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Appraising the Role of Military Governments towards Nation Building in Africa: A Focus on Murtala-Obasanjo Administration in Nigeria

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Abstract

Obviously, the military is essentially an institution saddled with the responsibility of protecting the territorial integrity of a nation. The military was not established for political governance. However, the crises-ridden political atmosphere in Nigeria gave rise to the January 15, 1966 coup that terminated Nigeria's first republic. This paper appraises the contributions of Murtala-Obasanjo military regime towards nation building in Nigeria. It discusses the concepts of military government and nation building. Nation building is one of the un-accomplished desires in Nigeria, mainly because of numerous challenges. These challenges are extensively discussed for better comprehension of this paper. The paper ended with contributions of the military government (Murtala-Obasanjo regime) towards nation building in Nigeria.

Key words: *Nation Building, Military Government, Nigeria..*

Introduction

Nation building entails proposals designed to bring about long-term political stability, rapid economic development and visible social justice. It is in realization of the importance of good governance and nation building in a democratic setting in Africa that the leadership of the African Union (A.U.) has to fashion a blue print of African economic development: New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD). They further stated that nation building involved the transformation of existing structures through the collective efforts of the citizens of the state (country).

Nation building as a concept can be viewed as conscious efforts by government, agencies, institutions and individuals towards the socio-political, economic and infrastructural development of a nation. In Nigeria, the discussion on nation building has been in the front burner since the country's independence in 1960. Sequel to the above, several institutional frameworks have been put in place by successive Nigerian governments to fast-track the process of nation building in the country. Some of these government and non-government institutions have recorded varied degrees of success; yet, others have been a colossal failure.

The primary responsibility of the military anywhere in the world is to defend a country against any external interference. Nigeria's political history has witnessed a sharp deviation of the military from its constitutional duty to embark on a voyage into Nigeria's political arena, leading to several coups and counter-coups between 1966-1999 (Ehimatic, 2018). That explains why Nigeria has experienced military rule for about twenty-nine years out of her fifty-eight years of independence. This development has generated many controversies and criticism of the military juntas, as being responsible for the avalanche of Nigeria's socio-political and economic problems. Thus, Nkrumah (1965) remarks "the duty of the armed forces is to defend and support the civilian government and not to overthrow it. It is not the duty of the army to rule or govern, because it has no political mandate".

Despite the wide condemnations, Nigeria's military had contributed much towards nation building. The above fact necessitated this study, which examines the country's military, its incursion into Nigeria's political landscape, and the reasons for intervention. It also discusses the challenges of nation building. The chapter ended with the contributions of military rule towards nation building in Nigeria.

Concept of Nation Building

Nation building refers to a concerted effort to bring people together for the purpose of achieving common objectives. It is a planned and determined effort to bring people together for the purpose of achieving common goals. Omolade (1998) sees nation building as an attempt to promote the survival of a nation and to build a virile and dynamic nation. He also said that nation building is an attempt to harness all the potentials of nation, human and natural resources for the benefit of the citizen of a nation. It also involves the contributions of individuals, groups and organizations in the realm of politics, economics, religion, socio cultural integration understanding. Nation building is process of constructing or structuring a national identity using power of the state by unifying people, so that political stability and socio-economic viability are ensured. In other words, Ndolo (2005) cited in Atake and Dodo (2010), noted that nation building is the process of politically socializing the people into becoming good citizens of the political order and making the citizens feel they have a stake in the community worth fighting for.

