is not the problem in Nigeria it is the executioners of the ideology.

PDP, POWER SHARING AND THE NIGERIAN POLITICS

The political leadership of Nigeria have always believed in co-existence because of they know that the people and the country have a lot to gain if united. It is for this reason people say: “In unity we stand, in division we fall.” At the same time, they are well aware that access to the power at the center is one of the banes of the survival of the country. The regime of General Ibrahim Babangida (1985- 1993) made attempt to resolve the issue of marginalization and ethnicity in the country when the two-party-system was introduced in 1992. The political parties in the pre-independence, first Republic and the second Republic were to a large extent regional (Anyanele; 1998), going by the leaderships, memberships and the results of the parties in the general elections. The Babangida regime created and sponsored two political parties; The Social Democratic Party and the National Republican Party and politicians were enjoined to belong to either of them. The presidential election was widely believed to have been won by the SDP whose candidate was Chief M. K. O. Abiola, a Yoruba man from the south. However, the result was annulled by the military junta. It was widely believed that the north secretly worked against the victory of Abiola because he was not a northerner and the northerners believed that the presidency was their birthright. Abiola later died in detention when he wanted to claim his mandate and this threw the country into crises. The government of General Sanni Abacha that came to power after the inglorious regime of the Chief Earnest Shonekan-led Interim-Government divided the country into six geo-political zones and the presidency was to be rotated among these zones (Olawale & Adesanmi: 2012). However, the ambition of General Abacha to be the next president under this arrangement scuttled the process. Abacha died while in power and he was succeeded by General Abdusalami Abubakar. Abubakar disbanded the five political parties created by his predecessor and when ban was lifted on politics, three parties; the Alliance for Democracy (AD), the All Peoples Party (APP) and the People’s Democratic Party (PDP) were registered.

The PDP seemed to understand the ethnicity and marginalization problems in the country more than the other parties. For this reason, key positions were to be zoned among the zones. For instance, the presidency was zoned to the South-West, in the words of Awopetu and Ajinde (2012; 14) to; “compensate the south-west due to the annulment of the June 12 presidential election of 1993.” To this end, nobody from the other zones vied for the post, and Olusegun Obasanjo emerged as the consensus candidate of the party that invariably won the 1999 election.

This was in keeping with the party agreement of the party members and the party's constitution on power sharing. The preamble of the party's constitution is as follows:

- (b) to create socio-political conditions conducive to national peace and unity by ensuring fair and equitable distribution of resources and opportunities.
- (c) to conform with the principles of power shift and power sharing by rotating key political offices among diverse peoples of our country.

Initially, this aspect of the constitution was said not to have been documented, and so, it was a merely "a gentleman agreement" (Awopetu & Ajinde: 2012; 15). Based on the understanding that power would stay in the south for a period of 8 years and after that, it would return to the north, Obasanjo picked his running mate, Atiku Abubarka from the north. The understanding probably was that there would be no second term, (although it was allowed), so that after a zone must have ruled for four years, power would shift to another zone but still in the south for another four years. The PDP zoning formula was however faulty on some grounds. It only acknowledged the division of the country in the south and the north but not according to the six geo-political zones. According to a Chieftain of the party, Alex Ekwueme (2013):

Still, because of the importance of the issue, when we came in PDP, we created the rotational arrangement so that the south and the north would have taken eight years term each, and Obasanjo has done his own for the south, and if Yar'Adua was still alive, he would have completed his eight years, meaning nobody would be talking about this or that by now.

PDP lived up to its principle of power sharing and Obasanjo, a Yoruba man from the southwest in the south, and Alex Ekwueme, another southerner but from the southeast in the south, contested the presidential primaries of the PDP. Again, no northerner contested the primary in accordance with the zoning formula. The composition of the voters in the election provided cheap victory for Obasanjo. The delegates included ministers and ambassadors, all of whom owned their positions courtesy of Obasanjo. They also included the governors of the PDP-controlled states who were also seeking Obasanjo's support for their second term agenda. At the end, Obasanjo won.

In 2007, at the PDP Convention held to pick the party's candidate for the 2007 presidential election, all the candidates were northerners. This also followed the power sharing formula of the party. Alhaji Musa Yar'Adua won the ticket, and picked Goodluck Jonathan from the south-south geo-political zone in the south. However, before the expiration of his term, President Yar'Adua died in office after a protracted illness in 2010. Following the provision of the 1999 constitution, Jonathan became the acting but later, the substantial president. This was not however without some controversies especially from the north part of the country which did not want a southerner to share their slot with them.

