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Nationalists Utterances, Nigeria Nation and Engendered Insurgency: A Case of if the Foundation be Destroyed, What Can the Righteous Do?

Aliu, Olayinka, PhD & Okutepa, Alhaji Momoh

Abstract

As a result of progressively more organised demand for nationalism, the British government embarked on gradual internal self-government programme. However, finding a constitutional arrangement satisfactory to Nigeria with such diverse interest became difficult. With the resultant various constitutional development and conferences that came up, some utterances of the frontline Nigerian nationalists prior to independence emphasised ethnic differences rather than national solidarity. Hence, it can be deduced that the mindset brought into independence in 1960 did not encourage the historical, cultural and economic contacts which inter-group relations had fostered in pre-colonial period, thus failing to promote national consciousness that could engender genuine national unity. More so, the in-built advantage the British constructed Federal State and Federal constitution conferred on the Northern Nigeria in a commanding position capable of dominating other regions. In view of this, the rising concern about insurgency in Nigeria cannot be explained outside the nation's political leadership experience from historical perspective. Hence, this paper examines the following variables; injustice, nepotism and ethnicity as they provided recipe that form the basis for restiveness, agitation and insurgency in some parts of Nigeria. The methodology adopted was secondary sources situated within frustration-aggression theory analysis.

Keywords: injustice and tribalism, insurgency, leadership, nationalists, nigeria.

Introduction:

Since 1914, the British Government has been trying to make Nigeria into one country, but the Nigerian people...are historically different in their backgrounds,...religious beliefs and do not show...any sign of willingness to unite...Nigeria unity is only a British invention.

Many Nigerians deceive themselves by thinking that Nigeria is one...This is wrong. I am sorry to say that this presence of unity is artificial and it ends outside the chamber—Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, 1948 (Falola et al., 1991)

Nigeria is not a nation. It is a mere geographical expression. There are no “Nigerians” in the same sense as there are “English”, “Welsh”, or “French”. The word “Nigerian” is merely a distinctive appellation to distinguish those who live within the boundaries of Nigeria and those who do not—Obafemi Awolowo, 1947 (Falola et al., 1991)

... it would appear that the God of Africa has specifically created the Ibo nation to lead the children of Africa from the bondage of ages...not only to conquer others but also to adapt themselves to the role of preserver—Nnamdi Azikiwe, 1949 (www.blackpast.org/global-african-history/1949)

Lugard and his amalgamation were far from popular among us at that time...we should set up on our own; we should cease to have anything to do with the Southern people, we should take our own way...Lugard’s amalgamation, the mistake of 1914—Ahmadu Bello, 1953 (Bourne, 2015)

As a result of an organized demand for nationalism, gradual internal self-government programme was embarked on by the British government. In the process, there came a challenge of constitutional arrangement satisfactory to people of diverse interests. Hence, between 1945 and 1954, three constitutions were introduced with each bringing Nigeria closer to full self-governance. The resultant effect was the Richard Constitution which came into effect in 1947, though promoted unity, unfortunately also aggravated regional identities, especially with the creation of regional houses of assembly in each of the three regions, that is, West, East and North. The Macpherson Constitution of 1951 improved on Richards Constitution and created a Council of Ministers, changing Central Legislature to a House of Representatives with half of the seats allocated to the North. (Bourne, 2015) This was done by Macpherson’s team to assuage the northern representatives who threatened to go back to the pre-1914 arrangement. (Bourne, 2015) The north’s decision posed a challenge to one Nigeria. More so, Sir Ahmadu Bello, Sardauna of Sokoto and Premier of the Northern Region, made it clear that he would not tolerate any attempt to divide the north into more than one state (Bourne, 2015). On the other hand, the south was divided into West and East. Macpherson provided for the first general Election in Nigerian history. Ethnic identities thus started solidifying and becoming politically meaningful with general elections galvanizing regional and ethnic identities. Hence, the emergence of Nigeria as a united country

