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The politics of regionalism: An analysis of national integration problems in Nigeria (1979–88)

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Clark Atlanta University, 1991

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THE POLITICS OF REGIONALISM:
AN ANALYSIS OF NATIONAL INTERGRATION PROBLEMS
IN NIGERIA (1979-88)

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY
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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Regionalism is a common problem in both old and new nations of the World today. It can be described as a phenomenon whereby distinct groups of people, living in discrete territorial enclaves within larger political communities, exert pressures for recognition of their differences. The idea of region or regionalism has been discussed over the years by several scholars to explain the interconnections between man and his ways of life. It has also been used to explain differences in culture and ideals between people of different geographical locations.

Louis Wirth examines several varied concepts of regions, and we shall examine two of these concepts. In the first concept, he defines region "as an area with one or more physical characteristics, such as rainfall, length of growing season, character of soil, vegetation, contours and other similar features."1

The second concept he defines as "an area delimited by the prevalence of one or more cultural characteristics--such

as language or dialect, costume, form of social organization, type of architecture, use of given tools, acceptance of a given religion, practice of certain social customs—which distinguish the region from adjacent areas or other regions."\(^2\) This second concept or definition is an ideal concept for our research paper. It points out differences in language, religion, customs and other variables which we will be discussing later in the paper. Hans Kurath argues about the importance of language in regionalism by saying that "language serves the purpose of communication within a society so as to produce cooperation and mutual understanding among its members in all activities, ranging from the performance of manual tasks to the development of rules and conduct. . . ."\(^3\) He sees language as a major part of regionalism.

Regionalism, therefore, entails collective consciousness or territorial separatism. People that live together for long under similar conditions are bound to share a sense of common belonging or similarity of traits. This sense of belonging or regional sentiment can lead to conflict or rivalry between regions as we see in several areas of the world. In extreme cases, it can lead to isolation,

\(^2\)Ibid., pp. 382-383.

parochialism, and finally secession as in the case of the Nigerian civil war.

The politics of regionalism has led to chaos in many nations and this is more pronounced in developing countries. In Nigeria, as well as other African nations, it has affected nation-building due to lack of continuity in politics and programs. Overall, it has created problems of national integration in these nations. Several developed nations, on the other hand, have been able to cope with regionalism. For example, Switzerland, a country with many nationalities have been able to achieve a high level of national integration or solidarity. The country, despite its lack of national language, religious and ethnic diversity namely German, French, Italian and others have been able to achieve integration because of its federal form of government. The type of government that "maximizes local autonomy and minimizes the imposition of one group's culture on another, and recognition that a universal desire for freedom and neutrality outweighs linguistic and ethnic differences."4

When Nigeria achieved independence on October 1, 1960, it expected to play a role in Africa because of its size, great economic potential and large population. At this time, most of Africa remained under the clutches of Western imperialism. As a result, the continent needed a leader who

would be committed to effecting the demise of colonialism. Throughout the First Republic of Nigeria under the leadership of Prime Minister Tafawa Balewa, the country failed to live up to this expectation, but rather maintained a low profile on most African issues. Hence, Nigeria was often referred to during this time by African scholars as "the sleeping giant of Africa."\(^5\)

It was believed that Tafawa Balewa's administration could not be effective in foreign policy because of the problems of ethnic integration in a new republic like Nigeria. The three major ethnic groups in the country, namely, the Ibos, the Yorubas and the Hausas did not trust each other.

**PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The objective of this study therefore, is to make an assessment of certain factors that have affected the pace and level of national integration in Nigeria from 1979 to 1988. In other words, the study will look at the role of several variables that have affected national integration in Nigeria during this period. These variables are traditionalism, colonial legacy, political parties, neocolonialism, religion and language. Overall, we will offer a suggestion that will be helpful in achieving national integration in Nigeria.

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October 1, 1979, marked the beginning of the Second Republic. It represents an historical turning point for Nigerians with the Federal Military Government voluntarily handing power to a democratically elected civilian government after thirteen years of military rule, including two and one-half years of civil war. In other words, 1979 represents Nigeria's claim to liberal democracy for her citizens. Liberal democracy guarantees Nigerians substantial rights of freedom, choice and participation.