Contributing, Okorodudu (2006) reveals that nation building is a process aimed at promoting peace and progress, reducing conflicts as much as possible while laying a solid foundation for economic development, and political advancement for the realization of national prosperity. Concurring with the above definitions, it is imperative to state that nation building is a process of bringing

The Major Challenges of Nation Building in Nigeria

Having x-rayed the reasons for military intervention, in Nigerian government, as well as the various contributions of military regimes towards nation building in Nigeria, it is pertinent to say such efforts or contributions towards nation building were marred by a number of factors which inhibited their capacity to yield the required results. Thus, their nation building efforts have remained a mirage due to:

The Challenge of Corruption

The high rate of corruption continues to constitute major challenges to Nigeria's nation building agenda. Nigeria is not just one country in Africa. She is also not just one country in the global setting. She is the most populous country in Africa as well as one of the best resource-

endowed countries in the world (Olanrewaju, 2015). Rarely any institution in Nigeria is corruption free. It is a deviation from the set down moral standards that hold society together, some of which include trust, rectitude, honesty, discipline, right attitude to work, courage, national consciousness (Ighojah, 1998). In 2012, Nigeria was estimated to have lost over \$400 billion to corruption since independence (Ezekwesili, 2012). In 2013, a former Governor of the Central Bank, Lamido Sanusi, alleged that the NNPC failed to remit N20billion oil money to the Government.

In 2017, the EFCC raid on an empty apartment in Ikoyi, a highbrow Lagos neighborhood, turned up bundles of cash in dollar, pound sterling and naira currencies totaling \$43.4 million. While the agency is yet to identify the owner of the apartment, a Federal High Court in Lagos has declared a temporary forfeiture of the money. The discovery, thanks to a tip under Nigeria's whistle blowing policy, has shocked many Nigerians who, given the many cases of corruption that come up in the country, are not easily taken aback by discoveries of this type. However, Nigeria has focused on tackling its corruption problem through a new whistle-blower policy and it seems to be paying off. The policy, which was approved by president Buhari, encourages Nigerians to report corruption-related offenses.

The Challenge of Socio-Economic Inequalities

Economic inequality has practically denied a large percentage of Nigerians access to government. Poverty, hunger, unemployment, among other economic predicaments has limited people's participation in government and decision making in Nigeria. Socio-economic inequalities across the country, fuels fear and suspicious, which keep the people divided. One important aspect of a nation is the building of a common citizenship. Nevertheless, how can we have a common citizenship when the person in Kano has a radically different quality of life from the person in Calabar; or when the woman in Yauri is more likely to die in childbirth, than the woman in Lagos. In Nigeria, not only that many of our citizens are denied of basic rights, such as the right to education and health; there is also serious variation in the enjoyment of these rights across the country. Consequently, the citizens are not motivated to support the state and society because he or she does not feel that the society is adequately concerned about his or her welfare (Falade, 2008) cited in (Akani, 2015).

The Challenge of Religious Conflicts and Intolerance

Religious conflicts and intolerance has a long history in Nigeria. This is common between Christians and Muslims. They continue to fight each other, resulting to loss of lives, physical injuries, destruction of churches and mosques, hatred, disunity etc. For instance, Jos, the capital of Plateau State, that used to enjoy peace and cordial relationship suddenly started going up in flames with Christians and Muslims slaughtering each other. Presently, the activities of the horrible and blood thirsty Boko Haram in North Eastern Nigeria is a major threat to nation building and national integration in Nigeria.

The Challenge of Leadership

One of the greatest problems with African countries today is bad leadership. The tragedy of it all is that all the shortcomings of the past governments for which they were either toppled as in military coups or voted out through the ballot box, are hardly corrected; they get worsen in succeeding administrations.

According to Chinua Achebe, the trouble with Nigeria is the failure of leadership. Leadership is a critical factor in nation building and it should be understood in two important but related ways. Firstly, leaders are to possess personal qualities of integrity, honesty, commitment and competence, secondly, they must have the collective qualities of common vision, focus, and the desire for development of the elites as a whole (Fountain, 2000) cited in (Akani, 2015). Visionless leadership has led to unemployment, violation of human rights, marginalization, political victimization, selfishness and so on. It is expected that a leader should place the national interest first before him, but today, the reverse is the case. This has led Nigerian citizens into ugly situations that are not favourable to nation building and national integration.