proved difficult, beset by intense and complex rivalries among the three regions with each dominated by a major ethnic group with its own political party. (Martins, 2011). At the centre of controversy over self-government, each region had the option of acquiring full internal self-government in 1956. West and East were allowed internal self-government in 1957 leaving the North that was not ready. Besides, the North was not in a rush for independence. They were anxious that a rush to self-government meant handing over its people and culture to rule by the Southerners. Their fear was borne out of the fact that the civil service in the north was dominated by Southerners. Macpherson tried to make Nnamdi Azikiwe, the founder of National Council of Nigerian Citizens who was the first indigenous Governor General of Nigeria in 1959 and its ceremonial president in 1963 understand the reasons for northern caution in run up to London talks on self-government in 1953. He told him; "Every postmaster, stationmaster was from the South. By the time their young men qualified all the jobs would be filled from the South. White pegs are easier to remove than black pegs." Hence, the northern leaders were keen to gain time to catch up (Bourne, 2015). The north was seen in the South as the obstacle to the campaign for self-government in 1956 – a motion moved by Chief Anthony Enahoro and there were threats that northern exports and imports might be stopped from using southern ports. It was not until 1959, on the eve of country's independence that the north attained self-government. It was treated by the British with respect appropriate to full independence for most of the colonies (Bourne, 2015). In the 1959 elections, the results revealed that in the Federal House of Representatives, the Northern Peoples Congress, won 142 Seats, the National Council of Nigerian Citizens had 87, the Action Group had 73. These political parties which were controlled by leaders of the numerically dominated cultural groups, that is, NPC by the Hausa-Fulani, the AG by the Yoruba and the NCNC by the Igbo had ethnic and regional colourations. Technically, the NCNC and AG could have had a majority, but the possibility broke down for the fact that the British feared that it would raise the prospect of southern domination.(Bourne, 2015). In fact, as was alleged by a former colonial official, Harold Smith, there was controversy that the 1959 election was rigged by the British to favour NPC. The British equally vetoed any break-up to the disproportionately large North. More substantially, the construction of federal state and the in-built advantage of the North in the Federal constitution reflected a long-running paternalist bias in British policy. The Sarduna had made it clear that as a direct descendant of Dan Fodio with spiritual and temporal powers, he would not be a party to the break-up of Northern region (Bourne, 2015). The independence constitution made room for federal structure that was deemed as an effective compromise providing a balance for regional interests, though with the North in a commanding position, capable

of dominating the other two regions. Nigeria became independent on 1st October, 1960, and Abubakar Tafawa Balewa who had been the Prime Minister since 1957 remained as such for Nigeria at independent.

Leadership in Nigeria at Independence

Leadership as a term has different meanings to various authors. Leadership is defined as influence, the art or process of influencing people to strive willingly and enthusiastically toward the achievement of group goals (Koontz et al., 1984). To lead is to guide, conduct, direct and precede. Leaders act to help a group achieve objectives with maximum application of its capabilities. They do not stand behind a group to push and to prod, but place themselves before the group as they facilitate progress and inspire the group to accomplish the desired goals.

The importance for good leadership was noted by distinguished management consultant, Marvin Bower (Bower, 1966). He believes that the requirements for business leadership, in terms of both personal qualifications and abilities, are far less than those necessary for political leadership. His position is based on two reasons. One is what he calls a “system-managed” business, the components of the system provide people with guidelines for action; therefore, a highly inspirational leadership may not be necessary. In the second place, he asserts that political leadership often requires inspiring people to do the unusual.