In the 2011 electioneering, the northerners felt that they had not spent their 8 years of rule. They had probably expected that the southerners would not contest the primaries of the PDP. This time the zoning formula was set aside. Some northerners in the PDP, led by Yahaya Kwande (*Nigerian Tribune: 2013*), went to court that the zoning be respected and preserved while some argued that the zoning formula was an internal arrangement of the party, and that the federal constitution which allows every qualified Nigerian to aspire for any elective position in the land

is supreme to the PDP constitution. The court ruled that, indeed, there was the zoning arrangement but that it was “an internal arrangement of the party”, and so, it could not supersede the provision of the 1999 Federal Constitution. Therefore, Jonathan, and every other qualified Nigerian was eligible to contest.

The northerner leaders lost but Jonathan knew that he needed them in the coming general election. According to Awopetu & Ajinde (2012; 17) the Northern Political Forum, chaired by Adamu Ciroma, tabled two conditions before they could support Jonathan. He was to sign an undertaking that he would not seek re-election after his first term, and that, he would ensure that power returns to the north by 2015. Jonathan was said to have rejected the two conditions. He left them and embarked on real politicking. He picked a northerner, Namadi Sambo, governor of Kaduna state, whom he had made the Vice-President when he became the president in 2010, as his running-mate. The northerners too devised their means of getting what they felt was their “right”. They made arrangement of producing a formidable candidate that could defeat Jonathan at the party’s primaries. In the internal election conducted in the north, Atiku Abubakar was said to have defeated General Babangida, the result of which Babangida did not wholly welcome. The race to win the PDP primaries was between Atiku and Jonathan. Unlike the race between Obasanjo and Ekwueme in 2003, the power of incumbency was not so much manifested in the election. Jonathan won due to a combination of factors: Obasanjo prevailed on the delegates from the southwest to massively vote for Jonathan. Most of the governors were his friends when Jonathan was the governor of Bayelsa State. Besides, the southeast delegates also sympathized with Jonathan who is from their neighboring zone, south-south. The Sambo option also worked for Jonathan while the lukewarm attitude of Babangida did not help Atiku. Atiku himself, though a seasoned politician, was more concerned about support from the north instead of the whole country. At the end, Jonathan won and this paved the way for him to contest the 2011 presidential election. It must be mentioned, however that, of all these factors, the Obasanjo factor stood out (see Obasanjo’s letter in the *Nation* Newspaper, December 12th, 2013). Evidence of this was the result from the southwest where Atiku scored 14 votes and Jonathan, 483 votes (Sahara report: Jan,14, 2011)

THE 2015 GENERAL ELECTIONS

The question of whether or not President Jonathan will contest the 2015 is no longer relevant because his actions and deeds lean towards this. Apart from having the constitutional right to contest, his admirers can easily point to his numerous achievements. The issues however are the implications it will have for him, PDP, the north, the East and the entire country. Awofeso (2013), worried by the PDP’s attitude to zoning, writes:

By PDP’s own machinations, “zoning” thus becomes a weapon of ethnic fights rather than a benign policy of ethnic peace it was designed for. And now, worse of all, as PDP interpretative crookedness mutates severally into virulent strands, each meretricious Interpretation of “Zoning” predictably fosters ethnic distrust in Nigeria.

The Yorubas, like other Nigerians, also have the right to contest the presidential election. What will be the implications of Jonathan contesting this election? What then becomes of the PDP zoning formula?

It is not likely that the PDP will still respect its zoning formula. The reason being that, there was no zoning, so to say, in 2011 after all, Atiku and Jubril from the north contested the 2011 PDP presidential primaries. If zoning is discarded as it is likely, then Nigerians should beware that in politics, there is no “gentleman agreement”, and so, the words of the politicians may not be taken seriously. If this is the end of zoning, then this portends danger for the unity and survival of the country. It must be remembered that zoning, as undemocratic as it may be, was a partial solution to the problem of marginalization as we earlier alluded to. Yet, the problem then is still relevant to the future of the country. Going by the nature ethnic politics in the country cum the lopsidedness of the population, the fear is that, a region may become so powerful in voting strength to dominate other regions in the country. Tari Sekibo (2013), made allusion to this when he said:

The structural imbalance has affected our demand for development. If you see what is happening at the National Assembly, if they (north) want something and is not given to them, they will use their number to subjugate the others. That is what is happening. So, we need structural adjustment in the way the Nigerian nation has been structured.