The Challenge of Insurgency

Insurgency is an attempt to interfere or take control of a country by force or violent, thereby disrupting peace and order in the society. According to Amali and Jekayinfa (2013) the Boko Haram (western education is a sin) saga has become a thorn in the flesh of Nigerian. In fact, this blood thirsty “Islamists” called Boko Haram is growing into a monster that is gradually threatening the cohesion of the Nigerian nation. The

government's inability to curtail the overzealous Islamic radical and faceless militant group has left the Nigerian nation on the brinks of being called a "terrorists state". This scourge can be permanently laid to rest through the effective implementation of school curriculum. The activities of the Boko Haram in the North Eastern Nigeria have posed a security challenge that is virtually affecting all the sectors of the economy – this had severely crippled development in Nigeria. Yet, no serious attempt has been made to arrest this terrible and unpalatable situation.

The Challenge of Religious Pluralism and Ethnocentrism

The twin phenomena of religious pluralism and ethnocentrism have combined to militate against nation building in Nigeria. The above have affected Nigerian politics both prior and subsequent to independence in 1960. Kin-selective altruism has made its way into Nigerian politics, resulting in tribalistic efforts to concentrate federal power to a particular region of interest. Regionalism has also led to active secessionist movements such as the Indigenous Peoples of Biafra (IPOB), the Movement for the Actualization of the Sovereign State of Biafra (MASSOB), Oodua People's Congress, Movement for the Emancipation of the Niger Delta, etc. Nigeria's three largest ethnic groups (Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba) have maintained historical preeminence in Nigerian politics; competition amongst these three groups has fuelled corruption and graft (Rashid, 2003).

The Challenge of Imposition of Candidates and the "Do or Die" Affair Syndrome

The system where an incumbent President or Governor insists on a particular candidate to succeed him in office and actualize it at party primaries and elections cannot be categorized as democracy but rather "democracy or demonstration of craze". The election process had often been turned to selection processes in party hierarchy. A situation where politicians see winning an election as a "do or die" affair is not healthy for Nigeria's nascent democracy and nation building drive/.

The Challenge of Language Diversity

Language diversity also affects free and easy interaction among Nigerians and this affects nation building and national integration. Language as a

means of communication and expression is an element of culture which in many ways determines and unarguably defines dimensions of a nation's identity in less organized society (Osa, 2010). Language is the most important means of communication and information among human beings. The adulteration of the language (mixing with other languages, especially English language) has become a normal phenomenon among the owners and speakers of the language. Many Nigerians, especially among the educated ones cannot effectively read, write and speak their mother tongue.

The Challenge of Struggle for Hegemonic Control

In a multicultural society like Nigeria, nation building is a difficult process. Cultural diversity or pluralism adversely influences nation-building and the entire socio-political and economic process of development, hindering positive change. In essence, it is difficult for any country which is multicultural and multi-ethnic to achieve the goals of nation-building or integrated national development. In practical terms, members of each ethnic group strive to actualize the interest of their groups, which are often conflicting because of group desire to exert hegemony over one another. Continuous ethno - cultural group struggles, weakness the centre and tends to strengthen the group with resources and strength to struggle (Bassey, 2015).

Military Administration in Nigeria

The military comprises of the armed forces, that is, the army, navy, and air force. Basically, the military are trained to defend the country against external interference. Military government is a government led by military officers. In other words, this is a situation where the armed forces dabble into power or government. Generally, military government/intervention in government is a phenomenon common among the under-developed countries of the world, especially Latin America and African countries. According to Nwobodo and Ezugwu (1999) military government is not a constitutional government. It monopolizes the power of the state through coercion, that is, through force. Its powers are absolute and are not based on any constitution.

It is an indisputable fact that the crises-ridden political atmosphere in Nigeria gave rise to the January 15, 1966 coup that terminated Nigeria's first republic. In the words of Aziken (2010), there were clear evidences

of corruption, tribalism, nepotism and political crises leading to break down of law and order, as well as evidence of politicking in the Nigeria army. The above remark, according to Ehimatie (2018) is a clear indication that all was not well with Nigeria politically, especially, towards the tail end of the first republic.