From this definition, the concept leadership is seen from the positive perspective; however, political leadership requires inspiring people that could perform the unusual. Hence, Nigeria requires visionary and inspiring leaders. Leaders that could bring a process that would create a collective identity through political integration of members within a given territory as demands by Nation building. Meanwhile, it is broadly known that a land devoid of visionary leaders and a nation without integrity can hardly enjoy peace and stability. This is the account of Nigeria recently. Visionary leaders motivate citizens and activate them for nation building. Leaders with crystal motives employ wisdom, foresight, sense of purpose and commitment, to galvanise people towards self-actualisation and propel the national spirit in them. Where public figures exemplify the sterling qualities of leadership, they rub off on the society at large and invest citizens with the patriotic fervor. Considering the complex political interplay that accompanied each of the political phases of the Nigeria’s chequered history since independence, it is obvious that the rein of power has been in the hands of political leadership class that are more interested in private, group and ethnic gains against the general interest of the citizens.(Ogbeidi, 2012). These variables provided the ground for the military coup d'état of the 15th January, 1966. Unfortunately, most of the coup plotters were military officers of Eastern Nigeria origin while the casualties of the

coup were majorly military officers and civilians of Northern and Western Nigeria extracts. This in effect gave the coup an ethnic colouration.

General Aguiyi Ironsi's military government that replaced the sacked civilian regime was expected to put the coup plotters on trial. General Ironsi being an Igbo, relied on a small caucus of Igbo advisers and refused to put on trial the majors who plotted the coup, but rather promoted some Igbo military officers to the rank of colonel against the advice of his Supreme Military Council (Bourne, 2015) His moves were centralist, using Decree 33 to abolish political and cultural organizations; on 24th May, he enacted Decree 34 which abolished the federal system thus further strengthened ethnicity insinuations (Bourne, 2015). While the northerners were agitated with this situation, the Easterners were triumphant and this eventually resulted in violent attack against the Easterners in Northern Nigeria. General Aguiyi Ironsi's actions were interpreted to mean the fulfillment of Azikiwe's statement of conquering others which translated to mean Igbo domination. This eventually led to the revenge counter coup on 29th July, 1966 by military officers of Northern Nigeria extract. The code name for the coup was Operation Araba, meaning "secession" (Bourne, 2015). General Aguiyi Ironsi alongside some other military officers and civilians were killed. General Yakubu Gowon emerged the head of the military government and to the dissatisfaction of Lt Colonel Odumegwu Ojukwu. This brewed a cloud of uncertainty over the country and efforts to reconcile the differences led to the meeting in Aburi, Ghana. The failure to resolve the crisis and the move by Lt Colonel Ojukwu to secede the East from Nigeria, especially with his announcement of Republic of Biafra on 30 May, 1967 metamorphosed into civil war which broke out on 6 July, 1967 and lasted till the early week of January, 1970. After the war, General Yakubu Gowon began the process of "No Victor, no Vanquished" policy with a programme of Reconstruction, Rehabilitation and Reconciliation. Adults in the East were given a nominal £20 each to restart a cash economy while civil servants and the military were reintegrated into Federal services though they lost promotion for 2½ Biafra years (Bourne, 2015). General Gowon encouraged the Igbo to return to Northern cities to reclaim their property. He was equally magnanimous in the aftermath of the surrender by ordering his troops to "become soldiers of peace", to share their food and medicine with the impoverished Igbo and to help transport them to their homes.(Bourne, 2015)

Basis for current Insurgency in Nigeria and Suitability of FrustrationAggression Theory

The term insurgency connotes different ideas with various scholars given it several meanings, though, some are closely related while some are not. In short, the concept is ambiguous. Insurgency connotes a rebellion by those not

considered as belligerents or lawful combatants against a constituted authority.

The term insurgency is subjected to diverse definitions by various scholars. Thomas Hayden defined insurgency as an organised movement aimed at the overthrow or destruction of a constituted government through the use of subversion, espionage, terrorism and armed conflict. (Hayden, 2007).

In another vein, the U.S. Department of Defense defined insurgency as an organized resistance movement that uses...sabotage and armed conflict to achieve its aims. Insurgency normally seeks to overthrow the existing social order and reallocate power within the country. (US Department of Defense, *July 2007*) Taking a critical look at the second definition, Nigeria structural system accounted more for the insurrection and agitation recently experienced in Nigeria.