The major issue at stake here is the population strength. It will be good if we do not forget where we came from.

For the Igbo, they may have to wait for a very long time to produce the Nigerian president. This is because the people in the area do not seem to be so united as to produce the president. Their egalitarian system (Ayanele; 1998; 124) of the pre-colonial days that portrayed a man as the king of his house seems to still have influence on their mode of playing politics even till today. To produce the president therefore, they need to put their house in order. Then, they should seek alliance with the major groups in the country. This seems not to be realistic before the next election. However, they can still make some compromise by supporting another major group this time so that in the nearest future, they can be supported.

The power of the incumbency is a major factor in African politics in general, and in Nigeria in particular. Very few reigning president have been defeated in Africa. For instance, Tafawa Balewa won the 1959 general election to become the Nigerian first Prime Minister. Everything unconstitutional was employed to win the election of 1964 (Anyanele; 1998; 186). The irregularities of the 1964 election were among the reasons given for the military take-over of January, 1966. Alhaji Shehu Shagari came to power in 1979 and won again in 1983 in another controversial election. The poor conduct of the election was also cited for the military take-over of that year. Obasanjo came to power as a civilian president in 1999 and won again in 2003. The election was no less controversial than the others before it. If precedence is anything to go by, if Jonathan contests the 2015 election, he may win. However, this is not to say that the incumbent cannot be defeated as we have seen the examples in some African countries. This is particularly important because a lot of things have happened and many are likely to happen before 2015. The road to the presidency may not be so rosy for Jonathan like that of 2011. For one thing, the Yoruba that massively voted for him in 2011, irrespective of their party affiliation and religious divides are not so much comfortable with his administration. Recently, notable Yoruba elders including Chief Olu Falae, a prominent politician, and Rev Bolanle Gbonigi, a vocal and fearless Clergy (*TELL; 2013*), lamented how the Yorubas have been marginalized in the government,

claiming that their men were not in the first six positions in the political hierarchy of the country. They also claimed that infrastructure in the area, especially, the Lagos-Ibadan Express Way, are in poor states. Besides, hardly would anyone doubt that Obasanjo worked hard to see that Jonathan became the president in 2011. President Jonathan, according to Obasanjo, himself acknowledged the crucial roles Obasanjo played in his emergence as the president.

According to Obasanjo (2013); "Mr President, you have on a number of occasions acknowledged the role God enabled me to play in your ascension to power. You put me third after God and your parents among those who impacted your life..." There had been a lot of rumours that the relationship between the 'father' and his erstwhile 'son' was not cordial and the members of the public seemed to be confused as to what to believe. However, the Obasanjo's letter to the president in 2013 left no one in doubt that the one-time 'father and son' have indeed become enemies. Obasanjo was so critical of the Jonathan's administration that he likened it with the inglorious regime of General Sanni Abacha. The point being made is that, the massive votes Jonathan got in 2011 from the Yoruba people may emaciate drastically in 2015. Sambo was another factor that contributed to the success of Jonathan in the 2011 election. It however remains to be seen if the magic wand will still be possible in 2015. This is because the northerners are eagerly waiting to get back what they thought was their 'birth right' which they lost some years back. The Rotimi Ameachi factor is also not in favour of Jonathan. Ameachi is the governor of Rivers state and the Chairman of the Governors' Forum. He can possess a serious challenge to Jonathan. All these factors put together show that Jonathan may need more than luck to win the 2015 election.

What about the north? The north is warming up for the presidency If there was any agreement, documented or not,, recognized by the Federal Constitution or not, that power must return to the north after eight years,, then the northerners may be justified to want to come back to power. To realize this ambition, they have two options: one, they have to put their house in order and produce a credible and acceptable candidate, not only to the northerners but also to the entire people of the country. Then they should zone the position of the Vice-president to either the Yoruba in the southwest or to the Igbo in the southeast. With this arrangement, it is likely they can win the PDP primaries. If this option fails and Jonathan wins the primary then, they have to decide to either wait for another four years (2019) or they put party alliance aside. The registration of the All Progressive Party (APC) can help the northerners to realize their ambition. If the APC zones the presidency to the north with a popular candidate, leaves the Chairmanship to the west and approach the Igbo with the Vice-president, there may be serious trouble for the PDP. The defection of some prominent PDP Leaders to the APC does not show that PDP is in good standing. As things are now, it is either PDP wins and the north loses or the north wins and PDP loses.