The first military head of state in Nigeria, Major General J.T.U. Aguiyi -Ironsi made some impact during his short rule. He restored normalcy, especially in the west, after the coup. He sought to build a stronger, united nation by instituting the unitary system of government. However, the preponderance of the Igbo in his appointments defeated the aim and prompted a counter coup, after six months (Oyeneye, Onyenwenu and Olosude, 2006).

Reasons for military Adventurism in Nigerian Politics

As stated earlier, the primary responsibility of the military is to defend and protect the territorial integrity of the nation. The above fact, notwithstanding, the Nigerian military had severally gone beyond their constitutional responsibilities to alter the political status-quo of the nation. What then could have led to such constitutional breach? The reasons, according Ehimatie (2018: 175-179) are advanced below:

Political Instability

Political instability is a key factor that instigates military incursion into politics. When the political atmosphere becomes so tensed that security of lives and properties can no longer be guaranteed, the military can intervene to bring back stability. This was the guise under which the Nigerian military struck on January 15, 1966. Obviously, the political environment in Nigeria as of the time of the military takeover was far from being stable. As mentioned earlier, the Tiv riot, the census crises, the federal election crises of 1964 combined with the Western regional election crisis of 1965 heated up the political atmosphere. There was total breakdown of law and order in Western Nigeria that the region was dubbed the 'Wild West'.

Autocracy and Oppressive Rule

When the government in power becomes so autocratic and oppressive, the oppressed citizenry could raise protests and agitations that could spur

the military into toppling the government. The high-handedness with which the first republic politicians handled the affairs of government both at the federal and regional levels was a major reason for the first coup of January 15, 1966. Politicians in power unleashed a reign of terror on their political opponents. While the entire nation was in a political turmoil, the government of the day did nothing to check or stem the tide of violence, particularly in western Nigeria.

Corruption and Abuse of Office

Closely related to the concept of autocracy and oppressive rule is the factor of corruption and abuse of office by civilian government officials. Military regimes in Nigeria had always hinged their military coups on the allegation of corrupt practices and abuse of power by ousted civilian governments. A major reason for the political upheavals that culminated in the fall of Nigeria's first republic was corruption and abuse of office by the Balewa government. Civilian government officials of that era were more interested in suppressing their political opponents through government machineries than delivering good governance to the citizens. Consequently, successive military governments, particularly that of Mohammadu Buhari, accused the civilian government headed by Shehu Shagari of corruption, indiscipline, misuse or abuse of office and misappropriation.

Inordinate Ambition of some Military Personnel

Another major cause of military intervention into government is inordinate ambition of some military personnel who wanted to rule by all means. The history of military rule in Nigeria is replete with the exhibition of inordinate ambition by young military officers who wanted to rule the nation by military might. The case of coup executed by Lt Colonel Buka Suka Dimka and Major General I.D. Bisaalla readily comes to mind. These military officers on 13th February, 1976 staged a coup against the regime of General Murtala Muhammed who was incidentally killed in the coup. The coup failed because the coup plotters could not take over the reign of power having killed Murtala Mohammed. Consequently, the latter's second in command, General Olusegun Obasanjo took over power which he eventually handed over to a democratically elected government under President Shehu Shagari on October 1, 1979.

Contributions of Murtala-Obasanjo Military Administration towards Nation Building in Nigeria

Much as military rule has been widely criticized in academic circles, some military regimes have left landmark legacies in the area of nation building in Nigeria. These legacies could be seen in the political, social, economic and industrial spheres of Nigeria. Some of these landmark legacies under Murtala-Obasanjo Administration include:

As a major key to nation building, the military government under review initiated several educational policies. The Universal Free Primary Education (UPE) programme, which has been restructured to be Universal Basic Education (UBE), was initiated by the military regime of Murtala - Obasanjo to address the controversy of educational imbalance and to eradicate illiteracy in Nigeria. Education was not only made a priority but was made a birth right of every Nigerian child. This is upon the realization of the fact that education is the best channel through which the anticipated nation building strive could be actualized (Ehimatic, 2018).