The structure of the First Republic (1960-1979) was not helpful in national integration. The British-styled parliamentary system of government was not conducive in a multi-ethnic African state like Nigeria. Hence, in 1979, the nation adopted an American-styled Presidential system that was expected to be capable of handling ethnic rivalries. Of course, this was not the case as we see the military seizing power again in December, 1983. This is one of the reasons why the period between 1979 and 1988 has been selected for this study. Secondly, during this period, Nigeria played a leading role in both African and world politics than before due to its oil wealth and demography. Finally, the issue of religion can now be added as one of the major problems of integration. In short, the period (1979-1988) represents a period of political maturity for Nigerians despite some national controversies.
THE PROBLEM STATEMENT

Nigeria is dominated by three main ethnic groups, Yoruba, Ibo and Hausa-Fulani. The Yorubas are located in the Western part of the country, the Ibos in the East and the Hausa-Fulanis in the North: These three ethnic groups expressed themselves in three main political parties prior to independence. The intervention of several military regimes did not change this phenomenon. In fact, it appears that the situation made it easy for the military to take over.

The existence of these three major groups and over two hundred minor ones coupled with the legacy of colonial rule presents a tremendous internal challenge to Nigeria. As a result, the task of the political and military leaders in Nigeria right from 1960 has been to minimize tensions among these groups so as to build a single society from a multiplicity of traditional societies.

The primary objective of this study, therefore, is how to nudge these ethnic groups into one national entity.

HYPOTHESIS

After a detailed survey of literature on Nigeria, it has been possible to isolate the following underlying problems of national integration in Nigeria: traditionalism, political parties, colonial legacy, neocolonialism, religion and language. In spite of the achievement of political independence in 1960, Nigeria has not been able to achieve national integration. An attempt by civilian governments to
achieve national integration has resulted in political instability due to the forces listed above.

Hence, the method and scope of this study will be geared towards establishing a relationship between these six variables and the problems of national integration. The six variables are the independent variables while national integration is the dependent variable.

The hypothesis, therefore, is that the six variables mentioned above made it very unlikely that national integration will occur in Nigeria.

DEFINITION OF KEY CONCEPTS

The following concepts will be used to carry out the research objective:

Integration

Research shows that this concept has varied interpretations and definitions. However, for the purpose of this study, we shall use the work of James E. Coleman and Carl G. Rosberg. In their book, they classified this concept into two processes:

(1) political integration, which refers to the "progressive bridging of the elite-mass gap in the vertical plain" and

(2) territorial integration, which refers to "progressive reduction of cultural and regional
discontinuities and tensions in the process of creating a homogenous territorial community."\textsuperscript{6}

\textbf{Colonial Legacy}

This term refers to social-political institutions like territorial boundaries, legal and administrative practices, the use of English language and the economic system as set up by the British colonial power. It is defined as a continuation or maintenance of the system set up by the colonial power in a newly independent state.\textsuperscript{7}

\textbf{Neo-Colonialism}

This is a concept used to explain the political-economic relations between the metropoles and "petty-bourgeois" regimes in the Third World Countries. A state that is subject to neo-colonialism appears to be independent and sovereign but in reality its political and economic system are directed from outside.\textsuperscript{8}


\textsuperscript{8}Kwame Nkrumah, "Neo-Colonialism--the last stage of Imperialism in Trevor Munroe and Rupert Lewis (eds), \textit{Readings in Government and Politics of West Indies}, (Kingston, Jamaica: The Herald Ltd., 1971), P. 168.
Traditionalism

This refers to the doctrines, principles or practices of those who accept or follow tradition. It is the handing down of knowledge, customs and beliefs from one generation to another before the Europeans came to Nigeria. It is anything handed down from the past and so strongly rooted as an unbroken law.¹⁹

Political Parties

Political parties form associations that activate and mobilize the people, represent interests, and become the proving ground for political leadership. A political party is an organization united by common policies and its main goal is the acquisition and exercise of power.¹⁰

Religion

This is an ideological system of beliefs and practices relating to the sacred and uniting its adherents in a community. It is an expression of man’s acknowledgment of the divine or supreme being or beings.¹¹

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Language

An organized system of speech used by human beings as a means of communication among themselves. It is used to communicate ideas, facts and feelings. It can also be used to distinguish a group of people from another.\textsuperscript{12}

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research involves a multifrontal strategy combining historical and documentary analyses and the use of questionnaires. The research was conducted in Lagos, Nigeria during the month of October 1989. Lagos is inhabited by people representing different ethnic groups. Being the major commercial centre for the nation, it attracts people from all parts of the country. Therefore, the sample used could be generalised as a true reflection of the Nigerian populace. Initially, 250 respondents were polled for the said study, only 100 responded to our criteria. The questionnaires dealt with the six variables and national integration problems discussed earlier.