Considering the suitability of frustration-aggression theory to this study, three areas of restiveness in Nigeria are considered. That is, Niger Delta region, Eastern Nigeria and Western Nigeria. First, the Niger Delta region; the abandonment of the Niger Delta region upon the discovery of oil since 1956 pitched the Niger Delta youths against the Nigerian government. The people believed that they have been deprived of the gains of resources that accrued from their soil. The crude oil exploration in the Niger Delta region with concomitant human and environmental degradation, has subjected the people to abject poverty as well as complete disregard to the people's welfare. Hence, the intricate trap of poverty and underdevelopment in the region present a formula for frustration and potential aggression. As a result of many years of lost hope, the youths from the region became restive; forming themselves into different militant outfits. This engendered violent resistance directed at those accountable, that is the federal government and those directly or indirectly connected. (Oil and multinational companies) Going by the theory, that frustration precedes aggression, the rapid increase of unemployed youths made them become easy targets for those seeking to turn resentment and hopelessness to their own purpose which included politicians seeking political power as well as those who have received training in the ways of militancy. The reaction to perceived injustice by the federal government and the multinational companies, created in the minds of the militants due to government inattentiveness and the violent behaviours expressed are the result of individual frustration and potential aggression. Political conflict makes people look for ways to explain and solve the problems they face. If such problem is deeply rooted, as seen in human and environmental degradation, abject poverty and disregard to the Niger Delta people's welfare; and the adopted ideology proves unable to deal with the problems, such as mere violent resistance under the aegis of the Niger Delta Volunteer Force

(NDVF), an Ijaw ethnic militia group, led by Major Isaac Jasper Adaka Boro, people begin to turn to other ideologies.

Perhaps, the basis for militancy, manifesting in pipeline vandalism, hostage-taking, piracy, kidnapping, and shedding of innocent blood lies in the injustice and total neglect of the people well-being by the government and the multinational companies within the Niger Delta region.

On the second note, with respect to the Igbo, since the Civil War, Igbo influence in the political sphere has been undermined, while recruitment into the upper levels of the Army was delayed for years, which meant that Igbo voices were stifled during the military regimes of the 1980s and 1990s. (Bourne, 2015). Although, Navy Commodore Ebitu Ukiwe (rtd) was made the Vice-President during the military regime of General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (rtd) from 1985-1986. However, he did not stay long in that capacity taking cognisance of his premature and unceremonious exit from the government. In fact, it was during Obasanjo's civilian administration (1999-2007) that the Igbo were again considered for the most senior positions with Igbo constituting his economic team. Obasanjo appointed Thomas Aguiyi Ironsi, son of the first military head of state Minister of Defence. He equally promoted Air Marshal Paul Dike as Chief of Air Staff while late President Yar'Adua made him Chief of Defence Staff two years after. The picture of the reintegration of the Igbo was completed in 2010 when Jonathan made Lt. Gen. Azubuike Ihejirika his Chief of Army Staff.

On the assumption of duty as the elected President of Nigeria on May 29, 2015, President Muhammadu Buhari in his inaugural speech said, "I belong to everybody and I belong to nobody." With this statement, it could be inferred that he would be a nation builder. Nation building, though as a normative concept with divergent meanings in different contexts, is primarily understood as a process of creating a collective identity or a national community through political integration of members within a given territory. It aims at the unification of the people within the state so that it remains politically stable and viable. Nation builders are members of a state who take initiative to develop the national community through government programs. Hence, when Buhari made this statement, it was assumed to mean that he was a nation builder going by the definition of nation building. However, since his second term in office, he has shown that he belongs to the certain tribes alone. He exhibited this in his appointments by appointing his kinsmen to higher positions thus ignoring Section 14 (3) of the federal character clause of the Nigerian Constitution which states thus:

The composition of the Government of the Federation or any of its agencies and conduct of its affairs shall be carried out in such a manner as to reflect the federal characters of Nigeria and the need to promote national unity, and also to command national loyalty, thereby ensuring that there shall be no predominance of persons from

a few states or from a few ethnic or other sectional groups in that Government or in any of its agencies.