What then happens to the country? This must bother Nigerians irrespective of party affiliation. In 2005, the American Intelligence Community held a conference with a topic: 'Mapping Sub-Sahara African Future', came out with some declarations, among which is that:

While currently, Nigeria's leaders are locked in a bad marriage that all dislike but not dare to leave, there are possibilities that could disrupt the precarious equilibrium in Abuja. If millions were to flee a collapse Nigeria, the surrounding up to Ghana, would be destabilized. Further, a failed Nigeria probably could

not be reconstituted for many years if –ever- and not without massive international support (Nzeribe; 2013)

Nigerians must embark on some political strategy if the US prediction that Nigeria may disintegrate by the year 2015 is not to come to pass. Some government officials have come out to say that there is nothing in the prediction and that there had been more serious challenges in the country in the past, yet the country survived them. This prediction should however not be taken lightly because it was specific, and the timing too should worry us. This was a prediction made in 2005 and everything seems to be working together to make it come to fulfillment. The Niger Delta crises, the Boko Haram insurgence and the declaration of the state of emergency in some states in the north, as well as the Jonathan-Ameachi saga, all lay credence to the possible fulfillment of the prediction unless some serious measures are taken to arrest the situation. Mass unemployment and marginalization are also parts of the issues that call for serious and timely attention. Then, the electoral body, INEC, must help to prevent the collapse of the country in 2015. The electoral bodies have contributed to the various political crises in the country since independence (Oluwasanmi, 2007).

The 1964, 1979, 1983 electoral crises in the country were generated and perpetuated by the electoral Commissions. If the presumed winner is declared loser and the loser declared winner in the 2015 election the violence that gripped some parts of the north following the declaration of the 2011 presidential election may resume in a wholesale dimension in 2015. In order to prevent the Hobbesian state of nature and avoid disintegration of the country, practical steps must be taken to arrest some of the issues discussed in this paper.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Federalism has the tendency of uniting people of ethnic and religious diversities. In fact, one of the advantages of federalism all over the world is the promotion of unity in diversity. It is the best system of government that allays the fear of domination and marginalization. Unfortunately, this has not been the case in Nigeria. One of the major reasons federalism works in America is that, the different tribes that form the union are able to put their cultural differences behind them after the formation of the federal government. According to Fukuyama (1998; 118):

Despite the diversity of backgrounds, lands and races to which Americans trace their ancestry, on coming to America, they abandoned those identities by and large and assimilated into a new society without sharply defined social classes or long-standing ethnic and national divisions. America's social and ethnic structure has been sufficiently fluid to prevent the emergence of rigid social classes, significant sub-nationalism or linguistic minorities. American democracy has therefore rarely faced some of the more intractable social conflicts of other older societies.

The founding fathers of the American federalism must have done serious work to make sure that the Americans forget the cultural differences and began to see themselves as one Americans. For a federal system to unite peoples of deep ethnic diversities there must be great commitment on the part of the people, and most especially, the leaders to make it work. The mere presence of federal structure and institutions are not enough to produce the desired result. The people must sit, talk

and agree on some issues that are fundamental to their existence. The people must be able to tolerate and accommodate one another. According to Elazar (Omotoso: 2010; 144); “Federalism can only exist where there is a considerable tolerance of diversity and willingness to take political action through conciliation even when the power to act unilaterally is available.”

No matter how undemocratic zoning and power sharing may be, it appears logical under the present circumstance in Nigeria. As a matter of fact, there is nothing that is undemocratic in what the people want if they freely express it. The system would have worked effectively if the leadership of the PDP had been so committed to making it work. Power sharing should be embraced by all well-meaning Nigerians, and should not be left for the political parties alone. Power sharing and zoning should be enshrined in the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria. One reason it has been abused by the PDP was because it is in conflict with the constitution of the country. This can still be done before the 2015 general elections.

However, the above suggestion is just a palliative measure and a short-time solution. There is no doubting the fact that one of the major reasons people want to control the power at the center is because, power is a means to ends such as money, glory honour and allocation of resources, and the more the power the more these ends. Nigeria should take a clue from Switzerland. That is, Nigeria should adopt a Collegiate Executive. By this suggestion, each of the six-geo-political zones should elect a Councilor, or if we like, we can still retain the name, president for a one-time period of six years. After the emergence of the six presidents from the six zones, one of them should be elected *only* by the other presidents, as the Chairperson of the Council for just one year. There must also be an elected Vice-President. The arrangement should be made in such a way that within the period of six years, each president must have acted as a Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson at different times. Both the Chairperson and the Vice are simply the firsts among the equals. They co-operate with colleagues just as their colleagues co-operate with them, knowing fully well that their turn will still come. One advantage of this proposal is that, no ethnic group will have the chance to dominate others. Second, no zone will have to wait endlessly to produce the president. Three, elections will be less violent than they are in the country at present. Four, rivalries among the parties will be healthy, knowing fully well that they need the co-operation of one another at the center. Lastly, this suggestion does not promote a one-party system. As a matter of fact, it is the peoples programs instead of the party programs that would be implemented because decisions are jointly taken.