Generally, military regimes in Nigeria gave the agricultural sector a high level of rejuvenation. Buhari's regime for instance, allocated greater funds for the development of agriculture. It also increased the number of river Basin and Rural Development Authorities (Oyeneye, Onyenwenu and Olosude, 2006). Operation Feed the Nation (OFN) as launched by the regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo was made to ensure food sufficiency and income generation for Nigeria. As a follow up to this programme, General Ibrahim Babangida re-structured and tagged it: Agricultural Development Programme (ADP) with a mandate to boost agricultural production for both local consumption and for export.

The administration from its inception stated clearly its mission of ridding the public service of corruption and redundancy. Many public officers and departments were probed and many got their appointments terminated on account of old age, redundancy, declining productivity and embezzlement of public funds. The convicted embezzlers were made to return, as much as possible, property they could not legitimately account for. All these were geared toward building discipline in the individuals as well as the nation.

Creation of states and a proposal for a new federal capital territory. The Murtala-Obasanjo administration created additional seven states, bringing the total number of states to nineteen. A panel was set up to consider restructuring Nigeria politically and solving the problem of a

new, central, acceptable capital for the country. This panel located Abuja that is Nigeria's capital today.

The Murtala-Obasanjo administration also organized the popular Festival of Arts and Culture (FESTAC "77"). The main aim of the festival was to promote and preserve Nigerian cultural heritage, as well as enhance nationhood and oneness among the diverse cultural groups in Nigeria.

Most importantly, the Murtala-Obasanjo's military rule returned the country to democratic government or civil rule in October 1979. Unlike the previous regimes (the Aguiyi-Ironsi's and Gowon's), the Murtala-Obasanjo's administration was definite and consistent in its programme to hand over power to a civilian government. In fact, the administration of Murtala - Obasanjo from the outset never wanted to remain in office for too long. One of the cardinal objectives of the regime was to return the country to democratic government. General Muhammed announced a transition to civil rule on October 1979. According to Oyeneye, Onyenwenu and Olosude (2006: 231) the administration's transition to civil rule programme included the following:

Establishment of constitution Drafting Committee (CDC). The government established the constitution drafting committee of fifty members to prepare a draft constitution for the country. The committee comprised eminent Nigerians from different sections of the country, and was headed by Chief Rotimi Williams, an accomplished constitutional lawyer.

Inauguration of a constituent assembly to ratify the draft constitution. The government inaugurated a constituent assembly which comprised members who were indirectly selected to debate and ratify the final draft. The Assembly was headed by Justice Udo Udoma (a Justice of Supreme Court).

Termination of the state of emergency and lifting of ban on political activities. The government terminated the state of emergency that had been in force since 1966, and further lifted the ban on political activities. The federal electoral commission requested the various political associations, which had been operating behind the scene to come for registration. Only five of them met the criteria for registration and these were the National Party of Nigeria (NPN), Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN), Nigerian Peoples Party (NPP), Great Nigerian Peoples Party (GNPP) and the Peoples Redemption Party (PRP).

Establishment of Electoral Commission for delimiting the country into electoral constituencies and registration of eligible voters for the

coming elections. The federal electoral commission conducted election into the offices of the President, Governors, Senate, House of Representatives and State Assembly. This ushered in Alhaji Shehu Shagari as the first (Civilian) executive president of Nigerian on 1st October, 1979.

Conclusion

Nation building entails the creation of the feelings and sense of nationhood within a country, which may be homogeneous or multi-ethnic in terms of composition. This article examined military rule in Nigeria as regards its efforts towards nation building. While x-raying the reasons for military incursion into politics, the various contributions of military regimes (Murtala-Obasanjo's regime) towards nation building in Nigeria were also examined. However, a number of factors that inhibited their capacity to yield the required results marred such efforts or contributions towards nation building. In the light of the above, this paper posits that nation-building efforts must be collective.

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