Buhari's action received public condemnation but he was not moved, rather in a BBC interview in 2015, he justified his action saying "he nominates people he could trust, and who had worked with him for years" (www.icirnigeria.org/Buharislopsidedappointment). Apart from lopsided appointments, some Nigerians from other regions were deprived the opportunity of reaching the highest echelon of their career in the civil service. For example, Matthew Seiyefa, an Ijaw man from Bayelsa State was removed as the acting Director-General of the Department of State Services and replaced by Yusuf Magaji Bichi who had earlier retired from the State Services. This is just one out of many instances. These variables which are being displayed beside the utterances of the frontline nationalists cannot but engendered agitations and insurrections especially from regions that suffer such injustice and deprivation. Such promotion of nepotism and ethnic irredentism which sidelined other tribes cannot but make Nigeria susceptible to agitation and restiveness as witnessed in the Eastern part of the country by Indigenous People of Biafra (IPOB) and Eastern Security Network (ESN).

With respect to the Western Nigeria agitation for Oduduwa Republic, it was more of insensitivity of the Federal government to the insecurity situation and herdsmen menace in the region rather than complete political marginalization by the government that triggered insurrection. In the PDP-led Goodluck Jonathan government, the magnitude of Yoruba marginalisation was high, despite the fact that he got to power through the efforts of Obasanjo. His treatment of Justice Ayo Salami, the President of the appeal court was obvious. Yet, the Yoruba did not because of this perceived anti-Yoruba agenda foment trouble or agitate for separation from Nigeria. It is a known fact that tribal differences are obvious under each successive government in Nigeria, though it should be noted that the situation was different during Obasanjo's administration. Obasanjo out-of-way fairness was such that embraced all ethnic groups in Nigeria. However, under Muhammed Buhari administration, Nigeria situation is worsened with his policy decisions. Appointments did not take federal character into consideration. He installed his Fulani kinsmen in strategic positions, ignoring the federal character provisions.

As earlier stated, the agitation for Oduduwa Republic is borne out of the inattentiveness and apathetic attitude of the Federal and Oyo State government to the plight of insecurity posed to the region by the Fulani herdsmen. Killing, maiming, banditry, kidnapping and ransom-taking become the order of the day by the Fulani herdsmen. Houses, hundreds of shops, cars, and petrol stations burnt. Farmers are killed while women and girls raped. The

failure of the government to address this was instrumental to the action of the Yoruba activist Sunday Igboho who mobilised against the Fulani herdsmen. In like manner with Nnamdi Kanu, Sunday Igboho's house was attacked by the combination of Department of State Security and the military. His properties were destroyed, people killed and some arrested. The Fulani herdsmen criminality with impunity coupled with government silence and triggered the agitation for Oduduwa Republic. Bandits and Boko Haram arrested were given amnesty while some were integrated into paramilitary units simply because they were from the north. Although the Niger Delta militants equally enjoyed amnesty, however, the question is, how many of the militants were or are integrated into the para-military service? And why were agitators from Eastern and Western Nigeria not considered for such amnesty but rather repressively attacked by the Buhari administration? These are the questions begging for answers. More worrisome is the fact that bandits of Northern Nigeria extract are treated with glove hands while agitators from other ethnic groups tagged terrorists. Of recent was the propaganda by the Federal government with respect to source of funding for Sunday Igboho while the list of the names of those sponsoring Boko Haram and Banditry in Northern Nigeria are kept in secrecy.

In the words of Nelson Mandela, "Government violence can do only one thing; that is, to breed counter-violence" (Martins, 2011) It is evident that as long as it is government of man and not government of law practiced; coupled with the current spate of injustice and tribalism which engendered violent agitations by Ibo and Yoruba ethnic groups, Nigeria would remain more divided, experience more agitations and insurrections.

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