CONCLUSION

We have argued in this paper that the Nigerian federalism was not imposed on Nigerians without their consent. Even if it were, there were opportunities to reverse it if the Nigerian leaders believed that it was not the best for the country. Instead, since they made commitments to make it work, they should then make it work in practice. Whether a federal system is formed for the bottom-up or from top-down is not a serious issue. Federalism works in America not necessarily in the way it was formed but most importantly because the people and the leaders were committed to making it work. The only factor that can make it work in Nigeria is the desire of the people and the leaders to make it work. A great opportunity now presents itself with the setting up of the National Conference inaugurated by President Jonathan Goodluck in 2013 to right the wrongs of the past 100 years of the Nigerian statehood. Jonathan in his inaugural speech at the Confab had said, as quoted from *The National Mirror* that he had heard people say that:

We do not need such a conference since we already have an elected parliament and government in place. As cogent as the argument may sound, I have on the sincere conviction that in the truly democratic nation we are striving to build, we must never ignore the loudly express views of the majority of ordinary Nigerians I have heard our people say that we need to openly and frankly discuss our problems and seek acceptable solutions instead of allowing them to fester and remain source of perennial conflict afflicted by strife and violence.

If those in opposition to the Conference are to be proved wrong, absolute commitment, political will and utmost sincerity are required, not only on the part of the president but also on the delegates. Already there are doubts about the conference by some of its delegates on the ground of sincerity. Abdulwaheed Orma of the NLC said:

We are protesting against something that is being brought through the backdoor: the decision for the committee to select their chairmen and deputies at the committee level. This decision was concluded by delegates at the plenary, only for it to be resurface through the Committee of 50, who are only mandated to talk about the voting pattern

Yet, something good can still come out this conference. Some of the delegates are making good demands in the conference. Olawale Isaac from Ibadan, for instance, said in the *Punch* that: "My interest at the confab is about issues relating to peace and security." Another one from a northern state is talking about employment for the youths. Cultural groups like the *Ohaneze Ndibgo* and the *Afenifere* harmer on issues like: resource control, fiscal federalism, federal character principle, power sharing and political structure, citizenship, structures of the security agencies, religion and secularism, and so on. These and other issues are shared by Yushau Shuaib (2014). Suberu Rotimi also discusses some other issues in his paper titled: *Lessons in Fiscal Federalism for Africa's New Oil Exporters*." The issues include; (1) General Vertical and Horizontal Resource Revenue Sharing Principle, (2) Accommodation of the Needs of Oil Producing Areas, (3) Revenue Conflict Resolution Institutions and Mechanisms, (4) Economic Management, (5) Intergovernmental Political Relations and (6) Reform of Fiscal Constitution. These issues are germane to the smooth operation of a true federalism.

Nigerians and all lovers of Nigeria should prevail on the INEC not to throw the country into unnecessary crisis in 2015. It should therefore conduct not only free and fair, but also a credible election in the country. If a winner is declared loser and loser declared winner, then, the prediction of possible disintegration must have been helped to come to pass. This paper believes that with commitment, tolerance and sacrifice as well as good leadership, federalism can take Nigeria to a greater height. It is therefore submitted that federalism is still the best government for a heterogeneous country like Nigeria. This one of the greatest legacies of the British colonial masters with the full participation of the founding fathers (mothers) on the Nigerian state, and most therefore not be molested