In administering the questionnaire, the respondents were divided into groups based on the nation's ethnic division, that is, Yorubas, Igbo, Hausa-Fulani, the Efiks/Tivs and others who form the minority group. In each of the four groups, twenty-five (25) questionnaires were administered.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 27.
Each group featured representatives of the following categories:

**Category A:** Included Chief Executives and Managing Directors; Director-Generals and successful business individuals.

**Category B:** Included Senior Managers, Upper Middle Income Earners and Senior Civil Servants.

**Category C:** Included Assistant Managers, Lecturers in Colleges and Universities.

**Category D:** Included lower group salary earners, teachers, and factory supervisors.

**Category E:** Included the semi-skilled laborers, clerical officers, messengers, and petty traders, etc. All respondents are Nigerian citizens and literate. Within each ethnic group of 25 respondents, 15 males and 10 females were randomly selected as follows:

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<th>Male Grouping</th>
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<td>5 people in categories A/B</td>
<td>5 people in categories A/B</td>
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<td>5 people in categories C/D</td>
<td>5 people in categories C/D</td>
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<td>5 people in category E</td>
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In analyzing this study, multi-variate relationships were utilized. The data obtained were analyzed through the use of cross-tabulation and graph(s). The graph involves a dependent variable (y) against six independent variables (X₁–X₆). The variables are as follows:
Y . . . National Integration
X₁ . . . Traditionalism
X₂ . . . Political Parties
X₃ . . . Colonial Legacy
X₄ . . . Neocolonialism
X₅ . . . Religion
X₆ . . . Language

The outcome of this analysis along with other sources will be used to achieve a concluding end to the study.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study will be based on the theories of pluralism in juxtaposition to elitism and the implication this has for national integration process.

The quest for national integration has characterized the declarations and pronouncements of all countries. Nevertheless, evidence continues to suggest that a majority of the Third World and Industrial nations are still not integrated. Several theories have been postulated in an apparent effort to understand the problems of national integration in these nations. Prominent among them is the pluralist theory. To understand pluralism, it is important that we explain the concepts of elitism and democracy.

Elitism proposes that all societies are divided into two classes, namely, the few who govern and the many who are
governed. Gaetano Mosca, the Italian political scientist, expresses this basic concept as follows:

In all societies - from societies that are very underdeveloped and have barely attained the dawning of civilization, down to the most advanced and powerful societies - two classes of people appear - a class that rules and a class that is ruled. The first class, always the less numerous, performs all of the political functions, monopolizes power, and enjoys the advantages that power brings, whereas the second, the more numerous class, is directed and controlled by the first, in a manner that is now more or less legal, now more or less arbitrary and violent.\(^\text{13}\)

Another political scientist, Harold Lasswell supports this concept when he made the following expression.

The discovery that in all large-scale societies the decisions at any given time are typically in the hands of a small number of people confirms a basic fact: Government is always government by the few whether in the name of the few, the one, or the many.\(^\text{14}\)

Mosca further argues that there is a circulation of Elites and this allows individuals from the lower class to rise to the top. In other words, elitism admits the mobility of nonelites to become elites. This strengthened the elite system. In any society, elites may be cohesive and more or less monolithic or they may be more or less pluralistic and competitive with the masses having some type of impact on the attitudes of the elites. This interaction between the elites


and the masses is brought about in many societies through democratic principles.

Democracy is expected to allow every individual to participate in the decisions that affect their life. Popular participation is to be achieved through majority rule and respect for the rights of minorities. Minorities are also permitted to openly attempt to win majority support for their views. Democracy also emphasizes the notion of equality in all aspects of life, namely, social, economic, political and others. This seems to be the basic concept of democracy in many democratic nations. However, democracy is never practiced exactly the way we described anywhere in the World and this is one of the criticisms of democracy. Ronald Pennock contends that:

The objective of equality is not merely the recognition of a certain dignity of the human being as such, but it is also to provide him with the opportunity - equal to that guaranteed to others - for protecting and advancing his interest and developing his powers and personality.\(^{15}\)

Overall, democracy involves popular participation, government by majority rule, respect for individual dignity and a commitment to equal opportunity.

Pluralism, on the other hand, is different from both elitism and democracy. Pluralism is the belief that democratic values can be preserved in a system of multiple,

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