References

- Akpeninor, James, (2007), *Democracy and Issues of Governance in African politics; The Nigerian Perspectives*, Nigeria, Bookright Nigeria Publications.
- Abduwaheed, Omar 'Labour, CSOS Protest reversal of decision on appointment' (www.punchng.com) (Retrieved, 19/4 2014)
- Alex, E. (2010) 'PDP Agreed on Rotational Presidency.' (<http://www.champion.com.ng>) Retrieved, 7/4/2014
- Appadorai, A. (1975); *The Substance of Politics*, Oxford, Oxford University Press.
- Ayanele, Johnson, (1998); *Comprehensive Government*, Lagos, Johnson Publishers.
- Awofeso, S. (2013) 'The Zoning Controversy Inside PDP' (www.naija.com/opinion.) Ret. 8/4/14
- Awolowo, Obafemi (1947): *Path to Nigerian Federalism*, Ibadan, Oxford University Press.
- Benjamin, Utim (2005): "Nigerian federalism, National Reform Conference and Conflict Resolution: A Diatribe on the Missing Links
- Eghosa, Osaghae (2011), "The Federal solution in comparative Perspective" www.unisa.ac.za/default.asp?cmd=viewcontent&contented=1159p-ForPrint=1 retrieved, 4/10/13
- Fadahunsi, A. (2000) "Enhancing Fiscal Federalism" in *Devolution of powers in a federal state* (eds), Babawale & Olasupo, Lagos, Frankad Publishers
- Gowon, Yakubu (1967); Speech by Major-General Yakubu Gowon Declaring A Twelve-State-structure for Nigeria. (<http://www.vanguardngr.com>2010). Retrieved 7/4/13
- Iraboh, Peter, (2011) "A Critical Assessment on Nigerian Federalism: Path to a True Federal System;" (file://a-critical-assessment-on-nigerian-federalism-path-to-a-true.htm). Retrieved, 4/10/13
- Jacob, S. Agbambu C. & Oyesina, T. (2011) (The trio monitored the PDP Presidential Primaries and reported for the *Tribune*. The story was published on January 10th, 2011.
- Kelvin, Ebiri (2013) "True and Fiscal Federalism will preserve Nigeria, INC, MOSOP Insist." In *The Guardian*, Sunday September, 2013.
- Michael, Ogu; (2011) "Federalism as an Essentially Contested Concept", file://E:301. Html Retrieved, 4/10/13.
- Nuhu, Yaqub, (2004); "The Travail of Federalism" in *Nigeria's struggle for Democracy and Good Governance*, (eds) Adegun, Larry & Ebere, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Nwankwo, B. (2002) *Authority in Government*, Onitsha: Abbot Books Limited.
- Obasanjo, Olusegun (2013) 'Before It Is Too Late' in *Thisday Newspaper*, Dec. 23, 2013
- Okungbowa, S. & Epku, C. (2012); "Federalism; Problems and Prospects of Power Distribution In Nigeria," *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa, vol. 14, No 4*
- Olawale, R & Adesanmi, A. (2012) 'Belgore Committee Revisits Abacha's Draft Constitution' Supports Rotational Presidency, 5-year Single Tenure' in *The Tribune*, 19th April 2012.
- Olawale, Oshun and Gary, Nnach Enwo-Igariwey, of the *Afenifere* and *Ndigbo Ohaneze*, respectively, presented their positions in *The NewsWatch Magazine* of the December 2013 edition.
- Olawale, A. I. (2014) 'Security Issues are Paramount – Confab delegate' *The Punch*, April 4, 2014. The story was reported by Friday Olorok
- Oluwasanmi, J. O. (2007): *Nigeria, Which Way Forward?* Akure, St MAOTEX Ventures.
- Omotoso, F. (2010): "Federalism Politics and Governance in Nigeria." In *Governance, Politics Good Governance*, (eds), Abegunde, Agagu & Omotoso, Porto Novo, SONOU d' Afrique.
- Onifade, C. A & Imhonopi, D. (2013): "Towards National Intergration in Nigeria: Jumping the Hurdles" in *Research on Humanity and Social Sciences, Vol3, No 9*.
- Richard, L. (2004): "Foundations of Federal Government in Nigeria." in, *Nigeria's struggle For Democracy and Good Governance*. (eds) Adegun, Larry & Ebere, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Sahara Report (2011) 'Goodluck Jonathan Defeated Atiku.' (saharareporters.com)
- Suberu, Rotimi (nd) 'Lessons in Fiscal Federalism for Africa's New Oil Exporters' *The Declaration of Independence: The Constitution of the United States of America. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria; Federal Republic of Nigeria Official Gazette*.
- Wheare, K. C. (1963): *Federal Government*, 4th Edition, London, Oxford University Press.
- Wole, Oladimeji quoted President Jonathan in his article titled: 'Issues that may hamper ongoing National Confab' March 24, 2014.
- Yushau, Shuaib (2014) 'Confab: Religion And Media' (nigeriaworld.com/.../270.htm).

